

# the latest form of Jew-baiting

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Jews at Western Wall, Jerusalem, 1870s; Félix Bonfils

The enemies of Israel and of the Jewish people, who infest social media, have developed a new meme. What's needed, they assert, is "Judaism without Zionism".

This is the next step up from their mantra that "anti-Zionism isn't the same as antisemitism". Both statements are designed to deny that hating Israel means they hate Jews — perish the thought!

Some of their best friends are Jews, they maintain; it's the Jewish state whose existence, alone of all the states in the world, that they oppose. Which apparently is absolutely fine.

This formula of "Judaism without Zionism" is the strategy of Jew-baiters. The "good" Jews, with whom they surround themselves as human shields against the charge of antisemitism, are those who hate Israel. The "bad" Jews are those who love it.

“Judaism without Zionism” is thus a weapon to divide diaspora Jews from each other and further hurt Israel by weakening the support it enjoys from Jews around the world.

Tragically, a small but noisy minority of anti-Zionist Jews have also adopted this stratagem. Whether those making this statement are Jews or non-Jews, it demonstrates their ignorance of both Zionism and Judaism.

Their attempt to separate them falls at the first hurdle because Zionism is an essential part of Judaism. Zionism is simply the movement for the self-determination of the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland.

Those who think that Zionism started with Theodore Herzl in the 19th century are wrong. It took time for Herzl, a secular Jew, to tap into the Jews’ unique relationship with the land of Israel.

This relationship isn’t so strong just because ancient Israel was the Jews’ national homeland centuries before the Romans, Christians, Arabs and Muslims colonised it.

Jews are the only people in the world who have retained an unbroken connection to their homeland since antiquity. After they were driven into exile, there were always Jewish communities there. In the mid-19th century, Jews formed the majority in Jerusalem.

More to the point, Judaism is the inseparable fusion of the people, the religion and the land. The religion of Judaism comprises the principles that Jews laid out as a matter of faith to be practised in the land of Israel. Which is why Jewish liturgy is studded with the longing to return to Zion.

That doesn’t mean that you need to be religiously observant or live in Israel to be a Jew. But it does mean that separating Zionism from Judaism is to remove the soul of the Jewish people.

That’s why anti-Zionism is most definitely anti-Judaism. So why do some Jews promote it?

One reason is that they think their anti-Zionism will buy their acceptance by the dominant anti-Israel cultural elites. Or they may be ideologues who have convinced themselves that universalist principles inimical to Judaism are actually Jewish principles.

Or they may have bought heavily into the wall-to-wall lies about Israel and therefore loathe what they think Israel represents and what it’s doing to the Palestinian Arabs. Whatever. They’re very wrong-headed and very harmful.

So how should Israel’s defenders react?

First, reclaim the language. Zionism has become a dirty word. So Jews should declare on every possible occasion that they’re proud Zionists – and that Zionism is the ultimate decolonisation movement.

Second, educate young Jews better. Too often, even those educated in Jewish schools know precious little about the history of the Jews in the land of Israel.

They may be taught to a high level about the minutiae of Jewish religious texts and practices. But many are taught next to nothing about Jewish history in the land; nothing about their own heroic ancestry in those Jews of antiquity who fought and defeated enemies who wanted to wipe them out, just like today; nothing about Britain's betrayal of the Mandate, which launched the century-old war of extermination against the Jewish homeland.

And they need to be taught pride in the State of Israel as the ultimate moral project — which means teaching them the truths necessary to counter the lies.

Third, the community should call out anti-Zionist Jews for the noxious fringe artists that they are. Community leaders should be pointing out publicly the malicious falsehoods they peddle about Israel, which makes them not just anti-Zionism but anti-Judaism. Rabbis and lay leaders should be saying: not in our name.

And this needs to be done in public, to give the community strength to resist the lies themselves — and to stop the gaslighting of Jewish defenders of Israel by anti-Zionist Jews making the disgusting claim that calling out antisemitism creates antisemitism.

Diaspora Jews are very reluctant to put their heads above the parapet like this. They stress the need to avoid disunity. They're worried that identifying as Zionists, and thus as a Jewish nation, will fuel accusations of dual loyalty. But those accusations are flying now anyway.

Disunity is indeed bad; but self-destructive behaviour is worse. The results of the risk-averse strategy practised for so long by diaspora Jews are now all around us. Time to wake up.

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