



Musings of a Gentile

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By virtue of accident or serendipity, Jewish individuals would appear at pivotal points in my life and influence key decisions. They ranged from my first business mentor to the first love of my life, from professional colleagues to rabbis. I would mentally note these occurrences but otherwise not delve deeper. Several years ago, I became moderately obsessed with the matter and stepped up my level of research and inquiry in an attempt to understand the Jews' place in the world and my relationship to it.

I would not be so bold as to speak to the Jewish people directly, but rather, as an outsider, share my musings with other Gentiles (non-Jews, most commonly Christians). Given the current state of world affairs, the subject is difficult to discuss because whether Jew or non-Jew, one will be vigorously challenged irrespective of position, a challenge frequently derived from the same data set. For example, evidence of Jewish success in one context or assertion may be regarded as an anti-Semitic trope in another. And any discussion of Jewish intelligence is a minefield unto itself.

In order to engage in civil discourse, we need to agree on what is true; if there is no truth, there are no lies. If truth is judged to be relative and a social construct, then no discussion is possible. We are entitled to our own opinions, but not to our own set of facts. I present what I believe are relevant facts, which in many cases can be verified with a quick online search. Where the topic is religion, for those who are active nonbelievers, I posit as factual the historicity of the people and places mentioned, and do not seek concurrence on beliefs.

Finally, I do not regard the words "Jew" and "Jews" as pejoratives, but merely synonymous with "Jewish person" and "Jewish people." Also, commenting on the behavior of more than one person in any group is a generalization and obviously subject to the criticism that not all the people share all the characteristics all of the time. I know this, and the reader knows this.

Personal Experience

My parents emigrated to America after the Second World War. They had lived in the Ternopil region of Ukraine under the regimes of both Stalin and Hitler, then survived the final years of the war on the run, living day-to-day between life and death. Subsequently, they were confined to displaced persons (DP) camps for four years before slipping in under the immigration quota and boarding a ship bound for the United States of America.

I was conceived in a camp and birthed on US soil in a small town in rural Wisconsin, where I was raised Catholic and graduated from a Jesuit high school. I had little direct contact with Jewish people, and my knowledge of the Jews was limited to what I had read in books, since my parents absolutely refused to discuss what had happened "over there." The central takeaway from their immigrant experience? The worst imaginable conditions they expected to encounter in their new homeland would infinitely surpass the best of times they left behind.

In 1968, I moved to Chicago to earn money for college. Desperate to find work, I met Irv, my first mentor. During that tumultuous summer defined by the protests associated with the Democratic National Convention, Irv taught me not how to foment revolution, but rather, the art of selling. Irv lived in Skokie^[1] and was the top door-to-door salesman for the Fuller Brush Company. The

lessons I learned peddling hairbrushes I later applied to marketing high-rise office buildings.

Several years later, while attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I met Julie, the first love of my life. Her Jewish family, wealthy and accomplished, lived on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Julie was a modern dancer and everything I was not—she grew up attending the premieres of Broadway shows while I drank beer in cornfields. The relationship ended after a year, and she left me bewitched, bothered, and bewildered.

In the 1980s, I achieved rising success as a commercial real estate investment banker with a national firm in San Francisco. To take advantage of the buying binge by the Japanese, I partnered with Adrian, a colleague in the Los Angeles office who had the right connections. Unlike many of his secular friends and associates, Adrian was in the process of converting to Orthodox Judaism. I learned of the different Jewish denominations and observed the choices he made and how he conducted his business in that regard.

In 2002, my Christian wife died suddenly and unexpectedly—a terrible blow, as she was not only lover and friend but also spiritual mentor and moral compass. To cope, I turned to different sources. I began to practice Zen Buddhist meditation, only to discover that the majority of participants at the practice center were not stern Japanese monks but Jewish men and women. I studied death and absorbed the works of Ernest Becker, fascinated by his thought.^[2] I read grief literature and was particularly impacted by a book on loss written by Rabbi David Wolpe.

Twelve years later, I moved to Los Angeles, and now had the opportunity to sit in on Torah classes with the selfsame rabbi. I had also turned to writing as a new occupation and labored to learn the craft. Fortuitously, I took classes with Corey, a commercially successful screenwriter, whom I later deemed one of the best teachers I had for any subject. This knowledge prompted me to write and publish a memoir.

My most recent Jewish friendship is with Dave, another business colleague. Initially, we met for lunch periodically to discuss real estate deals. We discovered that our ancestors hailed from the same region of Ukraine, and gradually trust developed. This led to conversation of a more personal nature, such as the behavior of Jews in West Los Angeles. Dave was secular and agnostic but politically conservative. The latter preference rendered him a pariah among mainstream LA Jews. To try to understand their wildly progressive attitudes—seemingly contradictory and oftentimes antithetical to their best interests—we would meet at small cafés, seclude ourselves in the corner, and speak in hushed tones.

What did these people have in common? They were all successful in their own right. But there was also an intangible quality that they shared. They seemed to perceive life in a qualitatively different way, mentally process at a higher level, imagine things that I could not. They exhibited a deep understanding of human nature, especially in interpersonal relationships. Upon reflection, I discerned that the best I could do was imitate.

Not all the Jews I met and interacted with possessed these qualities. The majority were prone to good and bad behavior, and at unexceptional levels, like anyone else. But the people I chose—or the ones who chose me—expanded my view of human behavior and the achievement that was possible. This realization set me on a path of investigation and invoked a need to comprehend the mystery of how a miniscule subset of the human population has survived for millennia and disproportionately impacted the course of human events—and my life.

History

Jewish religious law (Halakhah) prescribes that a Jew is either one born of a Jewish mother, or a

convert. In actuality, one can self-identify, or be identified by others, as a Jew, according to multiple dimensions, including religion, ethnicity, and other sociocultural criteria. What it means to be a Jew exactly is not a rigid definition but a fluid process that shifts with time, perspective, and purpose. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the historical antecedents along each dimension to understand at even a rudimentary level what it means to be a Jew today.

Nearly four millennia ago, a shepherd and later merchant named Abraham developed a relationship with God, and at an advanced age, was directed to leave the land of his birth and move to Canaan, in what later became Judea and what is now Israel. There, God promised, "I will make of thee a great nation."^[3] God subsequently communicated, "For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God; the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth."^[4] And so, the covenant was sealed.

Thereafter, the nomadic tribes affiliated with Abraham gradually developed an agricultural economy and a central government. They competed and fought with other tribes, at times prevailing and at other times being displaced from Canaan. When enslaved by the Egyptians, they escaped and returned again to the Promised Land, led by a Hebrew prophet named Moses, to whom God revealed the Ten Commandments. Eventually, the Jews developed an empire and flourished under various monarchs. The most notable was King David, another shepherd with a close relationship to God. He established Jerusalem as a religious center, and his Psalms (hymns) constitute one of the longest books of the Hebrew Bible.

Their fortunes rose and fell until the relationship between the people and the land was ultimately severed by the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD. For the next two millennia, the Jewish people lived without a homeland until the creation of the State of Israel. Thus, much of Jewish history is the story of dispersal and expulsion, of a shifting diaspora in which the Jews remained a tiny, minority population living within, and at the political mercy of, larger empires and nation-states.

Anti-Jewish sentiment would wax and wane. Typically, Jews would enter a region and develop success; the reaction would be jealousy, fear, and anger, resulting in expulsion, or worse. Frequently, economic decline would ensue for the expeller. And sadly, at times, Christians would serve as the persecutor.

Over the centuries, the dispersal from Judea resulted in Jews living in most parts of the world, but especially concentrated in three regions, in what today are: Spain and Portugal; North Africa and other parts of the Middle East; and Central and Eastern Europe. The ancestral groups from these regions are named, respectively, Sephardic, Mizrahi, and Ashkenazi Jews.

Genetic studies confirm that these three groups share a common Middle Eastern ancestry. However, there is no evidence for a single Jewish prototype, or "Jewish gene." The Ashkenazi Jews also display southern European (Italian) ancestry, reflecting their migration to the north in the late Middle Ages. The Ashkenazim constitute the majority of Jews worldwide today, and are most characteristic of the Jews one might meet in America.

Population

The world population reached 1 billion people around 1800, and then grew rapidly due to technological advances in medicine, health care, agricultural production, and sanitation. Today, it is estimated at over 8 billion people. The global Jewish population remained at perhaps one to 2 million people until 1800, when it likewise grew rapidly, reaching a peak of roughly 16 million in the 1930s. Most of this increase occurred within the Ashkenazi population of Central and Eastern Europe. The Holocaust diminished the Jewish population to roughly 10 million after World War II. It has since recovered to near the previous peak level, and is estimated at roughly 15.8 million

people worldwide in 2024, representing one-fifth of 1% of the global population.

Of contemporary significance is how this population was redistributed in the 19th and 20th centuries. Waves of Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants—first from German-speaking states and later from the Pale of Settlement^[5] and adjoining regions—moved to America such that by 1950, the center of Jewish life and influence had permanently shifted. Concurrently, the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 increased the migration of Jews from around the world to their original homeland under the concept of Aliyah.^[6] Today, approximately 85% of the world Jewish population is roughly divided between Israel and the United States.

Within the US, the population hub has always been New York City, which received the Jewish immigrants at Ellis Island and offered immediate access to the American Dream. This expanded to Los Angeles, initially prompted by the growth of the motion picture industry, and to South Florida, with retirees from New York. Today, the states of New York, California, and Florida account for roughly 50% of the US Jewish population.

Thus, the Jews who appeared in my life were largely the children or grandchildren of Ashkenazi immigrants. They grew up in the most influential cities in the US and held a distinct set of beliefs and values. Had I lived in Israel or other parts of the world, or even other parts of the US, my experience would be quite different.

Religion

The gift of the Jewish people to humanity is monotheism, specifically, the idea of the one true God^[7] who is largely unknowable but with whom one can develop a personal relationship. This God is not an abstraction (i.e., a void or a watchmaker or a cosmic superintelligence or nature itself) but one who promulgates an ethical and moral order and demands obedience. The religious dimension of Judaism is rooted in the Torah and the other books of the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), as well as in a vast body of works, such as the Talmud and Midrash, written over the centuries. These writings elucidate in detail the application of belief to religious observance and everyday life, and are constantly examined and debated by Jewish scholars.

Judaism birthed Christianity 2,000 years ago when a Jewish carpenter's son named Jesus of Nazareth began his own ministry and took Jewish beliefs to a new level.^[8] Disciples later catalogued his life and teachings in what became the Christian Bible and which incorporated the Tanakh. Today, Christianity is the largest religion in the world with roughly 2.4 billion adherents, followed by Islam (also an Abrahamic religion derived from Judaism) with 1.9 billion adherents.

The primary difference between Judaism and Christianity is that Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God,^[9] whereas Jews do not. Of course, this has implications down the line for religious ceremonies, practices, and conduct. Another critical tenet of Christianity is that Jesus died and was resurrected in human form three days later. Christians believe that the soul will likewise survive physical death in a resurrected body, and will ultimately be judged by God as to belief and conduct.

In contrast, Judaism emphasizes life on Earth. The Torah enumerates 613 *mitzvot* (commandments) governing day-to-day life but makes no explicit reference to an afterlife. In Jewish theology, several concepts of a world to come (Olam Haba) are suggested, but they are ambiguous, and are neither addressed in ritual nor deemed particularly relevant to conduct. This difference between the two religions figures prominently in a world of increasing secularization.

Unlike Roman Catholicism, Judaism does not have a top-down administration with a centralized hierarchy and an elected leader (such as the pope). It is organized at the local level, usually

around a synagogue led by a rabbi.[\[10\]](#) Doctrinally, it is characterized by vigorous ongoing exegesis and hermeneutics so that specific individual beliefs may vary widely.

Most religions experience periodic reformations. The last major Catholic reformation originated in 1517 when Martin Luther posted his *Ninety-Five Theses* and the Church split into other denominations, such as Protestant and Lutheran. The analogous reformation for Judaism occurred coincident with the “Enlightenment,” a European intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries. A parallel movement known as the Haskalah arose among the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe. It emphasized rationalism, liberalism, relativism, scientific inquiry, and assimilation.

Essentially, Haskalah promoted the adoption of “modern” values and the demotion of tradition. It resulted in more sects, but all still under the name of Judaism. The values of modernity were the values of many of the first-wave immigrants to the United States, resulting in the following three major Jewish denominations in the US today (with their respective percentage of the US Jewish population[\[11\]](#)):

1. Orthodox Judaism (9%): The strictest form which accepts Torah as the word of God—largely adhering to the traditional beliefs and practices of Jews from biblical times;
2. Conservative Judaism (17%): Still retaining the essential beliefs and rituals but with more relaxed adherence and practice;
3. Reform Judaism (37%): Total adaption to modernity and emphasizing social responsibility over faith, and does not require a belief in the one true God or any other deity;
4. None of the Above (37%): Of which 4% identify with some other branch and the rest with no particular branch at all.

Clearly, while secularization has affected all religions, it has dramatically affected Judaism. When I met Adrian decades ago, Orthodox Judaism was already largely discounted by the majority of American Jews, who deemed it outdated and irrelevant. I realized the commitment it required on his part, especially in a landscape such as West Los Angeles. Today, the gulf persists, particularly between Orthodox and non-Orthodox denominations. Most Orthodox Jews view their counterparts as heretical to the religion of Judaism but nonetheless “full-fledged” Jews, and hold the hope of reconciliation.

Exceptionalism

The success of Jews in certain fields of endeavor, wholly disproportionate to their percentage of the relevant population group, is indisputable and well-documented. Whether Nobel Prize winners, Academy Award-winning directors, or world chess champions, Jews have won anywhere from 20% to 50% of the time.

Perhaps in no area has their success been more impactful than in business and finance. In 2024, six of the 10 richest people in America were Jewish; these six fall within the 12 richest in the world.[\[12\]](#) Coincidentally, the companies they founded represent entities central to the development of artificial intelligence (AI), thus amplifying their influence.[\[13\]](#)

And the representation of Jews among the top-performing hedge fund managers is legendary. Hedge funds invest in liquid assets anywhere, anytime, long or short. This is an occupation that attracts some of the most creative minds in the world. The elite enjoy outsize influence, not only in terms of the deployment of personal wealth, but also in directing enormous sums on behalf of institutional investors.

The reasons for this exceptionalism have been debated since antiquity. I offer the following, which

is a combination of nature and nurture. According to several studies, the performance of specifically Ashkenazi Jews (irrespective of denomination) on IQ tests has indicated an advantage of 0.5 to 1.0 standard deviation over any other group. Where this has the most dramatic effect is at the right tail of a distribution curve. Whereas the Jewish population overlaps other populations throughout most of the distribution, it has little competition at the tiny segment representing the brightest of the bright.

Based on that which an IQ test measures, this advantage occurs primarily in occupations and interests that require high cognitive ability. Results from other types of standardized testing used for university admissions support this hypothesis historically. Unfortunately, the academic research on the topic has been shut down for years due to the administrative edict at most colleges and universities that declares that science itself is a social construct that must be regulated. This state of affairs is publicly endorsed even by some Jews, on the rationale that to challenge it brings unwanted trouble without much accrued benefit. Until legitimate scholarship is restored, it will not be possible to refine or falsify the research.

The possible environmental causal factors for Jewish exceptionalism are varied, and while plausible, are difficult to measure as to degree of contribution. The overall logic is that Jews developed certain skills in order to survive as a people, and were able to retain them in the group by resisting assimilation and intermarriage. These range from placing a premium on literacy and education (an intellectual rigor perhaps derived from the demands of religious studies at Talmudic schools) to thriving in those occupations open to them (such as the “middleman” in finance and other transactional activity). The Ashkenazim may have additionally benefitted in the most recent centuries by being proximate to the major European cities, and thus the centers of power and influence.

In my career as a broker, operator, and developer of major properties, I recognized that Jewish men dominated the upper rungs of commercial real estate, particularly for entrepreneurial enterprises since for many years they were shunned by corporate America. Similar to the movie industry, the New York family dynasties were founded largely by Ashkenazi immigrants who built the Manhattan skyscrapers and exported their knowledge to the rest of America and the world. In terms of the Jewish founders and senior executives of the dominant real estate companies, I observed a *chutzpah*, an edge they enjoyed by being superior negotiators, thinking outside the box and exhibiting no fear under pressure.

State of Israel

Since roughly 45% of the global Jewish population lives in Israel, the history of this country merits discussion. The State of Israel did not come into existence as the result of a nascent independence movement by the Jews living there nor due to a religious revival of some kind. It started with the effort of an Austro-Hungarian Jew named Theodor Herzl who convened the first Zionist Congress in 1897. Herzl was secular and driven by the practical concern that the pogroms and growing anti-Semitism would render assimilation impossible, and the only solution was the establishment of a safe haven to which European Jews could flee.

The logical place was Palestine, an area which approximated Canaan. This occurred at the precise point in time after World War I that the modern history of the Arab world began with the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. The victorious allies led by Britain and France drew new political boundaries and effectively created most of the contemporary Arab nation-states. Also, Britain established Mandatory Palestine as a geopolitical entity, and encouraged the immigration of European Jews to settle with the Jews already living there.

This scenario repeated itself after World War II. With the Allies again successful, Britain ended its

administration of Mandatory Palestine, and the State of Israel was declared on May 14, 1948. With the Holocaust of the Jew now understood as a monstrous crime against humanity, the international response supported the creation of a secure Jewish homeland. At the time, the population of the greater Palestine region was approximately 2 million people, of which roughly one-third were Jewish. This provoked an immediate response from a coalition of Arab states and resulted in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The conflict between Arabs and Jews that had begun in the 1920s now intensified and continues to the present day.

Islam

In order to understand the politics of the Middle East, one must appreciate the impact of Islam.^[14] I have not studied this religion. As with other major religions, when considered “at its best,” I believe Islam can represent a different path up the same mountain, especially since it is rooted in Judaism and Christianity. However, for purposes of this discussion, I will limit my comments to those matters which affect Jews in Israel and the diaspora.

For the Muslim community, Islam represents a total system with no separation of church and state. This system is implemented through a variety of mechanisms, but principally through Sharia, the body of Islamic religious law that is similar in concept to Halakhah.^[15]

Traditionally, Muslim society has been led by three groups: the clerics, the government authorities, and the ethnic tribes. The relative influence of each group has varied with time and place. Recently, more power has shifted to the clerics, who function not only as religious intermediaries but as societal spokesmen.

A key concept in Islam is *jihad* (“struggle” in Arabic). *Jihad* represents the struggle of the individual for spiritual purification. In this regard, devout Muslims worldwide pray daily to Allah. However, it can also represent the communal struggle of Islam against its suspected enemies, frequently through aggressive and coercive means. And it is this radical reinterpretation that drives the contemporary narrative.

To further complicate matters, the Muslim-majority states do not function as a monolithic entity. They range from Iran, an authoritarian, theocratic, Persian state feared by its neighbors, to Iraq, a country plagued by internecine violence between Sunni and Shia Muslims (the major sects of Islam), to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), at the forefront of modernity and with recently established diplomatic relations with Israel. And into this admixture is thrust the involvement of the United States.

American Influence

America had minimal leverage in the Middle East until after the Second World War. Britain and France were the primary European imperialist forces at the turn of the 20th century; the US never colonized the Middle East nor was directly involved in the partition of the Ottoman Empire. Its involvement increased in the 1930s through oil exploration by American oil companies, particularly in Saudi Arabia. It was regarded favorably in the region, in contrast to the Europeans.

From the 1950s on, the strategic influence of the US expanded to not only protecting access to oil, but to countering Soviet expansion in the region and supporting the State of Israel. In 1960, a group of predominately Arab states formed a cartel called the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to wrest control of their vast oil reserves from international oil conglomerates. In the 1970s, they placed restrictions on oil production, which led to a dramatic rise in oil prices, and the oil-producing countries of the Middle East suddenly enjoyed an unprecedented explosion of wealth.

For centuries prior, the economies of the Middle East had stagnated, due at least in part to the influence of Sharia. As Islam did not experience a reformation prior to modernity and Sharia law prevailed, economic progress lagged. The new wealth resulted in the unofficial, incremental adjustment of Sharia to allow for participation in the global economy. I recall negotiating commercial real estate transactions with Middle Eastern clients and was impressed at how they respected and nominally conformed to Sharia, but still got the deal done.

This oil wealth was invested throughout the world, and nowhere more spectacularly than in the Middle East itself; fabulous new cities sprang from inhospitable desert. American capitalism was instrumental in helping realize these ambitions through financial investment, technical assistance, and other efforts. The apogee of this material success was the construction of the Burj Khalifa, completed in 2010 in the city of Dubai. Over half a mile in height, this is the world's tallest building, and would dwarf anything in Manhattan. SOM, the prominent American firm, designed and engineered the project.

So how was this image of America simultaneously transformed into the Great Satan? As the US emerged as the dominant military power and with a significant Jewish diaspora, it also came to be identified as a capitalist oppressor and colonizer, despite not having experienced any significant historic animosity in the Middle East. This was due to America's continued support of Israel based on shared democratic and religious values, and to a moral reaction against the decadent aspects of Western culture. This image was then fueled by pervasive anti-Semitism and the rise of Islamism.

Anti-Semitism

Simply put, anti-Semitism is Jew hatred, which has persisted since antiquity. Since its inception, Islam classified people in a binary fashion: One was either a faithful Muslim or an unbeliever, which category included Jews, Christians, and others. As elsewhere in the world, Jewish relations with the Muslim caliphates (similar to theocracies) over the centuries would fluctuate between persecution and tolerance.^[16] However, since Jews represented a minority population wherever they lived, most Muslims generally regarded them with contempt and ridicule but not as any serious threat, as was the case with Christians during the Crusades.

The trope of the Jew as a cosmic force of evil did not originate in the Middle East but in Europe and the Russian Empire. The theory of a Jewish plot for global domination was spelled out initially in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a fabricated text first published in Russia in 1903. After Germany's defeat in the First World War, a young Adolph Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle" in German) while in prison. The idea of a Jewish conspiracy was a critical component of his political manifesto, and would lead directly to the Holocaust.

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Arab nations were in a state of disarray. Having aligned with Germany due to their antipathy toward the British and the French, Arab secular intellectuals found inspiration in the ideals of German nationalism. After Germany was again defeated in World War II, the Arab revolutionary vanguard turned to other organizing principles of social transformation, including Soviet communism, French existentialist thought, and eventually postcolonial theory.

These secular narratives were typically infused with Islamic language and symbolism. Whatever the ideology, the common thread remained anti-Semitism. In that the schools, media, and other purveyors of culture were state-run, anti-Semitic indoctrination became omnipresent. The terrorist group Hamas, founded in 1987, explicitly called for the destruction of Israel through *jihad* (now clearly implying an Islamic holy war) and for the struggle against world Zionism and secular Western culture. In its charter, Hamas mentioned only one non-Muslim reference: *The Protocols of*

the Elders of Zion. Entering the 21st century, the efforts of the various state-funded terrorist groups would coalesce into a larger enterprise: Islamism.

Islamism

While the dictionary definition refers to Islamic fundamentalism, I prefer to define Islamism as a contemporary totalitarian project to restore the Caliphate by any means necessary. It is more modern than medieval. It is more political/ideological than religious. And it is global in scope rather than contained by the boundaries of the historic Islamic Empire. Well-known actors include organizations such as Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State (ISIS), Hamas, Hezbollah, and the State of Iran.

A number of Arab states were run by tribal family dynasties who reaped the benefits of modernity; however, the surplus wealth did not always trickle down to the lower classes. Thus, the government authorities shadow-financed a growing number of Islamist insurgent groups in order to maintain control. Following the Arab Spring—a series of antiestablishment uprisings in the Middle East that started in 2010—a number of regimes trying to hold on to power found their resident Islamists to actually constitute a destabilizing force. Subsequent crackdowns merely encouraged the Islamists to expand their operations in the Western world and maintain contact through already well-developed networks.

The Islamists are noted for their fundraising prowess, and for an ability to find support not only from like-minded authoritarian regimes, but astonishingly, from progressive liberals in the democratic capitals of Europe and North America. This unlikely alliance in the United States will be discussed subsequently.

The current global Muslim population numbers approximately 2 billion adherents. Of this total, only 20% reside in the Middle East and North Africa. The impact of Islamism is hardly limited to the Arab-Israeli conflict, which consumes global media attention.

For example, total deaths (both sides, but predominantly Arab/Palestinian) in all the Arab-Israeli conflicts combined since 1948, including the Gaza War, are estimated at approximately 175,000 people. The Islamist group Boko Haram (“Western Civilization is Forbidden” in Arabic) has caused an estimated 350,000 deaths in Nigeria since 2009, and the displacement of millions, resulting in a devastating humanitarian crisis.[\[17\]](#) Most of the victims were Christians, many were children. The work of just one actor in one (non-Arab) country brings home the reality of the global *ji*had.

Islamism is a singular threat to both Jews and Christians worldwide. It revels in the spectacle of violence and death, and finds no shortage of recruits, especially young men fully formed by anti-Semitism and enticed by heroic meaning cloaked in religious language.

Postmodern Challenges

The 1960s were marked by the “countercultural revolution,” a period of great upheaval in America characterized by a concern for the rights of the individual within society. It produced the Civil Rights Movement, which led to legally and politically protecting Black Americans and other racial minorities; this quickly spread to recognizing the rights of women, gays, and other subgroups within the population. Culturally, this period was accompanied by a general sense of freedom and license coupled with the loss of religiosity, particularly among Jews and Christians.

American Jews were at the forefront of advancing cultural change: as activists in the various movements, as founders of the seminal organizations, and as intellectual theorists to constantly mold and expand the enterprise. They contributed significantly to shaping culture in America through movies, television, shows, book publishing, and the other forms of media available today.

Social messaging was woven into the fabric of entertainment, which represented the cutting edge globally and promptly exported to other countries.

Politically, American Jews have been consistently aligned with the Democratic Party since the last major wave of Eastern European immigrants passed through Ellis Island in the 1920s. In the 25 presidential elections over the past 100 years, the Democratic candidate has received 70% of the Jewish vote on average. The Jewish population is not a uniform voting bloc, with the Orthodox and non-Ashkenazim tending to be more conservative. However, it does represent an ongoing commitment to one political party.

The idea of social justice emerged as the key tenet of liberalism. For Jewish people, it was inspired by the concept of *tikkun olam*, translated from Hebrew as “repairing the world.” *Tikkun olam* is not part of the Torah and Tanakh; reportedly, it was first coined by a 16th century rabbi and mystic named Isaac Luria. But for many secular Jews, it has been elevated to a de facto deity, substituting for belief in God and the old ways.

For Catholics, it also came to represent the governing principle of the Church hierarchy under the papacy of Pope Francis from 2013–25. Born Jorge Mario Bergoglio, he was an Argentinian Jesuit priest who chose his papal name in honor of St. Francis of Assisi, known for ministering to the poor. The Church has always emphasized care of the needy and the marginalized. But Pope Francis’s commitment came at the expense of discounting other missions and especially the defense of Church dogma.[\[18\]](#)

As an ideal, social justice instantly engenders compassion and concurrence; the idea of helping the disadvantaged has existed since time immemorial. However, when implemented in practice, problems arise. Modifying the word “justice” by social, economic, restorative, or other adjective does not create a better justice, but merely allows for the ongoing redistribution of preferences to suit particular groups, and the overall reduction of justice. And when social justice is not only considered a virtue, but as *the* virtue—to the virtual exclusion of all others—confusion reigns.

At this point, it is necessary to mention a conjecture referred to as the “3.5% Rule.”[\[19\]](#) It specifies that the success of movements, even revolutions, occur as the result of the activism and agitation of the “passionate few” (PF), estimated at roughly 3.5% of the relevant population. The PF’s level of commitment is exceptional, and they will do whatever it takes to get the job done.

Unless the vast majority is opposed to the preferences of the PF, vehemently and early on, it will simply let the PF have their way. Then the general population will start to believe that the views of the PF represent the consensus, particularly if some perceived virtue attaches without one having to do anything. This situation quickly ripens into the tyranny of the minority. Like the frog placed in a pot of lukewarm water but with the heat gradually raised to boiling, the “masses” will simply ignore the inconvenience until it is too late.

Progressivism

The principles of liberalism espoused by the famed Jewish activists of the 1960s and 1970s gradually devolved into a mélange of nihilism, relativism, and primitive Marxist-Leninism which I term “Progressivism.”[\[20\]](#) This did not occur by accident but by the determined efforts of the next generation of PF, especially those influenced by Herbert Marcuse.[\[21\]](#) The governing ideology was that everything was a social construct and the only truth was what the Progressives deemed true, and that could change in an instant.

This shift occurred coincident with the rise of social media, where an individual could express his or her egoistic ideas and emotions instantaneously to the world at large. Personalities on the internet

soon drew enormous followings, greater than heroic figures or the heads of state. The only behavioral restriction was that any opposing dissent was immediately censured by the virtual mob. Ergo, the birth of wokeism and cancel culture.

Progressivism was disseminated through the major avenues of communicating ideas: centers of learning (universities, high schools, and eventually grade schools); the media; government bureaucracies; and even corporate America. And of course, through the bombardment of images on handheld digital devices. This takeover occurred without significant opposition, primarily because many of the Progressive claims were so absurd that few took them seriously. Today, these claims have entered the lexicon, and range from the peculiar to the macabre.[\[22\]](#)

Shortly after the turn of the new millennium, the Islamists, also familiar with the 3.5% rule, adopted new tactics in attempting to delegitimize the State of Israel. They organized movements such as BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions), and increased their prominence among the ranks of the Progressives. With flawed logic, they labeled Israel an apartheid state and compared the plight of the Palestinians to that of South African Blacks before apartheid was repealed. And, they averred, one could hate Israel and still (wink) like the Jews.

The Progressives, which included many activist Jews, supported this narrative. They felt compassion for the Palestinians and demanded social justice for an oppressed minority (apparently oblivious to what these people endured under their terrorist guardians). They cautioned that one must not conflate anti-Israel with anti-Semitism, which in theory sounds plausible, but perhaps demands a second thought, in light of the fact that Israel is a sovereign state that others deem does not have the right to exist, and which needs not to be policed but to be liquidated.

Predictably, this has led to the currently fashionable view of the Jew, not as a person of genetically Middle Eastern ancestry and the victim of oppression over the millennia who was led on the path to extinction during the Holocaust, but as perhaps the most successful example of “white supremacy” and the ultimate colonizer. The enemy consists of Israel and its Jewish occupants who must be removed and driven from the (Jordan) river to the (Mediterranean) sea. The other enemy is its ally, the United States of America, the great oppressor. The conflict of Israel against Hamas and other state-sponsored terrorist groups is framed, not as a just war in response to an unprovoked attack, but as a genocide of innocent civilians.

The matter reached a crescendo of sorts within the university system on December 5, 2023, several months after the start of the Gaza war on October 7, 2023. The presidents of three of the most prestigious universities in America, including Harvard, gave testimony before Congress as to anti-Semitic activities on their campuses. When repeatedly asked if calls for the genocide of Jews violated their school's code of conduct, all hemmed and hawed and refused to answer “yes.”[\[23\]](#) This dramatically brought to light in a single moment the corruptness rampant within the highest centers of learning. Rabbi Wolpe, who had previously impacted my life, had been asked several months earlier to sit on a newly formed Antisemitism Advisory Group at Harvard; on December 8, 2023, he resigned.

The Arc of History

In my opinion, if one believes that life is random and essentially meaningless, if it starts at zero and ends at zero, if it is not teleological (that is, causal and purposeful), then one will interpret the contribution of Judaism and the Jews from a different perspective. For purposes of this essay, if not already obvious, I disclose my belief in the transcendent.

The psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers posited a concept he termed the Axial Age, the period of the middle centuries BC during which “the spiritual foundations of humanity were laid

simultaneously and independently in China, India, Persia, Palestine, and Greece. And these are the foundations upon which humanity still subsists today.”[\[24\]](#) During this period, the beliefs of major religions were codified as were the philosophical contributions of the Greeks. Jaspers believed in transcendence, that aspect of reality beyond time, space, and science.

The religious prophets wrought signs and wonders as attention getters, but always pointed away from themselves toward the heavens. The holy men and women exemplified lives worth living. The major religions flourished over the millennia, and while competing with each other for adherents, never wavered in their belief in a transcendent power. The Enlightenment changed the arc by eliminating God and substituting the idea that the ultimate reference was, in fact, the individual person, who could be perfected if he or she would only listen to “reason.” Science and technology worked the “miracles,” those remarkable achievements that created material wealth and alleviated physical misery.

Unfortunately, this worldview could not provide meaning. In the late 19th century, the more prescient observers of human nature noted where all this might be heading.[\[25\]](#) The 20th century witnessed the emergence of totalitarian regimes, which either imposed state-sponsored atheism by diktat or made life very difficult for practicing religions. Their excursions into savagery resulted in monumental civilian and military deaths. During the milieu of World War II, three events occurred that directly involved the Jews and impacted history.

The first was the Holocaust (in Hebrew, “Shoah”). This event is extensively documented and indisputable: the systematic murder of approximately 6 million civilian Jews by Nazi Germany during World War II.[\[26\]](#) While the death toll is exceeded by the orchestrated famines of the Soviet and Chinese Communist regimes, several factors render the Holocaust unique:

1. The fact that these deaths represented nearly 40% of the entire global Jewish population, and Hitler’s ultimate objective was to eliminate the remaining 60%
2. The fact of the planning, commitment of resources, and industrial efficiency with which it was carried out, often at odds with military objectives
3. The fact that it was not directed at political opponents but at a “people”
4. The fact that the crime was perpetrated not by a barbarian horde but by perhaps the most intellectually advanced society extant at the time, the embodiment of “reason”

The second was the invention of the atomic bomb, possibly the greatest theoretical and technological achievement in human history. The Manhattan Project was initiated during the early years of the war when victory by the Axis seemed likely, with the fear that Nazi Germany would develop the bomb first. Its invention required the greatest scientific minds in the world working in concert to overcome theoretical and practical challenges considered impossible.[\[27\]](#)

And most of these minds belonged to Jewish men residing in Europe. As Hitler assumed power, they fled to America and teamed with the most brilliant American scientists, of whom many were also Jewish. They literally took the possibility of the bomb out of Hitler’s hands. The detonation of the first two atomic bombs over Japanese cities shortened the war in the Pacific Theater but at a great loss of life. It had irreversibly let the genie out of the bottle, a technology that made possible the ultimate existential threat: a self-induced, human extinction event.

The third was the creation of the State of Israel, which captured worldwide attention from the moment of statehood. Why? In addition to representing the origin of Judaism, Israel is the location of the birthplace and ministry of Jesus Christ and thus the geographic epicenter of Christianity. Jerusalem is also the third holiest city for Muslims. There is no other place on Earth with such religious symbolic value.

Politically, Israel is the only functioning democracy in the Middle East. Despite its size, it has won

multiple conflicts with neighboring Arab states. And it has been allied with America, the most powerful nation in history. This alliance stands as a message to the world, not only to other nations but to the proponents of Islamism, a threat unknown or underestimated by most.

Today, with oppositional global forces and worldviews concentrated on Israel and Jerusalem, it is not difficult to envision an end-of-days scenario, even for the nonbeliever. Iran neared the point of possessing deployable nuclear weapons as well as maintaining the largest ballistic missile arsenal in the Middle East. A single nuclear strike on Israel would instantly annihilate nearly half the Jews on Earth.[\[28\]](#) Fortunately, in June 2025, air strikes on Irani nuclear facilities and military installations by Israel (assisted by the United States) severely impacted Iran's nuclear weapons program. For the near term, this threat has been averted.

Whether humans go out with a bang (thermonuclear war augmented by other weapons of mass destruction) or a whimper (a world government run by machine general intelligence with not much use for humans), it is likely that we will once again suffer from the amnesia of not learning from history. As stated succinctly by Jonathan Sacks, the distinguished Orthodox rabbi, "The hate that begins with the Jews never ends with the Jews."

Whither Shall We Go?

I believe the Jewish people entered into a covenant with God to serve, among other things, as "a light to the Gentiles."[\[29\]](#) This is not to imply any sort of ethnic supremacy, or that God does not have equally strong relationships with other people. If anything, to be chosen imposes a heavy responsibility to lead the way, to often act as a lightning rod or a canary in the coal mine, particularly during the times of epic clashes between worldviews. Within this context, and based on all of the foregoing, I offer the following to other Gentiles for reflection and consideration.

One. Disavow anti-Semitism. Examine first what is in your own heart. Frequently, what most angers us is subconsciously rooted in the personal flaw we fear the most, and can represent psychological displacement. Understand that the charge of anti-Semitism is meant to include every Jew and that in reality, there are different lineages, denominations, and outlooks. Invest the time to understand the breadth of the Jewish people and establish relationships to personalize your perceptions.

Two. Support the State of Israel as a nation-state that has the right to exist, an existential threshold that defines the point at which anti-Israel becomes anti-Semitism. This leaves plenty of room to criticize the government and its decision-making as one would do discussing the United States of America or other democratic governments where criticism is even allowed.

Three. Reject secularism and Progressivism as antithetical to the core tenets of Judaism and Christianity. These ideologies are explicitly nontheistic. The loss of a belief in God creates a vacuum that *will* be filled; in the present age, not by a golden calf, but by an idea that always sounds good and virtuous at the outset, be it a socialist utopia or a humanistic world order. And for the nonbeliever, consider the impact of these two religions on the course of Western civilization and the dangers of aligning with the Progressives merely based on a shared atheism.[\[30\]](#)

Four. Respect the exceptionalism of the Jews in specific occupations and learn from it. I was fortunate at a tender age to have been instructed by Irv on the art of selling. Later in life, when I entered the field of commercial real estate and conducted business in San Francisco and Los Angeles, I studied the leading Jewish entrepreneurs and professionals, particularly noting their negotiating skills and their willingness to take outside risk yet somehow manage it effectively. It forced me to up my game. Take advantage of this opportunity if it presents itself in your field of endeavor.

Five. Show courage in combatting Progressivism in your life, particularly if you have school-age children who are subject to teachers and curriculum promoting its worst excesses. Support organizations that are emerging to change the hearts and minds, one person at a time, of those Jews in the American diaspora who cannot let go of supporting a distorted liberalism.[\[31\]](#) Speak the truth.

The essence of God's covenant with the Jews is stated in the first mitzvah (commandment), "I am the Lord thy God," and the second, "Thou shall have no other gods before me."[\[32\]](#) When these *mitzvot* are violated, then the covenant is jeopardized, a recurring theme in the Torah. The Jews of the American diaspora, particularly the Ashkenazim in the key strongholds, wield the power to support the State of Israel and its residents—who daily put their lives on the line and thus have true skin in the game—without equivocation.

And they have the influence and resources to redirect belief back to the one true God—to engage the finest scholars and theologians and bridge the gap with the Orthodox community—and perform a contemporary exegesis of Judaism. And as Gentiles, we must examine our own conscience and work tirelessly to turn the arc of secularism.

Coda

Several years ago, I started on a journey to solve the mystery of the Jewish people to my satisfaction. Have I succeeded? No, not really, and it is likely that I am not alone. The place of the Jews at the edge of the Great Unfolding ensures that they are usually a half-step ahead of other tribes and human groups. But the effort compelled me to clarify my own thinking on life's big questions, and more importantly, to strengthen my beliefs. And for this, I'm sure my Jewish mentors and friends would be proud.

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