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: Zionism: The best defense against antisemitism

# Zionism: The best defense against antisemitism

• By COOKIE SCHWAEBER-ISSAN

Unlike the well-known riddle of what came first, the chicken or the egg, no one has to guess when it comes to antisemitism and Zionism.

Although he may not have been the first to figure it out, Theodor Herzl, credited with being the father of modern Zionism, understood that, without a safe refuge, by way of a national homeland, Jews would never live securely. Scattered throughout the globe and dependent upon the goodwill of other nations, they were always in danger of being exiled whenever their hosts would turn on them.

The history of the Jewish people is one where the Jews were welcomed and then despised. Sometimes it was due to their choice of living among themselves rather than assimilating into the local culture. Other times, it was their great success and prosperity, which became a sore spot for those whose jealousy and envy drove them toward resentment and bitterness.

Always ending in harsh persecution, Herzl believed that the only solution for this unjustified hatred would be the establishment of a Jewish state where its citizens could live under their own sovereignty, responsible for their own destiny.

In other words, Zionism was born out of the need to overcome the fear and loathing directed toward Jews. Ironically, it is that term, "Zionism," used as a slur, to justify the demonization of the collective Jewish people. Anyone who doesn't know the real meaning of the word might assume that it was associated with a detestable abhorrence, akin to a dreaded disease.

But the best part of Zionism is its ability to preserve us as a people, without the worry of how long it will be before we are ejected from the place we call home, how long before we are no longer tolerated, and how long before someone decides that the world would be better off without us?

With that kind of past, one lived by our ancestors, we know just how important a Jewish homeland is when it comes to our survival. For even the warmest of relations have been known to eventually sour, causing our wanderings as we would, yet again, have to search for a place to lay our heads in peace.

We get it. Some people don't like the drive that we possess to accomplish great things. Many wonder why we seem to excel more than others. Then there are those who question our differences. Our Sabbath is on Saturday, not Sunday. Our food, customs, values,

culture, humor, and so much more are often misunderstood by a world that doesn't appreciate them or see things as we do.

So, in our choice not to impose our unique way of life on others, Zionism has provided an answer, allowing us to live in our own neighborhood, with our own people, knowing that many non-Jews actually like it that way.

When you think of it like that, Zionism has actually been the considerate option, separating ourselves from those who, like us, prefer living among others who share the many things they have in common, which bring them, and us, together as one big family.

Oddly enough, you would think that Zionism would be looked upon as a great relief and a solution to the vast distance that might make others forget about us. Remember, out of sight, out of mind.

Despite that, here we are in the year 2025, with the largest Jewish population living far away from the same people who claim that Zionists are the enemy, unwanted in their schools, communities, and countries. Yet, who thinks, for one minute, that we would be less hated if every Jew were to leave and return to Israel?

Would the campus protests against Jews stop? Would the boycotting of our goods be unnecessary? Would every economic and social issue plaguing mankind come to an end once we were no longer around to blame? It's not likely. Because Jews will somehow be the perennial favorite when it comes to being cast as the world's villains. That's because it conveniently takes the onus off of the real failures.

But, if we are hated as much as we're being shown, thank God that we do have our one safe place where we can rest in the knowledge that we are able to defend ourselves from the likes of those who accuse us of genocide, the wholesale murder of innocents, and just about every evil known to man.

HERZL NEVER got to live out his prophetic dream. But the fact that his ability to see well into the future became the impetus and force behind the promise made by God Himself is proof of its divine inspiration. Through the passionate aspirations of one man, prescient enough to perceive the urgency of what would shortly take place, we are living in Zion today.

If that isn't astounding, given the repeat of a dark history and the dangers to which it led, then what is? As new accounts of Jewish persecution throughout the world are recorded each day, it's hard to predict



A NEW immigrant from France kisses the ground upon arriving at Ben-Gurion Airport last year. The writer asks: Yet, who thinks, for one minute, that we would be less hated if every Jew were to leave and return to Israel? (Tomer Neuberger/Flash90)

how long Diaspora Jews will feel personally threatened enough before deciding that Zionism is their answer.

We are at a defining moment in our lifetime, when another wave of antagonistic hostilities toward Jews has broken the floodgates of the societal boundaries, which just a couple of years ago were still well-contained, due to the dangers of its release. That is no longer the case.

Today, celebrities, prominent leaders, heads of state, and even religious people are not holding back. They are part of the anti-Zionist, anti-Israel, and anti-Jew bandwagon, unashamed to express their disdain for those whose blood is derived from the line of King David. No longer will they whisper their ugly senti-

ments because it has become fashionable to say it out loud with no accompanying regret.

That is why we are grateful and blessed to have Zionism because it is the best defense against the rampant antisemitism, which is as virulent as a metastasizing cancer. Coming home to Zion is the cure!

Without Zionism, that would not be possible. So, call it a scourge on humanity, but it is our saving grace, thanks to the little bug that the Almighty put in one man's head more than 128 years ago.

The writer is a former Jerusalem elementary and middle school principal. She is also the author of Mistake-Proof Parenting, available on Amazon, based on the time-tested wisdom found in the Book of Proverbs.