Positive Thinking, Positive Action

View PDF



Rabbi Elie Weinstock is Senior Rabbi of the Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach on Long Island and serves as a Nassau County Police Chaplain. A graduate of Yeshiva University with ordination from the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, he is a Senior Rabbinic Fellow of the Shalom Hartman Institute, active in AIPAC and UJA-Federation of New York, and is Immediate Past President of the New York Board of Rabbis.

There’s no honest way to look at the Jewish moment we’re living in and pretend everything is easy. It isn’t. The rise in anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism is real, visible, and often unsettling. But there’s also no honest way to look at the Jewish story—past or present—and conclude anything other than this: we are far more powerful, resilient, and capable than the noise would have us believe.

We need to start by telling the truth about what we’re seeing. Hatred of Jews is not new. What is new is the amplification system. Social media has taken what once simmered on the margins and handed it a megaphone. As Abe Foxman memorably said, "The rats are out of the sewer." It creates the illusion that hatred is everywhere, overwhelming, unstoppable. It isn’t. It’s louder, not necessarily larger.

And not all hostility is the same. Some people hate. Others simply don’t know. That distinction matters. Ignorance can be educated; hatred must be confronted differently. The tragedy of our moment is that fewer people meaningfully encounter those who are different from them. When there is no relationship, misinformation fills the vacuum. Add a media ecosystem that rewards outrage over nuance, and you get a distorted picture of Jews, Israel, and Zionism.

Take anti-Zionism. Much of the rhetoric is passionately delivered and intellectually empty. Many chanting slogans couldn’t tell you which river or which sea, let alone articulate what Zionism actually is. And here’s the uncomfortable truth: many Jews can’t either. Yet studies and real-life experience show that when people are actually taught what Zionism means—the right of the Jewish people to self-determination in their historic homeland—opinions soften. People often oppose a caricature, not a reality.

That insight should shape our response. We spend far too much time chasing terminology and arguing with abstractions. A healthier metric is simpler: how do people actually treat Jews? How do they speak? How do they act? The macro conversation is loud, but our lived experience is often far

more nuanced and far more hopeful.

Because alongside the challenges is a remarkable story of Jewish strength.

Since October 7, the Jewish community has shown itself at its best. Whether or not the phrase "the October 8 Jew" fully captures it, something real has happened. Jews are showing up—for each other, for Israel, for Jewish life—with renewed seriousness and pride. Communities are gathering, learning, giving, building. That doesn't make headlines, but it is the headline of our lives. We would do well to focus there.

Jews have never survived let alone thrived by obsessing over those who oppose us. We succeed when we invest in what is ours: our Torah, our communities, our values, our sense of purpose. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks taught so powerfully, non-Jews respect Jews who respect their Judaism. The most compelling response to hostility is not insecurity, it is dignity.

And that brings us to what we can actually control.

We cannot singlehandedly reshape the media landscape. We cannot eliminate hatred. But we can live visibly, proudly, intelligently Jewish lives. We can educate patiently and persistently. We can be ambassadors in everyday encounters that will never trend online but shape how people understand Jews in the real world.

Every interaction matters.

In my own experience serving as a police chaplain in a predominantly Catholic department, I'm often the only Jew many officers truly know. They don't come in with deep knowledge of Judaism or Israel but they come with openness. Over time, through conversation and presence, respect is built. That is not unique to one role or population; it's a model. Every Jew is, whether we like it or not, a representative of our people. And that is not a burden; it is an opportunity.

The same principle applies when we think about Israel. It is natural to have opinions, even strong ones. But we need to be thoughtful about how and where those opinions are expressed. There is a difference between constructive engagement and unintentionally strengthening those who seek to delegitimize Israel altogether. Wisdom, not just passion, must guide us.

So where does this leave us? Not in denial. Not in despair. But in focus. Focus on building Jewish life that is deep, serious, and joyful. Focus on educating ourselves so we can educate others. Focus on relationships that turn strangers into allies. Focus on the quiet, steady work that never makes headlines but changes hearts.

The Jewish story has never been written by those who shouted the loudest about us. It has always been written by those who lived most powerfully as us.

The future? Onward and upward.