

Antisemitism - Beyond Hate



By Keith Krivitzky, Managing Director
Jewish Federation of Ocean County
keith@ocjf.org
www.jewishoceancounty.org
www.jewishoceancounty.org/donate
732.363.0530

I am troubled. We all should be. About the hate being directed to Jews and the double standards being applied to Israel.

The rise in antisemitic attacks has been significant. The rhetoric against Israel and the Jews has become extreme. To me, seemingly, there has been a huge shift in a matter of a few years. And not just on college campuses, though this seems to be more concentrated there.

It's scary. I don't mean in terms of physical risk, though it may increasingly turn to that. (And that's one reason why the Jewish Federation has been investing in security for our partners in Ocean County.) But, rather, because of the shattering of the narrative we told ourselves about living in polite, civilized society. That Jews had finally made it...the Golden Land really was a new homeland; we solved the conundrum as to how Jews could

finally be accepted and safe co-mingling with others in a big, happy community.

Instead, reality seems a lot different today....

How can people blithely call for the destruction of a state? Especially one whose people have been scarred, have just as much right to be there as anyone else... and have nowhere else to go? How can rational people blame all citizens for the rhetoric of a "leader" or the actions of a government? You don't hear folks blame Russians for Putin, Venezuelans for Maduro, Iranians for the Ayatollahs, or all of Ireland for the actions of the IRA? And how can Jews who don't live in Israel be scapegoated and attacked as if they were personally responsible? Typecasting and applying a label to everyone as part of a group regardless of how that individual identifies and classifies himself (the antithesis of liberalism, no?).... As if we (and Israelis too, btw) are somehow responsible for the lousy circumstances forced upon those who live in Israel.

And I am wrestling with some questions.

While I recognize that there is something that sets antisemitism apart and feeds its persistence, I still thought that this was just another form of hatred or bigotry towards the "other." Now, it's hard to believe that. It's like Jews are the quintessential other. No matter what we do, as long as we survive, it won't go away. That's chilling. That's why the partnership we have with Ocean County to combat hate is so important – and why the unique staying power of antise-

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mitism needs to play a more prominent role. I think it also has real implications in other areas as well (perhaps for another column).

We also see this when it comes to blindness on the part of so many of the complexity of the situation of Palestinians and Israel. Yes – people today tend to not like complexity or nuance, but the worst that can be said of the genesis of this conflict is that Jews and Palestinians have equal, competing claims to the land. The best is that Zionism predated Palestinian national identity and was, in part, its progenitor.

The argument that the Zionist endeavor's aim was to dispossess Palestinians don't know history – or don't care. Those who decry Israel as a colonialist endeavor are willingly blind or beholden to an ideological agenda.

And it is hard to believe how rational people can embrace such blatant double standards when it comes to attitudes towards Israel today. How is kidnapping hostages acceptable? In any moral universe? Or using a civilian population as shields while creating military bases underground to hoard food and hide hostages? No one is calling for the end of Australia – or, for that matter, the expulsion of whites from South Africa. And where is the outrage at what is happening in Sudan? Sheesh. Making such claims under

the guise of morality is absurd. (If you get the chance, check out the Eretz Nehederet, the Israeli SNL, clip about Greta Thunberg.)

The question we all need to deal with now is what to do about this. Some preliminary thoughts....

- We need to encourage everyone to recognize and call out antisemitism, as well as other hatreds, when we see it. This can't just be from a self-centered perspective. And while Jews may be particularly susceptible, we need to lead the way for others to take a stand on behalf of others. That's the idea behind our Heroes Against Hate awards. You can learn more and nominate a hero here: www.jewishoceancounty.org/communitycaring/nominations.
- We also need to make sure that we know our story, and our history – like the history of Zionism and Israel. And this can't be a whitewashed version: we have much to be proud of – and we get in more trouble, especially with our own youth, for not being forthright about this. Visit www.jewishoceancounty.org/JVU to learn more.
- And we need to take opportunities and make time to come together as a community...to learn...to support...to show solidarity...and to be resolute. We hope to see you soon and encourage you to step up and stand with us.

At the Jewish Federation, this is why we are here and this is what we do. We make a critical difference in these areas and we need to do more. Thank you for being our partners.