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“Real” Antisemitism

I was going to begin this sermon with a lyric from Taylor Swift, but I can't now because journalist [Megyn Kelly has called for us to boycott](#) Time Magazine's Person of the Year for attending a comedy show where the comedian was donating the proceeds of the show to help civilians in Gaza with humanitarian aid.

Today, I want to talk about the news and current events much more and more directly than I usually do.

Here's another true story. A [man on Long Island was relieved of his volunteer job as Santa Claus](#) for asking pointed questions and getting a little too upset and irate at a synagogue's presentation about Israel that the man felt adhered to closely to the Netanyahu government's party line. Who asked the town's chamber of commerce to replace this Santa? Eleven members of the synagogue who said they would be uncomfortable coming to the Christmas event if that man were there as Santa.

Oh, did I mention the man is Jewish?

I saw people complaining on a Facebook group that Global Foods in Kirkwood used to have more Israeli foods, and now they have fewer. Antisemitism, anti-Israelism, for sure, right? Others later reported that the Israeli products had been selling poorly, and that it was hard to get products shipped from Israel now, so stock was running low.

[Here's one more.](#) At a vigil for Hisham Awartani, a Palestinian student at Brown University who was one of the three students wounded in a shooting in Vermont three weeks ago, Brown's president, Christina Paxson's remarks were to be that "every student, faculty, and staff member should be able to proudly wear a Star of David or don a keffiyeh on the Brown campus, or to cover their head with a hijab or yarmulke," according to the prepared remarks on her office's website. But she delivered the line without the references to the Star of David and yarmulke, video shows.

Clear antisemitism, right? Well, she was interrupted by pro-Palestinian protestors and was barely able to finish her remarks. Oh, and did I mention? Christina Paxson is Jewish. A Jew by choice, but just as Jewish as you or me.

Let's talk about a couple things now that are actually antisemitic, actual antisemitism. Hamas. Period.

Calling for a genocide of Jews. Calling Jews dogs or pigs. Assaulting people who are Jewish because they're Jewish or threatening violence against people who are Jewish.

An American elected official (in St. Louis County!) accusing an electoral opponent or their opponent's spouse of being Israeli foreign agents. That happened recently, and yeah, that's antisemitism—the old “dual loyalty” accusation, just even more bizarre.

Supporting humanitarian aid for Gazan civilians is not antisemitism. The whole Santa situation is just crazy.

Business decisions are not antisemitism. And a speech by a Jew that under the duress of hecklers doesn't mention stars of David and yarmulkes? Not antisemitism.

I don't have a whole lot of patience or compassion for those who do really hate us, and I'm not super-interested in engaging in conversation with them, although I have to think that's going to be how we convince people that we're people, humans, and not stereotypes.

But there's a much larger group who are not neo-nazis or Hamasniks, but are speaking and acting in ways that are painful, offensive, and threatening to us, or permitting people to speak and act in ways that are painful, offensive or threatening to Jews. I'm thinking about people on college campuses, among others. Those are the folks that need to hear from us in calm, thoughtful ways that don't threaten or scream, but explain and help people understand. Because we want them as friends, not as antagonists.

Let's talk Torah for a minute. What would we think about accusing Jews of being people who would sell their brother to slavers for twenty pieces of silver? Or of being people who would use economic crisis and famine to profiteer and consolidate wealth for themselves and the government that employs them?

Well, Joseph's brothers do sell him for twenty pieces of silver. And Joseph does use the seven lean years to gather all the wealth of Egypt (Gen. 47:13-22).

But saying that Jews do those things—that's antisemitism. So what is and what is not antisemitism?

[Here are some examples:](#)

- When criticism of Israel or Zionism **uses an antisemitic trope** that has historically been directed at Jews — it's antisemitic.
- When Israel is used as a **surrogate term for Jews** — it's antisemitic.
- When criticism **depicts Israel as having hidden power or control** — it's antisemitic.
- When Israel is **criticized because of its Jewish character** — it's antisemitic.
- When Jews are **held collectively responsible** for Israel's policies or actions — it's antisemitic.
- When criticism **insinuates that Jews are more loyal to Israel** than to the country in which they live/are citizens — it's antisemitic.
- When, based on their Jewish identity, Jews are **denied the same individual or national rights as others** — including the right to self-determination — it's antisemitic.
- **Any behavior that targets and harms someone because they are Jewish, whether through words or actions, is antisemitic.**

But don't confuse criticism of Israel with antisemitism.

- **Criticism or disagreement with Israeli government policies is not antisemitic.**
- Harsh characterizations of Israel that may be unfair are not necessarily antisemitic.
- Even Yitzhak Rabin once warned that maintaining an occupation would lead to apartheid. He certainly wasn't an antisemite.
- **Non-violent actions that press for changes in Israeli policies are not generally antisemitic.**
- Boycotting goods made in the West Bank and/or Israel is not antisemitic unless it specifically singles out Israel because of its Jewish character.

- **Anti-Zionism can be antisemitic if it employs an antisemitic trope, targets and harms Jews, or specifically denies the Jewish right to self-determination.**
- **But opposition to Zionism in and of itself is not necessarily antisemitic.**
- **Devoting special attention to Israel is not generally antisemitic.** Israel attracts special attention for many reasons: e.g., because it is at the crossroads of the three major Western religions or because the U.S. is Israel's closest ally and provides \$3.8 billion annually in aid to Israel.
- **Advocating for equal rights and justice for all peoples is not antisemitic.**

They say it's not paranoia if they really are coming to get you. But Taylor Swift is not coming to get us. Neither is the Jewish Santa who dislikes Netanyahu. The Jewish president of Brown isn't coming to get us. Nor is the Jewish president of MIT, Sally Kornbluth. And neither is Global Foods.

There are real threats out there, real problems, for Israel, and for us. From the far right, from the far left, from the apathetic, sometimes pathetic, center. From Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran.

Let's save our energy, our fear, our anger, for our true enemies. We have, God help us, enough of them. And let us not alienate our potential allies with our fear, our fury, our accusations. We need all the friends we can get.

Shabbat shalom.