A New Antisemitism?

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Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (London) surveys recent incidents of antisemitism and explores the root causes of the phenomenon.

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Jonathan Sacks

The following is the text, edited for publication, of a lecture I gave to the Inter-Parliamentary Committee against Antisemitism on 28 February 2002. As I explain in the lecture, the subject is one on which I was reluctant to speak. There is always the danger that in speaking about antisemitism (a) one can exaggerate, or (b) by drawing attention to it, one can give it publicity that fuels the flames. As the Talmud says in another context, "Woe if I speak; woe if I am silent." I decided, none the less, to sound a warning. That is not because I believed, then or now, that there is a real and present danger in Britain. There is not. But the new antisemitism – and it is new – is a global phenomenon conveyed by Internet, e-mail, television and video, and we do not yet know how the new communications media will affect its spread. Under such circumstances, early warning systems are important.

My analysis, in February, was sombre. Much worse has happened since. In the first two weeks of April, for example, in France synagogues, Jewish schools, student facilities and Jewish shops were attacked and firebombed. A synagogue in Marseilles was burned to the ground. Jews were attacked by gangs of hooded men wielding iron clubs. The French Interior Ministry reported, during those two weeks alone, 360 crimes against Jews and Jewish institutions. I was in Italy with my family at the time (it was the festival of Passover), when a Jewish couple from France, sitting next to us, received a phone call from their son, saying, "The time has come for us to leave and go to Israel. France is not safe for us any more."

During the same period, in Kiev, Ukraine, 50 youths chanting "Kill the Jews" attacked a synagogue, broke twenty windows, and assaulted the director of the Jewish school. In Salonika, the Holocaust memorial was defaced with Palestinian slogans. In Slovakia, Jewish cemeteries were desecrated. In Brussels, synagogues were firebombed and a travel agency specializing in Israel tours was set alight. There were violent anti-Israel demonstrations in Amsterdam, during which rocks and bottles were thrown and shop windows broken. In Berlin, Jews were assaulted, swastikas daubed on Jewish memorials, and a synagogue spray painted with the words "Six million is not enough."

More recently in America there has been intimidation of Jewish students. A student newspaper at Rutgers University carried an article containing the words, "Die Jew. Die, die, die. Do us all a favour and build yourself an oven." In Britain, two synagogues, one in London, another in Manchester, have been desecrated. One of my rabbinical colleagues was assaulted as he sat waiting for a train. Almost none of these acts was directed against an Israeli target. These were attacks on Jews, their schools and places of worship. This is not anti-Zionism, not generalized racism, not random violence, but antisemitism.

It is coming simultaneously from three different directions: first, a radicalized Islamic youth inflamed by extremist rhetoric; second, a left-wing anti-American cognitive elite with strong representation in the European media; third, a resurgent far right, as anti-Muslim as it is anti-Jewish. It is being fed by the instability of globalization, the insecurity of the post-Cold War international arena, and the still-undischarged trauma of 11 September. It has been allowed to grow unchecked because of a general unwillingness among Europe"s political leadership to confront the problem head on ("For evil to triumph", said Burke, "it is necessary only for the good man to do nothing"). It has been aggravated by the breakdown of a morality of right and wrong acts in favour of a therapeutic ethic which "feels the pain" of the perpetrators of violence. Taken in combination, these are powerful forces, to which the countervailing influences of reason, responsibility and restraint are as unequal now as they have been at any other time of populist ferment and generalized fear.

Antisemitism exists and is dangerous whenever two contradictory factors appear in combination – the belief that Jews are so powerful that they are responsible for the evils of the world, and the knowledge that they are so powerless that they can be attacked with impunity. Those two factors are in abundant evidence today in many parts of the world. That this has happened with such speed and so little protest, less than sixty years after the Holocaust, is profoundly shocking. No one – not Jews, not Muslims, not Christians, no one – should suffer this kind of hate, and the moral credibility of more than one civilization is at stake. On 28 February I thought it was sufficient to sound a warning. Now I think more is needed: a call to all those with a sense of history and humanity to say, Stop. No problem was ever solved by hate, falsehood, racism, religiously inspired terror, and the willingness to deflect attention from real abuses of power, human rights and moral responsibility. Now is the time for good men and women to do something: to say Never again, and mean just that: Never again.

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Item: 13th February 2002. Letter to The Times, London:

Dear Sir,

I am 67 years old – a Jew born in London. My grandfather fought with Kitchener in Sudan, my uncle was in the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War, my father volunteered at the beginning of the Second World War and was with the British Forces at Dunkirk, and my late husband was called up and joined the Royal Navy towards the end of the war.

I have always felt I had a share in the land of Shakespeare and Milton. Their culture was my culture. But now I fear for my childrens" and grandchildrens" future because, in spite of the new race laws, the Government, for which I voted twice, does nothing to protect one of the oldest and smallest of its ethnic communities. There are fewer than 300,000 Jews in this country.

I don"t know one British Jew who supports Ariel Sharon and yet Muslim extremists are free to threaten every Jew in this country using the Middle East conflict as a pretext. Jewish University students regularly encounter virulent antisemitism. As the novelist Howard Jacobson has said, "Suddenly it doesn"t feel safe to be a Jew again."

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Item: 21st February 2002. The trial begins in London of a cleric charged with soliciting to commit murder after allegedly distributing videos to his followers in which he is seen giving his audience nineteen reasons why Moslems cannot have peace with, in his words, "the filthy Jews" whom he calls "evil to the core".

According to press reports he is seen making a joke: "How did the Jews get back at Hitler? They sent him back the gas bill." At this the audience laughs. In answer to a question he allegedly says: "How do you fight the Jews? You kill the Jews."

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Item: 23rd February 2002. News emerges of the murder in Pakistan of the American journalist Daniel Pearl, foreign correspondent of the Wall Street Journal. The murder is carried out in front of a video camera. In the video, Pearl is forced at gunpoint to admit he is a Jew and his parents are Jews. His throat is then slit from behind. Over film of his writhing, decapitated body a voice declares: "Other Americans and the Jews should be ready to face a fate like Daniel Pearl.

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Item: New York Times, 27 February 2002. "Garges-Les-Gonesse, France. Shalom Temim, who lives in this modern soulless looking suburb of Paris where the government has built row after row of subsidized high-rises, knows that he is the only Jew in his housing block on the Rue Delorme. So he does not doubt that the graffiti spray-painted in his stairwell "Vive Hezbollah" and "Dirty Jew" are directed at him."

"Nor is it the only sign of hostility that surrounds him in this predominantly Arab neighbourhood. Six months ago a rock crashed through his livingroom window, after it a smoky fire cracker. On a recent morning, fresh spit was visible on his front door."

"I have lived here for 32 years", Temim said. "All this is new and it seems like the public authorities are down-playing everything which is of course very worrying." The French Government has acknowledged a sharp increase in antisemitic incidents since September 2000 when fighting between Israelis and Palestinians intensified. One Government report says that acts of violence against Jews have increased from 1 in 1998 to 9 in 1999 to 116 in 2000. Other antisemitic incidents, ranging from threats to arson, went from 74 in 1998 to 60 in 1999 to 603 in 2000. But some Jewish groups say that even those numbers fall far short of the actual situation with many Jews afraid to report incidents and some officials quick to classify attacks as ordinary misbehaviour by young toughs."

"What seems indisputable is that the news that a synagogue has been fire-bombed or that stones have been thrown at Jewish schools has become commonplace. In Garges-les-Gonesse, the distinctive blue school bus that takes children to the Jewish school in nearby Aubervilliers has been attacked three times in the last fourteen months, when there were dozens of young children aboard. The first time a knife was thrown through an open window, the bus driver said. The second time three men used their car to block the bus from moving. Then one man smashed a window with a tyre iron while another menaced the driver with a gun telling him he was not in Tel Aviv. Recently rocks were hurled at the windows, smashing one of them." "I keep trying to tell the kids it"s nothing", says the bus driver "but of course they"re scared. No one wants to live like this.""

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I AM FRANKLY RELUCTANT to speak about antisemitism. Firstly, I never experienced it. To the contrary, I have received nothing but kindness from this, my country – the nation that, from John Locke to John Stuart Mill to Winston Churchill, has been the matrix and defender of tolerance in the modern world.

Even my late father, who came to this country as a refugee fleeing persecution, used to make a joke about it. Every time we were driving and the traffic lights went red, he used to say, "Antisemitic traffic lights!" For him, as for me, it was the past; it was over; in Britain, at least, it was not serious.

Secondly, we are wrong to see all criticism of the State of Israel as anti-Zionism, let alone as antisemitism. No nation is perfect. No nation is above criticism. A democracy must welcome criticism – and Israel is a democracy.

Indeed it was the prophets of ancient Israel who invented the institution of self-criticism three thousand years ago. To this day, Jews are gold medalists in the art of self-criticism. As Abba Eban once said: "We are the nation who can"t take yes for an answer."

However, the most important reason for my reluctance is that it should not have to be Jews who condemn antisemitism; who see it, feel it, protest against it. It should be Christians, Muslims, secular humanists. As for me, in my annual message to the nation on BBC Television last September, I protested against hatred of non-Jews: of blacks, Muslims, immigrants and asylum seekers. I am proud that the Union of Jewish Students, who have been subject to much verbal and physical abuse recently, have led the fight against Islamophobia on campus, as well as against other forms of racial and religious hatred. I am proud that in America, just as Jews in the 1960s marched alongside Martin Luther King to fight for blacks, so today they are among the leaders in the fight against persecution of Christians in Arab lands.

I salute the brave non-Jews who have raised their voice on this issue. Now, though, I have to add my own, because as God said to the prophet Ezekiel: "If the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people, and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood. Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the House of Israel." A prophet must issue a warning, and every rabbi, however humbly, is an heir to the prophets.

WHAT, THEN, IS ANTISEMITISM? This is so emotive a subject that it is best approached by way of a thought experiment. Let us suppose that someone claimed to have discovered a phenomenon he called anti-Kiwism, a pathological hatred of New Zealanders. What would have to be the case to convince us that he was right and that there really is such a phenomenon?

The fact that the government of New Zealand is criticised? Clearly not. The publicly-voiced claim that New Zealand has no right to exist? Perhaps. The fact that in the past twelve months – February 2001 to February 2002 – there have been 7732 terrorist attacks on New Zealand"s citizens, almost one every hour of every day for 365 days. Maybe.

But in truth, not yet. What all these facts would amount to would simply be a tragedy – a human tragedy, a political tragedy, but not yet anti-Kiwism.

Now, though, suppose that at a United Nations Conference against Racism in Durban, New Zealand, because of its treatment of Maoris, is, alone among the nations of the world, singled out and accused of apartheid, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity; and that those making these charges carry posters inspired by Der Sturmer, the paper published in Nazi Germany. Suppose that there are calls to murder all those with New Zealand loyalties, even though they were born elsewhere and live elsewhere.

Suppose, on Al-Jazeera television earlier this month, an official spokesman of the government of Saudi Arabia said that "The media of America is in the hands of the New Zealanders," and then adds, "I am surprised that the Christian United States allows the brothers of apes and pigs [his way of describing New Zealanders] to corrupt it. The New Zealanders are the most despicable people who walk the land and are the worms of the entire world."

Suppose that New Zealand was accused of inventing AIDS to decimate the population of Africa. Suppose that, simultaneously, New Zealand was held, not merely to control the United States, but also to have engineered the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11th September 2001. Suppose that this claim – that it was not Osama bin Laden, but New Zealand who carried out the outrage – was not confined to fringe groups but was believed by 48 per cent of people questioned in Pakistan, 71 per cent of the population holding it to be at least possible.

Suppose Arab radio and television in the past year had broadcast a thirty-part series dedicated to proving the truth of the Protocols of the Elders of New Zealand; that Kuwaiti TV had shown a satire in which the Prime Minister of New Zealand was shown drinking the blood of Maori children, or that the current Syrian Defence Minister had written a book to prove that this was true.

Suppose you discovered that, in country after country, the Protocols of the Elders of New Zealand, along with Hitler"s Mein Kampf, were best sellers, and that the claim was commonplace that New Zealand is a satanic force, the embodiment of evil against whom a holy war must be fought, then I think you might be reasonably convinced that there was such a think as anti-Kiwism, that it was alive and well, disturbing and dangerous.

Every single statement I have just made – with New Zealand deleted and the words Israel or Jew substituted – has happened in the past year.

This might seem, to reasonable and dispassionate people, to be worthy of some concern. But putting it this way altogether fails to communicate the real pathos of the situation, because we are not dealing with anti-Kiwism. We are dealing with antisemitism. And antisemitism has a history.

Let me state the point as simply as I can: Antisemitism is alive, active and virulent in the year 2002, after more than half a century of Holocaust education, inter-faith dialogue, United Nations declarations, dozens of museums and memorials, hundreds of films, thousands of courses, and tens of thousands of books dedicated to exposing its evils; after the Stockholm Conference, 27 January 2000, after the creation of a National Holocaust Memorial Day, after two thousand religious leaders came together in the United Nations in August 2000 to commit themselves to fight hatred and engender mutual respect. After all this.

What more could have been done? What more could and can we do to fight antisemitism? Yet it exists today in many parts of the world: in the Middle East, Africa, South-East Asia and yes, in Europe, in more virulent forms than at any time since the Holocaust. There can be little doubt that it has been the most successful ideology of modern times. Fascism came and went. Soviet Communism came and went. Antisemitism came and stayed.

HOW DOES ANTISEMITISM SURVIVE? Sadly, the answer is this. Antisemitism is not a belief system, a coherent set of ideas. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jews were hated because they were rich and because they were poor; because they were capitalists and because they were communists; because they kept to themselves and because they got everywhere; because they were superstitious believers and because they were rootless cosmopolitans who believed nothing.

Antisemitism is not a belief. It is a virus – and like a virus, it mutates. The human body has the most sophisticated of mechanisms – the immune system – to defend itself against viruses. It develops antibodies. Viruses defeat the immune system because they mutate. They are then able to get past the body"s defences, in effect by persuading them that they are friends, not foes. The immune system, alert to last year"s virus, fails to recognize this year"s.

The classic case of mutation happened in Europe in the nineteenth century. There was a belief that in an age of enlightenment – emancipation, the French Revolution, the secular nation state – prejudice would die, not least the age-old Christian prejudice against Judaism and Jews. What happened instead was that religious anti-Judaism mutated into racial antisemitism.

The word "antisemitism" itself was coined in 1879. What made racial antisemitism so much worse than its religious precursors was that now Jews were hated not because of what they believed, or not because of how they lived, but because of who they were. You can eliminate a religion by forcibly converting all its followers. You can eliminate a race only by genocide. As Raul Hilberg put it: "There is a straight line from "You have no right to live among us as Jews," to "You have no right to live among us" to "You have no right to live.""

What we are witnessing today is the second great mutation of antisemitism in modern times, from racial antisemitism to religious anti-Zionism (with the added premise that all Jews are Zionists). It

uses all the mediaeval myths – the Blood Libel, poisoning of wells, killers of the Lord"s anointed, incarnation of evil – transposed into a new key and context. This could not have succeeded, however, without one mutation – a mutation so ingenious, demonic and evil that it paralyses the immune systems of the West built up over the past half-century.

The mutation is this: that the worst crimes of antisemites in the past – racism, ethnic cleansing, attempted genocide, crimes against humanity – are now attributed to Jews and the State of Israel, so that if you are against Nazism, you must ipso facto be utterly opposed to Jews. I regard this as one of the most blasphemous inversions in the history of the world"s oldest hate. I am shocked that so few non-Jews in Europe have recognized it and denounced it.

WHAT THEN SHALL WE DO? I have three messages – one to Jews; a second to antisemites; the third to us, to humanity as a whole.

My first message is to the Jewish community in this country and throughout the world. We must not internalise this hate. The great mistake Jews made in the nineteenth century – and it was a mistake made by good and serious people – was that to believe that since Jews are the object of antisemitism, they must therefore be the cause of antisemitism.

That is untrue. We now have copious evidence that there can be fierce antisemitism in countries where there are no Jews at all. The moment we internalise antisemitism, the result is that tortured psychology – from ambivalence to self-hatred – against which my last book, *Radical Then, Radical Now* (in America, *A Letter in the Scroll*) was directed. Ambivalence and self-hatred have injured Jewish life for a century, and we still suffer its after-effects today.

Some years ago, in the early years of Russian Glasnost, the following episode occurred (I heard it from one of my rabbinical colleagues). Glasnost allowed Jews in the Soviet Union to live freely and openly as Jews for the first time in seventy years. Unfortunately, it also brought to the surface a degree of antisemitism that had been suppressed before.

A British rabbi went out to Russia in the late 1980s to help reconstruct Jewish life. One day he had a visit from a young woman. She said, "Rabbi, all my life I have hidden the fact that I was a Jew. No one ever commented on it. Now, though, when I walk in the street, people shout out, Zhid, Zhid ["Jew, Jew"]. What shall I do?"

The rabbi said, "You don"t look Jewish. If you hadn"t told me, I would never have known that you were a Jew. Look at me. With my black hat and my black yamulka and my beard, people probably know that I"m a Jew. Yet in all these months that I have been here, no one has ever shouted out to me Zhid. Why do you think that is?"

The girl was silent for a minute, and then replied, "Because they know that if they shout "Jew" at you, you will take it as a compliment. If they shout "Jew" at me, they know I will take it as an insult." The best way for Jews to combat antisemitism, beyond eternal vigilance, is to wear our identity with pride.

I TURN NOW TO THE ANTISEMITE. I say to him or her: Forgive me, but I cannot return hate with hate. I fight my hatreds. You must fight yours. You cannot fight my battles and I cannot fight yours. But this I can tell you: When bad things happen to any of us, there are two different questions we can ask – and which we ask defines what kind of person we are. We can ask, "How can I put it right?" Or we can ask, "Who did this to me?"

The first question – "How can I put it right?" – defines me as a subject, a moral agent, a person with freewill. The second question – "Who did this to me?" – defines me as an object, a victim who, being a victim, can only experience resentment and rage. If there is anything that paralyses human

freedom and destroys human responsibility, it is resentment and rage.

Throughout history, antisemitism has been the weapon of choice of tyrants, dictators and rules of totalitarian states because, more effectively than anything else it deflects all justified complaints – of the hungry, the poor, the uneducated, the sick, the repressed, those denied the most basic human freedoms – away from those responsible, and projects them on a mythical enemy elsewhere.

That is why those who care for freedom, democracy and human rights must realise that antisemitism or mythic anti-Zionism will not liberate the supposed victims of Jews but the opposite: It will perpetuate their self-definition as victims and thus perpetuate their victimhood. It will gain them sympathy but deprive them of all responsibility. It will allow them to embark on policies that, in more than one sense, are suicidal. The link between self-defined victims and their sympathizers (whose intentions are nothing if not noble) is what in therapeutic terms is called co-dependency and its effect is profoundly self-destructive. More than hate destroys the hated, hate destroys the hater.

FINALLY I TURN TO US, all of us in our shared humanity. There is something I must say in its full depth and gravity. Since the destruction of the First Temple, nearly 2600 years ago, Jews have known the bread of affliction. Think of the words Jewish history has added to our vocabulary – expulsion, inquisition, ghetto, pogrom, Holocaust. I do not want to dwell on that history. It is too painful, and besides, I do not think it defines who and what we are. Judaism is about sanctifying life, not remembering death.

However, during those twenty-six centuries Jews adopted three strategies in order to survive. The first was initiated by the prophet Jeremiah at the beginning of Israel"s history of exile. He sent a letter to the Jews who had been forcibly taken from Israel, or who had fled. He told them (Jeremiah 29): "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which you were exiled, and pray to God for it, for in its peace, you will find peace." That is an idea that was ancient even in Jeremiah"s day. It goes back to the opening words of Jewish history (Genesis 12) and to God"s first call to Abraham, in which He tells him to act so that "through you, all the families of earth will be blessed." That was, and remains, the Jewish vocation: to be true to our faith while being a blessing to others.

That is what Jews sought to do for some twenty-five centuries: to contribute to the countries in which they lived by developing businesses, enlarging trade, adding to the arts and sciences, to poetry and philosophy, and above all, to the spiritual heritage of mankind.

That was the first strategy. It failed. It failed because, until the nineteenth century, Jews had no civil rights. They lacked the protection of the law. They were dependent on the favour of the ruler, and when it was no longer in his interest to keep Jews, they were expelled: from England in 1290, and then, in the course of the next two centuries, from virtually every country in Europe, culminating in 101 years of anti-Jewish persecution in Spain and finally the expulsion, in 1492. Thus, the first solution failed.

What was the second? It arose in nineteenth century Europe, and came about as a result of Enlightenment, emancipation and birth of the secular nation state. For the first time in history, Jews were offered equal rights as citizens. The promise was that the rule of reason would dispel the ancient mists of prejudice.

The failure of that dream is one of the most devastating chapters in European history. The depth of its failure is measured by this: that virtually all the great philosophers of modernity – Voltaire, Fichte, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Frege – made sharply antisemitic statements in the course of their work (These are documented in my book, *The Politics of Hope*, 98-108). The greatest German philosopher of the twentieth century, Martin Heidegger, was an enthusiastic

member of the Nazi Party who never, in the post-war years, recanted, atoned or apologized for his acts. Thus the Europe of reason, enlightenment and philosophy became the Europe of the Holocaust. (I speak, of course, not of Britain, one of the honorable exceptions). The second solution failed.

Zionism was born in the consciousness of that failure. It began in 1862 with Moses Hess, friend of Karl Marx, and the first person to diagnose the emerging German antisemitism. It was followed in 1882 by the assimilated Russian Jewish doctor, Leon Pinsker, after the great Russian pogroms of 1881. Then, in 1895, Theodor Herzl, a Viennese journalist covering the Dreyfus trial in Paris, heard the crowds cry *A mort les Juifs* ("Death to the Jews"). France at that time was widely regarded as the most civilised nation in Europe, the home of the revolution, the birthplace of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. When he heard that cry on the Parisian streets, Herzl knew that Europe was no longer safe for Jews. This is what he wrote a year later. It sums up the experience of a century of Jewish life in Western Europe:

"We have sincerely tried everywhere to merge with the national communities in which we live, seeking only to preserve the faith of our fathers. It is not permitted to us. In vain are we loyal patriots, sometimes super-loyal. In vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow citizens. In vain do we strive to enhance the fame of our native lands in the arts and sciences, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In our native lands, where we have lived for centuries, we are still decried as aliens, often by men whose ancestors had not yet come, at a time when Jewish sighs had long been heard in the country."

He added: "I think we shall not be left in peace."

The idea of Hess, Pinsker and Herzl was simple. If the nation states of Europe had no place for Jews, then Jews must have a nation state of their own. Sadly, it took the murder of two-thirds of Europe"s Jews before the state was born.

That solution must not fail. For the only fourth solution is the one the Nazis called "the final solution." That is why Jews must have a safe collective home, in the sense defined by the poet Robert Frost, who wrote "home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to let you in."

From here on, we must stand and fight our ground. There is no other. We must fight it with courage, integrity, honesty, cogency, with neither animus nor hate nor desire for revenge, but we must fight it – and Jews must not be left, yet again, to fight it alone.

Why have Jews been persecuted and hated throughout the ages? Not because they were better than anyone else, not because they were worse than anyone else, but because they were different and because there is a natural human tendency to dislike the unlike, to fear the stranger and hate what we fear.

But surely, every nation, each faith, every culture is different. That is so. What made Jews singular is that, with more tenacity than anyone else, they insisted on the right to be different, the duty to be different, the dignity of difference. In the days of the Alexandrian Empire they refused to be Hellenized, so they were persecuted. In the days of Rome, they fought for the right to practice their faith, and they were persecuted. In Christian Europe they resisted conversion, and they were persecuted. Today, in an Islamic Middle East, they are not Muslims; and so they are persecuted. Had the majority of Jews capitulated under any of these dispensations, they would have spared themselves and their children much suffering and grief, and today there would be no Judaism and no Jews.

Our ancestors believed – I dare still to believe – that no one should be forced to abandon his faith,

traditions, history and loyalties to have the right to be free, to walk down a street without fear of being attacked, to build a place of worship without fear of it being burned down. I was a student at Cambridge. The synagogue in Cambridge, built in the 1930s, has no windows in the walls that face the street, because of the fear then that if there were, they would be broken. That fear has now returned, if not in Cambridge, then in Paris, Marseilles, Brussels, Berlin.

Antisemitism is a crime against humanity – not because Jews are human beings (I hope that much will be conceded) but because human beings are Jews, by which I mean difference is the essence of our humanity. There is a fine rabbinic saying, two thousand years old, that "When a human being makes many coins in the same mint, they are all the same. God makes every person in the same image – His image – and they are each different." The miracle of creation is that unity in heaven creates diversity on earth. Or, as I have put it elsewhere, the fundamental challenge is to see God"s image in one who is not in our image. A world that has no room for Jews, has no space for difference; and a world that lacks space for difference has no room for humanity. That is why antisemitism is not a, but *the*, paradigm of a crime against humanity.

The unfolding tragedy in Israel will not be solved by demonization, myth, blood libels, reiterations of medieval fantasies, modern forgeries like the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, attacks on Jews and synagogues throughout the world, evasions, lies, and conspiracy theories. Political problems have political solutions, and they require nothing less than truth, fact, relentless honesty, self-criticism, the capacity to compromise, and a willingness to prefer an imperfect peace to the perfect purity of holy war, sacred suicide, and murderous martyrdom. Antisemitism begins with Jews but never ends with Jews. Now is the time for those who care about humanity to join in the defence of humanity, by protesting this newest mutation of the world"s oldest hate.

QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION

David Menton

Chief Rabbi, at the beginning you mentioned some of the issues surrounding September 11th and the terror attacks and I was wondering if you could maybe draw some parallels over the obviously long-term fight against antisemitism and obviously this new fight that we"re seeing across the globe of the fight against world terror:

Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The thrust of my argument has been that words become deeds after a while – that teaching young people in schools and religious seminaries to hate, eventually leads to violence. That is why we have to sound the early warning signal against speech that incites to hatred.

The postwar fight against antisemitism focused on a particular territory and a specific culture, and maybe our eyes were averted from the fact that it was re-emerging somewhere else in a different form. But there is no way, for instance, that people are willing to commit suicide in order to kill innocent human beings, without there being an indoctrination in hate. That is why, even though the fight against terror is a fight against its overt forms, there has to be another fight: not only against terror but against the hate that inspires terror. Otherwise we will find that we have only battled against terrorism, even successfully for a while, to see it re-emerge once more in a new generation.

That is why I believe that the war against terror – although I do not agree with calling it a war; it is a campaign, not a war – must now become an international campaign against education in hate

and hate-speech. Each of us must take on that responsibility, because hate is destructive, whoever harbours it and whoever it is harboured against.

That is why I feel that in the fullness of time – actually now – the leaders of the free world must also make a quite explicit denunciation of hate speech and hate-filled education.

Lord Janner

Can I ask what advice you would give to politicians actively engaged in the battle against antisemitism?

Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Take a course from Greville Janner!

Beyond that, we have to sound the warning. That is what I hope I have done tonight. I do feel that political leaders of this country should know that many members of the Jewish community in this country, including especially our students on campus, are feeling very exposed and vulnerable, and when we raise our concerns they deserve to be taken seriously.

Many of us warned about this, several years ago: that London was becoming a centre for extremists, and indeed for potential terrorists. We warned several years ago that campuses were becoming hot-beds of extremism. I do not feel our warnings were taken seriously enough. And therefore, Greville, I hope others will join us in sounding that warning somewhat more forcibly at this time.

John Benjamin

My name"s John Benjamin. I"m the head of the Human-Rights Policy Department in the Foreign Office and that was the Department which for better and worse oversaw the input into the British delegation to the World Conference against Racism which you mentioned in your talk.

As you know, the United States and Israel left that Conference and the Europeans remained in an attempt to in some way mitigate some of the draft statements that were out there and so as not to leave the Conference totally in the hands of the hardliners.

In retrospect, do you think that was the right decision? Thank you.

Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

At the time, I said I understood the British decision. You know that I pulled out. I refused to attend. However, there is a story behind the story, which contains some good news as well as bad.

Along with Prince Hassan of Jordan, I was one of a group of twenty-five called "The Eminent Persons Group". I have rarely felt so eminent: Michael Gorbachev, Jimmy Carter, Nelson Mandela were also members. I was contacted, early in the summer of last year, by Mary Robinson, the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner, who was the convener of the Conference, and who asked me whether I could help to pre-empt the confrontation she could see coming.

We met , under the aegis of an NGO, in King"s College, London, in June. The group included two wonderful people from Lord Janner"s Holocaust Education Trust, an outstanding delegation from

Jordan sent by Prince Hassan (it included his daughter), some fine British Muslim leaders, the Norwegian Ambassador, representatives of the World Council of Churches, and possibly some other groups that I can"t recall at present. The group worked for three days, and drafted a document that both Arab and Islamic groups felt did justice to the Palestinian cause, while omitting all the references that we, as Jews, found invidious.

That was an exceptional achievement, and told me that there are people of goodwill of all faiths who – if we could only meet and talk together – could avert so much of what is evil. It was when that draft was rejected at the pre-conference in Geneva that I felt duty-bound to withdraw, because it was then clear that this was a Conference in which goodwill and mutual respect were not on the agenda. I took my decision in conscience. Britain took its decision in conscience and I respect that decision. You will hear no criticism from me.

However, the scenes that took place in that Conference and the charges that were leveled – this was less than seven days before September 11th – have an after-life. They were quoted extensively in the alarming and extremist motion that students attempted to pass yesterday in Manchester University. It was actually passed by a majority of the students, and was only defeated on a technicality because somebody in the audience noted that this motion – which might not merely have condemned Zionism as racism, but also made it impossible for Jewish students to hold meetings on campus – involved a change to the Student Union Constitution and therefore needed a two-thirds majority. So it fell on a technicality, and Jewish student life in Manchester was saved for the time being. Two of the students who fought that fight yesterday are with us here in this room this evening. So I respect the Government"s decision, but I also say that Durban has an after-life, up to and including yesterday.

Lady Clinton-Davis

I would just like to make it possible for everybody to hear via the BBC the lecture that we"ve been privileged to hear this evening and I wondered if that could be made possible:

Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Could I just answer that and say that lady in the front there is from the BBC Russian Service and has asked to tape the whole of this lecture.

Sir Sydney Samuelson

Chief Rabbi, Saudi Arabia has had nothing to do with Israel ever since the creation of the State nearly fifty-five years ago. With this in mind, do you feel the proposal/the initiative put forward by a Saudi Arabian member of its Royal Family has any credibility at all?

Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Forgive me if I say that I am not a politician and I get very fearful when religious leaders become politicians. So I honestly can"t say – but it is an interesting intervention. It is for those who understand the situation better than I do, to know whether it is made in good faith. Speaking personally, I believe it is always right to take risks for the sake of peace.

And if I may say so, mindful of the many criticisms that might be made against the State of Israel – and I respect those criticisms – I still feel that few nations fifty-three years old, have shown more courage in the conduct of war for the defence of the safety of their citizens, or more courage in the pursuit of peace.

So I pray that there is indeed some substance in this, and that this, or some other strategic

intervention, regardless of its source or motivation, can at least bring the partners together again and halt this violence which we all abhor.

Colin Blakeley

You mentioned something earlier about Holocaust Memorial Day creating a backlash. I wanted to just quiz you a bit more about that and ask if you think it"s possible for society to remember such an event without creating a backlash or is there perhaps a different way that we should be remembering the Holocaust?

Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Colin, it"s tremendously generous of you to attribute that remark to me but actually it was made by Steven in his introduction, so Steven perhaps you"d like to answer the question!

Stephen Rubin

I would but I think for everyone"s sake I ought to answer it for you afterwards and leave this to the Chief Rabbi.

Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

I truly did not make that statement. Perhaps you"d like to know, Colin, why, when I was asked by the Prime Minister, I was in favour of the creation of Holocaust Memorial Day – an initiative for which we owe a great deal both to the Board of Deputies, whose President, Jo Wagerman, is with us this evening, to the Holocaust Education Trust, whose president, Lord Janner, is also with us – and to a very special gentleman, Ben Helfgot, Chairman of the 45 Group, the Holocaust survivors. I was asked by the Prime Minister about this initiative of these groups, and whether I approved.

I said this: the Jewish community does not need a national Holocaust Day. We already have our own – Yom HaShoah (this year on April 12th). For us, Yom HaShoah is what I call, in C. S. Lewis" phrase, "a grief observed". All of us, literally or metaphorically, lost family, and we mourn. A national Holocaust Memorial Day cannot therefore be designed for the Jewish community alone as a day of grief. I said that it must be a day dedicated to the theme of man"s inhumanity to man. It must be used to highlight not just the Holocaust but also other suffering and persecuted peoples or groups, and its primary impact should not be in the form of a big public ceremony but rather on education in schools. Each year, at that time, I have gone to a school. The purpose of the day must be educational.

This year I was at a school in South London. It had no Jewish pupils, but its children came from 38 different language groups. It could not have been more ethically or religiously diverse. I sat with them as they listened to two sixth-formers from the school – one African, the other an Asian Muslim – giving deeply moving speeches about their visit to Auschwitz (organised by Rabbi Marcus who is also here this evening). At the end of the ceremony, the 11-year-olds – they were sitting in the front row, they"d been sitting there cross-legged on the gym floor for an hour without moving – called me over: "Come here Sir, can we have your autograph?" And they said to me, "Sir, we want you to know there is no racism in this school. If any of us is attacked, we will go to their defence. We"re all friends here, regardless of colour or regardless of anything Sir." And I said to myself: if we created Holocaust Memorial Day for that alone, it would have been sufficient.

I wrote in The Times this year (January 26th), that for me the most moving moment of the first ceremony was when a Cambodian lady came up to me after the ceremony and said: "Thank you for including us and for giving us a platform through which we could be heard."

So I will leave Steven to tell you of his reservations privately afterwards, but for me Holocaust Memorial Day really has made an impact. The primary impact we"re concerned it should make is in schools. We do not wish to single out the Jewish story, but instead let each group make the Jewish story their story.

Winston Held

In your incisive and quite bleak analysis of the three methods that were attempted to integrate Judaism into modern society, given your unique moving in all circles and all strata both nationally and internationally, do you get the feeling that once certain misconceptions are clarified and certain lack of information, for example, the school in South London a few moments ago but perhaps more amongst adults, do you find that there is a sincere desire to know the truth or is the absence of that knowledge regarded as a convenient cloak for continuing one"s misconceptions? Do people genuinely want to know what the actual situation – I"m not discussing Israel; I"m talking of the phenomenon of antisemitism – does knowledge and education make a difference?

Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

I"m going to give you a lovely rabbinical answer. The world"s greatest Talmudist is Rabbi Adin Steinzaltz, who lives in Jerusalem. Some years ago, when we were already at the beginning of this process, I asked, "Adin, are you an optimist or a pessimist?" Only a rabbi could have given the answer he gave. You may need post-graduate qualifications to understand it. He said: "I am not an optimist in the Leibnitz sense that this is the best of all possible worlds, nor am I a pessimist in the gnostic sense that this is the worst of all possible worlds. What do I believe? That this is the worst of all possible worlds in which there is still hope." From one sliver of hope, redemption can come.

I had the great privilege of visiting Crown Prince Hassan in his Palace in Amman in 1996. We were doing a film to mark the murder of the late Yitzhak Rabin. Thinking about the possibility of peace in the Middle East, I said: "Your Highness, what will bring our two religions, our two peoples together?" He said: "Our shared history of tears. Jews have suffered much. Muslims have suffered much. Those tears are a common language between us." If we do have the imaginative grace to understand that, though we are hurting, other people are also hurting; that we have shared tears; then we can find grounds for hope.

There is a Chassidic story told of Rebbe Chaim of Sens, and with this I end. Once there was a man who went for a walk in a forest and became completely lost. He had been wandering for three days, when he heard rustling in the undergrowth and looked up to see a stranger coming towards him, the first human he had seen in three days. He thought, now I will find the way out. But the other man walked up to him and said: "Friend, I cannot show you the way out, because I too am lost. But this I can tell you: Do not take the road I have taken, for it too leads nowhere. Now let us search for a new way together."

May Israelis and Palestinians, and the people of all faiths, search for and find a new way together.

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