**The world's oldest hatred**

By Rabbi Shmuley Boteach

July 1, 2010

The Washington Post

*http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2010/07/the\_worlds\_oldest\_hatred.html*

Anti-Semitism is the world's oldest hatred. Yet, it was a prejudice that I thought the world was moving passed. But clearly with the endless vitriol shown to Israel it is alive and well.

What's that? Hatred of Israel is not motivated by Anti-Semitism? Yeah, I thought so too. I was even naïve enough to write column after column admonishing my fellow Jews not to jump to such simplistic conclusions. Surely hatred of Israel was due to the Jewish state being terrible at PR. Surely Israel, a lone democracy in a sea of tyranny, assumed that the justice of its cause was so self-evident as to require no explanation. A renewed PR effort was necessary. Or maybe the endless and unjust criticism of Israel was simply a manifestation of the world's natural proclivity to champion the underdog. The Arabs, numbering in the hundreds of millions, have somehow successfully positioned themselves as being oppressed by six million Israeli Jews. All of this could account for why Israel, a thriving democracy where one million Israeli Arabs vote and have robust representation in the Israeli Knesset, is hated while its tyrannical, terrorist neighbors escape censure.

I now know that none of this is true and that hatred of Israel is just another manifestation of the world's oldest hatred.

Believe me, it pains me to write this. It represents a fundamental defeat for my Jewish universalist worldview. I believe with every fiber of my being that we are all G-d's children, part of an indivisible human family. That Arabs and Jews are equal before G-d and that we are all brothers. And the knowledge that I will never be fully included in that family due to a deep-seated hostility to my people is devastating beyond words.

But what else are we to conclude? Why would British academics ban their Israeli counterparts and not, say, the Chinese whose human rights abuses and slaughter of innocent civilians at Tiananmen Square took place before the whole world? The Turks bomb Kurdish independence fighters on a regular basis and continue to deny their genocide of more than a million helpless Armenians. Yet their condemnation of Israel over the Gaza flotilla gains international currency. Hugo Chavez brutally dismantles Venezuelan democracy, imprisons his political opponents, locks up judges, and persecutes a free press that criticizes him. But his condemnation of a genocidal Israel is lauded by countries throughout the world. And the UN censures Israel on a monthly basis while countries like Libya sit on its Human Rights Council. If that isn't rank anti-Semitism then the word has no meaning.

Israel's obviously not perfect. Like any moral democracy fighting for its very life it's going to make mistakes. But compared to Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia and so many other of its neighbors, it is positively angelic. Disagree? Well, rather than engage in useless and endless debate let's employ John F. Kennedy's famous argument delivered in the summer of 1963 in his memorable 'Ich Bin Ein Berliner' speech. Kennedy addressed the two world systems that were in mortal conflict, Capitalism and Communism. Each said their side was right. Each brought endless facts to make their case. "There are many people in the world," Kennedy said, "who really don't understand, or say they don't, what is the great issue between the free world and the Communist world... There are some who say that Communism is the wave of the future... And there are some who say in Europe and elsewhere we can work with the Communists...." OK. A major dilemma. Two world systems each claiming to be righteous and asserting the other to be evil. How to adjudicate between them? Kennedy did so with memorable eloquence. "Freedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect, but we have never had to put a wall up to keep our people in, to prevent them from leaving us."

I say the same thing to you. If Israel really is so terrible, if it's government is so evil, then let's put it to the Kennedy test. If all of Israel's most rabid critics were forced to choose to live either in Israel or under Hamas in Gaza, or under Assad in Syria, or under Ahmedenijad in Iran, or under Abdullah in Saudi Arabia, or even in Communist China, which would they choose? In Israel they would have the freedom to mercilessly assail their government on the radio, in print, and in public squares. In any of these other countries they would be locked up or worse midway through their inaugural speech. In Israel if they were female or gay they would enjoy absolutely full rights and equal protection under the law. In Iran or Saudi Arabia, if female they would be severely punished for not adhering to a certain dress codes, and if openly gay they would be lucky to escape with their lives.

Yet it is Israel which the world hates.

Go figure.

Or perhaps there is no need. This kind of hatred has a long and cruel precedent. It comes in many guises. Today it targets Israel but at its root it's just good old-fashioned, unbridled, unapologetic Jew-hatred. Ecclesiastes had it right. There is nothing new under the sun.

*Rabbi Shmuley Boteach hosts "The Shmuley Show" on WABC/77 AM in New York City and is the author, most recently, of "Renewal: A Guide to the Values Filled Life." Follow him on Twitter @RabbiShmuley.*