*On the afternoon of October 6, 1965, the Brooklyn Dodgers and the Minnesota Twins assembled on the field of Metropolitan Stadium outside Minneapolis for Game 1 of the World Series. Don Drysdale was pitching for the Dodgers. In the third inning, the Twins scored six runs, pulling ahead 7-1. They would go on to win the game 8-2.*

*It should have been Sandy Koufax on the mound that day. The Dodgers ace was having the best year of his career in 1965, leading the majors with 26 wins and racking up 382 strikeouts, a Major League record at the time and still only one fewer than the all-time single-season record held by Nolan Ryan. Koufax had also thrown a perfect game less than a month earlier, becoming just the sixth pitcher of the modern era to do so.*

*But October 6, 1965 was also* [*Yom Kippur*](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/yom-kippur-101/)*, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. And Sandy Koufax declined to play.*

*The decision would become the stuff of American Jewish legend. Jewish baseball fans around the country swelled with pride at the thought that one of their own — a star of the most quintessential of American sports — would decline to play on the game’s biggest stage out of religious conviction. And a mythology quickly grew up around it, including the claim (unverified and probably false) that Koufax showed up in synagogue in Minneapolis that day, and the story (likely true) that a rabbi visited him at his hotel after the holiday to offer him a pair of* [*tefillin*](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/tefillin-phylacteries/) *in gratitude.*

*Koufax wasn’t the first Jewish baseball star to sit out a game because of a Jewish holiday. Hank Greenberg, the Detroit Tigers slugger, skipped a game during the 1934 pennant race because it fell on Yom Kippur. (The Tigers won the pennant anyway.) But Koufax’s refusal to play became a major point of pride for American Jews, who saw that it was possible to live in two cultures at once.[[1]](#endnote-1)*

Sandy Koufax expressed his pride in Judaism even knowing that he would encounter critics and outright Anti Semites for his determined stand. However, even then, Koufax would not have anticipated the extent to which Anti Semitism has grown.   And today’s Anti Semitism is not the same as it was in his day, either, though some of the same tropes have been recalled and restated. Today’s Anti Semitism is coming from three places: from the far left, the far right and radical Islam.

According to an article called “Anti Semitism in the 21st Century: Taboo no longer?” by Ira Rifkin,

*The new anti-Semitism is most apparent in Western Europe and the Muslim world. But even in the United States, long viewed as the world’s safest nation for Jews, anti-Semitism’s resurgence may be seen in the proliferation of websites maintained by right-wing extremists and anti-Israel activists, and in the rhetoric of left-wing anti-globalization demonstrators on the streets of New York and Washington, many of whom equate Israel with fascism.*

*Modern Israel, the state its founders believed would provide safe sanctuary for Jews, is the prime target of contemporary anti-Semitism. It is recognizable in anti-Israel criticism that blurs the line between legitimate opposition to Israeli government policies and a barely concealed hatred that blames Israel’s very existence–and by extension Jews everywhere, all of whom are presumed to support Israel’s every decision–for much of the world’s troubles.[[2]](#endnote-2)*

Since last Rosh Hashanah, we have witnessed horrific acts of Anti Semitism in America, the likes of which I never imagined we would see: among many other examples, these stand out:  a white supremicist slaughtering 11 Jews at the Tree of Life Synagogue while they were praying, the shooting in the synagogue in Poway, CA April 28, two oped political cartoons in the International NYT depicting horrific Anti semitic pictures including one with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel as a dog wearing a Star of David on a collar. He was leading President Trump, drawn as a blind man wearing a skullcap.  This year, we also read the words of the President of the United States of America: saying that, "I think any Jewish people that vote for a Democrat -- it shows either a total lack of knowledge or great disloyalty." an old Anti Semitic trope of "dual loyalty," which questions the loyalty of Jewish citizens. Add that to the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, still vivid in our minds, though it occurred two years ago with Nazis by the hundreds chanting blood-curdling diatribes evoking the Third Reich, shouting “Jews will not replace us.”

There is a classic Jewish telegram: “Start Worrying: Details to Follow.” I am not a worrier.  But we would be foolish to not pay attention to what is happening in our world around us.

So, how do we confront this ever mutating virus of Anti Semitism? First, we need to define it.

*The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism is a crucial first step in addressing the horrific rise in antisemitism, especially in Europe. The Working Definition is a clear and compact description of antisemitism in its various forms, including Holocaust denial, prejudices against Jews, and the denial of Israel’s right to exist. The Definition sends a message that governments understand the threat, which is the obvious first step in addressing it. On May 26, 2016, the IHRA Plenary decided to adopt the following non-legally binding working definition of Antisemitism:*

*Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.*

*We must also clearly identify the sources of Anti Semitism. There are primarily three places where Anti Semitism is coming from - radical Islam, the far left and the far right.  And please understand that when I refer to Anti Semitism emanating from Radical Islam, I am talking about a perverse interpretation of our fellow Abrahamic faith. The vast majority of our Muslim brothers and sisters want nothing more than to live in peace with their fellow citizens, and I have strong friendships with our local Muslim clergy, who send their heartfelt NewYears greetings to us. That said, we can not ignore the threat posed to the Jewish community by extremists.*

According to David Harris, CEO of AJC, *Consider the fact that every fatal attack against Jews in Europe in recent years has been carried out by Islamic extremists.*

*From the kosher supermarket in Paris to a Jewish school in Toulouse, from the Jewish Museum in Brussels to the synagogue in Copenhagen, from the murders of Ilan Halimi and Sarah Halimi in Paris to the Israelis (and Bulgarian) killed in Burgas, they were all perpetrated by jihadists.*

*Add to that the genocidal ambitions of Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas, incendiary Salafist teachings in many madrassas, and the ubiquitous anti-Semitism in important segments of the Arab media.*

*So, by all means, let’s express our utter revulsion when Nazis march in Charlottesville, and let’s speak up when the occupant of the Oval Office stunningly fails to provide moral clarity in confronting such an unfolding drama.*

*But, equally, the same Jewish outrage needs to be manifested when the leader of a country, Iran, seeks a world without Israel, when Hezbollah’s top cleric calls for the mass murder of Jews, when Jewish children are shot to death in front of a Jewish school for the simple fact that they are Jews, and when groups on American campuses single out Israel, alone among 193 UN member states, for delegitimization and disappearance.[[3]](#endnote-3)*

We must also speak out strongly when Anti Semitism appears on the political far left, including when Representative Ilhan Omar tweeted, “Israel has hypnotized the world” in 2012 though she apologized after and again when she tweeted, “It’s all about the Benjamins baby” referring to “how much time US political leaders spend defending a foreign nation,” i.e. Israel, even at the expense of American civil liberties.  She again apologized unequivocally, but in the same statement insisted that she would continue to speak out against the influence of pro-Israeli lobbyists. Rep. Rashida Tlaib, has a similar problem, using Anti Semitic tropes and anti-Zionist language and expressing an ahistoric version of Israeli history. Criticism of some of Israel’s specific policies and government is fair, but that is not what this is.

In 2018 ADL recorded 1,879 anti-Semitic incidents in the United States.  2018 included the deadliest attack on Jews in the history of the U.S. at the Tree of Life Synagogue by a white supremacist October 27. The Pittsburgh attack was one of 39 reported physical assaults on Jewish individuals in 2018, a 105% increase over 2017. A total of 59 individuals were victims of assault, not including the police officers injured at the Tree of Life Synagogue.

Nearly half of the incidents of harassment targeting Jewish institutions were the work of known white supremacists or extremists.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of NY wrote this week: “I have been deeply disturbed by the horrific attacks on the chasidic community in Brooklyn. Members of the community no longer feel safe on their own streets without fear of physical attack. Students at schools across the state are confronted with symbols of anti-Semitism. Reports of swastikas appearing across college campuses mean our students are bombarded by symbols of hate even as many of them first leave their families and experience the broader world.”

“Just this week Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed, a leader with a long history of outrageous and harmful anti-Semitic rhetoric, was here speaking on the Columbia campus. I condemn his words and am saddened to see him given such a prestigious stage to bolster his image and normalize his rhetoric. Earlier this month, the Rockland County Republican Party ran a deeply anti-Semitic ad that used imagery directly meant to target Orthodox Jews.”[[5]](#endnote-5)

To quote Rabbi Angela Buchdahl of Central Synagogue, “Today, we hear the sound of the shofar: Yom Teruah.  The sound of the shofar is to warn our people of coming danger. This year, our shofar blasts say: Wake Up! Pay Attention!”

*There has not been a single moment in Jewish history in which there weren’t anti-­Semites determined to eradicate Judaism and the Jews. When the Pittsburgh killer shouted “all Jews must die,” he was merely echoing a command uttered in a different tongue by Amalek, the villain who stalked the weakest of the ancient Israelites in the desert on their way to the Promised Land.*

*But the Jews did not sustain their magnificent civilization because they were anti-anti-Semites. Our tradition was always renewed by people who made the choice in the face of tragedy that theirs would not be the end of the Jewish story, but the catalyst for writing a new chapter.*

Of course, we must stand up and speak out and confront Anti Semitism wherever it rears its ugly head.  But there is more that we must do.

It is time that we renew our love for and dedication to building strong Jewish identities.  We must continue to bring the joy of Judaism not only into our own lives, but into the lives of our children and grandchildren. We will build and strengthen our relationships with Israel, no matter how challenging that relationship may be.

How do we do this? It is easy:  you are here, so you have already taken the first step.  By being here today, celebrating the Jewish New Year, supporting the Jewish community and sustaining our congregation, you are taking a stand. You are making this sacred place and Judaism a priority in your life.

By choosing to send your children or grandchildren to the Margaux School or our JPLex Religious School, Jewish summer camp, sending your children to Israel on the various programs, you are making Judaism your priority.  Learning Hebrew, taking Melton courses, participating in our robust Adult Education programs - these are all ways in which you show up as Jews. Observe Shabbat in your home, commit to coming to services once a month and doing something for Shabbat every week (lighting candles, hosting a Shabbat dinner with guests, studying Torah either in our Saturday morning minyan or Monday morning minyan).  We are hosting Show up for Shabbat on Friday, October 25th, in partnership with American Jewish Committee to show our solidarity. Please come and bring a friend or a potential ally to show their support of the Jewish community and to stand up against Anti Semitism.

Volunteer in our Rabbi Michael Eisenstat Soup Kitchen, get involved in our Social Action network, our Caring Touch chesed committee, our affiliates Women of Temple Judea, Mensch club or JTY youth group or Gen J, our young adults group.  If you are not already a part of the Jewish Federation of Greater Miami family, I encourage you to make a commitment and get involved. Volunteer. The Federation offers plenty of ways to make a difference within our larger Jewish community as does Jewish Community Services of South Florida. There are also other Jewish organizations doing important work - American Jewish Committee, Anti Defamation League AIPAC, you can buy Israel Bonds, which we will have out in the lobby. Join me on an adult trip to Israel this May or a Family Mission to Israel in June. Information is in our lobby and online.  FIND YOUR WAY of being Jewish in the year ahead - commit to raising the level of priority Judaism has in your life.

As stated by Bari Weiss in her NYT op ed, titled To Fight Anti Semitism, Be a Proud Jew: *“The long arc of Jewish history makes it clear that the only way to fight is by waging an affirmative battle for who we are. By entering the fray for our values, for our ideas, for our ancestors, for our families, and for the generations that will come after us.*

*In these trying times, our best strategy is to build, without shame, a Judaism and a Jewish people and a Jewish state that are not only safe and resilient but also generative, humane, joyful and life-affirming. A Judaism capable of lighting a fire in every Jewish soul — and in the souls of everyone who throws in his or her lot with ours.*

*But the Jewish community — 2 percent of America’s population — cannot go at this problem alone. We have to insist that the societies of which we are a part take a stand against anti-­Semitism, because any society in which it flourishes is one that is dead or dying.”*

Two excellent books have been written recently on this topic that are must reads for all Jews: Deborah Lipstadt’s book ***Anti Semitism here and now*** explains the differences in these different types of Anti Semitism: on the left and on the right, on college campuses and at dinner parties, in Europe and in the US.  Bari Weiss’s excellent book, ***How to fight Anti Semitism*** explains in a brief and clear manner, what we must do. I urge you all to read both of them. Here is a spoiler alert for Bari Wiess’s book: *“We must take up this fight, not only for our own good but for the good of the country, and in fact, the world. She explains that the idea of Judaism that each person is made in the image of God, Betzelem Elohim, is actually a concept about freedom that has threatened many societies. If you believe that each person is in the image of God and therefore worthwhile and valuable, than that implies that each person deserves freedom and certain humane rights, which some societies have been built to deny.”[[6]](#endnote-6)*

In some ways, the answer to the question, what do we do about Anti Semitism is complex.  But, in some ways, it is quite simple. Be true to who you are. Our future college students not only need to know how to deal with anti semitism on campus, but they need to feel strong enough in their Jewish identity that they do not check their Jewishness at the door when they are asked to do so in some college settings, a common new trend.

Sandy Koufax said it this way: a “man is entitled to his belief and I believe I should not work on Yom Kippur. It’s as simple as all that.”[[7]](#endnote-7)  Today, more than ever, we must not be afraid to stand up for ourselves as Jews, to know who we are, to be proud of our Jewish heritage, and to live a full and robust Jewish life.

And just in case we need a reminder, here is why we should we be proud: *Rabbi Asher Lopatin, of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School writes:* *I am proud of the impact the Jewish people has made in every quarter of the world: in saving lives through science, medicine and psychology; in making the world better through morality, ethics, law, technology and art; and in connecting much of humanity to a God of compassion and caring for every person. On a grander level, I am proud that Judaism gave the world the idea of change and hope through the Messianic vision, and empowered humanity with the responsibility to achieve an ever-more perfect world.[[8]](#endnote-8)*

*75 Rosh Hashanahs ago, in 1944, the sound of a shofar rang out at Auschwitz.*

*Very few heard it. It was Rosh Hashanah, and as the Jewish year 5704 turned into 5705, Chaskel Tydor, a Jewish work dispatcher at Auschwitz III-Monowitz, arranged for a minyan of prisoners to be sent to an isolated part of the camp so they might pray unnoticed by the SS guards.*

*When they returned from their prayers, one member of the minyan confided in Tydor that they had brought a shofar with them, and that they had blown it.[[9]](#endnote-9)*

*We just heard the words chanted beautifully by our congregants from the story of the Akeidah, where Abraham was asked to bring his son, his dear on to the mountain to slaughter, only to be stopped by an angel of God in the last moment, saving the life of Isaac and with Isaac being replaced by the ram, caught in the thicket, of which we remember with the sounding of the shofar, the ram’s horn.  When asked about what Abraham must have thought on his way up that mountain, I like to think that he did have ultimate faith, faith in God and hope in the future that God had already promised: a future of fulfillment of God’s promise that Abraham’s children would be as many as the stars in the sky - that would only be possible if God spared the life of Isaac. Abraham lifted his eyes to see the ram and realized there was an alternative.*

*We too, like Abraham must lift our eyes to see the miracle and opportunity that a strong Jewish community provides. Like Abraham, we can see the sacredness of life is and always was what God cared about. Continuing this faith of monotheism. Continuity of our values and morality of standing up for ourselves and others against all hatred and bigotry, a continuation of our traditions including Shabbat and holidays, constant reminders of our Torah values.*

*“Am Yisrael Chai” means “The Jewish nation lives.” Jew-hatred has changed from generation to generation, from pogroms to expulsions to genocide, but “the Jewish nation still lives” May the new year bring us many opportunities to live a fully Jewish life and to be proud of who we are as Jews.  Am Yisrael Chai!*

1. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/when-sandy-koufax-refused-to-play-on-yom-kippur/?fbclid=IwAR1gfVcnagH9zahn99syUBxRrsuYPHsgaR1SIBm16GjPvid5px4R6b76Mq0> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/anti-semitism-in-the-21st-century/> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.ajc.org/news/confronting-anti-semitism-jews-need-trifocal-lenses> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.adl.org/audit2018> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/gillibrand-we-must-address-anti-semitism-head-on/> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. <https://baseballhall.org/discover/sandy-koufax-sits-out-game-one> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. <https://forward.com/opinion/spirituality/388934/we-asked-20-rabbis-what-makes-you-proud-to-be-a-jew/> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. https://forward.com/culture/432164/shofar-auschwitz-museum-of-jewish-heritage-rosh-hashana-new-york/?utm\_content=buffer60955&utm\_medium=social&utm\_source=facebook.com&utm\_campaign=buffer [↑](#endnote-ref-9)