

ANTISEMITISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

B'ruchim Ha'baim! Welcome!

I turn 75 four days after the Nov. 3 election. I never experienced a period more bizarre than what has been taking place since 2020 began. Perhaps you would agree. I have lived through pretty scary times.

The cold war and the threat of mutually assured destruction (MAD).

The Viet Nam War.

The drug revolution.

The sexual revolution.

The rise of the civil rights movement.

The assassinations of JFK, Dr. King, and Bobby Kennedy.

All of these happened simultaneously and turned life in America inside out and upside down. It is different now and in some ways more threatening: Covid 19, climate change, the proliferation of hate groups and gunslingers, the necessity of confronting police reform, systemic racism, threats to the electoral process and constitutional norms, accompanied by dramatic increases in antisemitism. That and more such as health care policy create a lot to handle. The politicization of these crises makes the divisiveness wide spread and especially harsh.

You indicated an interest in sharing today in a conversation about how and to what extent is civil rights our fight; what to make of Trump's violations of civil and human rights; and antisemitism before and since the Holocaust.

Doing this virtually is a challenge. Thanks to Eric Tublin as host and moderator it should all work well. And some folks in this meeting have extra special expertise that will be especially enriching to encounter. At the very least we will all learn from one another.

Below are a variety of hopefully relevant topics/questions that we could probe in relation to the four categories you favored. Just take a couple minutes to look through the list and identify by LETTER and NUMBER (Ex: A1) any item(s) you want addressed. **YOU ARE NOT RESTRICTED TO THESE TOPICS/QUESTIONS.** Feel free to engage in any other point or question not covered by the list.

I thought we might try this for an hour, but if you wish I will be happy and humbled to continue the discussion beyond the hour. I am at your disposal. Of course, we will likely hear a variety of points of view. My guiding principle for dealing with different points of view about possible hot button issues comes from Mishnah Avot 2:10. "Let the honor of one's fellow be as dear to us as our own."

A. IS THE FIGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS OUR FIGHT?

1. Does religion in general and Judaism in particular necessarily include advocacy for civil and human rights?
2. Treating the stranger (immigrant) well is commanded 36 times in Torah, the most often repeated mitzvah. See: <https://rac.org/jewish-texts-immigration>. From the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism we read: Leviticus commands, “When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do them wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” [Lev. 19:33-34]. Our own people’s history as “strangers” reminds us of the many struggles faced by immigrants today, and we affirm our commitment to create the same opportunities for today’s immigrants that were so valuable to our own community not so many years ago.
3. What are we to take away from the story of the oppression and murder of Jews throughout history? Some say we should learn to be careful and not to draw attention to ourselves. Some say we should fight for the safety and security of Jews but not others. Some say we should respond to the injustices afflicting non-Jews too because when civil rights and human rights violations of non-Jews occurs, Jews will likely become victims too. And some say that Torah and our history teach us to apply civil rights and human rights to all for the sake of doing what is true and right “lishma” for its own sake.
4. Fair housing is often considered the linchpin for civil rights pursuits because where one is permitted to live may have such a large impact on access to transportation, food, good schools, employment opportunities, safety and security of the family. Do you agree? Should fair housing laws and their implementation

remain our concern today? The Fair Housing Act was became law in 1968 and was amended and expanded in 1988. Some people believe if you own a property you should be able to decide to whom to rent it or sell it. The federal Fair Housing laws limit that right to prevent discrimination based on one's race, color, national origin, sex, disability, familiar status and religion. In Maryland a bill just became law that also forbids housing discrimination based on one's source of income, including protection for holders of housing choice vouchers.

5. What are examples of illegal housing discrimination?

6. Some of us remember signs in Baltimore that read: No Coloreds, Jews, or Dogs Allowed. In the past 75 years the leading advocates for fair housing in the nation have been Jews, Christians and Muslims. Conversely, the practitioners of housing discrimination have been Jews, Christians and Muslims. Do we have to chose up sides?

7. Deuteronomy 16:20: "Justice, justice, you shall pursue." Who? When? Under what circumstances is it right to ignore this commandment?

8. Is the frequent killing of unarmed black men and women by too many members of law enforcement a national disgrace? How well understood is the call: Black Lives Matter?

If you have a chance before Sunday at 1, please watch this Anti Defamation League Webinar: Fighting Racism as a Multiracial Jewish Community. It is riveting and something to return to again and again: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BhxEuKGDtz0&list=PLEPACLR6xldgDZHj4dkQb-HSizqdgWtiJ&index=15&t=0s>

9. Some claim the protected class suffering the most varied and consistent acts of illegal discrimination in America is PEOPLE

WITH DISABILITIES, even thirty years after the American with Disabilities Act. Is this true?

10. Hillel Houses on campuses around the country were named for the great leader and teacher Hillel the Elder who died in the first century of the common era. Hillel taught: “Do not do to another what is hateful to you.” Is that a call to civil rights awareness and action by each of us, or is that taking the teaching too far? Hillel also taught: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am for myself alone, what am I? If not now, when?” What does this mean and what are we to do with it?

B. TRUMP’S MOST RECENT VIOLATIONS OF CIVIL RIGHTS

1. In Exodus 34:6-7, just two verses, we read these commandments. What have they to do with the statements and actions of Donald Trump?

- a. You shall not subvert the rights of the needy in their disputes.
- b. Keep far from a false charge.
- c. Do not bring death on those who are innocent and in the right, for I will not acquit the wrongdoer.
- d. Do not take bribes, for bribes blind the clear-sighted and upset the pleasure of those who are in the right.
- e. You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.

2. Deuteronomy 24:14: “You must not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities in your land.” Relevance to Donald Trump?
3. Amos 2:6-7: “...they have sold so silver those whose cause was just; and the needy [were betrayed] for a pair of sandals. You who trample the heads of the poor into the dust of the ground, and make the humble walk a twisted path.” Relevance to Donald Trump?
4. Mishnah Avot 1:6: “Judge all men in the scale of merit.” Relevance to Donald Trump.
5. If Donald Trump himself has personality disorders, should judgment of his words and deeds be evaluated differently than were he without such disorders?

C. ANTISEMITISM BEFORE THE HOLOCAUST

1. What is antisemitism and how should it be spelled?
2. 167-160 BCE: Antiochus Epiphanes’ antisemitism as described in the Books of Maccabees.
3. Rome’s destruction of Jerusalem and the history of Masada.
4. A boost to antisemitism from the Gospel Book of John 8:41 and following.
5. Fifth century antisemitic laws.
6. The Crusaders embrace of horrifying antisemitism.

7. Twelfth century rise of the Blood Libel in England and France and the massacres and expulsion that followed.
8. The Spanish Inquisition: hate, torture and expulsion.
9. Martin Luther a 16th century blueprint for Hitler.
10. Antisemitic legislation around Europe.
11. 1648-67 The Chmielnicki Massacres
12. The Kishinev Pogrom of 1903 and the Czars.
13. Antisemitism and the Rise of Hitler Leading to the Holocaust.

D. ANTISEMITISM SINCE THE HOLOCAUST POSSIBLE QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS

1. What is antisemitism and why the different ways of spelling it?
2. The hatred of and terrorism directed against Israel: Is anti-Zionism antisemitism?
3. Is the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement necessarily antisemitic?
4. How antisemitic is the United Nations and why?
5. Is Holocaust denial necessarily antisemitism?

6. Suffocating, oppressive Soviet antisemitism: What, how, why?
7. The deterioration and repair of Black and Jewish relations in America.
8. Today's hate groups in America and the connection with the slaughter at Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh and the terror in Charlottesville.
9. Milder, accepted forms of antisemitism in America.
10. Does the British Labor Party embrace antisemitism?
11. Is Islam inherently antisemitic?
12. The coming clash between changing attitudes towards Israel among some Arab nations and Saudi Wahabi extremism?
13. Trump has a Jewish daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren. Is Trump an antisemite?
14. Can Jews be antisemitic? Examples from the far left and right.

**IF YOU HAVE NOT YET READ IT, I STRONGLY RECOMMEND
TO YOU "ANTISEMITISM HERE AND NOW" BY
PROF. DEBORAH LIPSTADT, SCHOCKEN PRESS, 2019.
HAPPY TO EMAIL YOU MY NOTES ON THIS BOOK.**