

Torah Perspective on Anti-Semitism – JewishClarity.com

Why call it “Anti-Semitism”?

Let’s begin by focusing on the term “anti-Semitism” itself. Why do we need a specific term for hatred against the Jews?

We know that there is much religious bigotry in the world. Religious bigotry would describe animosity towards **any** religious group, whether they are Buddhists, Hindus, or Mormons. There is racism, which could refer to looking down at **any** other race, whether it is blacks, Asians, or American Indians. And there is xenophobia, which is relevant for **any** foreign group or outsiders at all.

Why then not refer to the hatred and persecution of Jews by these more generic terms like religious bigotry, xenophobia, or racism? The very need for a distinctive term for hatred of the Jews tells us that the world recognizes that anti-Semitism isn’t simply one more unfortunate example of hatred in the world. It is, rather, a phenomenon that is specific to the Jewish people.

What is it which makes anti-Semitism so distinctive?

Reasons vs. Excuses

The most common reasons given for the hatred and persecution of the Jews are: Jews having money, influence, power, intelligence, etc. In fact, there are probably as many attempts to understand anti-Semitism as there are perceptions and distinctive aspects of Jews.

An important point to consider is: What is the difference between a reason for something and an excuse? And is there a litmus test to differentiate between the two of them?

The reason for something is the true cause. If it is removed, then, of course, the phenomenon will cease. As an example, let’s say that money, power, and influence were the causes of anti-Semitism in Germany during the 1920s and 1930s. If that were true, then the hatred for Jews in Germany should have significantly diminished after the Nuremberg laws were passed (beginning in 1935), since those laws largely eliminated Jewish money, power, and influence. But, as we know, the hatred only continued to increase. Therefore, it is clear that money, power, and influence of Jews were never the real reason for the anti-Semitism in Germany, but rather only excuses.

Whatever we do, that is what is cited as the reason for the hatred against us. For example, at the same time that Jews in America were accused of being communists, Jews in Russia were being labeled as capitalists. The more that one studies anti-Semitism, the more obvious it becomes that the innumerable “explanations” offered throughout the various societies in which Jews have resided are not **reasons** at all (whose absence would necessarily result in an end to hatred and persecution), but simply **excuses**.

Four Unique Aspects of Anti-Semitism

Not only is anti-Semitism puzzling in terms of its cause; it has a number of other aspects that make it a truly unique phenomenon.

Universality — The universal scope of anti-Semitism can be seen in the fact that Jews have been expelled from virtually every country in which they have resided. Jews were expelled

from England in 1290, France in 1306 and 1394, Hungary in 1349 and 1360, Austria in 1421, from various places in Germany throughout the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries, from Lithuania in 1445 and 1495, Spain in 1492, Portugal in 1497, and from Bohemia and Moravia in 1744-45. Between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, Jews were not permitted to enter Russia, and when they were finally admitted, they were restricted to one area, the Pale of Settlement.

Parallel to these atrocities in Europe were various levels of anti-Semitism at the hands of the Arabs. From Islam's inception in the 7th century, Jews living in Arab countries were constantly forced to live as second-class citizens. Violent outbreaks sporadically occurred throughout the following 1300 years and reached their peak during the years from 1948 to 1967. During that period, almost all of the Jews living in Aden, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Yemen — over 500,000 in all — were forced to flee, fearing for their lives, in the wake of pogroms, assaults and massacres. (*Why the Jews?*, Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, pp. 17,18)

Intensity — The clearest example of this was the Holocaust — widely recognized as the ultimate manifestation of evil in history. It was the only time that an entire people (men, women and children) had a campaign of complete annihilation waged against them — by the Germans, regardless of where they were residing, throughout the entire world.

Longevity — Most of the world's great powers, even those with only a small percentage of Jews among them, regarded the Jews as a central enemy. This began with the Greek persecutions of Jews during the Second Temple period. It continued with the Roman Empire, the Arabs, and the Christian world (most notably the Crusades and the frequent occurrence of blood libels throughout the Middle Ages) and more recently with the Nazis and the Soviet Union, as well as the Arabs today. (Adapted from *Why the Jews?*, Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, pp. 20)

Irrationality — We are the only people ever accused of “deicide” (i.e., killing god) — and this was one of the major causes of anti-Semitism for almost 2000 years.

Despite the fact that consuming blood is a more serious prohibition than against eating pork, Jews were persecuted throughout the Middle Ages with the blood libels, the charge that they drank the blood of non-Jewish children.

The Jews in Germany were accused of having brought Socialism and Communism to Germany, of being responsible for Germany losing World War I, and of causing the economic problems of the 1920s. This paranoia existed in spite of the fact that the percentage of Jews in Germany at the time was only 0.8%.

Many nations even hurt themselves as a result of their persecution of the Jews, most notably Spain (economically) and Germany (with science, culture, and the military).

A forgery purporting to be the conspiratorial discussions of Jewish elders plotting to take over the world, “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” has been a best-selling book, and has been reprinted in numerous languages, all throughout the world, for over 100 years.

Lloyd George (Prime Minister of England from 1916-1922) wrote the following in 1923:

Of all the extreme fanaticism that plays havoc in man's nature, there is none as irrational as anti-Semitism. The Jews cannot vindicate themselves in the eyes of these fanatics. If the Jews are rich, they are victims of theft and extortion. If they are poor, they are victims of ridicule. If they take sides in a war, it is because they wish to gain advantage from the spilling of non-Jewish blood. If they espouse peace, it is because they are scared and anxious by nature or traitors to

their country. If the Jew dwells in a foreign land, he is persecuted and expelled. If he wishes to return to his own land, he is prevented from doing so.

And, finally, **Martin Gilbert** wrote:

But as my research into Jewish history progressed, I was surprised, depressed, and to some extent overwhelmed by the perpetual and **irrational** violence which pursued the Jews in every country, and to almost every corner of the globe. If, therefore, persecution, expulsion, torture, humiliation, and mass murder haunt these pages, it is because they also haunt the Jewish story. (**Jewish History Atlas**, Oxford 1985)

Understanding Anti-Semitism from the Nazis

As much as it may sound counterintuitive, Adolf Hitler, *ym*'s (his name should be obliterated), as well as some of the other Nazis, seemed to have had a remarkably clear understanding of anti-Semitism. Although, on second thought, perhaps it is not really counter-intuitive at all. As the single most destructive anti-Semite in Jewish history, it might actually make a lot of sense that he understood anti-Semitism so well. In any case, by studying his speeches and writings, we will be able to gain many powerful insights into this so commonly misunderstood phenomenon.

Joseph Goebbels, *ym*'s, the Minister of Propaganda in Nazi Germany wrote:

"Fifty or a hundred years from now, National Socialism [i.e., Nazi ideology] too, will have become a philosophic system that can be studied at the universities for four or five semesters, just as today, theology or classical economics are academic subjects." (*Der Krieg als Weltanschauungskampf*, Berlin, 1944, pg. 9)

What was his point? We often think of anti-Semites as simply stupid and uneducated, and their hatred of Jews as being largely irrational. While that may be true with most of them, it seems not always to be the case. The Nazis, in fact, saw their ideology as a rational system of belief.

Quotes from Hitler, *ym*'s

Another misconception is the notion that the anti-Semitism in the writings and speeches of Hitler may have merely been a product of his political motivations. Since he saw how much hatred there was in Germany for the Jews, perhaps he was simply capitalizing on it to gain political power. When we see the intensity of the language in his writings and speeches, however, it seems clear that he really believed his hateful words against the Jews.

He wrote:

"It is the inexorable Jew who struggles for his domination over the nations", and referred to the Jews as "this greatest of all dangers to the peoples" (*Mein Kampf*).

He called Judaism "the plague of the world" (*Der Nationalsozialist*, No. 29, Aug. 17, 1924) and declared:

"There are only two possibilities: either victory of the Aryan, or annihilation of the Aryan and the victory of the Jew." (Speech, NSDAP meeting, April 12, 1922)

And probably clearest of all, in the final words he spoke to the German people, from his bunker in Berlin, just before he committed suicide, he first demanded:

“...of all Germans, all National Socialists, men, women, and all the men of the armed forces, that they be faithful and obedient unto death to the new government and its President.”

He then continued to his final message:

“Above all, I charge the leaders of the nation, and those under them, to scrupulous observance of the laws of race, and to merciless opposition to the universal poisoner of all peoples, international Jewry. (From Hitler’s last political testament, Issued in Berlin, April 29, 1945, 4:00 am)

One of his more puzzling quotes is from a speech given Jan. 3, 1923 in Nuremberg:

“Unless we expel the Jewish people soon, they will have judaized our people within a very short time.”

What could Hitler have been concerned that the Jewish people were doing? “Judaizing” the German people sounds like the Jews were indoctrinating the Germans to accept Jewish values. The irony, of course, is that it was exactly the opposite which was really happening. It was the Jews that were abandoning their own ideology and values in order to adopt the German ones.

Clues to Understanding Hitler’s Fear

We may gain some insight into the above comment by the following:

Hitler once referred to Christianity and Bolshevism as two ideologies besides Judaism which also posed a danger to his goals (in *Hitler’s Table Talk*, 1941-44).

What do all three of these very different systems have in common, besides all having Jewish origins?

All three focus on and try to help the weak members of society. Christianity speaks about “the meek inheriting the earth”, Bolshevism/Communism is most concerned with the proletariat (worker), and Judaism emphasizes *tzedakah* for the poor, and caring for the orphan and widow. This concern for the weak and downtrodden is in sharp contrast to the ideology of social Darwinism that the Nazis believed in. Just as Darwinism is based on “the survival of the fittest” with regard to the individual, social Darwinism believed in “the survival of the fittest” in terms of the society. Not only did the Nazis believe that the strongest society should survive, they felt that it absolutely needed to survive for the sake of the future of mankind. And since the Jews (both through Judaism itself, as well as through the other ideologies that have their roots in Judaism, like Christianity and Bolshevism) try to help the weak to live and multiply, the Nazis saw the Jews as a mortal threat to all of mankind.

Perhaps the clearest articulation of the threat that Hitler felt from the Jews is the following –

“It is true, we are barbarians. That is an honored title to us. I free humanity from the shackles of the soul, from the degrading suffering caused by the false vision called conscience and ethics. The Jews have inflicted two wounds on mankind — circumcision on its body, and conscience on its soul. They are Jewish inventions. The war for domination of the world is waged only between the two of us, between these two camps alone — the Germans and the Jews. Everything else is but deception. (Hitler quoted in *Path through the Ashes*, pp. 88)

To understand this quote, we need to clarify the Jewish view of the inherent battle which exists within every human being. Every person has a body and a soul. The body is interested in physical matters, while the soul is concerned with the spiritual. The Jewish analogy which expresses this duality is a horse and a rider. Our body is like a horse, a purely animalistic being, and our soul is like the rider on top. When the rider is in control, the horse is happy to follow his guidance, and both of them are content. If, however, the rider does not have control over the horse, the horse does whatever it feels like doing, which ends up being bad for both of them.

The Torah's Utopian/Messianic vision is a world in which every human being, both Jew and non-Jew, identifies with and acts like the rider, the soul, that values the spiritual over the physical. The Nazi goal for history seems to be exactly the opposite — a world in which all human beings identify as the horse, the body that is primarily focused on physicality. While the Torah values peace and civilization, the Germans wanted a pagan, jungle-like society.

When one considers how much the world has changed over the past 2,000–3,000 years, we can see just how successful the Jews have been in transforming and civilizing the world. Some of this influence happened directly through the Jews and Judaism, and some occurred through the Torah ideas that were adopted by and spread through both Christianity and Islam (as the Rambam points out). In any case, the world is certainly much closer to the Messianic values at this point than it ever was in the past. It could be that this is what Hitler, *ym*'s, was referring to when he spoke about the impact of the Jewish people, either through Judaism, or through Christianity and Bolshevism.

And perhaps this is what he meant when he said:

"Unless we expel the Jewish people soon, they will have judaized our people within a very short time."

Even though the Jews in Germany were largely non-observant, and were actively embracing many aspects of secular culture, they were still very strongly connected to these basic Jewish values of concern for the weak and oppressed. And these values may very well have been what was, "judaizing the German people" away from the Aryan outlook.

Understanding the Nature of the Jews

If we examine two more quotes from Hitler, we will see another remarkable insight that he seemed to have into the nature of the Jews. He said, in the full version of this previous quote:

"The internal expurgation of the Jewish spirit is not possible in any platonic way, for the Jewish spirit is the product of the Jewish person. Unless we expel the Jewish people soon, they will have judaized our people within a very short time." (From a speech given Jan. 3, 1923 in Nuremberg)

And, in a second quote, he said:

"The war will come to an end. Then we must consider that the last great task of this era is to solve the problem of the Churches. Only then will the German nation be secure." (Hitler Maser, pg. 183)

When it came to the Jews, his goal was to "expel the **Jewish people**", mentioning nothing about the synagogues; whereas with Christianity, the point was to "solve the problem of the **Churches**", not speaking at all about the Christian people themselves. What could explain this difference?

Christianity is a set of religious beliefs that one either accepts or rejects; it contains no aspect of nationhood or peoplehood. Hitler, therefore, understood that if the Church — the religious structure — was destroyed, then all of Christianity would be gone.

The Jews, however, are a distinct nation and people; G-d's chosen people. Every single Jew, regardless of how observant or interested he or she happens to be, necessarily has a deep connection to Jewish values and beliefs. Somehow, Hitler seemed to understand this intrinsic relationship between every Jew, regardless of his or her lifestyle, and Judaism. As he himself had expressed this:

“...the Jewish spirit is the product of the Jewish person.”

This may also explain his desire to kill every single Jew, as well as anyone with any Jewish lineage at all. This was such an obsession that, even when Germany was losing the war, and desperately needed trains to send more troops and supplies to the front lines, Hitler refused to divert the trains from taking Jews to the concentration camps. Killing Jews seemed to be even more important to him than winning the war itself.

This is what Hitler himself believed and spoke about (although not necessarily did the rest of the Germans). As he put it:

“By exterminating the pest, we shall do humanity a service of which our soldiers can have no idea.”

Quotes from Others about Anti-Semitism

This understanding of anti-Semitism as an attack on Jewish values, particularly in terms of the spiritual nature and identity of man, was also discussed by others.

Jean Paul Sartre wrote the following in his book, *Anti-Semite and Jew*:

“He [the antisemite] is a man who is afraid... of his own consciousness, of his liberty, of his instincts, of his responsibilities, of solitariness, of change, and of the world... Anti-Semitism, in short, is fear of the human condition.”

Sigmund Freud addressed the puzzle of how the Christians, whose religion is built on Judaism, could be such terrible anti-Semites, in his book, *Moses and Monotheism* (pp. 116-117):

“We must not forget that all the peoples who now excel in the practice of antisemitism became Christians only in relatively recent times, sometimes forced to it by bloody compulsion. One might say that they all are ‘badly christened’; under the thin veneer of Christianity they have remained what their ancestors were, barbarically polytheistic. They have not yet overcome their grudge against the new religion which was forced on them, and they have projected it on to the source from which Christianity came to them... The hatred for Judaism is, at bottom, hatred for Christianity.”

Professor Franklin Littell of Temple University, a Methodist, and world renowned scholar on both anti-Semitism and the Holocaust:

“Antisemitism is rebellion against G-d. Christian antisemitism is rebellion against the Jewish G-d. It is hatred of the Law. Christian can't hate Jesus, but they can hate the Jewish G-d, and they can hate the Law. Their hatred of the Jew is hatred of the people that reminds them of their failing.”

Dennis Prager, a well-known author and popular radio personality, who wrote a book about anti-Semitism entitled, *Why the Jews?*, wrote the following in an article about anti-Semitism:

“... to the antisemite, the Jews are the embodiment of fundamental moral values of the Western world. It is those values, and ultimately all those who hold those values, that antisemites seek to destroy. The Jews are only their first target... Antisemitism is a Jewish problem, but non-Jews make a very self-destructive error when they dismiss it as only the Jew’s problem. Treatment of the Jews has served as one of humanity’s moral barometers. Watch how nations, individuals, or ideologies react to the Jewish people or the Jewish state, and you will have an early and deadly accurate picture of their values and intentions. The Jews are the world’s miner’s canary. Miners take canaries down to the mines because canaries are particularly vulnerable to noxious fumes. They die upon exposure to those fumes well before the miners are aware of them. When the miner sees the canary is dead, he knows there are noxious fumes to be fought.

So it is with the Jews. Moral non-Jews who fail to act against antisemites and anti-Zionists will in due course suffer from them. Jew-haters begin with Jews but never end with Jews. This is why anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism should be so important to non-Jews. Identifying the Jews’ enemies gives civilized societies an unparalleled opportunity to identify the forces that also wish to destroy them.” (*Ultimate Issues*, Vol. 1, Number 1, Winter, 1985)

And finally, **Rashi’s** fundamental commentary on the Torah spells out the classical Jewish understanding of anti-Semitism (*Bamidbar* 31:1-2). The background to Rashi’s commentary is that G-d told Moshe to fight against the nation of Midian, since they had launched an unprovoked attack on the Jews in the Sinai desert. G-d explained that this would be a “vengeance for the children of Israel.” When Moshe communicated this to the Jewish people, however, he told them to prepare to fight against Midian, as a “vengeance for G-d.” Rashi addresses how Moshe could have changed G-d’s command and characterization of the war against Midian from a “vengeance for the children of Israel” to a “vengeance for G-d.” His answer is perhaps the simplest and most succinct understanding of anti-Semitism of all:

“Because whoever stands against Israel is as if they are standing against G-d.”

In other words, the hatred of the Jews is really hatred of G-d and morality.

In a similar vein, the **Gemara** (*Shabbat* 89a) asks why the mountain upon which G-d gave the Torah to the Jews was called *Har Sinai*. It answers with a play on the word *Sinai*, which is similar to the word *Sinah*, meaning hatred:

[Once G-d gave Torah, the system of absolute morality, to the Jews on this mountain, it became] the mountain where hatred (*sinah*) came down to the non-Jewish world.

The *Bris bein Ha'Besarim* (Covenant Between the Pieces)

One of the more cryptic passages in the Torah (*Genesis* 15:4-8), what is known as the *Bris bein Ha'Besarim* (Covenant Between the Pieces), gives a deeper understanding of the nature of anti-Semitism. After G-d had promised Avram (i.e., this was before his name had been changed to Abraham) that he and his descendants would inherit the land of Israel forever, Avram asked G-d, “*Bamah Eidah?* — How do I know that this will really happen?” The *Gemara* (*Nedarim* 32a) says that this question was one of the reasons the Jews needed to go into slavery in Egypt. Rashi gives two different explanations for what Avram meant with his question, “*Bamah Eidah?* — How do I know that my descendants will really inherit the land of Israel forever?”

He was asking for some **tangible sign** that the inheritance of the land of Israel would really occur. He was asking what **merit** of the Jews would ensure that the inheritance of the land of Israel would really occur.

While the first interpretation of “*Bamah Eidah?*” in which Avram asked for a tangible sign, sounds like some slight lack of trust in G-d, the second approach, in which he asked about merit, is harder to understand as anything wrong. In fact, Rav Matis Weinberg, the nephew of my *Rosh HaYeshiva*, Rav Noach Weinberg, *zt”l*, explained that this question actually appears to be very reasonable. An eternal inheritance of the land of Israel, which signifies that the descendants of Avram will always be G-d’s chosen people, only seems to make sense if these descendants will fulfill their role properly forever. There are two ways that we could imagine this happening: G-d will force the Jews to stay true to their mission, but without free will they will have no real relationship with G-d.

The Jews will maintain their free will, but almost inevitably slide further and further away from their mission of being a “light to the nations” at various points in their history.

Therefore, Avram was really asking a very reasonable question. How will his descendants, the Jewish people, be able to maintain their free will, while always being guaranteed to stay true to their mission of being a “light to the nations” at the same time? And how, we may ask, has the Egyptian exile and slavery, which was the historical response to his question, helped the Jewish people to accomplish this despite the enormous challenges they have had to deal with throughout their history?

Our Critical Mission

Rav Matis Weinberg offers an answer based on how two well known but puzzling passages from the Passover *Hagadah* address the *Bris bein Ha’Besarim* (Covenant between the pieces):

Boruch Shomer Havtachaso l’Yisrael — Blessed is the One that keeps His promises to Israel, Blessed is He. For G-d calculated the end [of our captivity], in order to fulfill what he had said to our forefather Avram at the Covenant between the pieces, as it says, “And He said to Avram: Know with certainty that your offspring will be strangers in a land not theirs, and [your offspring] will serve them, and they will oppress [your offspring], for four hundred years. Then I shall also judge the nation whom they will serve, and after that they will go out with great wealth.” (*Bereshis* 15:13-14).

V’hi Sh’Amdah — And it is this that has stood for our fathers and for us. For not only one has risen up against us to destroy us, but in all generations they rise up against up to destroy us, and G-d saves us from their hands.

While it is certainly wonderful that we can depend on G-d always keeping His promises to us, this particular example of G-d’s reliability, highlighted in *Boruch Shomer Havtachaso l’Yisrael*, seems like a strange one to pick. G-d had promised Avram that his descendants would be strangers in a foreign land, that they would be enslaved and oppressed there for hundreds of years, and then finally be liberated. While this promise does end on a good note — that the Jews would leave this foreign land with great wealth — the main message certainly sounds quite negative.

And *V’hi Sh’Amdah* sounds even more sad and depressing. People will try to destroy us in every single generation, and we will manage to survive only through G-d’s help. How then do we reconcile this bleak paragraph with its upbeat opening phrase — that “this is what has stood for our fathers and for us”?

The answer to all of these questions is a proper understanding of anti-Semitism. As an analogy, picture a mountain road with guardrails on the edge of the road to protect against a drop down the side of the mountain. Now imagine someone driving on this road beginning to get sleepy. As he starts dozing off, his car slowly slides off to the side of the road. Suddenly his car hits the guardrails with a loud thump and starts scraping against them. He immediately wakes up and quickly steers the car back onto the road. Is it possible that this guy will get out of his car, and after surveying the extensive damage to his car, begin to curse the people that put the guardrails there? Of course not. As much as he is upset with the damage to his car, he will certainly appreciate the fact that the guardrails kept him from going over the edge of the mountain.

Anti-Semitism functions very much like these guardrails. As long as we stay on the road, we are relatively far from the guardrails. They bang and scrape us specifically when we start sliding toward the edge. And while that will be very damaging and painful, it will certainly be a lot better than going over the edge and down the side of the mountain.

Therefore, when we thank G-d for keeping His promise to send the Jews to Egypt in *Boruch Shomer Havtachaso l'Yisrael*, the prototype of exile and anti-Semitism, we are really acknowledging the extent of His love for Avram and his descendants. Whenever, all throughout Jewish history, the Jewish people will begin sliding off the road towards assimilation, the oppression of the non-Jewish world will limit how far we will be able to go. And that is the meaning of *V'hi sh'amdah* as well. What it is that has "stood for our fathers and for us in every single generation" has really been two things:

Anti-Semitism which always knocked us back onto the road.

And, at the same time, G-d always preventing it from completely destroying us.

We see this very clearly with the recurring pattern that occurs in the book of *Shofetim*:

The Jewish people do evil.
They are attacked and persecuted.
The Jewish people do *teshuva* (spiritual return).
G-d sends a prophet or deliverer to save them.
The Jews have peace and quiet for a number of years.
The Jewish people do evil again.

An essential prerequisite to understanding anti-Semitism is to appreciate what it means that the Jews are G-d's chosen people. Once G-d forged this special relationship with Avraham and his descendants, making them the moral leaders for the world, it became absolutely essential, both for the Jews as well as for the rest of the world, that we properly fulfill this role.

The message of *Boruch Shomer Havtachaso l'Yisrael* is that G-d will never allow the Jewish people to abandon their mission as His chosen nation. Whatever it takes, and regardless of how difficult it may be, He will always make sure to keep them on track.

The Final Question

There is one final question to address. Based on everything we have discussed so far, is anti-Semitism inevitable? At first glance, it would seem that it is. However, when the *Hagadah* tells us, "In every generation they rise up to destroy us," this may simply be referring to the guardrails always being in place, and standing guard to keep us from sliding off of the road. And, as we mentioned previously, the more that we stay on the straight and narrow, the less damage we will have from them.

In order to understand how this dynamic operates, think about our chosen role as a “light to the nations.” What should happen if we fulfill this role well? We will end up living in an enlightened world. How would we expect an enlightened world to treat the Jews? Positively.

However, if we, G-d forbid, don’t fulfill our role well, then what would we expect? Since we will end up living in an unenlightened world, that unenlightened world will probably treat the Jews very badly.

Rav Chaim m'Volozin, one of the great Rabbinical leaders in the 1800s, expressed this very succinctly and poignantly (with a play on the two *mitzvot* of *kiddush* and *havdalah*, which begin and end every Shabbat):

“If the Jews don’t make *kiddush* (i.e., sanctify G-d in the world), the non-Jews will make *havdalah* (push us away from them and back toward our distinctive role in the world).”

A striking example of anti-Semitism forcing Jews to identify more Jewishly was expressed in a letter that was written to a German government minister in 1925:

“When I first came to Germany 15 years ago, I discovered for the first time that I was a Jew, and I owe this discovery more to gentiles than to Jews.... If we did not have to live among intolerant, narrow-minded and violent people, I would be the first to throw over all nationalism in favour of universal humanity.”

That letter was written by **Albert Einstein**.

So while the “guardrails of anti-Semitism” will always remain in place, the degree of impact that they will actually have upon us will largely be a function of the choices that we make. In an ideal world, we will fulfill our role as a “light to the nations”, and then these “guardrails of the anti-Semitism” will simply remind us how committed G-d is to us continuing to fulfill this role.

And one final example of someone that was struggling to make sense out of anti-Semitism:

“Who knows – it might even be our religion from which the world and all peoples learn good, and for that reason and that reason alone do we now suffer. We can never become just Netherlanders, or just English, or representatives of any other country for that matter. We will always remain Jews.”

This was written by **Anne Frank** in her famous diary.

It is critically important for us to understand anti-Semitism. If we can come to understand why Jews are so hated, we might also be able to understand who the Jews are and, more importantly, who the Jews can and should be. And that may be the deepest and most important insight into anti-Semitism of all.