

# **Anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism**

**By Rabbi Ahron Cohen**

I am what is known as an orthodox Jew (that is a Jew who endeavours to live his life completely in accordance with Judaism, the age old Jewish religion). I am here under the banner of the group known as Neturei Karta, which can be loosely translated as Guardians of the Faith. We are not a separate party or organisation but basically propagators of a philosophy on the subject of Zionism, held by a large section of orthodox Jewry.

The title of my talk is Anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism, meaning of course by implication that anti-Semitism is not to be approved of, whereas anti-Zionism is something to be applauded and I hope to explain why. This subject is particularly relevant to us in the light of the current situation in Palestine and the claimed rise in anti-Semitism. Also because in the eyes of the world Zionists are equated with Jews and Zionism is equated with Judaism. It is the error of this assumption, which I wish to bring out today. Discussion and debate on the subject is important because the matter tends to be very confusing both to Jews and non-Jews. On the other hand the discussion and debate tends to be stifled because, particularly to Jews, the subject is very emotive.

In order to understand the statement 'anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism', I think we have to go back to basics and understand the terms used. What do we mean by 'Semitism' (or Judaism, Semitism is a misnomer. What we really mean is anti-Jews or anti-Judaism)? What do we mean by 'anti-Semitism'? What is 'Zionism' and what is 'anti-Zionism'?

Firstly we have to understand that basically anti-Semitism is a dislike or hatred of a people, a particular section of society. The hatred is directed at the Jewish people and not at the Judaism.

Where we find opposition to or hatred of the Jewish Religion, this is usually an extension or manifestation of the hatred of the People. Although we do find a specific hatred of the Jewish Religion where it is a form of religious zealotry, whereby believers in one religion will not tolerate belief in another religion. In this case the intolerance is usually directed against all other religions and is not specifically anti-Jewish.

Anti-Zionism is an opposition to a philosophy, an idea. The opposition is directed, at least initially, at the idea rather than at the people.

Anti-Semitism, which although it has existed for as long as the Jewish People have existed, is an illogical bigotry. Anti-Zionism, however, is a perfectly logical opposition, based on very sound reasoning, to a particular idea and aim.

But let us look at the matter in more detail. Judaism is a very wide ranging and far reaching religion, or way of life. Zionism, however, is a comparatively narrow and restricted concept, as I hope to explain. I can only give you here today an overview and try to bring out some aspects of Judaism which are relevant to Zionism.

Let me firstly state quite categorically that Judaism and Zionism are incompatible and mutually exclusive, but let us compare Judaism and Zionism in general and in particular.

Firstly let us look at Judaism in general. Judaism is for us a total way of life. Showing us how to live a moral, ethical and religious life in the service of the A-lmighty. It affects every aspect of our life from the cradle to the grave. We are taught and we believe, that it was revealed to us by Divine Revelation, as described in the Bible, some three and a half thousand years ago, and that is when the Jewish People came in to being. All of our religious requirements, practical and philosophical, are set out in our religious teachings, the Torah, which comprises the Bible and a vast code of Oral Teaching based on what is known as the Talmud handed down to us through the generations.

Zionism, on the other hand, before looking at its particular positive aim, is a secular irreligious philosophy engendered some one hundred years ago by some secular Jews, that is Jews who had in the main cast off their connection with their Jewish way of life handed down to them through the generations.

So there you have the first general difference between Zionism and Judaism. Zionism is secularism, materialism, no, particular religious belief, no particular moral or ethical obligation. Judaism is G-dliness, morality, ethical standards, religious belief. So obviously an opposition to Zionist secularism would have no logical connection with an opposition to people who adhere to or have a connection with Judaism.

But now let us look at aspects of Judaism which have particular relevance to Zionism. The first of these aspects is the question of a land or country. As mentioned, our religion is a total way of life covering every aspect of our life. Included among those aspects is the matter of a land. Right from the beginning, our Torah taught us that subject to certain conditions we would be given a land, the Holy Land, now known as Palestine, in which to live our lives in the service of the A-lmighty.

What were the conditions? They were basically that we had to maintain the highest of moral, ethical and religious standards. We were taught, and it was foretold, that if the conditions were not fulfilled the Jewish People would be sent into exile. We did have the land for approximately the first one thousand five hundred years of our existence. However, regrettably, the conditions were not fulfilled to the required degree and the Jews were exiled from their land. For the last two thousand years or so the Jewish people have been in a state of exile decreed by the A-Imighty because they did not maintain the standards expected of them. This state of exile is the situation that exists right up to the present day. It is a basic part of our belief to accept willingly the Heavenly decree of exile and not to try and fight against it or to end it by our own hands. Judaism teaches that we are forbidden under oath to attempt to come out of this exile by our own efforts and to form a State of our own in Palestine and certainly not by force. We are taught that exile means acceptance of the authority of the people occupying the countries in which we live, including Palestine, and not to rebel against that authority, but only to support its well-being. Finally, we are taught that non-compliance with these prohibitions constitutes a rebellion against the wishes of the A-Imighty and would produce dire consequences.

What about Zionism. This was founded approximately 100 years ago, as I mentioned earlier, mostly by secular people who were discarding their religion but still retained what they considered as the stigma of being Jews in exile. They considered that our state of exile was due to our own subservient attitude - 'the Golus (exile) mentality' - and not by Divine Decree. Their aim was to propagate what was a new idea among Jews and that was to form a Jewish State in a Jewish homeland. The land they chose for their aim was Palestine. Not for any religious reason, remember they were a completely secular group, but probably because of the historical and cultural attachment to Palestine held by the Jewish People and thereby they hoped to attract the Jewish masses to their new idea. In principle, they were prepared to consider any land. In fact at one time Uganda was suggested. The underlying philosophy of their aim was that they wished to force their way out of exile by their own efforts.

It will be clear that this Zionist ideology flies in the face of the Jewish Religious attitude to exile outlined above and is entirely incompatible with Jewish teaching. In fact as soon as the Zionist ideology was appreciated at the inception of Zionism it was pronounced as total heresy by the great Jewish religious authorities.

So here again anti-Zionism, that is opposition to the Zionist aim of forming a State for Jews is certainly not anti-Semitism. Since Judaism itself is in total opposition to this aim as I have explained.

A further aspect of Judaism relevant to Zionism is on the question of Jewish identity and Jewish nationality. The age-old way of life of Judaism is in fact the measure of the Jewish national identity. I would say that it is demonstrably true that the identity of a Jew, that is a member of the Jewish People, is established by his or her attachment to Judaism, and not as with most nations an attachment to a particular land or country. This is borne out by the fact that the Jewish People have been without a land for two thousand years, have been dispersed to the four corners of the earth, but have retained their identity by virtue of their attachment to Judaism.

Many will of course argue that we see that the majority of Jews to day, even those in the Diaspora who do not even have an attachment to a land, do not appear to have an attachment to Judaism and yet have retained a Jewish identity. However, you will find that they only have to go back three or four generations at the most and they will find that their forbears were practicing Orthodox Jews. In other words they have retained a degree of Jewish identity by virtue of the continuing but fading effect of their forbears' attachment to Judaism. I say fading because the continuing effect does fade away. You will not find people aware of their Jewish identity today if they are descendants of Jews who forsook their Judaism, say, five hundred years ago.

The Zionist concept of Jewish identity is a completely secular typically nationalistic identity based on a land. This, however, is not a Jewish identity but a Zionist or Israeli identity which is something completely different.

So once again it will be apparent that to be anti the Zionist identity is totally different to being anti the Jewish identity, since the two are different concepts.

I have spoken until now about concepts which may be somewhat intangible and divorced from the consciousness of the everyday person, perhaps from most of you here today - theological theory. However, there is a further aspect of Judaism relevant to Zionism with which I believe most people can identify. That is the question of Jewish Religious values of humanitarianism.

The Jewish teaching on basic humanitarian values is compassion and consideration for one's fellow man and scrupulous respect for the rights and property and of course lives of one's fellow men. This would quite rightly imply that Orthodox Judaism is in total sympathy with the Palestinian Cause. Zionism is the exact antitheses of these values. Determined to further its aim of a State irrespective of the effect on those standing in the way whether Palestinians and even Jews.

It is very well documented in the writings of the founding Zionists and recorded in their public statements, that they fully intended to implement their aim irrespective of its effect on the indigenous population, the Palestinian people. The lives, property and right to self-determination of the Palestinians were of no relevance to them what so ever against the idea and aim of forming their State. To a significant degree even the lives and well being of their own Jewish brethren, whether physical or spiritual, is secondary to the aim of forming and maintaining a State. As is now well known, it is with this philosophy that they eventually achieved the formation of their State. This philosophy continues to this very day and in fact is the underlying cause of the strife and bloodshed in Palestine, nothing else. Zionism has the ideal, and has always had the ideal, of imposing a 'sectarian' State over the heads of the Palestinians, the indigenous population and this has resulted in a terrible confrontation. This confrontation as we all know has resulted in horrific bloodshed and brutality with no end in sight unless there is a very radical change.

So here again, it will be abundantly clear that the very logical and reasonable opposition to the anti humanitarian attitude of Zionism has no relevance what so ever to the old bigotry of anti-Semitism.

So anti-Zionism is a logical opposition to a philosophy, held by some apparent members of the Jewish People, which is racist, fascist-like, totally unacceptable. Anti-Semitism is an irrational bigotry and dislike of a whole people. So I would think that it is very obvious that anti-Zionism is not by any stretch of the imagination the same as anti-Semitism.

I mentioned earlier and I think it became clearer as I continued, that Judaism and Zionism are incompatible and mutually exclusive.

This Zionist movement is a complete abandonment of our religious teachings and faith in general, and, in particular, an abandonment of our approach to our state of exile and our attitude to the peoples among whom we live. The practical outcome of Zionism in the form of the State known as 'Israel' is completely alien to Judaism and the Jewish Faith. The ideology of Zionism is not to rely on divine providence but to take the law into ones own hands and to try to force the outcome in the form of a State. This is completely contrary to the approach to the matter of exile which our Torah requires us to adopt, as handed down to us by our great religious teachers. Furthermore, Zionism flouts completely the basic Jewish values of humanitarianism in its treatment of the Palestinian People.

There was and is however, an additional Zionist phenomenon which confuses the picture. That is the Religious Zionists. These are people who claim to be faithful to the Jewish Religion but they have been influenced by the Zionist secular nationalistic philosophy and have added a new dimension to Judaism - Zionism, that is the aim of setting up now and expanding a Jewish state in Palestine. This they try to fulfil with great religious fervour. (I call it Judaism-plus). They claim that their nationalistic philosophy is inherent in the Jewish religion and have attempted fallaciously to rationalise Zionism in the light of Judaism. This is a phenomenon, which has developed mainly since and perhaps because of the Second World War but remains a total departure from the teaching of Orthodox Judaism throughout the ages. These Religious Zionists too, flout completely the basic Jewish values of humanitarianism in their treatment of the Palestinian People.

But we do have a problem and that is that the Zionists have made themselves to appear as the representatives and spokespeople of all Jews and, with their actions, arouse animosity against all Jews. Then those who harbour this animosity are accused of anti-Semitism. So although it is abundantly clear that opposition to Zionism and its crimes does not imply hatred of Jews or 'anti-Semitism, however the wrongs of Zionism are a cause of anti-Zionism overflowing into old fashioned anti-Semitism. Paradoxically Zionism itself and its deeds instead of being a remedy for anti-Semitism are in fact the biggest cause of modern anti-Semitism. Furthermore Zionism actually feeds on anti-Semitism by using it as a means of attracting more immigrants to its State

The confusion between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism reaches up to the highest levels of government and is the only explanation I can give for something that amazes me constantly and that is when I observe the protestation of nations such as the USA and the UK that 'Israel' is a 'democratic State', when actually the whole concept of Israel was and is patently non-democratic and when by a short look back in history it can be seen that the whole Zionist State was begat by the very violence (and the UK was a victim of this violence) against which these countries now protest. The free world waged the Second World War in order to eradicate the very policies, which they are now condoning by supporting the State of Israel!

To sum up. According to the Torah and Jewish faith, the present Palestinian Arab claim to rule in Palestine is right and just. The Zionist claim is wrong and criminal. Our attitude to Israel is that the whole concept is flawed and illegitimate. So anti-Zionism is certainly not anti-Semitism.

I would like to finish with the following words. It is often said that Jew and Arab cannot live together. We want to tell the world, especially our Arab neighbours, that there is no hatred or animosity between Jew and Arab. We would wish to live together as friends and neighbours as we have done mostly over hundreds even thousands of years in all the Arab countries. It was only the advent of the Zionists and Zionism which upset this age-old relationship. Historically, the situation frequently was that when Jews were being persecuted in Europe they found refuge in the various Arab countries. Our attitude to Arabs should only be one of friendliness and respect.

We consider the Palestinians as the people with the right to govern in Palestine.

The Zionist State known as “Israel” is a regime that has no right to exist. Its continuing existence is the underlying cause of the strife in Palestine.

We pray for a peaceful solution to the terrible and tragic impasse that exists. Perhaps based on results brought about by moral, political and economic pressures imposed by the nations of the world.

We pray for an end to bloodshed and an end to the suffering of all innocent people - Jew and non-Jew alike - worldwide.

We are awaiting the annulment of Zionism and the peaceful dismantling of the Zionist regime, which will bring about an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people. We would welcome the opportunity to dwell in peace in the holy land under a rule, which is entirely in accordance with the wishes and aspirations of the Palestinian People.

May we soon merit the time when all mankind will be at peace with each other.

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