The Hatred Syndrome

View PDF



Rabbi Marc D. Angel is director of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

It is a strange feeling to be hated by people who don't know you and don't want to know you. It is perplexing to hear people calling for your death and the death of all your people without ever considering your humanity, your goodness, your contributions to society.

Haters don't see their victims as fellow human beings. They create and foster ugly stereotypes. They promote outrageous conspiracy theories that dehumanize their targets.

Hatred is an ugly thing. It not only promotes hatred of the perceived enemy, but it distorts the lives of the haters themselves. Energy and resources that could be utilized to build compassionate societies are instead diverted to hatred, weaponry, death and destruction.

We have always been aware of an under-current of antisemitic and anti-Israel attitudes, but things today seem qualitatively and quantitatively different. We witness throngs of people throughout the United States and throughout the world who brazenly and unabashedly call for the annihilation of Israel and the murder of Jews. The public display of raw hatred is alarming.

I suspect that almost all of those spewing hatred of Israel and Jews don't even know Israelis or Jews in person. They don't hate actual Jews: they hate stereotypes of Jews. They are indoctrinated with propaganda and are fed a stream of lies about Israel and about Jews. The haters are steeped in their hateful ideology and are not interested in civil dialogue and relationship with actual Jews and Israelis. They know little or nothing about the connection of Jews to the land of Israel going back thousands of years, from Biblical times to the present.

So why do so many haters take aim at Jews and Israel? Some of this hatred stems from anti-Jewish religious teachings. Some of it stems from jealousy at the phenomenal success of such a tiny group. Some people spew hatred as a way of making themselves

seem important, as though picking on Jews somehow makes them appear stronger and braver.

Erich Fromm has written of the syndrome of decay that “prompts men to destroy for the sake of destruction and to hate for the sake of hate.” Many people poison their own lives with hatred and only feel truly alive and validated when they express hatred of others.

When societies allow hatred to flourish, they are sowing the seeds of their own destruction. When universities, media and political forums condone blatantly anti-Jewish intimidation and violence, the infection spreads well beyond Jews. Civil discourse is threatened. Respectful dialogue is quashed.

All who stand for a civil society must not be intimidated by the haters, bullies and supporters of terrorism. The syndrome of hate eats away at the foundations of society. It must not be allowed to prevail.

Rav Nahman of Bratslav taught: The whole world is a narrow bridge (precarious), but the essential thing is not to be afraid, not to be afraid at all.