Israel Haters and their Naïve Humanism

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Why do they oppose us with such intensity? Why does the hyper-liberal world react so viscerally to Israel? What stirs their agitation, driving them to fabricate wild claims and hurl accusations with unbridled fury?

These questions have haunted us for nearly a year. Has the world gone mad? In just a few weeks, every soul will stand before Hashem, as described in the solemn tefilla of *U'netaneh Tokef* passing in front of Him like sheep. As we exclaim in the haunting *Zikhronot* prayer of Rosh Hashana: the fate of nations will be sealed — some destined for the sword, others for peace; some for famine, others for abundance. On this sacred day, we plead not just for ourselves but for all of humanity. What has become of the world we pray for?

Of course, there are many answers to this question. Irrational and disproportionate hatred of Jews is nothing new. It is humanity’s oldest hatred, a vile stain on the moral conscience of mankind. Though ancient, antisemitism evolves with each generation, latching onto the shifting cultural narratives of the times.

In the current cultural milieu, hatred of the Jewish state presents a profound challenge to a core tenet of modern progressive ideology. It unsettles naïve humanists on both a moral and existential level. When individuals feel that their ideological foundations are threatened or discredited, they fiercely defend their worldview. In this current struggle, our enemies are willing to concoct far-fetched notions and propagate blatant falsehoods, desperately clinging to their old convictions. This is part of what fuels the irrational and vehement opposition to Israel and the disturbing support for Hamas, despite its horrific acts of rape and barbaric murder. The events of October 7th profoundly challenge core aspects of humanistic belief, and for some, the only solution is to find a way, anyway, to blame Israel. This is their only strategy for preserving their ideological premises.

Humanism and Religion

A core belief of religion is that humanity was created with inherent goodness. At the heart of faith lies a profound conviction in mankind’s potential. Hashem ended each day of creation by declaring it good, and after creating man, He pronounced His creation "very good" or "tov me'od". As Shlomo Hamelekh writes in *Kohelet*: Hashem made man upright, yet man himself devolved into complexities and distortions.

Hashem endowed us with reason and the capacity for growth, and through these divine gifts, humanity has transformed the world. People of *emuna* are meant to be humanists, optimistically believing in mankind’s ability to elevate society through education, reform, and dialogue. Ultimately, the advancement of the human condition reflects the will of Hashem.

Unfortunately, many religious Jews feel alienated by the term "humanism," viewing it as a replacement for religion — a system of ideas that has supplanted religious identity. This perception is not unfounded. Humanism, which began in the 14th century, emphasized the potential of man. Initially, it was a religiously inspired movement, celebrating the divine spark within humanity and mankind's ability to reshape the world. However, as human innovation progressed, society grew more secular, and humanism gradually severed its religious roots. As man became more self-sufficient, the need for a Higher Being seemed to diminish. The tragic result of 600 years of humanism has been the rise of the modern secular city.

Despite its unfortunate impact on religious observance, the core ideas of humanism are not foreign to religious belief. People of faith affirm the potential of man, and acknowledge the divine spark that resides within each person. It is Hashem's will that we harness these gifts to better our world.

Too Much Humanism?

As opposed to those who place too *little* faith in humanism, others place too *much* faith in human virtue. Radical humanists believe so deeply in the inherent goodness of man that they struggle to acknowledge the existence of evil, hatred, and unprovoked violence. "If humanity is innately virtuous," they argue, "hatred should be eradicated through education, understanding, and dialogue." If people are naturally kind, eliminating evil should be fairly straightforward. Radical humanism is sometimes naively utopian.

This compassionate but naïve humanism is deeply challenged by barbaric atrocities such as those committed by Hamas. The evil and hatred of Hamas are beyond comprehension, shaking the foundations of a humanistic worldview. The chilling footage of the cramped tunnels where our slain hostages spent their final months starkly reminds us of the darkness that can reside within some hearts. Who will ever forget the raw, repugnant evil displayed on October 7th?

Such manifestations of hatred deeply trouble radical humanists. How can such blatant cruelty exist in a supposedly enlightened world? How can we reconcile this butchery with the belief that humanity has transcended base instincts? The shattering of their worldview terrifies them and challenges the very foundation of radical humanism. Their unwavering belief in the inherent virtue of man is profoundly shaken.

To reconcile such violence and preserve their naïve notions about the virtue of humanity, radical humanists seek an underlying justification for the hatred — a rationale for the violence. They must find an original sin so severe, so criminal, that any response no matter how evil can be framed as resistance to an even greater evil. To make sense of such brutality, they vilify Israel, accusing the Jewish state of the most heinous crimes to explain away the unexplainable. In their view, our fictitious crimes against humanity justify any response, reframing Hamas's violence not as savage evil but as legitimate resistance against occupation, imperialism, and apartheid. This distorted narrative allows naïve humanists to cling to their idealistic beliefs about mankind.

It is this ideological struggle over foundational beliefs that drives their vehement opposition to Israel. In their worldview, it cannot be that human beings are capable of such atrocities on their own; it must be a reaction to even graver crimes committed by others. The current battle is fought with such ferocity because it threatens their fundamental understanding of human nature.

Clear-Eyed Humanists

As Jews, we believe in the inherent goodness of human beings and their capacity for progress. We also hold that education, dialogue, and cooperation can reduce hatred and bigotry. Yet, we recognize that evil will always exist. Divinely endowed free will gives humanity the power to commit heinous crimes and harbor baseless hatred. It allows individuals to build cultures based on animosity, to distort religion into a tool for spreading venom, and to perpetuate multi-generational hatred. Our belief in human potential is not at odds with acknowledging the existence of pure evil.

We are not responsible for the crimes ascribed to us. We face animosity because we are Jews and because we have persistently sought to return to our ancestral homeland peacefully. Antisemites around the world will continue to hate us and portray us as the root of all societal ills. Alongside antisemites, naïve humanists, unwilling to confront the reality that even divinely graced humans are capable of devilish behavior, join in the hatred. To avoid confronting the collapse of their ideals, they fabricate accusations against the Jewish state. To avoid the death of their worldview they murder Jews.

Our belief in humanity is not naïve; it is tempered by an awareness of the persistent evil in the world. We strive for a world where justice, peace, and understanding prevail, but we do so with the understanding that not everyone will choose the path of goodness. Man is free to choose, and often, he chooses the path of destruction and hatred. It is as simple as that.

This year, when we pray for Hashem to remove the "kingdom of evil" or the "memshelet zadon" from the Earth, we know precisely whom we are referring to. God creates good. Man creates evil.