

# You don't have to be a Jew to be a Levite

Category: Devarim, Re'eh

## Antisemitism Today

On Sunday, CNN aired a 1-hour program about anti-Semitism in the United States. They showed that there's been a dramatic increase in hate crimes against Jewish people over the past few years; according to the FBI, the most persecuted religious minority in the country is the Jewish minority — and by a very wide margin.

Anti-Semitism, they said, is the earliest form of hatred towards a specific group, and a hatred that has no rational explanation. It seems that people simply need someone to blame for all their issues; if there is a pandemic, it's the Jewish people's fault, and if there's an economic crisis, it's the Jewish people's fault as well.

They also showed that anti-semitism is prevalent everywhere, from the extreme right to the extreme left. However, they explained, each side harbors anti-Semitism in a bit of a different way. On the extreme right, anti-Semitism is like a tornado that comes and uproots and destroys everything in its path. On the extreme left, anti-semitism resembles climate change — at first they try to deny it, but then, the Earth continues to grow hotter and hotter, and it becomes impossible to contain.

Towards the end of the program, they discussed ways to combat anti-semitism. First of all, they said, Jews should never be cowed by it. To the contrary, we should proudly display our Judaism whether through wearing a kipa or other identifying Jewish symbols— because the more we hide, the more antisemites feel encouraged.

For the program's conclusion, they interviewed a holocaust survivor who said that education is key. She, personally, travels from place to place to speak to young people and tell them what caused the terrible Holocaust and how important it is

to avoid such hatred in the future.

## **The Source for Anti-semitism**

The Rebbe notes on several occasions that people search for the cause of anti-semitism in vain.

First the explanation was that they hate us for our success, but then, when we were no longer successful, they explained that it was because we were poor.

Some suggested that we are hated because we are religious, but history has proven that when Jews assimilated and converted to other religions — after the Spanish expulsion and in Germany of the early 20th century — the hatred did not abate.

Others reason that we are hated because we are the chosen nation, and therefore some feel the need to apologize and deny it at every opportunity. But the non-Jews don't accept any sort of apology — after all, the Bible itself says that we are the chosen nation, whether we deny it or not. We read it in this week's Torah portion: "For God chose you to be for him a treasured Nation from among all nations" (Re'eh 14:2).

The classic Jewish story about anti-Semitism is the story of Purim. Haman wanted to kill every Jew, young and old, without distinction; he wanted to get rid of them all. During the Purim farbrengen of 1968, the Rebbe addressed the topic, and explained the source of it all.

Before I share the Rebbe's words, I'd like to share the following story.

There was once a boy who was shorter than his younger brother. One time, to 'rectify' the situation, the older brother dug a small pit and had his younger brother step inside. "You see," he told him, "now I'm taller than you."

At that moment, their father happened to pass by and saw the interaction. He turned to the older brother and said, "You should have stood on a hill. The way to be taller than your brother is not by lowering him, but by raising yourself." The father in this story was the Rebbe Maharash, and the younger of the two children was the Rebbe Rashab.

There is something about the Jewish people that raises us up. Some people might say that we are hated because we are successful or because we are smart, or because family values are important to us, or because we have a good work ethic. But in truth, there's something much deeper, and something unexplainable and intangible about the Jewish people — which makes us different.

In the Rebbe's words: "The very existence of a Jewish person is what makes those people uncomfortable. If a Jew thinks that he'll be accepted by removing his tefillin, or by opening his store on Shabbos and closing it on Sunday, or by talking, dressing and acting like everyone else....he is sorely mistaken."

Why is that the case?

"The gentile feels an emptiness. Our sages say that anti-Semitism came into the world at Mount Sinai — because when the Jewish people received the Torah, it gave a feeling of emptiness to those who did not receive it. Now, he has the option of resolving that feeling of emptiness by trying to raise himself higher, but that could be too difficult; instead, to suppress that feeling, he chooses to get rid of that which feels superior to him. If the Jewish people won't exist, the Torah won't exist either — and then, he won't be missing anything" (Toras Menachem vol. 43 pg. 40).

In other words, according to the Rebbe, the non Jewish world senses something special about the Jewish people, something spiritual — a morality and a humanity founded on the principles of the Torah. It gives them an inferiority complex, and since it is too difficult to raise themselves to a higher level, they choose the easier path — to try and push us down, so that his existence will not remind them of something higher to aspire to.

## **How to Fix It**

What could we do to, at least to some extent, better the situation?

A delegation of Chabad rabbis was once preparing to meet with the prime minister of Canada. Before the meeting, they reported to the Rebbe that they planned to present the prime minister with a gift of a silver kiddush cup.

The Rebbe asked: "What will a non-Jewish prime minister do with a kiddush cup?"

Instead,” the Rebbe suggested, “give him a prayer book with an English translation; prayer is something he can relate to; he is also obligated to pray to the creator of the universe..”

This is our contribution to the world. Judaism, as you all know, does not seek converts. To the contrary, Judaism believes that every human being was created in the image of G-d, and there’s no need to change him. However, it is our responsibility to teach every human being that a connection to G-d is not the exclusive domain of the Jewish people.

Every human being has the ability, and the obligation, to develop a personal connection with the Creator of the universe. Every person should believe in G-d and have faith in Him, just as every dollar has those famous words inscribed upon them — “In G-d we trust.” Whenever a person is faced with a need, he should and he must turn to G-d and pray that G-d should help him. We need to teach the world that G-d listens to their prayers.

We also need to teach the world that those mitzvos regarding decent human behavior between man and man, are relevant to gentiles as they are relevant to Jews. It is our responsibility to ensure that the world is a civilized place, with societies that are based on the common truths of justice and charity.

## **The Levite**

This week’s Torah portion mentions the status of a Levite. The Levite is someone who dedicated his entire life to serving G-d and serving the Jewish people. He was not given a portion of the land of Israel, because his role was to deal with the spiritual needs of the people of Israel.

Now, Maimonides writes something amazing in this regard (end of Hilchos Shemitah V’Yovel): “Not only the tribe of Levi, but every person on Earth who is inspired to separate himself and stand before G-d, serving Him, worshiping Him and knowing Him ... and chooses the straightforward path as G-d created him, and casts off the yoke of the many pursuits of mankind — he becomes a sanctified as the holiest of holies.”

The Rebbe noted (Toras Menachem vol. 40 pg. 228) that Maimonides says something very novel: being a Levite is not only for Jews, but for non Jews as well.

Any human being who decides that G-d is the most important thing in his life, and dedicates his life to bring this knowledge and passion to the rest of the world — he too, can be a Levite, and he too, can be like the high priest in the Temple.

That's why, the Rebbe explains, the Talmud says that a non Jew can earn a place in the world-to-come. History has proven that people who truly believe in G-d have proven themselves to be "righteous gentiles" and have saved and protected the Jewish people throughout generations.