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Did Zionism increase or decrease antisemitism in the world?



LIVING THE DREAM

• By URI PILICHOWSKI

The Talmud mentions a law about the hanukkiyah that can be seen put into practice every year during Hanukkah in Israel. The hanukkiyah that holds the oil or candles for Hanukkah should be placed outside one's house in the doorway. Although the law is that the hanukkiyah should be placed outside, for thousands of years Jews lit their lights inside out of fear of antisemitic persecution. In Israel today, where there is little fear of antisemitism being sparked by an outdoor hanukkiyah, Jews have returned to the practice of the Talmud and light their Hanukkah candles outside.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was a Torah scholar and Halacha decider in America during the 20th Century. Arguably the greatest scholar of his time, his decisions are considered by many to be authoritative. In a fascinating decision, he maintained that since more Jews are attacked for being Jews in Israel more than in any other country, Jews in Israel should light their hanukkiyah inside. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's opinion is fascinating because it presumes a higher rate of antisemitism in Israel than anywhere else in the world and begs the question of causation.

Is antisemitism higher in Israel because a Jewish state inspires more people to hate Jews, or because there are more Jews centered in Israel than any other place? If the former is true, is it possible that the Zionist dream of creating a Jewish state so Jews would have a place of refuge from their haters has actually increased antisemitism and its problems rather than decreased it?

In late June, The Times of Israel's Emmanuel Fabian reported, "According to Shin Bet statistics, this year has seen 147 significant terror attacks, including some 120 shootings. Security forces foiled 375 significant attacks this year, including some 300 shootings." That report came out on the 172nd day of the year. Palestinians have attempted, or carried out, more than three terror attacks a day, every day in 2023. That is a remarkably high number of hate-inspired attacks. In March of 2023, a new report released by the Anti-Defamation League revealed that antisemitic incidents increased by 36% in 2022, the highest level recorded since 1979.

According to a report published by The Jewish Agency for Israel and the World Zionist Organization, there was a peak in antisemitic acts around the world in 2021, at more than 10 incidents per day. Roughly 50% of those acts were committed in Europe, and around 30% in the United States. It seems that antisemitism is on the rise around the world.

In the Europe of the 1800s and 1900s, antisemitism was hidden by discussion of the "Jewish question," a debate around the status and treatment of Jews. It highlighted that Jews didn't belong in gentile countries and asked what the world should do with all its Jews.

Hitler's "Final Solution" of exterminating the world's Jews came to answer the Jewish question. Zionist leader and American Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis answered differently than Hitler, saying that the only solution to the Jewish question was a return to the land of Israel, that "only in Palestine can Jewish life be fully protected from the forces of disintegration, that there alone can the Jewish spirit reach its full and natural development; and that by securing for those Jews who wish to settle there the opportunity to do so, not only those Jews, but all other Jews will be benefited, and that the long perplexing Jewish Problem will, at last, find solution."

Zionism's founder Theodor Herzl echoed Brandeis's answer of returning to Eretz Yisrael as the answer to the Jewish question, in his book, *The Jewish State*. Herzl wrote, "The whole plan is in its essence perfectly simple... Let sovereignty be granted to us over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the rightful requirements of a nation; the rest we shall manage for ourselves." He continued later in his book writing, "I think the Jews will always have sufficient enemies, such as every nation has. But once fixed in their own land, it will no longer be possible for them to scatter all over the world."

Zionism hoped to end antisemitism, and if it couldn't end it outright, at least provide a place of refuge and defense to Jews persecuted by antisemitism around the world. An argument can be made that Zionism has actually accomplished the opposite and that since its founding, antisemitism has risen. This opens



HANUKKAH CANDLES are lit outdoors, in Jerusalem, last December. (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

the oft-asked question, is anti-Zionism and criticism of Israel antisemitic by nature? Or is it legitimate opposition to a nationalistic movement and a country's policies? Is it legitimate to argue that Zionism has increased antisemitism? Or is it more accurate to claim that the hate focused on Israel and Zionism isn't antisemitic at all?

The argument that hate of Zionism isn't antisemitic seems to be premised on the assumption that antisemitism would have decreased after the Holocaust without Zionism and a Jewish state to focus its anger. Could an alternative argument be made that post-Holocaust antisemitism would've stayed at the same levels,

and the world would have just found a different excuse to hate its Jews? One could posit there was a natural lull in antisemitism due to the shame of the extent of the rise of antisemitism to the point the world created a Holocaust - but given a few decades of space, it would have recovered to its natural levels.

I'm not confident anyone can definitively answer whether Zionism has decreased or increased antisemitism in the world, but another Talmudic principle can help clarify the ramifications of Zionism on antisemitism. The Talmud taught that Esav (representative of gentiles) will always hate Yaakov (representative of Jews). According to the

Talmud, the antisemitic hate gentiles have of Jews is evergreen. The increases and decreases in antisemitism and their causes are less important than how can Jews protect themselves from it.

Zionism provided the answer of a Jewish State with Jewish police and soldiers to protect its Jewish citizens from attacks. Zionism gave the Jewish people the tools to defend themselves against antisemites - a protection Jews didn't enjoy for over 2,000 years.

The writer is a senior educator at numerous educational institutions. He is the author of three books and teaches Torah, Zionism, and Israeli studies around the world.