

Anti-Semitism and “Killing the Messenger”

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In the summer of 2014 I had experienced, for the third time in my life, a reign of terror coming from the sky as rockets were launched from Gaza onto Israeli civilian population. As in the previous times (during the Six Day war and during the first Gulf war), I was stunned to realize that my main reaction to the sirens yelling of an impending life-threatening danger was not fear. Rather, it was a sense of insult, perhaps indignation: Why would anybody wish to kill me? What did I do wrong? What is wrong with me?

Probing this strange reaction I have reached the conclusion which forms the premise of this article:

There is no anti-Semitism in the world; there never was. There is only a burning desire to kill the messenger.

And there are peculiar adjustments of the messenger, trying to cope with this desire and escape its devastating psychological effects.

In October of 1892, Asher Tzvi Ginzberg (1856-1927), also known by his pseudonym *Achad-Haam*, published an article in the Hebrew periodical *Hamelitz*. The title of the article was: “Half a Comfort” (*Chatzi Nechamah*). The article was published half a century after the Damascus blood libel, and in it *Achad Haam* tries to extract a useful lesson from the anti-Semitic blood libel (if one can extract one at all). He denotes this lesson: *Chatzi Nechamah*. It may be instructive to re-read a paragraph from this article, where *Achad Haam* refers to the effect that the “General Agreement” (in today’s parlance, the general consensus),

emanating from blatant Anti-Semitism, has on the Jewish psyche (translation mine):

“In generations past, when our ancestors believed in the simplicity of *Atah Bechartanu* (“You have chosen us”), vilification by the nations of the world would not have affected the internal purity of their soul. They knew their worth and were not affected...However, in this generation this is not so. Nowadays our “world” has expanded immensely, the European agreement has a strong effect on us in all walks of life...A certain Russian author innocently asked these days: Since the whole world hate the Jews, can we say that the whole world are guilty and the Jews innocent? – and this question makes its way now into the hearts of many of our brethren: Can we say that all those corrupt characteristics and evil deeds that the whole world attributes to the Jews are but a fabrication?” Later on *Achad Haam* reaches the main conclusion of his article, the lesson to be extracted from the recent blood-libel (my summary of *Achad Haam* conclusion, not a quote): “We, as Jews, know that Jews do not use blood to make Matzos for Passover. Therefore our reaction to the baseless “General Agreement” regarding the blood-libel should be extended to other forms of anti-Semitic vilification. And this, the lesson from the blood-libel, should serve as our *Chatzi Nechamah* while mourning the losses brought about by the blood-libel.”

Regrettably, this lesson is not common nowadays and this is not what we currently witness. A common form of current escape from the unbearable burden of anti-Semitic vilification is to put on a gown of self-righteousness and join the crowd in spitting out venomous judgmental pronouncements against the Jews and against its representative, the State of Israel. This flight-from-guilt allows some of the most blatant current denouncers of Israel and of the Zionist enterprise to come from among our midst. A recent example is a title of a blog posted by an Israeli Rabbi, equating the Haganah to Chamas (to the small credit of the Rabbi, this equation was not originally his and the title of his blog ended

with a question mark). Another example are Israeli youngsters leaving Israel, as if in a state of protestation: "Listen world, we are not part to this country!"

In this article, I wish to offer another *Chatzi Nechamah* ("Half a Comfort"), to complement that of *Achad Haam*: "There is no anti-Semitism; just a burning desire to kill the messenger." I assume that given the voluminous literature about anti-Semitism and its roots, probably someone has already come up with this explanation for anti-Semitism. Yet given the growing wave of current anti-Semitism in the world, it might be worth repeating the other half of the "Half a Comfort" in order to introduce to us a clear mirror of the true reality of anti-Semitism and its roots.

Killing a messenger of bad news is not a new practice. It was common among kings and rulers of ancient times. In fact, it already appears in the Bible. When an Amalekite boy breaks the news to David that King Saul and his son Jonathan were killed in war, David kills the messenger, obviously offering some rationalization (2 Samuel 1:13-16).

The Jewish people has a message to the world: The Ten Commandments, delivered by the Almighty, and all that this message implies.

By sharp contrast, the politically-correct basic tenet of the modern world, as represented by the West, is: Total Freedom. Freedom to do as the heart desires, so long as it does not hurt your neighbor; And at times – even if it hurts thy neighbor, conditioned on the hurt being consistent with the *supposed* word of God or with some other home-made creeds. The message of the Jewish people is different: there are boundaries to total freedom. And these boundaries are rooted in a message conveyed to the Jewish people by the Creator, commanding them to be His witnesses (Isaiah 43:10,12 ; 44:8), and to pass the message on to the entire assembly of the nations of the world.

This message of the witnesses is unbearable and hard to accept by the recipients. It is inconsistent with today's message of total freedom to such a degree that one feels compelled to react adversely to the messenger in order to be liberated from its *supposedly devastating* implications. Thus, the only remedy to the suffocating feeling brought about by the message is to vilify the messenger, in the best of scenarios, or kill him, in the worst; Or, alternatively, attack the deeds and assassinate the character of the messenger's declared representative among the nations, the State of Israel.

In other words, the other "Half a Comfort", to complement that of *Achad Haam*, may be paraphrased in the words of the Godfather:

"Do not take it personally; It is not you we are after but the message that you have stubbornly insisted on carrying on and witness over the centuries; The desire to kill you, in short, is strictly business!"

Understanding this lesson is essential. It is essential to the way we perceive ourselves, it is essential to how we define our national identity and it is essential to how we cope with "righteous" demands constantly targeted at the Jewish state. It is particularly essential for minimizing the devastating effects of the bizarre modern-time Jewish anti-Semitism, disguised by home-made self-righteousness, which inflicts so much pain and damage on Jews, in general, and on those of us living here in Israel, in particular.