In the ancient world, Judaism’s greatest threat to Monotheism was not Christianity or Idolatry. Its greatest threat was Gnosticism, which taught a variant form of dualism. Recent archaeology in Nag Hammad, Egypt and Qumran, Israel has uncovered ground backing gnostic manuscripts. The first from Egypt includes 52 early Christian texts, many of them unknown, including the Gospel of Truth, The Gospel of the Egyptians, Secret Book of James, the Apocalypse of Paul and the Apocalypse of Peter. The second came from Qumran, which was the home of the Essences who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls.

These two thousand year old scrolls turn the teachings of the Bible upside down. In the Hag Hammadi texts, the creator of the physical universe was not God but a secondary power, a fallen angel who had gotten out of hand. This demi-God made the material world with its disease, death, violence and pain. The true God had nothing to do with the physical universe but lived in heaven, in a realm beyond time, death and change. Nag Hammadi sectarians saw the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels as a lie. The real hero of the Garden of Eden was the serpent. It was he who opened Adam and Eve’s eyes to the truth. The Gospel of Thomas offers the
startling revelation that the only disciple who truly understood Jesus was Judas, seen in the canonical Gospels as the traitor who betrayed him.

Likewise in Qumran, a sect of Judaism, known as the Essenes produced 981 different texts. Among them were by far the oldest manuscripts of the Bible known, dating from the third or second century BCE. In addition to all of the books of the Bible with the exception of the book of Esther, the Essences wrote about the teacher of Truth who had to confront the forces of darkness. They wrote about seeing themselves as the Children of Light, while the entire world was shrouded in darkness and evil. The Teacher of Truth would lead them in a religious end of days revolt that would culminate in the messianic age.

Both Christianity and Judaism rejected dualism. The church fought it during its formative days, continuing through the Crusades and some say the Inquisition, which began in 1234.

Judaism confronted this dualistic theology with gusto. In fact, one of our prayers condemns this good God vs. evil God teaching. The Maariv reads, “we worship God who rolls away light from darkness, who fashions both day and night.” In other words, both darkness and light are part of God’s design.

Honestly, not all teachings of Dualism were dangerous. Plato
differentiated between mind and body, the spiritual and physical. The soul is eternal while the body is temporal. There is moral dualism, which sees good and evil as internal instincts, between which we must choose. The Rabbis speak of our mandate to choose the Yetzer Hatov, our drive to help others over our Yetzer Harah, our selfish impulses.

So you may be thinking who cares about dualism? What does this ancient theological conflict have to do with me? Well, the greatest problem we are facing today is dualism. We see it on the political platform where candidates describe their opponents as forces of evil and treachery. We see it on the streets of every American city. Police are seen as oppressors and blacks as criminals. The Alt-right advances racial theories, which put us clearly on the wrong side of destiny. College campuses are becoming places of increased anti-Semitism where you can't openly support Israel without suffering scorn, ridicule, or outright physical assaults. Radical Islam in the form of ISIS, HAMAS, HEZBOLLAH, BOCO HARAM, and others have divided the world into two communities the pure and the infidel, the noble Muslim world, and everyone else who needs to be killed. We see this in the videos produced by HAMAS teaching children, who shouldn’t know of murder, to kill Jews. We see this in Iranian Missiles being tested in the desert with the words, “Death to Israel written on them.” The radicals of
Islam are dualists who refuse to negotiate with anyone.

In the political world, compromise is a virtue. You negotiate. You give and you take. But the dualist cannot negotiate. And this is hard for us westerners to understand and accept. A dualist doesn't bargain with what they perceive to be evil. They destroy it. There can never be accommodation. And we are seeing the fruits of dualism; Trucks running over innocents on the streets of Nice, women and children stabbing Israelis at bus stops, and murderous psychopaths shooting up discos in Orlando. Our world is being divided between the unimpeachably good and the irredeemably bad. You are either one or the other; one of the saved, the redeemed, the chosen or the child of Satan, the devil’s disciple. Today’s dualism is not like Gnosticism, which was all about the gods. Today’s dualism is about us.

Freud taught why dualism is so compelling. When a person cannot tolerate dark or unpleasant thoughts in themselves, they project these thoughts and traits upon someone else. Lustful urges, greedy thoughts, basic instincts that make a person uncomfortable become the traits of another. What becomes intolerable in oneself becomes the personification of another. Thus, the Jews in dualistic cultures became the embodiment of all that was evil. The Nazis did that to us. In their twisted ideology, the
Aryan was pure, chaste, giving and nationalistic. The Jew was debased, lecherous, greedy and disloyal. The assailant in Orlando who shot up the gay nightclub was clearly trying to destroy his own urges.

Rabbi Jonathan Sachs in his book, “Not in God’s name.” writes, “Pathological dualism does three things. It makes you dehumanize and demonize your enemies. It leads you to see yourself as the victim and it allows you to commit altruistic evil, the killing of others in the name of God. A Dualist today hates in the name of the God of love, and practices cruelty in the name of the God of compassion. And of course, it allows a follower to kill in the name of the God of life.”

As the Nazis held a dualistic understanding of the world, we sadly have to say, that this attitude exists in much of the Muslim world. An Anti-Defamation League study released in May 2014 found ‘persistent and pervasive” anti-Jewish attitudes after surveying 53,100 adults in 102 countries and territories worldwide. It found that 74 percent of those surveyed in in the Middle East and North Africa held anti-Semitic attitudes. They didn't just hate Israel as a state. They hate us, as Jews. Ironically, there are almost no Jews in most of the 56 nations that comprise the Organization of Islamic Co-operation. There once were, but in the mid-1940s and 1950s almost all left or were driven out. In Nazi Germany, Jews comprised just 1
percent of the population. A joke in the 1930s captured the absurdity of the situation. Two Germans are discussing the source of their nation’s troubles. One says that it is the Jews. The other replies, “The Jews and bicycle riders.” “Why the bicycle riders?” asks the first. “Why the Jews?” replies the second. Then as now, it is irrational, self-contradictory and self-fulfilling.

Yet, there is a reason for the madness of Jew hating and dualism. It works at deflecting criticism away from the real problems. Rene’ Girard in 1972 wrote in his book *Violence and the Sacred*, that the most effective way by which two groups can end the cycle of killing each other is by killing a third party, one who is neither a Montague nor a Capulet, one who stands outside the feud, and whose death will not lead to another cycle of retaliation. The victim must be, in other words, an outsider, someone not protected by a group, or a member of a group not in a position to inflict its own retaliatory violence. A scapegoat is the mechanism by which a society deflects violence away from itself by focusing on an external victim. Hence whenever you find obsessive, irrational murderous anti-Semitism, there you will find a culture so internally split and fractured that if its members stopped killing Jews they would start killing one another.

But there is hope. The antidote to dualism and anti-Semitism is not
just bridge building and education. It is in empathy.

How many of us remember that picture of the dazed little boy of Aleppo. It moved the world. No matter what our attitude about intervention, you could not close your heart to that little boy. You remember him. He sat there dazed and stunned, covered in dust. His sister, according to reports was just killed by a barrel bomb. It forced the world to empathize with their plight.

When it is far too easy for us to be dualist and to hate, the book of Genesis teaches us to be more empathetic. As the Bible affirms the choosing of the Jewish people, there are always those who are not chosen, the rejected. But brilliantly, our Torah bids us to feel for the other, the stranger, the uncovenanted.

The Biblical sibling narratives begin with exclusion and hate. Cain kills his brother Abel because he perceives that God prefers his brother’s sacrifice. As a result Cain is exiled. Cain cries out and, "my punishment is too much to bear." And we feel for him, the exiled one. Then Abraham and Sarah reject Hagar and Ishmael in preference of their biological son, Isaac. Hagar and Ishmael are banished into the desert, to Beer-lahai-roi to die. As Ishmael lay dying, Hagar, his mother, looks away as she couldn’t bear the pain of seeing his death, “Let me not look on as the child dies.” We
begin to see that rejection leads to cruelty and suffering.

Every time, God choses one of the patriarchs, we are forced to enter into a humanizing relationship with the other. Remember the struggles of Jacob and Esau in the great scene where Jacob steals the blessing from his brother, by deceiving his blind father? We read in Genesis. 27:38, “When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, "Bless me-- too, my father!'” Another betrayal and more hate. But again, we are led to feel for Esau, the rejected one.

Joseph, Jacob’s chosen one, is betrayed by his brothers who sell him as a slave to Egypt. Following years of servitude in Egypt, Joseph puts his siblings in the same position when they sold him. He threatens to take the younger brother, Benjamin as his slave and the brothers cry out in despair, “Let me be your slave and let the child go free.” They now confronted enslavement after enslaving Joseph. They repent and it is then that he reveals himself saying, “I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.”

By forcing his brothers to empathize with Benjamin who was soon to be a slave, and not wanting to put their father Jacob though another loss, they understood what they did to Joseph. Empathy was their path to redemption.
I love these extraordinary stories because they force us to enter into the mindset of the characters who are not chosen, who seem to be left out. They encourage us to feel another’s pain, to empathize.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel defined empathy, as a way out of our self-centeredness. “Empathy he writes, “is the pain a father feels when his child hurts his hand playing ball; the pang a mother knows when her daughter is not invited to the party she had her heart set on; the concern a lover has for the least concern of his or her beloved; the anguish which touches a person when someone bears their troubles to him; the tears a child sheds for the limp of his dog or the broken arm of her doll; the sigh a judge heaves when he must pronounce a strong sentence; the care a doctor exerts towards a patient in pain; the dull tug at the heart of a soldier when he sees the destruction he has wrought; the help a business owner extends towards a failing competitor; the forgiveness a person grants towards one who has hurt him; the pleading of Moses when people were to be destroyed because of their Golden Idol; the weeping of Rachel for the exiles who trudged by her grave on the bloody way to Babylon. It is the eternal mercy of God toward the folly and misery of humankind.”

I suspect that few know about the transformation of Csanad Szegedi, who was a leading figure in the Hungarian ultra-nationalist party,
Jobbik. Up until recently he and his party accused Jews of being part of a ‘cabal of western economic interest’ attempting to control the world; Szegedi promulgated the lie of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a forged document written in the early 1900s purportedly by Jewish leaders who planned to take over the world.

Szegedi’s political adversaries in order to discredit him did some research on his background and discovered that he was in fact Jewish. They discovered that his maternal grandmother was a Jewish survivor of Auschwitz. So was his maternal grandfather. Half of his family was killed during the Holocaust. You see, after Auschwitz his grandparents once Orthodox Jews decided to hide their identity completely. Upon hearing this, Szegedi went to the local Rabbi Shlomo Koves who at first thought it was a joke. The biggest anti-Semite in Hungary was in fact a child of survivors? The Rabbi told him to come to services for Shabbat. At first, he was treated as a leper. The community wasn’t sure what to do. But he persisted. Today he attends synagogue, keeps Shabbat, has learned Hebrew and now call himself Dovid. In 2013, he underwent circumcision.

His story is not just a curiosity. I think it is the antidote to dualism. In order to cure ourselves from this us vs. them mentality, we have to be able to see the other in ourselves. We have to understand what it feels like to be the
one we hate.

We too can hate the stranger. We too can distrust those who do not worship as we do. We too, having been victims can victimize others. But imagine how we can change.

Imagine if the Hutu in Rwanda had experienced what it was like to a Tutsi. Imagine what would have happened if all the Serbs imagined themselves as Croats or Muslims. Imagine if the Police could experience the pain of living as a minority in our cities. Imagine what it’s like to be a police officer stopping a car with darkened windows in the middle of the night when there are so many guns on our streets. Imagine if an Islamic terrorist could feel for his victims. And yes, imagine if a Palestinian could feel for the plight of the Israeli and the Israeli the suffering of the Palestinian. Imagine if a rejected wife could feel for her husband as they negotiate divorce terms. Imagine if an ex-husband could show some empathy for his former wife, instead of continual conflict and intentional torture. And what of familial estrangement? Psalms teaches that in the messianic age, the hearts of the children will be turned to their parents, as will parents feel for them.

Think about it. Three times in the Torah we are commanded to love. The first, is in the V’ahvata, “you shall the love the Lord your god
with all your heart.” The second time is to “Love your neighbor, as yourself.” Or as the commentators told, love the person who lives near you who is like yourself. But the true demand of our tradition comes from the phrase, “You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” The solution to Dualism is seeing the stranger as one of us.

If there is hope, it lies in our ability to feel another’s pain, to understand their story. Empathy is key, to confronting dualism, for in truth we are them and they are us. ¹

¹ I am indebted to the writings of Rabbi Jonathan Sachs in his book, Not in God’s name in the preparation of this sermon.