

Z-mail Parshas Vayishlach

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“ANTI-SEMITISM: THE HATERS GONNA HATE ...”

“*And the haters gonna hate, hate, hate, hate ...*” sang Taylor Swiftly.

The popular American singer-songwriter Taylor Swift was right on the money when she sang those lyrics in her hit song *Shake it Off* ... although she likely wasn't referring to anti-semitism!

The haters of the Jews – the anti-semites all around the world – are just not going away, and are gonna continue to *hate, hate, hate, hate*, whether we like it or not!

Witness the following scary statistics on anti-semitism in the US in the year 2020 (taken from the Anti-Defamation League's website <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/us-antisemitic-incidents-remained-at-historic-high-in-2020> :

~ **Harassment:** There were 1,242 harassment incidents, cases where one or more Jews reported having been harassed by antisemitic language or actions. Acts of harassment increased by 10 percent from 1,127 in 2019.

~ **Vandalism:** There were 751 vandalism incidents, cases where property was damaged in a manner that harmed or intimidated Jews. Swastikas, which are generally interpreted as symbols of antisemitic hatred in this context, were present in 517 of these incidents. Acts of antisemitic vandalism decreased 18 percent, from 919 incidents in 2019.

~ **Assault:** There were 31 assault incidents, cases where individuals were physically targeted with violence accompanied by evidence of antisemitic animus. Antisemitic assault decreased by 49 percent from 61 incidents in 2019. The assaults involved a total of 41 victims. No antisemitic fatalities were reported for the first year since 2017.

[Incidents were reported in 47 states as well as the District of Columbia. The states with the highest numbers of incidents were New York: 336, New Jersey: 295, California: 289, Florida: 127 and Pennsylvania: 101. Combined, these states account for nearly 57 percent of the total number of incidents.]

Truth be told, it is actually alluded to in this week's Torah portion, *Parshas Vayishlach*, that anti-semitism is a “fact of human nature” and is here to stay:

When Jacob and Esau finally meet after so many years, the Torah tells us that Esau fell upon Jacob's neck and kissed him (see Genesis 33:4 and commentary of Rashi *ibid.*)

Rashi cites a *Midrash* which brings various opinions as to whether or not Esau's kiss was sincere at that time. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai is quoted as saying that “It is a *given fact* that Esau hates Jacob, but his mercy was aroused at that time, and he kissed him with all of his heart.”

I guess that if we can't actually *stop* anti-semitism much as we try, at least we can learn how to *label* it. What I mean by that is that not all anti-semitism or anti-semites are the same.

And the more we know our enemy, the better we can protect ourselves from it when it inevitably comes our way.

Allow me to demonstrate:

Everyone knows the story of Purim and how the wicked anti-semite Haman convinced the wicked anti-semite Achashveirosh to annihilate the entire Jewish nation, until Mordechai and Esther saved them. What you might not have heard about are some of the "backroom negotiations" that were going on between the King and Haman regarding the future of the Jews.

Haman concluded his pitch to Achashveirosh to destroy all the world's Jews with an offer to give ten thousand talents of silver to the kingdom [to make up for lost revenue] : "If it please the king, let it be written that they be destroyed, and I will weigh out ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who perform the duties for deposit into the King's treasuries" (Esther 3:9).

Achashveirosh responded to Haman's request: "And the King said to Haman: The silver is given to you; the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you" (Esther 3:11).

As we are taught in the Talmud in *Megillah* 14a, by refusing to take Haman's money, Achashveirosh showed his true colors:

Rabbi Abba said: The actions of Achashveirosh and Haman can be understood with a parable; to what may they be compared? To two individuals, one who had a mound of dirt in the middle of his field and the other who had a ditch in the middle of his field, each one suffering from his own predicament. The owner of the ditch, noticing the other's mound of dirt, said to himself: Who will give me this mound of dirt suitable for filling in my ditch; I would even be willing to pay for it with money. The owner of the mound, noticing the other's ditch, said to himself: Who will give me this ditch for money, so that I may use it to remove the mound of earth from my property? One day, they happened to have met one another. The owner of the ditch said to the owner of the mound: Sell me your mound so I can fill in my ditch. The mound's owner, anxious to rid himself of the excess dirt on his property, said to him: Take it for free; if only you had done so sooner. [Both Haman and Achashveirosh wanted to do away with the Jews. And when Haman offered money for the right to exterminate them, Achashveirosh was only too happy to agree and turned down the money.]

The *Mahara"l* in his commentary *Ohr Chodosh* on *Megillas Esther* (ibid.) explains that the comparison of Achashveirosh and Haman to a *mound* and a *ditch* is more exact than we think, as they represent two types of anti-semitism.. He writes that to the Achashveirosh-type of anti-semite, the Jewish people are like a mound of dirt –

something extra that doesn't fit in. We are different than the other nations (primarily because we have the Torah and they don't), and thus we are extra and not wanted. Being different and not fitting in may not be enough of a reason for this type of anti-semitism to kill us outright, but if someone else does the job for them then they are okay with that ...just like with Achashveirosh and Haman.

To the Haman-type of anti-semitism (Haman descends from the nation of Amalek, the anti-Jew) the Jewish people are like a ditch of dirt whose very existence ruins the entire field and which has to be removed. So, too, our very existence as Jews ruins Haman's world. And the Jewish people must therefore be destroyed.

Throughout our bloodied history, we find this pattern repeating itself. most recently during the Holocaust, when our very existence was threatened by the Nazis who sought to rid the world of the ditch that was the Jewish people (in their warped way of thinking). Many other nations (can you say Poland?) saw us as a mound of extra dirt – and which they wouldn't mind at all if it were gone.

There is a fascinating commentary of the *Beis Yosef* (written by Rabbi Yosef Karo in the 1500's) on the *Tur Shulchan Aruch* Laws of Megillah (692:1) regarding the meaning of the words of the blessing that the Rabbis established to be said after the Reading of the Megillah on Purim night and day (see Talmud *Megillah* 21a), and which I quote for you below.

[*Ed. note:* This particular commentary of the *Beis Yosef* had been censored by the Church for hundreds of years (for obvious reasons) and has only recently been printed together with a new edition of the *Tur Shulchan Aruch* just a few years ago.-dz]

In this commentary, the *Beis Yosef* talks about the different types of anti-semitism that exist, as well as the way that G-d deals with the nations who want to hurt us, which is why it is relevant to our present discussion.

“Blessed are you, L-ord, our G-d, King of the universe, Who fights our battle, judges our claim, avenges our wrong; Who brings just retribution upon all enemies of our soul, and exacts vengeance for us from our foes. Blessed are You, L-ord, Who exacts vengeance for His people Israel from all their foes, the L-ord Who brings salvation.”

Asks the *Beis Yosef*: *Why did the Rabbis who composed this blessing write five [seemingly redundant] expressions of punishment/judgment: (1) 'fights' (2) 'judges' (3) 'avenges' (4) 'pays retribution' (5) 'exact's vengeance'? Aren't they all pretty much the same?*

He answers that these five expressions refer to the different types of anti-semites and anti-semitism that there are in the world, and how G-d deals with them: (1) Sometimes the nations of the world attack us without any pretense – just to have a fight. (2) Other times they come with a 'claim' against us in court. In both cases, G-d protects us. In the first case, He 'fights' our battle, and in the second case, He 'judges' our claim. (3) Sometimes our sins cause that our enemies around us do us (disproportionate) harm.

However, after we have received our due punishment, G-d 'avenges' the wrong that was done to us.

The Beis Yosef continues to explain the blessing:

Of those who would do harm to the Jewish people, there are really two types – as expressed by the Rabbis in the blessing. (4) The first type are “enemies of our soul” – Amalek-types who hate what we stand for – and to them G-d will ‘pay just retribution’ ‘measure for measure’ so that the nations will realize that they are being punished because they did harm to the Jewish people. (5) The second type are our “foes” who love to oppress us – but not because they hate us. In fact, they don’t like anyone who is not like them. From them, G-d ‘exacts vengeance’ – but they are not punished measure for measure, because they are not smart enough to connect the dots and to understand how G-ds’ justice works.

As to the ending of the blessing, . Blessed are You, L-ord, Who exacts vengeance for His people Israel from all their foes, the L-ord Who brings salvation.”, the Beis Yosef explains that it is not proper to take joy in another’s misfortune - even if he’s your enemy. The Rabbis therefore end the blessing by stating that even though G-d certainly exacts vengeance on the nations, His primary purpose is to bring salvation to His people.”

GOOD SHABBOS!