

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

Sometimes called "the longest hatred," antisemitism has persisted in many forms for over two thousand years.

Jews in America, in the last 100 years, tackled antisemitism in different ways. On the one hand, they tried to assimilate into the way of life of those who rejected them, creating similar institutions of their own, as they gradually tried to blend in and to be accepted.

On the other hand, they maintained that antisemitism germinated from ignorance and prejudice, so they strongly believed that all that antisemites needed to do to change their behavior was to be educated and to see the contributions of the enlightened Jew to society.

Liberal Jews, many of them children and grandchildren of socialist immigrants, were at the vanguard of every social and political movement in America defending the rights of minorities, including African Americans, women, immigrants, and LGBT. Jews were also disproportionately involved in the women's suffrage movement, labor unions, and in the Socialist Party of America.

Finally, Jews, especially after the 1950s, were to be found in high numbers, in every Ivy League university in America, both among the students and the faculty.

The tragic events of October 7th shattered a sense of internal and external security not only in Israel, but among American Jews as well. Jewish institutions and individuals have been exposed to levels of antisemitism that many of us don't remember having experienced in our lives. What makes this new wave of antisemitism even more challenging is that it originates within populations, movements, ideologies, institutions, and organizations, which have been heavily supported by Jews in the past.

Many Jewish individuals and organizations are still in shock, trying to accommodate themselves to this new reality, a reality in which Jews are being the target of hatred not *because*, but *despite*.

The open support for Hamas by many leaders in institutions promoting the rights of minorities, the inability to condemn the rape of Israeli women, by many leading feminist organizations, and the deafening silence by Ivy League leaders witnessing alarming demonstrations of antisemitism, is a cataclysm for which very few of us were prepared.

What should we do now?

First of all, we need to face the somber reality without denying it any longer, without justifying the unjustifiable. We need to accept that our love was unrequited, that the many "alliances" and "friendships" we forged throughout the years with many organizations and individuals, didn't withstand the test of time.

Perhaps we were loved as individuals -my best friends are Jews- but not as a people. Count Stanislas de Clermont Tonnerre put it very eloquently in his famous statement at the French National Assembly in 1789: "We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals." As King Solomon said it in Ecclesiastes: "there is nothing new under the sun."

Second, we need to turn the focus back on ourselves. In the words of Hillel, the Elder: *"If I am not for myself, who will be for me?"* That doesn't mean stopping caring about others. After all, it was Hillel who also said: *"If I am only for myself, what am I?"* However, there is a time for everything, and now I believe, is a time for introspection and self-care.

I am sure you heard the joke about a grandson who tells his zayde that the Yankees defeated the Red Sox, to which the zayde asks: Is it good or bad for the Jews?

I am afraid the joke isn't funny any longer. It is time for all of us to ask the question: Is it good or bad for the Jews? Is it good or bad for Israel? Is it good or bad for us? After all, it looks like if we don't ask the question, nobody will.

With hope for better days,

Rabbi Manes Kogan