Palestinian terrorists perpetrated another heinous attack in Tel Aviv, murdering four Israelis and wounding nine others. Israeli police were quick to neutralize the two gun-wielding terrorists so that no further casualties resulted. As could be expected, Israeli leaders, some world leaders and some international media sharply condemned this wanton attack.

As also could be expected, there were celebrations among Hamas supporters and other Palestinians who rejoice when Jewish blood is spilled at the hands of Palestinian “martyrs.” As could be expected, some international media presented the story in a way that aimed blame at Israel rather than at the terrorists. Some world leaders called on Israel to show restraint in its response to this tragic event.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the Mayor of Tel Aviv himself blamed Israel for the terrorists’ actions. The article (June 9, 2016) opened with these words: “Tel Aviv Mayor Ron Huldai and Joint List lawmakers found the culprit for the terrorist attack in Tel Aviv that took four lives – not just the two terrorists from Yatta, but the ‘occupation’ and the government, they said Thursday.” According to the Mayor and some Israelis on the “left”, it is Israel’s fault that the Palestinians are frustrated. If the frustration results in terrorism, the fault isn’t primarily with the terrorists but with Israel.

Mayor Huldai seems to think that if Israel abandoned its “settlements,” and granted statehood to the Palestinians, all would be peaceful and terrorism would disappear. He ignores the vast anti-Israel propaganda in the Arab world going back at least 100 years; he ignores the Arab wars against Israel before 1967 when Israel could not be accused of “occupying” Palestinian territory; he ignores the ongoing incitement to hatred and murder fostered within Palestinian schools and society; he ignores the peace offers made by Israel and rejected by the Palestinians time and again.

When Palestinians murder Israelis, blame Israel!

When Hamas trains its children to become “martyrs” and murderers, blame Israel!

When Palestinian leaders amass great personal wealth while keeping the Palestinian people in perpetual misery, blame Israel!

Mayor Huldai ignores the fact that the Palestinian Liberation Organization was founded by Yasir Arafat in 1964, well before the Six Day War of 1967. Arafat wasn’t thinking about liberating the West Bank and Gaza—those territories were under Arab control at the time. For him and other Palestinian ideologues, liberation meant (and still means) the removal of the Jewish State, and its replacement with an Arab State. The terrorism initiated by the PLO was aimed at “liberating” all of
Israel—including Tel Aviv! For Hamas, and for so many of its sympathizers and like-minded Palestinians, there will be no cessation of terrorism unless Israel itself ceases to exist.

Instead of facing this ugly fact, it is so much easier to simply blame the Jews. It’s always our fault. Not only do external anti-Semites take this route, but some Jews also take this path.

Throughout history, Jew-haters have blamed Jews for being communists, capitalists, too rich, too unproductive, too smart, too stupid, too superior, too inferior. No matter what the time or place, it has always been easy to blame things on the tiny and persistent Jews.

Jews themselves, constantly victimized by anti-Semitic vitriol, sometimes internalized the perspectives of their oppressors. After the lynching of the Jewish Leo Frank by an anti-Semitic mob in Atlanta, Georgia in the early 20th century, Rabbi David Marx, one of Atlanta’s leading rabbis, urged his Reform congregation to remain silent and to assimilate as much as possible. He blamed the growing anti-Semitism on the ritual-heavy practices of Atlanta’s Orthodox Jews. Rabbi Marx blamed “the anti-Semitism that led to the lynching on the Orthodox Jewish community, rather than on the anti-Semites.” (cited by Alan Dershowitz, America on Trial, p. 222).

Some Jews think that if only Jews would be absolutely inconspicuous, there would be no anti-Semitism. Some Jews think that if only Jews would observe their religion openly and proudly, anti-Semites would come to respect us. Some Jews think we are Jewish because anti-Semites define us as Jews. Some Jews think we are Jewish in spite of the anti-Semites.

What is at the root of Jew-hatred? I recently wrote a blog in which I approached this topic from the vantage point of an anti-Semite, a person who hates Jews even though he/she may not even know any Jews. He/she has disdain for an entire community of people and is willing to cause them harm. Imre Kertesz, a Hungarian Jewish writer who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2002, describes an incident in his childhood before he was deported to a Nazi concentration camp. In his book, “Fatelessness,” he relates how he went to a store to buy some bread. The baker was a notorious Jew-hater and cheated the boy by short-changing him by a half pound of bread. The boy wondered why the baker hated Jews and why he would cheat them out of the bread for which they paid. “I suddenly understood why his train of thought would make it impossible to abide Jews, for otherwise he might have had the unpleasant feeling that he was cheating them. As it was, he was acting in accordance with his conviction, his actions guided by the justice of an ideal....” (p. 12).

Kertesz offers a poignant psychological insight. The baker and other anti-Semites need to view their behavior in a positive light. They do not want to think of themselves as thieves, even though they are plainly stealing from Jews. How do they justify their theft? They claim that it is the Jews’ fault! The haters allow their anti-Semitism to serve as a cover for their crimes. They convince themselves that they steal from Jews because Jews are hateful; that it is virtuous to cheat and hurt Jews; that Jews don’t deserve any better. By placing Jews in a hateful category, they maintain a clear conscience when they commit crimes against Jews. Anti-Semitism serves as a psychological device protecting the haters from feelings of guilt or moral turpitude.

This insight can be extrapolated to many (all?) examples of racial, religious, ethnic, national hatred. The haters turn their victims into despicable stereotypes, not as equal fellow human beings. When the haters perpetrate violence or thievery against their victims, the haters actually see themselves in a virtuous light. They have so fully dehumanized their victims, that it is no worse hurting them than it would be to kill vermin or mosquitoes. The greater the level of dehumanizing the victim, the greater the level of harm one can do to the victim without feeling guilt or moral qualms.

This logic can also be applied to Jews who blame Jews when anti-Semites attack. Such Jews see...
themselves, or want very much to see themselves, as “the good Jews,” not like those “bad Jews” who
stir up the anti-Semites.

Perhaps we will have to wait until Messianic times for human beings to learn that scapegoating the
“other” is inherently immoral and self-destructive. Those who self-righteously victimize others sin
not only against their victims; they sin against the “image of God” within themselves.

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I write these lines after the horrible act of murder perpetrated in Orlando, Florida. The murderer
saw himself as morally correct in murdering those whom he considered to be sinners. The
murderer was a Muslim, and it is unlikely that Jews will be blamed for this heinous crime…but who
knows if someone out there will find a way to blame Jews anyway.

The terrorism in Orlando is part of the pattern of self-righteous individuals who dehumanize their
victims. They see no moral dilemma in committing murder, since they feel they are serving a
“higher” cause. As long as this attitude persists among human beings, we will be facing these kinds
of tragedies for a long time to come.

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