

# An Attempt to Identify the Root Cause of Antisemitism

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***Editor's note:***

*The following essay was originally published in the Hebrew journal Alpayim in 2005 and provoked an intense public debate. Its author, the renowned Israeli novelist A.B. Yehoshua, undertook a demanding task: to decipher the most disturbing riddle of Jewish history, to analyze and describe the quintessence of antisemitism in its various historical and cultural incarnations. Yehoshua's thesis disputes the general intellectual consensus on antisemitism, which denies that there is any single or unique root to the phenomenon. He asserts that it is the unique structure of Jewish identity which has given birth to the venomous reaction of antisemitism—and he offers a way out of this impasse. Yehoshua's position has outraged many but also given them much to think about. AZURE is proud to present an English translation of this essay, which embodies Zionist thought in its most daring form.*

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*Dedicated to my teacher, Zvi Yavetz, who taught me to walk the paths of history.*

Science, which has exposed the lie of pure spirituality, has also been able to re-assert the mutual influence between the body and soul of the nation and will teach us to see with unbiased sobriety the tremendous problem of the relations between Israel and the nations of the world—without tearfulness and without boastfulness.

—Gershom Scholem, “Thoughts on the Wisdom of Israel”<sup>1</sup>

Does Jew-hatred stem from a single root? Dare one raise such a question regarding a phenomenon—called antisemitism since the end of the nineteenth century—that has persisted for so long in so many forms and with so many explanations? A hatred that dates back to antiquity and has remained fixed for thousands of years in a world that is constantly changing; a hatred and hostility toward Jews that is embedded in different nations and cultures and shared by members of different religious faiths, even those at war with one another, such as Christianity and Islam; the hatred of Jews that persists not only in totalitarian and absolutely secular societies, but in liberal democracies as well? Of course, for hundreds of years, the Jews themselves have been undergoing countless changes, assuming new aspects, shedding old ones, and, sociologically speaking, altering their way of life, their occupations, their places of residence, and their involvement in the societies in which they live—whether they are religious, secular, nationalist, assimilated, isolated, or living in communities.

Is there a discernible line connecting the first-century Roman philosopher Seneca (who called the Jews a “criminal tribe”) and the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (who called the Jews “the abhorrent ones”) to the German composer Richard Wagner or the French writer Louis-Ferdinand Céline, both of whom lived centuries after the Romans and yet were also gripped by a murderous hatred of the Jews—despite the great cultural,

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ethical, and social gulf between them, and the fact that the Jews they encountered were so utterly different from those the Romans knew?

I grant all due respect to the intellectual apprehension of serious historians and others who recoil at the idea of trying to identify a common root of Jew-hatred throughout the ages. Indeed, it is exactly those who so thoroughly examine the complexities of every historical period, who probe the subtleties of the various elements specific to Jewish and non-Jewish society in each period, who study antisemitic sources in medieval Christianity or contemporary Islam, who delve into the complex undergrowth of German identity that gave birth to Nazism—it is they who will refuse, perhaps justifiably, to accept the possibility that all antisemitic phenomena are based on a common foundation. Scientific caution obliges them to refrain from attempting to make a sweeping generalization that stretches over such a long period of time, it becomes something like a mythological concept instead of a historical assertion.

It is true that, now and then, historians do allow themselves to express sweeping historiosophic views, usually in the manner of an “Eternal Hatred of the Eternal People” (as Nahum Sokolow’s 1882 book was titled); but even these grand syntheses generally remain descriptive rather than analytical.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, perhaps it is only natural that people like myself, who are not historians and not bound to conduct their research with scientific precision within a specific time frame, will try to ignite a spark in the hope of reaching a responsible historian who will use it to start a bonfire. For if we pride ourselves on the historical continuity of the Jewish people over thousands of years, and see the contemporary Jew as connected via the structure of his identity to the Jew of hundreds, possibly thousands of years ago, it is not unreasonable to try to discover whether the antisemitism that so consistently accompanies the Jew has its own fixed structure.

Of course, even if such a structure were to be found, it would not negate or marginalize historical analyses and explanations concerning the essence and character of antisemitism wherever and whenever it occurs.

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In seeking to identify and understand the structure of the hatred of Israel known as antisemitism, I actually rely on a traditional Jewish notion which intuitively accepts the premise that there is indeed one, eternal, fixed root, without being able to explicate it. R. Shimon bar Yochai's resolute words "The halacha holds that Esau hates Jacob" have been accepted as comprehensive folk wisdom that regards gentile hatred of Jews as an immutable phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> It should not be forgotten: Esau was Jacob's biological twin! R. Shimon's saying, therefore, indicates the existence of a real, exceedingly primal hatred independent of socio-religious conditions. Even in the verse Jews sing with such feeling on the first night of Passover—"In every generation they stand ready to annihilate us" (note the use of the present tense)—there is the basic assumption that antisemitic hatred, which actively seeks to destroy the Jewish people, is passed from generation to generation in a variety of circumstances and places. The continuation of the verse, "and the Holy One, Blessed Be He, delivers us from their hands," also takes for granted that this deliverance can be only partial and ephemeral. The problem in and of itself cannot be solved if God must "deliver" us over and over again. In other words, even for the absolute believer, it is not in God's power to eradicate hatred against Jews, but only to rescue them, and then only partially and temporarily.

Therefore, in seeking the essential structure of antisemitism, I am expressing the basic Jewish perception that, although inexplicable, this shared antisemitic root is a constant motivating factor of human behavior unrelated to the religious, national, social, or economic conditions prevailing in any given period. Fatalistically, this perception also assumes that this structure cannot be destroyed. It will exist eternally. In a particular and tragic sense, antisemitism has become a most important and natural component in the crystallization of Jewish identity, to the extent that the absence of antisemitism—and how much more so the existence of philosemitism—is suspect and unnatural in the eyes of many Jews. The observant Jew sometimes identifies the active antisemitic element as an essential aspect of the proper ordering of the world.

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It seems that no other people is so preoccupied with defining and clarifying its identity as is the Jewish people. It is enough just to see the reports from so many conferences worldwide dealing either covertly or overtly with the subject of Jewish identity. What is a Jew? Who is a Jew? To what extent is an Israeli a Jew? Not to mention questions concerning the secular Jew, the humanist Jew, the assimilated Jew, and the countless variations on the theme so compulsively examined in thousands of books and essays. There is something absurd about an ancient nation that is still, after some three thousand years, hammering away so intensely and so obsessively at the enigma of its identity, tirelessly searching for more and more explanations, definitions, and versions of it—so much so that the definition of a Jew in the State of Israel’s Law of Return has been changed several times within a very short period.

Here, for example, are two strange and fascinating passages written by Sigmund Freud, the first taken from a letter written to the Viennese B’nai Brith organization, and the second from his introduction to the Hebrew translation of *Totem and Taboo*. To B’nai Brith, he wrote:

What bound me to Jewry was (I am ashamed to admit) neither faith nor national pride.... But plenty of other things remained over to make the attraction to Jewry and Jews irresistible—many obscure emotional forces [which] were the more powerful the less they could be expressed in words, as well as a clear consciousness of inner identity, the safe privacy of a common mental construction.<sup>4</sup>

In his introduction to the Hebrew translation of *Totem and Taboo*, he adds:

No reader of [the Hebrew version of] this book will find it easy to put himself in the emotional position of an author who is ignorant of the language of holy writ, who is completely estranged from the religion of his fathers—as well as from every other religion—and who cannot take a share in nationalist ideals, but who has yet never repudiated his people.... If the question were put to him: “Since you have abandoned all these common characteristics of your countrymen, what is there left to you that

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is Jewish?" he would reply: "A great deal, and probably its very essence." He could not now express that essence clearly in words; but some day, no doubt, it will become accessible to the scientific mind.<sup>5</sup>

This is perhaps the only time, as the psychologist Zvi Giora has said, that Freud ever sought the help of others in order to understand himself.<sup>6</sup> But meanwhile, these others were themselves amazed and moved by the phenomenon of Jewish identity and its survival. The historian Jacob Talmon, apparently in the grip of his emotions, wrote:

We are in this respect confronted with the supreme difficulty which Doctor Weizmann used to call Jewish "ghostliness." The world is too small to contain them, and they are said to possess all the wealth of the earth, and yet, when you strain every nerve to pin them down by a definition, they elude you like a mirage. It seems impossible to lay a finger on anything tangible and measurable in the Jew's Jewishness; yet an ailing, all-devouring self-consciousness comes like a film between him and the world.... But these things are too subtle for the historian's techniques and such crude instruments as quantitative measurements of Jewish participation in trades and professions, or data on attendance at synagogues and contributions to charities.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike Talmon, Freud was not prepared give up in despair and leave the matter in the realm of mystery and enigma. As a confirmed rationalist, Freud believed scientific research would uncover the Jew's "very essence"—despite his own inability to articulate it.

An attempt to rationally perceive the structure of antisemitism will help us to comprehend the "enigma" of Jewish identity. No wonder so many Jewish historians conduct their research into the annals of the Jewish people by elucidating the phenomenon of antisemitism in different periods, such as the Crusades, or the expulsion from Spain, and, of course, the Holocaust and what preceded it. This resembles the connection between the study of disease and the study of the anatomy and mechanisms of the human body, or the attempts to understand the structure of human

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personality through the study of distress and mental illness. After all, if people did not contract serious illnesses, the vast efforts to understand the secrets of the biological mechanism might never have been made. This also applies to the existential or mental injuries that compel human beings to investigate the workings of the human mind and soul on the individual and collective levels. Likewise, studying the plague of antisemitism can serve as a key to the study and understanding of Jewish identity.

The calamities inflicted by antisemitism are so horrendous and cruel, and remain such a grave and possible future menace, that we must at all costs give up the romantic comfort of evasive chatter about the mystery and enigma of Jewish identity. We must use scientific research tools to understand its nature and try, in the words of Jacob Talmon, to “pin it down.”

It is astonishing to discover that the keys to deciphering seemingly impenetrable phenomena are sometimes more available than we thought or had been indicated by others. It is possible that fear of the obvious conclusions has created the strange aversion which leads to disregard and denial.

**T**he essentials of Jew-hatred were already thoroughly, clearly, and concisely formulated in an ancient text, written long before Christianity, before Islam, before modern antisemitism, before Nazism, and before the Middle East dispute. Scholars date this text to the era between the fourth and first centuries B.C.E., but historians have found no evidence from the ancient world indicating that the events recounted in the Book of Esther in fact actually happened.

It is, therefore, a fictional Jewish text written by Jews for Jews. It is not merely one neglected book among many written by Jews throughout the generations, but an important canonic text to which Jews demonstrably return every year, insisting that it be read from a parchment scroll. A Jewish holiday was built around the text in an attempt to imprint it permanently on the Jewish national consciousness in a manner not much different from

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the treatment of other mythological stories which accompany holidays such as Hannukah and Passover.

Meticulous study of the text reveals a high level of Jewish self-awareness, but regrettably, this self-awareness was never translated into practical behavior on the part of the Jews throughout history.

The words of Haman ben Hammedata, a literary character created by the Jews themselves centuries before Christianity, provide the first clear focus on the structure of Jew-hatred. They will constitute the starting point of our discussion:

And Haman said to King Ahashverosh, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; and their laws are different from all people; nor do they keep the king's law: therefore it is of no benefit to the king to tolerate them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed; and I will weigh out ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries." And the king took his ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the son of Hammedata the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.<sup>8</sup>

I will try to make a detailed analysis of Haman's words, which were put into his mouth by the Jews themselves, as mentioned above, and are therefore all the more authoritative in the search for the truth about antisemitism. In my interpretation of Haman's words, I do not relate specifically to that historical period but to the principle on which the words are based. After all, soon after it was written, the Book of Esther was taken out of its historical context and given archetypal, mythological status.

Haman clearly speaks of a specific people and a specific religion, and he differentiates between the two concepts. He does not speak of a territorial national minority, but of *one people* scattered throughout many different nations and states. Had the Jews settled within the borders of only one nation, the task of identifying them might have been simpler. However—and

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this is a salient point—Haman is not satisfied with the word “scattered;” he adds the word “dispersed.” In my opinion, this is not by chance, because by the addition of this adjective he implies that not only are the Jews scattered, they also do not resemble one another; they have been diversified, which adds to the difficulty of identifying and marking them. Wherever the Jew lived, his features were different from those of Jews living elsewhere: he dressed differently, his name was different (Jews often changed their names to local names), he adopted local customs, and his language differed from place to place, since Jews appropriate the language of their surroundings. Even when Jews created their own Jewish languages, they mutated the host tongues. As a result, Jews could not understand each other on a primary level. They lacked a common language, the very basis for communication between members of the same nation.

Haman’s first sentence expresses this difficulty of identification, this element that is honed with the passage of history, the invisible “essence” that Freud hoped would in time be explained by scientific research, while Talmon and other historians bowed to its mystery.

Here we find the word *dat* (religion, translated as “law” in the quote above), which Jews themselves sometimes hesitate to use as a legitimate description of their identity, alternately evading and returning to it through lack of choice, even though there are various linguistic alternatives, and one could, in principle, use such designations as “halachic,” “believing,” or “practicing” to describe this way of life. Yet, because of the universal validity of the word “religion,” Jews must continue to use it. The source of the word *dat* is Persian, and the translation “law” faithfully reflects the Jewish religion, which is based on laws of do and do not.

Haman goes on to say that not only is this people diverse from all the nations among whom it has settled, but its religion is exclusively its own and different from all the local religions. That is, the Jewish religion cannot be shared with a different nationality, unlike other faiths, such as the Hellenistic religions, which were common to members of many different nations at the time this text was written.

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Here we must consider another nuance in Haman's words, one that will emerge as valid and present throughout Jewish history and which will help me to clarify the thesis that I am attempting to present in this essay. Haman's text speaks of the *religions* (or "laws") of the Jews and not of *the* Jewish religion, using the plural and not the singular form. Ostensibly, it can be explained in a simple, philological manner—*their religion* in the sense of *their customs*. However, the Hebrew word for religion—*dat*—is so fundamental to Jewish identity that it has never been replaced by another Hebrew word, though this could have been done with ease. This fact, in my opinion, proves that the religion Haman refers to already possessed several basic characteristics of prevailing religious concepts. However, the moment the word "religion" appears in the plural, it indicates that even the singular religion of the Jews could, like the people, be "diverse," that is, capable of assuming different spiritual forms, even without any connection to belief in God. Nevertheless, these different forms or interpretations of their spiritual configuration are also specific to the Jewish people, who apply them solely to themselves, engaging in what Freud, amazingly and almost absurdly, called "a common mental construction" of the Jews—as if a single mental construction could possibly be shared by millions of people who do not live in the same territory, do not speak the same language, do not know one another, and who include both the secular and the religious, the nationalist and the assimilated. After all, even the claim that the inhabitants of a single island like Ireland or Corsica have a common mental construction is refutable; how much more so in the case of the Jews. Yet Freud, continuing in language that lacks responsibility and accuracy, seemed drawn to imply something that he himself could neither understand nor define.

Another astonishing, shocking thing that emerges from an analysis of the text of Haman's words is the expression *that they may be destroyed*. In other words—annihilate them. That is, at such an early stage of the appearance of Jew-hatred, the possibility of annihilation already arises. Not economic sanctions, not cultural sanctions, not even banishment,

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but—explicitly—annihilation. Clearly, the threat of annihilation that has materialized so terribly throughout Jewish history was indicated as a real possibility thousands of years before it actually transpired. In this context, Haman ben Hammedata continues to develop a motif present in the speeches of the Hebrew prophets, who never ceased to rain down dire visions of doom on the people of Israel. One might say it is no wonder that the eternal, unfortunate candidate for obliteration internalized the motif as an integral, immanent part of his historical destiny and perhaps did not work very hard to save himself from it.

There is one more puzzling aspect of the Book of Esther, and many have already noted it: God is not mentioned even once in the entire text. God is not relevant to this story, which is built entirely on the Jews' realistic self-analysis of their own historical-geographical situation. The rescue at the end of the story is entirely disconnected from any metaphysical advantage that the Jews enjoy as a result of their Tora or their special relationship with God. And indeed, God (whether he exists or does not exist) will not deliver his Jews. This has already been proven numerous times over the course of history.

To summarize: For generations, the Jews themselves (speaking through the persona of Haman) have frankly and soberly elucidated the nature of their interaction with the nations of the world, clarifying to themselves the extent of the antisemitic menace. They speak of the uniqueness of a people whose religion, however multi-faceted, belongs solely to them. They are aware of their exotic separateness within the fabric of other nations, wherever they live. They also speak (in Haman's voice) of the Jews' refusal to accept the religions of the surrounding population, and they understand that this refusal might provoke the desire to destroy them. We will return to this shortly.

This essay is not a historical, philological analysis of an ancient text, but a cognizant analysis of a text that has been read and studied by many generations of Jews who have applied it to the reality of the Diaspora, beyond the historical kingdom of Ahashverosh. When Jews past and present come across the word *dat* in their reading of the Hebrew text, they are unaware

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of its Persian source, as mentioned above, and they naturally interpret it as referring to the Jewish religion, a religion that is crystallized, separate, and different from the religions of the people among whom they live.

This lucid passage, which was composed by Jews and holds an important place in the Jewish canon, expresses an idea which played a significant role in Zionist thought until recent times. Had the Jews fully understood the significance of the text they themselves composed, and had they used it for self-analysis, say the Zionists, they would not have had to wait over two thousand years for Theodor Herzl to elucidate the matter. Instead, they would have congregated in their homeland and prevented the dangerous dispersals and separations. In the Second Temple period, half the nation had already scattered to the four corners of the ancient world and was not living in the Land of Israel.

Put another way, this is the essence of antisemitism according to Zionist ideology, this is the root: not envy and not Christianity, not Islam and not economic relationships, not intellectual prominence and not the backward religion of the ghetto, but the dispersion, the alienation, the otherness, and the borderlessness of the Jews, which, in certain situations, can create a murderous antagonism toward them on the part of their host nations. (“Host” nations, by the way, according to the Jews themselves, who bear witness every year that they are only guests passing through other people’s countries, and next year they will return to their true home in Jerusalem, though this year is for some reason forever postponed.)

**I**n recent years this theory, which for the sake of convenience we shall call classic Zionist theory, has become inadequate for determining the root of antisemitism. Even after a considerable part of the nation has now returned to its homeland, antisemitism does not appear to have abated either toward the ingathered collective or, of course, toward the still-existing dispersion. The same pattern of extreme Jew-hatred, of old antisemitic stances, is manifesting itself in the relationship between the sovereign

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nation living in Israel and its Middle Eastern neighbors. This animosity goes beyond the limited arguments over small tracts of land or the occupation of disputed territories and discrimination against Palestinians. Though these factors fan the flames of conflict, they can by no means explain the force of the hatred and menace they arouse. The more so, since such absolute anti-semitic stances existed long before the occupation of the territories in the Six Day War in 1967 and even before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. The necessity to explore and understand the root cause of antisemitism does not arise only from the justified demands for liberation from the yoke of occupation: It arises from threats of annihilation and a seemingly bottomless racial hatred carried to the point of suicidal attacks, over and above the phenomena of dispersal and disparity that, however real and true, turn out to be inadequate explanations of its essence. Lately, the actual legitimacy of a Jewish state—not just its policies—is sometimes questioned by its opponents and critics, who refer to the establishment of the State of Israel as a “historic mistake.” This is a troubling development which even the most pessimistic Zionists did not foresee.

The urge to objectively analyze the motivations and reasons for antisemitism and to describe the pathological interaction between Jew and gentile have occupied secular Jews since the end of the nineteenth century. Consequently, the literature on the subject is vast. The Zionists in particular wanted to correctly appraise the depth of antisemitism on the assumption that the radical remedy they were proposing was the right one. Incisive and very critical texts were written by some of the great and most respected Zionists concerning the essence of the Diaspora experience and Jewish responsibility for it. These formed an integral, legitimate part of Zionist ideological discourse.

Apparently, however, this self-critical trend became much weaker following the Holocaust. The reasons for this are certainly understandable. The monstrous dimensions of Jew-hatred revealed in the Holocaust debilitated attempts to understand the motivations that were at work, lest any kind of

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objective understanding—even the most reserved—confer indirect legitimacy on the worst crimes in history, not only against the Jews but against humanity itself.

Thus, harsh and venomous self-criticisms, such as those voiced by Yosef Haim Brenner at the beginning of the twentieth century (I dare not even quote them), became impossible for even the most brazen critics of the Jewish way of life.

However, the attempt to halt and temper objective analysis for fear of giving the murderers some legitimacy rebounded on the victims in the end. The lesson of the Holocaust obliges us to make every serious intellectual effort to understand (but not, heaven forbid, to justify) the pathological interaction that leads human beings to commit crimes as terrible as those committed against the Jews. If, justifiably, we say, “never again,” we must empower ourselves to cope with all possible threats in the future. This empowerment and preparation for the possibility of further onslaughts requires more than a proper understanding of the root of the evil; it demands a profound understanding of the roots of Jewish existence and its relations with the rest of the world. Talmon and Salo Baron’s romantic notions regarding the “mystery” and “enigma” of Jewish identity are insufficient when faced with so serious a matter. Even Freud’s “some day, no doubt, it will become accessible to the scientific mind” is a kind of evasion, however respectable it may be. It is necessary to go to the roots of Jewish identity, to delve deep in order to understand the dangerous pathological interaction that sometimes occurs between the Jews and their surroundings. Our main effort has always been devoted to studying the official, legal dimension of Jewish existence in the midst of other nations, but we do not relate sufficiently to the spiritual relationship between Jews and their surroundings. Such an understanding, should it be achieved, may perhaps make us despair when we realize that such is the ingrained structure of our identity and there is nothing to be done about it. Yet perhaps it will also become clear that there are things that can and should be changed.<sup>9</sup>

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Of all the attempts to comprehend antisemitism, Leon Pinsker's theory that fear of Jews is at the core of Jew-hatred seems to come closest to the heart of the problem. The fact that Pinsker was a doctor gave him, in my opinion, a more balanced view of the root of antisemitism. He intuitively discerned an element of individual mental illness in it that outweighed religious, sociological, economic, and political factors. In this, he returned the matter to the antisemitic individual and only afterward to antisemitic society as a whole. Indeed it is easy to prove that sometimes, in the same society, living under the same socio-economic conditions, some are more infected with severe, personal antisemitism than others. Even in the Nazi state, which officially adopted the ideology of hatred and war against the Jews, there were, by many accounts, a considerable number of people who did not identify with the antisemitic ideology or fantasy—although they did not dare to admit it openly. Thus, for example, throughout the generations we find absolute believers in the Christian faith who do not carry the antisemitic virus within themselves, just as there are those of the same faith who fully identify with it—which indicates that it is not only Christianity that causes antisemitism (even though it certainly can promote it), but something else that has its primal roots in a *personal* interaction with the (real or imagined) Jew, before he has become a social phenomenon.

In his famous essay, *Autoemancipation*, published in Berlin in 1882, only three years after Wilhelm Marr coined the term “*anti-Semitism*” to describe the definitive concept of Jew-hatred, Pinsker speaks of fear of Jews. In a somewhat poetic vein, he adds:

To the living the Jew is a corpse, to the native a foreigner, to the homesteader a vagrant, to the proprietary a beggar, to the poor an exploiter and a millionaire, to the patriot a man without a country, for all a hated rival.<sup>10</sup>

The various and contradictory designations enumerated in this rhetorical description are not the main point, but rather the fact that the Jew possesses

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undefined characteristics (in his own eyes, too) that allow and even invite the non-Jew to project his generally negative fantasies onto him.

However, first let us return to the premise that fear of the Jew is the basis of antisemitism. On the face of it, this appears to be peculiar and contradictory, since who knows more clearly than we do that not only is there nothing to fear from Jews but that throughout history they have been essentially most vulnerable and weak. Nevertheless, Pinsker is correct in asserting that it is projected fear that evokes such intense reactions, particularly in the most extreme and cruel cases of antisemitism.

Fear of Jews—not envy of the Jews—is the prime, decisive cause of antisemitism. It is difficult for Jews to accept this, since they would much prefer to relate antisemitism to envy because of their religious conviction that they are God’s chosen or, according to the secular view, because of their success and achievements. After all, anyone who is despised prefers to believe that he is hated because he is envied for what he regards as his material or spiritual success, or, if these achievements are not obvious, at least because of his “elevated morality.”

But the belief that envy of Jews is the primary, not the secondary, reason for antisemitism is unconvincing. After all, to say that Jew-envy explains antisemitism sounds ridiculous and absurd considering the fact that for such long periods Jews were poor and humiliated, subject to many harsh decrees and prohibitions. For what could they possibly be envied? What was enviable in the fate of Holocaust refugees whose lives were so viciously destroyed and who were greeted with such powerful hatred when some of them returned to Poland after the war? What is enviable about the citizens of the State of Israel, living for so many years with so many wars and vicious terrorist attacks? Does the wave of antisemitism now passing through Europe stem from envy of Israel’s recent military or moral “successes?”

Can envy of the true achievements of others arouse such murderous frenzy in people? Sometimes quite the opposite is true. People are attracted to the successful individual, hoping to learn his “secret” and imitate it.

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At the foundation of the mad frenzy of antisemitism lies something more genuine: fear. It is fear which drives people to the most ferocious reactions. Perhaps the most prominent and astounding proof of the existence of this absurd dread is to be found in the words of Hitler himself, spoken on the eve of his suicide in his Berlin bunker as it was bombarded by the approaching Soviet army in 1945. "I had underestimated the power of Jewish domination over Churchill's England," he said to his companions.<sup>11</sup> And at the conclusion of his political testament, he wrote: "Centuries will pass away, but out of the ruins of our towns and monuments the hatred against those finally responsible whom we have to thank for everything, international Jewry and its helpers, will grow."<sup>12</sup>

The greatest criminal in history, knowing precisely how vulnerable and weak the Jews were and how easy it was to murder six million of them with no danger of any real resistance, could still express fear of their power, even after the catastrophe he had wrought on that same wretched people; he could attribute his terrible defeat not to the Russians or the Allies but to none other than international Jewry, which was proven powerless to save its people from a massacre unequalled in human history.

What is the nature of this insane and absurd fear—now echoed throughout the Muslim world—which sometimes brings disaster on the antisemite himself? From where does it stem and how does it evolve into such strange and dangerous fantasies? This must be investigated. As mentioned, apart from profound research into the problematic personality of the individual antisemite, it is necessary to discover what it is in Jewish identity that causes such an intense reaction.

At this point, it must be said that in referring to sharp expressions of antisemitism we do not mean only common xenophobic phenomena. First, in most cases, the Jews are not foreigners, but veteran inhabitants who generally do not look foreign at all. Second, research into xenophobia recently conducted among members of the extreme right in Europe shows a clear differentiation between xenophobia and antisemitism. The fantasies and heinous accusations against the Jews are wilder and more serious than

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those concerning declared minorities, and they come from people who are learned, enlightened, and liberal in other spheres. Take, for example, the Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis, who recently said that “today it is possible to say that this small nation [the Jews] is at the root of evil”;<sup>13</sup> or the words of the Nobel Prize-winning Portuguese writer José Saramago: “What is happening in Palestine is a crime.... We can compare it to what happened in Auschwitz. Ramallah is the barracks of the camp, and the Palestinians are the prisoners inside”;<sup>14</sup> or the words of the former Malaysian prime minister—that the Jews rule the world (when the Jews are not even capable of ruling over a weak people like the Palestinians).

All of this requires a specific analysis which will lead us, through this absurd fear of the Jews and their evil intentions—which are, apparently, to rule over all other peoples in order to crush them—to the projected element at the root of all these irrational emotions and thoughts.

**A**ny in-depth investigation of the structure of Jewish identity must concentrate on the component that separates the Jews from most other nations and relates to the special combination of religion and nationality, or religion and peoplehood—the same combination emphasized in the *Book of Esther*. Namely, a monotheistic religion with universal components that inspired the birth of two great religions, intended solely and by definition for a specific nation with a language and territory of its own. This combination is so essential that the Jews cannot remain part of the Jewish nation or the Jewish people if they convert to another religion. Exactly how is this connection created? The scope of this essay does not permit me to enter into the details of its essence and evolution, except to say that it is indeed unique. So powerful and persevering a combination is impossible to find in other nations. Even if this type of bonding exists in primitive tribes, it always relates to a strictly local religion that relies on rites and rituals performed in a physical location and in an almost familial, territorially aligned tribe.

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In my opinion, this singular formula was created in the Jewish consciousness in three main phases: the story of the binding of Isaac, the gathering at Mount Sinai, and the Babylonian Exile. In the story of the binding of Isaac, the new monotheistic religion that Abraham created did not relate to humanity as a whole, as did the other great religions, but was created to answer the needs of a specific biological family. Nevertheless, even in that family there was selectivity regarding those who were or were not worthy of bearing the religion: Isaac and not Ishmael, Jacob and not Esau. The animosity of the rejected ones became a symbol of eternal, universal hatred in the eyes of the chosen ones. The second phase of the bonding came at Mount Sinai, where a pre-territorial and possibly pre-linguistic group of freed slaves was joined to a unique religion that became an essential component of its national identity. The connection was disrupted and almost collapsed in the First Temple period, in both the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judea. Although the Israelites worshipped foreign gods during the First Temple period, they remained legitimate members of the people of Israel. But the additional component that to this day has succeeded in renewing and maintaining the connection in spite of its problems was first found in the period of the Babylonian Exile: a partly Jewish lifestyle, on foreign territory, within the tapestry of foreign nations.

When I describe the first two phases, I relate not to real, historical occurrences, but to events in the sphere of consciousness that become myths which establish identity. Of course, anthropological research shows how the connection was created and developed from a historical point of view; but when modern archaeologists want to disprove large tracts of biblical lore, they are unable and, in my humble opinion, even unwilling to damage the national consciousness it has created.

It would seem that an identity created by the fusion of a unique nationality and religion is solid and strong, so that anybody wishing to abandon it would find it more difficult than he would if he belonged to a nationality that was singular in itself but whose religion could be shared by other nations. Anyone wanting to convert to another religion while retaining his

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nationality can do so more easily in peoples other than the Jewish people, because in the latter religious conversion implies expulsion from the nation as well.

Strangely but understandably, this double helix of religion and nationality created another element—free, imagined, and virtual. The significant discovery of this element during the Babylonian Exile gave the Jews the fully exploited possibility of choosing to remain in the Diaspora without forfeiting their identity. It has enabled them to make virtual and imaginary transfers of essential and basic components—such as territory, language, and even a natural framework of national solidarity—from national to religious life, and to preserve them for thousands of years as if they were realistic and practical: The actual territory of the Land of Israel has been kept as the symbol or metaphor of a Holy Land in prayer or religious texts; Hebrew became a holy language restricted to prayer; the sovereign institutions, the royalty, and the army became symbols and metaphors which the Jews could shape with various spiritual interpretations to suit their wishes and needs, but not by action in the physical world.

This virtual transference from the national to the religious component is not one-directional. With the passage of time, it has also transferred religious elements to purely secular or exclusively intellectual frameworks in an attempt to define the Jewish essence and role: to foster justice in the world, or missions of teaching and enlightenment, or a kind of spiritual sensitivity—the vague something that Freud called “a common mental construction,” resting on virtual national elements designed and interpreted according to the needs and inclinations of the individual imagining them.

For example, when the British literary critic George Steiner, a secular Jew, states that the purpose of the Jews is to be wanderers, eternal guardians of alienation and foreignness in a definitive nationalistic bourgeois world, thereby therapeutically invigorating petrified values, he is moving quasi-religious elements to a secular framework, exploiting the virtual transfer of Jewish national components to serve his own philosophical viewpoint. If Steiner believes that the values of alienation, wandering, and foreignness

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are important as a kind of immunization against the power of territorial nationalism, why must it be the task of the Jews to spread them? He exploits a certain imagined, weak, and sleepy nationalism of Diaspora Jewry as a platform to nourish the spiritual, moral goal he has set for *himself*. What does this resemble? It is as if a Jew contended that the goal of the Jews in the exile is to spread the gospel of ecology and that environmentalism is the true national essence of the Jewish people, along the lines of: “There is no Israel but the Tora, and the Tora is improvement of world ecology.”

The mechanism of this imagined identity transference operates in an accelerated manner to preserve Jewish identity itself, since the Jew must maintain a grip, mainly in his imagination, on the unity of a nation that is scattered among other nations, speaks various languages, and lives under various cultural and economic conditions. For example, though a Polish Jew regards himself as sharing a national identity with a Yemenite Jew (and not only through religion), or vice versa, his view cannot be put into effect because reality provides very few tangible means of doing so. The Polish Jew has never seen Yemen, has never encountered a Yemenite Jew, and, if he had, would not have been able to converse with him. Such a partnership would exist mainly in the realm of imagination or spirit. Nationalism, religion, and, in their wake, other elements are designed according to the imagination and needs of the Jew—whether in an independent, individual, or communal framework—and the Jew’s identity thus becomes much more flexible and fluid than that of members of other nations.

Benedict Anderson, in his book *Imagined Communities*, states that the sense of identity and unity of every national community is also the product of spirit and imagination.<sup>15</sup> But there is a vast quantitative and qualitative difference between the imaginative and mental effort the Jew must invest in order to build and maintain identity and the parallel effort among other nations. The Italian, Thai, or Finn, for example, does not require feats of imagination to fashion his identity; for that purpose, he draws on elements from his real environment. Territory, landscape, climate, historical sites

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with clear memories, a common language with all its cultural associations, and, of course, human interrelationships in the obligatory frameworks of ruling institutions, enable these other nations to maintain their identity simply and easily. The need for speculative, imaginative qualities is limited by the concrete components of reality. The Jew can imagine his country as a “land of milk and honey,” since, for him, it has not been real for many generations; whereas the Saudi, for example, cannot do so, because he lives surrounded by desert. The Jew can entertain fantasies about his scattered people because he is unlikely to meet many of them, while for the people of other nations, imagination is curtailed by the actuality of their tangible human environment.

As a result, the Jew can easily change not only his place and his national context, language, and behavior, but also his national ideas and opinions. The structure of his identity does not depend on permanent, external elements (territory, language, and frameworks of communal life), but rather on the internal workings of identity, which transfer different elements from place to place and exchange them for others while willfully preserving some hidden “essence.”

It is true, however, that this identity is sometimes gripped by the fear of a vague threat to the “common Jewish destiny”—a problematic concept, in my opinion, usually lacking any basis in reality, rooted only in the mind. If we examine whether the Jews do, in fact, have a common destiny, we will find that this is far from being so. In World War II, for example, European Jews were sent to the gas chambers, while in the United States or South America Jews continued to live completely normal lives. The expulsion of the Jews of Spain in the late fifteenth century disrupted and shocked one Jewish community, while Jewish communities in the rest of the world continued their economically and personally secure existence. Or consider the difference between everyday life in contemporary Israel and Jewish life in the Diaspora: The fate of the Jews in the spheres of society, economy, and security is bound to the fate of the nations among whom they live rather than to that of other Jewish communities. The British, the Argentinians, the

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Egyptians, the Palestinians, and the Israelis each have their own common destinies, but the Jews do not.

The belief in a “shared Jewish destiny,” which is deeply held, as if it were an anchor of identity, is often a matter of the heart more than a reality. In fact, when one speaks of a “shared Jewish destiny,” one does not mean a good destiny, but usually a bad one, meaning that those whose current fate is good are waiting for it to go bad, as this is the true Jewish destiny. Therefore, the Jews assume that the existence of antisemitism is a permanent phenomenon, and in places and times when it is not prevalent or active, it is always presumed to be a future possibility. As a result, a complicated relationship has been created with antisemitism: on the one hand, fear of it and anger toward it, and, on the other hand, an attraction toward and empowering of it in order to use it as powerful cement with which to reinforce the unstable structure of Jewish identity.

Ultimately, a Jew’s identity is entirely in his own hands, to be annulled or revived by him (except during the Holocaust, and even then only part of the Jewish people was affected). By converting to one of the major religions which surround him, such as Islam or Christianity, which are not only accessible but also eager to embrace him, he can with relative ease cancel his Jewish identity without having to uproot himself or change his language and lifestyle. For members of other nations such a change is either impossible or subject to great difficulties. Throughout centuries of exile, many Jews were easily absorbed, changing their identity either by conversion or, like today, simply by assimilating. The number of Jews in the Second Temple period is estimated at four to five million, whereas at the beginning of the eighteenth century they numbered only one million, indicating the massive assimilation that continues until today. However, even after the Jew seemingly revoked his identity, he kept it in an “inner box,” enabling him to return to it at will, sometimes with less difficulty than he had experienced in giving it up. Thus, the gentile is faced with something amorphous that possesses astonishing potential for change over the widest range of possibilities. The disappearance of the Jew is never final, and his presence is never certain.

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This flexible virtual element that surrounds a very tough and very compacted nucleus of religion and nationhood makes it possible to spread the wings of Jewish identity to remote and unidentified boundaries. These wings of identity can be stretched very thin, enabling them at times to easily infiltrate the identities of other nations, who sometimes cannot determine what has entered them and certainly cannot be sure of their ability to digest it effectively; for these penetrative elements bear an unclear connection (is it religious? national? a mindset? an implicit principle?) to other Jewish elements that exist far beyond their borders.

We now come to the crucial point: The non-Jew's ability to connect with the imagination and virtual capability of the Jew living alongside him. In his imagination, the non-Jew can tap into the mechanism of the Jew's unidentified elements with relative ease and project his fantasies, fears, and wishes onto them—for better or, mainly, for worse. If the non-Jew also happens to have a weak and disturbed sense of identity, and perceives a real or imagined threat to it from that vague element alongside him and within him, he might be provoked to acts of madness and frenzy. The Jew becomes a text full of huge gaps that invites different readings with many nuances, all in keeping with the reader's inner needs.

I do not know if Hitler actually uttered the shocking statement attributed to him: "We have to kill the Jew within us."<sup>16</sup> This devastating portrayal of the Jew as a kind of amorphous entity that can invade the identity of a non-Jew without his being able to detect or control it stems from the feeling that Jewish identity is extremely flexible, precisely because it is structured like a sort of atom whose core is surrounded by virtual electrons in a changing orbit. As mentioned, this perception has prevailed ever since the beginning of the Babylonian Exile, when the Jews began the imaginary "transfer" of national elements to a bed of religious or other elements and back again, over generations. Therefore, when the antisemite—because of his own identity problems—becomes obsessed with the murderous idea that something has infiltrated him, he begins a saga of hatred that climaxes in rounding up the Jews, marking them with an actual physical sign (a tattooed

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number on a Jewish arm is a diabolic continuation of the yellow patch of medieval times), and then annihilation by gas.

This essay is an attempt to locate the root of antisemitism and to show that it has more to do with structure than with content. To be concise: The Jew possesses purely virtual elements that allow his identity to become flexible and fluid with no clear or easily identified boundaries; this can incite, for better or worse, the parallel virtual activity of the non-Jew, which taps into the Jew's identity more easily than into national identities that are clear and defined by territory, language, and other traditional and natural elements. This link is usually formed by the needs, fantasies, fears, or various wishes on which the edifice of antisemitism—its religious, historical, social, economic, and political rationales—is built.

This is also why many societies that differ from one another (pagan, Christian, Muslim, secular, and even liberal) have revealed, over such a long stretch of history, the same signs of the antisemitic disease that manifests itself, in extreme cases, as an individual psychosis before it becomes a public phenomenon. This is also why it is occasionally possible to find severe antisemitic expressions among artists and intellectuals with strong and sometimes disturbed imaginations. The list is long and impressive.

In my view, this is the root, and, I emphasize again, it has to do with structure rather than content. It is not connected to any real aspect of the Jewish character or personality, because it is impossible to speak of any shared Jewish character or personality, let alone a shared Jewish ideology—just as it is impossible to speak of a German character or personality shared by Goebbels and Thomas Mann, Goethe and Himmler, or a French personality shared between de Gaulle and Sartre. The non-Jew sometimes imagines to himself that because Trotsky and Rothschild were both Jews, they also shared a secret ideology, in the style of “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” But the truth of the matter is that the variety of opinions and personal qualities which exist among the Jewish people is no different from that of any other people, and the dispersal of the Jews has only enhanced this *mélange*.

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The root of antisemitism stems primarily from the correlative activity of two imaginations: the Jewish one and the non-Jewish one attached to it. The specific content that the antisemite introduces to clothe his imaginings is a different matter, changing from generation to generation. This, incidentally, is why antisemitism also can manifest itself in places where there are no Jews: The imaginative element in Jewish identity can stimulate a counterimagination, even without the physical presence of Jews.

This structure creates many other layers of antisemitic feelings and attitudes that have been the subject of research. Each society has scores, if not hundreds, of open or hidden codes that constitute its identity and come into contact with the numerous components that make up the particular identity of the Jewish community living in its midst. It is here, for example, that historical research can elucidate why Christian Bulgarian society is far less infected with antisemitism than is Christian Hungarian society; or why French antisemitism (because of the stability and confidence of French identity) can never reach the degree of frenzy and murderous hatred exhibited by German society, which has suffered from the historical flimsiness of its amalgamated identity.

I wish to re-assert a clear moral principle. By comprehending the transference of imagination between Jew and antisemite, we do not free the antisemite from moral responsibility for his deeds. Understanding pathological interaction does not rectify, justify, or legitimize any abhorrent criminal act—whoever the perpetrator may be.

**T**he metahistorical attempt to understand the antisemitic structure as a persistent phenomenon across time and space will almost certainly encounter many reservations and attempts to undermine it with all manner of historical counterexamples. However, I feel that every attempt to explain such an enduring problem deserves serious discussion and encouragement. The aim of the present effort is to demystify the Jew for the antisemite (and

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maybe for the over-enthusiastic philosemite) as well as for the Jew himself.

If the antisemite understood what it is in the mechanism of the Jewish identity structure that really stimulates him to activate his imagination and project such strange and violent fantasies onto it, perhaps he would relax his obsessive preoccupation with the Jews and, in the end, turn to a frank examination of the demons that plague his soul and his thoughts. The same applies to the Jew: If he were to understand the virtual mechanism at work within him, and see how it affects his interaction with his surroundings, he might avoid weird and contradictory accusations directed at himself, and the kind of guilt felt by some victims who identify with the aggressor and destroy themselves with self-hatred. He might possibly liberate himself from his tragic sense of historical pre-destination and try to acquire more precise control over his interaction with non-Jews.

I emphasize again that the theory posited in this essay does not negate other historical causes, nor does it repudiate what we know about political antisemitism, which cynically exploits Jew-hatred to achieve political ends. However, the very fact that the unique element in the Jew's identity can be used to stimulate the human imagination to the point that antisemitism becomes a significant part of the mentality of some individuals and societies—producing ecstatic, disturbed or even suicidal states of mind—obliges us to look for explanations that go beyond expedient political considerations. After all, what political gains did the Nazis derive from the destruction of the Jews in World War II, a goal in which they invested so much, at times even at the expense of their war effort?

Is it possible to repair something in the unique structure of Jewish identity in order to clarify it and restrict its unlimited virtual activity, or are we destined to remain locked in this cycle forever, exposed to murderous aggression of the kind we knew in the Holocaust? After all, the means of mass murder have become more and more available, simple, and deadly in modern times.

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I have not the slightest doubt that the re-grouping of part of the Jewish people in Israel has considerably and blessedly restricted the degree of virtuality and imagination that constitute the classic Jewish identity. The basic elements of nationalism—territory, language, and a real and actual framework of communal life—despite their youth from a historical perspective, are already present and actual in the Jewish state, and there is no need to activate the imagination in order to create them. *However, Israel is still deeply bound to the Jews of the exile.* And even if its real existence allows the Jews to moderate the imaginative aspects of their identity, the cultural dynamics of the post-modern world have the opposite effect and allow them to broaden the space of their indeterminateness. This is also the case with Israel itself, which since the Six Day War has blurred its borders and dragged itself into a deeply symbiotic and ill-defined relationship with the Palestinian people and, through this, with the greater Arab and Muslim world—a complete regression from the first important achievements of delineating the borders of Jewish national identity at the founding of the state. Thus, we have returned to the old and dangerous Jewish patterns, fostering the virtuality and indeterminateness to which deranged enemies are so dangerously attracted.

Indeed, accompanying the reasonable political criticism (justified or not) leveled against the policies of the Israeli government, the sort of criticism based more or less on accepted political and moral criteria, we find the residue of venom, fantasy, and imagination that is reminiscent of classic antisemitism. This new mix, with its sediment of traditional Jew-hatred, is creating a wave of antagonism capable of legitimizing ruin and destruction.

Let us imagine a gathering of the leaders and sages of Israel, all those who have shaped Jewish identity throughout the ages, convened in a single great hall: Abraham, Moses, the judges and the prophets, Ezra and Nehemiah, the writers of the Tora, the sages of the Mishna and the Talmud,

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the sages of Babylon, Rabbi Saadia Gaon, Maimonides and Nahmanides, the sages of Ashkenaz, the giants of Hasidism and their opponents, up to the men of the Haskala and the artisans of Jewish national identity before the establishment of the state and after. They have all been gathered in one hall.

Darkness falls, and a detailed documentary film about the Holocaust and the death camps is projected before them. When the lights come back up, all present are asked a simple question: “You return now to your time and your era. Would you, in retrospect, do something different in order to prevent this horrendous catastrophe?”

I am certain that some of the shapers of Jewish identity would throw up their hands and say: “This is the fate of our special identity—there is nothing to be done.” But it is possible that others might say: “It is appropriate to change something.” Moses might say: “If this is to be the horrible end, it would be better if my burial place were known to the world, and I would insist that my coffin be taken and interred in the soil of the Land of Israel, and that a great pyramid be built over it in order to make it difficult for the Jews to leave their land so easily, so as not to forsake their leader’s grave.” R. Yohanan ben Zakai might say: “Instead of requiring a minyan of ten men for prayer, I would require a thousand or two thousand in order to prevent the easy dispersion of the Jews among the nations of the world.” Maimonides would plead before Saladin (whom he never mentions in his writings) to give the Jews permission to settle in the Land of Israel, which he had just conquered—or at least, he would make *aliya* himself. Everyone who persecuted, excommunicated, and banished Shabtai Zvi would perhaps, on second thought, consider the possibility that this “false messiah” felt, by some hidden sense, the great inferno awaiting the Jews of Europe and justifiably desired to escape it. Rabbi Nahman of Braslav, who came with his followers to the Land of Israel and left immediately after, might have overcome his fears after all and stayed.

One thing is clear: In this unique and problematic connection between a specific religion and a specific nationality is enfolded the riddle of Jewish

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identity, its ability to survive, and its troubled interaction with its foreign surroundings. Any thought of possible repair and reconstruction must begin here.

*Translated from the Hebrew by Riva Rubin.*

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## **Notes**

1. Gershom Scholem, "Thoughts on the Wisdom of Israel," *Luach Haaretz*, 1944/1945 [Hebrew].
2. Nahum Sokolow, *Eternal Hatred of the Eternal People* (Tel Aviv: Jabotinsky Institute, 2007) [Hebrew].
3. Sifre Numbers, sec. 69.
4. Sigmund Freud, "Address to the Society of B'nai Brith," in Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 20 (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1959), pp. 273-274.
5. Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo: Preface to the Hebrew Translation," in *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 13 (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955), p. xv.
6. Zvi Giora, "Toward a Psychohistory of Jewish History," *Filosofia Oggi* 29 (2006), pp. 263-279.

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7. Jacob L. Talmon, *The Nature of Jewish History: Its Universal Significance* (London: Hillel Foundation, 1957), pp. 12-13.

8. Esther 3:1-10.

9. In an important article by Professor Dina Porat, published in the Hebrew journal *Gesher* 149 (Summer 2004), “The Historian and Antisemitism Research,” there are two most instructive comments. One is from the introduction to volume two of Leon Poliakov’s *The History of Antisemitism* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1974), and the second is from Moshe Idel’s lecture “Jewish History as Satan,” delivered at Tel Aviv University in 1999, in which he summarized Gershom Scholem’s article “Thoughts on the Wisdom of Israel.” Poliakov (according to Porat) and Scholem (according to Idel) employ obscure and problematic concepts that require clarification.

Porat summarizes Poliakov’s thinking as follows: “This denunciation [of antisemites] is an unacademic stance—and it comes after he has invested decades of his life in his research—since his self-imposed professional caution and equal approach to everything relevant to the subject, as a historian, cannot alter the fact that he is the accuser and denouncer, even if he is in the right. *In continuing along this line, he cannot avoid asking if and how, when and where did Jews and Jewish nature in themselves contribute to the development and atmosphere of antisemitism and its phenomena. In the wake of these questions, he is likely to become the accuser, or at least, the critic of his own people as well.*” (Emphasis mine.)

Idel goes even further in his interpretation of Scholem’s article, which was written while the smoke from the death camp incinerators still darkened the sky. Porat summarizes Idel’s lecture as follows: “Moshe Idel points out that what he highlighted in Scholem’s demand has still not received the attention it deserves; Scholem’s demand that historians writing after the Holocaust should look the evil in the eye and cope with the real demon, *the demon that is the active element in Jewish history.*” (Emphasis mine.)

The words “demon” (Scholem) and “nature” (Poliakov) are strong, vague, and dangerous. It is the aim of this essay to de-demonize these concepts and to attempt to clarify them in a rational manner.

10. Leon Pinsker, *Autoemancipation*, trans. D.S. Blondheim (New York: Federation of American Zionists, 1916), [www.wzo.org.il/en/resources/view.asp?id=122](http://www.wzo.org.il/en/resources/view.asp?id=122).

11. Adolf Hitler, “The Testament of Adolf Hitler, February 4, 1945,” in Francis Genound, ed., *The Testament of Adolf Hitler: The Hitler-Bormann Documents, February-April 1945*, (London: Cassel, 1961), pp. 30-31.

12. *The Private and Political Testaments of Hitler*, April 29, 1945, Office of United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, in *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946-1948), vol. 6, pp. 259-263, No. 3569-PS, [www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1945/450429a.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1945/450429a.html).

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13. Quoted in Nikos Konstandaras, "Greeks and Jews," [www.mikis-theodorakis.net/grandj-e.htm](http://www.mikis-theodorakis.net/grandj-e.htm), November 15, 2003.

14. Ellis Shuman, "Storm Over Nobel Prize Laureate's Auschwitz Comparison," *Israel Insider*, [http://www.israelinsider.com/channels/diplomacy/articles/dip\\_0184.htm](http://www.israelinsider.com/channels/diplomacy/articles/dip_0184.htm).

15. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991).

16. Appropriately, the Hebrew title of Joachim C. Fest's biography of Hitler is *Hitler: Portrait of a Non-Man* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1986) [Hebrew].