

What is anti-Zionism?

Last year, the Students' Society of McGill University, in Montreal, barred the reelection of three Jewish members of the board of directors. The issue, according to a report undertaken on behalf of the university, was not the students' Jewishness, but their Zionism. It was, the report concluded, a political issue, not one of discrimination against Jews. There is a great deal to unpack in this story.

B'nai Brith Canada has launched a petition calling for a comprehensive investigation into antisemitism on the campus, noting that the SSMU incident was far from the only concerning episode in recent years.

Sometimes, antisemitism is unequivocal. Swastika graffiti and statements that overtly target Jews for condemnation or murder are uncontested. But, in many cases, unwitting perpetrators are so unaware of the history of antisemitism and its associated symbols and tropes that they employ antisemitic concepts without consciously knowing it. For example, many images and much of the language of the anti-Zionist movement dovetails with traditional images of scheming Jews merely recast as scheming Zionists or Israelis. Note the term "Israel lobby," which does not imply a legitimate political position but rather suspect coercion.

With the McGill situation, part of the problem is that "anti-Zionism is not antisemitism" is often stated as a self-evident truth. A more accurate statement would be "anti-Zionism is not necessarily antisemitism." Because, sometimes it is. For example, the most casual perusal of online discussions about Israel turns up volumes of images evoking blood libels of the Middle Ages. And the equation of Zionism with Nazism, which can plausibly be denied as explicitly antisemitic, intentionally rubs salt in the most painful of Jewish historical memories. Label such comments as one

will, they have the very deliberate effect of inflicting pain on Jews.

And this is the important point here. People can defend their positions by saying that their criticisms are of Israel, not of Jews; that their positions are political, not based on ethnicity or religion. But, as we have said in this space before, outcome matters as well as intent. Israel may be the intended target but Jews feel the effects.

It doesn't matter that not all Jews are Zionists. It would not matter even if most Jews opposed Zionism. The fact is that opposition to the existence of a Jewish state — which is the definition of "anti-Zionism" — is arguably de facto antisemitic. There are all sorts of defences, of course. Some people claim to oppose all forms of nationalism, yet the practical application of their ideology is to start by boycotting the Jewish state rather than, say, the Mexican, Malaysian or Dutch nations. As well, opposing Zionism, while knowing the historical impacts of Jewish statelessness, including history that took place in the memory of living generations, could be viewed as such disregard for Jewish individual and collective security as to be antisemitic.

Others claim they support Israel's right to exist, but then take positions that defy these words, such as denying Israel's right to defend itself, which in effect is a denial of, if not statehood outright, the right of Israeli citizens to live free from terrorist murder and missiles. What name should we give that?

When Jews say they feel singled out because of their Jewish identity or because of their support for a Jewish state, they are met with responses ranging from outright denial of the legitimacy of their experiences to accusations that they are fabricating their concerns as a political weapon. The idea that anti-Zionism is not rife with antisemitism would be more believable if its purveyors acknowledged that such a thing does exist, and condemned it. ■

A need for ethical guidelines

JOANNE SEIFF

This time of year, we read Torah portions in the Book of Leviticus. It's full of information about how to do sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem. It's a good reminder — things have changed in the Jewish world, haven't they? Perhaps we don't need details for how to do a sin offering, an offering of well-being or for first fruits? Then again, maybe we do.

Huh? No, I don't mean we need to learn to kill animals to sacrifice them. However, the rituals described in Leviticus have become guidelines for other things we do. For instance, it's common to make a donation to a synagogue in honour of someone, or to express gratitude for a return to good health, a success at work or a family celebration. There are modern interpretations for some of these rituals, including the need to do something to repair things when feeling guilt or after committing a sin.

Parts of Leviticus offer us good metaphors... reminders that we can apply to other things in Jewish life.

I receive an email newsletter from the Jewish news organization JTA. One of the articles that popped up was about fundraising: "Women in Jewish fundraising say harassment is pervasive." I followed the link. It turns out that fundraisers for Jewish organizations and in the nonprofit world are mostly women.

Donors? You guessed it, are predominantly men. Just like in other parts of the #MeToo professional world, many Jewish fundraisers have tolerated widespread harassment in order to do their jobs. If you don't bring in the money, it's hard to keep your fundraising job. These fundraisers have told hair-raising tales of stalking, requests for dates or sexual favours and dangling professional opportunities "if only" the woman professional would "cooperate."

Most of us don't want to imagine that one's body has to be part of a professional encounter in the fundraising arena, unless perhaps your wife, daughter, mother or sister is a sex worker (and Jewish tradition has plenty of those. Read the Bible for more

on that). Imagine if your daughter, recently graduated from university, went to lunch for her job at a Jewish nonprofit. A grey-haired man sat next to her, put his chequebook down, stuck his hand up her thigh under the table, and let her know that there would be more money to come if she just went out with him.

Disgusting? Yes. These days, there are laws that say both men and women deserve the same fair pay for their work and freedom from harassment on the job.

Oh, come on, some say — this doesn't happen in the Jewish world. Well, it does. Jews can be alcoholics, drug addicts, adulterers, criminals and more. We are people. People aren't perfect. We commit sin, and feel guilty. (Remember those Temple sacrifices?)

The sad part is that, in many ways, we groom children to be cooperative, to respect adults in their community, to listen and obey us even if they don't know everyone's name. This grooming, particularly for girls, starts young. This sometimes results in bad things happening. Young women tolerate a lot before they realize something bad happened and they should complain.

As someone who used to teach full-time (and a mom), I see things that make me scared in this regard. Imagine free-range preschoolers and elementary schoolers, left to roam in a Jewish community building without adequate parental supervision. Adults offer them candy or encourage them to find their parents, but no one leads them directly to the children's activity or to their parents. Never mind the potential for accidents or getting into mischief... worse happens.

This situation is ripe for a predator to step in with candy and lure a child away. This is how horrible, life-altering, illegal things happen to children. When I mentioned this concern aloud, the response was: "Oh, kids roam around. It's always been this way." Really? Thank goodness that, in Jewish tradition, we evolve and change. Even the most traditional among us don't do sacrifices anymore. We no longer sweep childhood sexual abuse under the rug. We no longer

think it is OK for women to earn less, or that they must tolerate sexual harassment on the job. We no longer think it is OK for male donors to expect they can get away with this, if only they write a big cheque.

The key to changing a culture that allows sexual predation is in Leviticus, too. The instructions for sacrifice are well laid out and clear to follow. There's a set of steps and a ritual to each one. In the JTA article written by Debra Nussbaum Cohen, she outlines some of the new efforts to make organizational and structural change to these interactions between funders and donors. This includes laying out ethical guidelines when it comes to sexual harassment and abuse, specifically addressing the power imbalance between fundraisers, who solicit donations to keep their jobs, and funders, who hold the purse strings.

Judaism has plenty to offer when it comes to respecting someone's body, modesty and personal space. If we know the rules to appropriate behaviour, we recognize that we can do a lot to make modern environments safer and more ethical. We also must be aware that harassing fundraisers (who happen to be women), paying our Jewish professionals (who are often women) inadequately, or failing to provide our children Jewish "safe" spaces are not acceptable ways to behave as Jews.

If Jewish tradition alone doesn't matter to some? Many of these behaviours are also illegal. We may mourn the loss of the Temple and pray for its return. However, I vote to exchange Leviticus's ritual steps for bloody sacrifice with those ethical behavioural guidelines for donations that emerged from the rabbinic age. We can ritualize good behaviour around *tzedakah* (charity) instead. ■

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Thank you for subsidy

The following letter was sent to the Lefohn Belzberg family and copied to the Jewish Independent, along with a request it be published.

Editor:

I am the proud recipient of a Lefohn Belzberg subsidy.

I live across the street from the JCC at the Louis Brier Home and Hospital. My membership enables me to have 30 showers a month at the JCC. I have sciatica and the hot shower eases the pain.

I think of the Lefohn Belzberg generosity. I feel that it is necessary for me to thank you and to indicate my appreciation and gratitude to you and your family.

David Pearlman, Vancouver