

# THE WHAT'S AND WHY'S OF ANTISEMITISM



**Antisemitism  
is a sign of an  
intolerant society.  
By ignoring it, we  
grant society a  
broader license  
to hate.**

The logo features the words "SHINE" and "A LIGHT" stacked vertically in a bold, teal, sans-serif font. A large, golden-yellow light beam graphic originates from the top right and shines down, passing through the text. Below "A LIGHT" is a thin teal horizontal line, and underneath that, the words "on antisemitism" are written in a smaller, teal, lowercase sans-serif font.

**SHINE  
A LIGHT**  
on antisemitism

# THE WHAT'S AND WHY'S OF ANTISEMITISM

## Q WHAT IS A JEW? WHAT IS A "SEMITE"?

**A** Jews are a people, descendants of a tribe, and a religious group. They are connected by a shared history, heritage, and culture. They have a historical connection to Israel as the Jewish homeland. Jewish identity today encompasses a broad range of ethnic, religious, political, and cultural beliefs and identities.

"Semites" are people from the geographical region of the Mediterranean with shared linguistic roots. Other Semitic peoples in this region include: Arabs, Phoenicians, Akkadians, etc. The term 'antisemitism' however, is used specifically in reference to Jews, not other groups.

## Q WHAT IS ANTISEMITISM?

**A** Antisemitism is the hatred of Jews. It targets Jews, individually and collectively, and can include the State of Israel. Antisemitism exists in many forms, from stereotyping to scapegoating to violence, to the desired eradication of the Jewish people. Over time, it has been adapted to link Jews to a host of societal ills.

## Q WHAT IS MODERN ANTISEMITISM?

**A** Antisemitism did not end with the horrors of the Holocaust. The hatred of Jews persists in the 21st century in overt ways, like a shooting at a synagogue or a swastika painted on a building. It also persists in more subtle ways – the perpetuation of Jewish stereotypes or retaliation against Jews of all nationalities for the actions and policies of the Israeli government. In all forms, antisemitism fosters fear and normalizes hate.

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## Q WHAT IS ZIONISM?

**A** Zionism is the belief that the Jewish people have a right to a homeland in the State of Israel. It is based on the Jewish people's deep historical connection to the land of Zion (ancient Jerusalem) and their right to live in a land free from persecution, exile, and the threat of extermination.

According to Jewish religious texts, Zion is located on the eastern hill of ancient Jerusalem. It was established by King David in the 10th century BCE as the royal capital. Mount Zion is the place where God was thought to dwell. Through these deep religious and spiritual connections, Zion came to mean the Jewish homeland, symbolic of Judaism and Jewish national aspirations.

In the 19th century, in response to both antisemitism and pressures to assimilate, Zionism surfaced as a political, cultural, and religious movement. The political formulation of Zionism is the collective liberation movement for Jewish self-determination. The result was the creation of a Jewish nation-state in the land of Israel.

**“Anti-Zionism is the belief that Israel does not have a right to exist as the Jewish homeland.”**

## Q WHAT IS ANTI-ZIONISM?

**A** Anti-Zionism is the belief that Israel does not have a right to exist as the Jewish homeland. It is not the same as criticism of the Israeli government. Calling for the destruction of Israel, denying Jews a permanent homeland, or holding Israeli policies and actions to a double standard are all forms of anti-Zionism.

Anti-Zionism, in its current manifestation, asserts that the Jewish state does not have a right to exist and that Jews have no right to self-determination. Anti-Zionism can be confused with certain political language and human rights rhetoric. When anti-Zionism flourishes it can cultivate a climate that breeds hostility toward the State of Israel, the Israeli people, and all Jews around the world.

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## Q WHAT IF I DON'T SUPPORT ISRAEL?

**A** You are not antisemitic if you don't support the policies of State of Israel. When anti-Israeli sentiments are used to justify a hatred of Jews globally, Israel is singularly delegitimized or held to a double standard, or prejudices against Jews are used to demonize the State of Israel, these are all forms of antisemitism. Criticizing Israeli policy is a form of free speech, while saying Israel has no right to exist is antisemitism.

Israel is often subject to overt hostility by global institutions, the mainstream media, social media, in political discourse, religious communities, educational environments, social justice movements, and certain ideologies. This hostility can be seen in direct threats that call for the destruction of the state of Israel or the erasure of the Jewish people's historic connection to Israel. Often, it relies on inaccurate or exaggerated characterizations of Israel's power, connected to old stereotypes about 'Jewish dominance' in society. Holding Israel to a different standard of behavior than other democratic states is rooted antisemitism.

## Q WHAT HAS ANTISEMITISM LOOKED LIKE THROUGHOUT HISTORY?

**A** **Antisemitism originated in Biblical times with Judeophobia and evolved over centuries into the hatred of Jews that created the foundation for the Holocaust and into what is now called modern day antisemitism.**

Judeophobia has its roots in the Biblical period, the emergence of Christianity, and the Middle Ages. Jews were seen as "other" because of their different beliefs and blamed for society's challenges throughout Christian Europe. It was not until 1965 that the Catholic Church acknowledged its role in perpetuating hatred of Jews and recognized that Jews should no longer be held responsible for killing Jesus.

In the Muslim world, Jews were required to wear a yellow Star of David and pay a special tax, synagogues could not be taller than mosques, and non-Muslims could only ride donkeys (as opposed to horses) to demonstrate their subordinate position within society.

The term "antisemitism" was coined in the 18th century by Wilhelm Marr, a German who categorized Jews as a distinct "race" of people. Eugenics was developed in the late 19th century.

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This pseudo-science categorized Jews as a race inferior to Aryans and led to depriving them of civil rights.

The most horrific example of modern antisemitism is the Holocaust, the systematic mass murder of over six million Jews under the German Third Reich between 1939-1945. The Third Reich's policies were built on a system of antisemitism. Nazis utilized antisemitic stereotypes and misinformation to marginalize Jews and ultimately seek their annihilation.

Modern day antisemitism exists in both overt and subtle forms. It can be seen in everything from violent physical attacks against people who are visually identifiable as Jewish to the perpetuation of Jewish stereotypes in everyday conversation.

## Examples of modern-day antisemitism include:

### Violence:

- Calling for the killing or harming of Jews.
- Physically attacking someone because they are wearing Jewish religious garments.
- Directing violence or threats of violence at Jews of any nationality in retaliation for acts of the Israeli government.

### Stereotypes and conspiracy theories:

- Perpetuating the myth that Jews control the media, economy, government, or other powerful institutions.
- Holding all Jews responsible for actions committed by a single Jew, a small group of Jews, or even non-Jewish people or groups.
- Denying the fact of, or aspects of, the Holocaust, or accusing Jews or Israel of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
- Using stereotypes of Jews in conversation, even with the intent of being humorous.

### Israel:

- Accusing Jews of being more loyal to Israel than to the interests of their own countries of origin
- Denying the Jewish people the right to a homeland or claiming that the existence of the State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
- Applying double standards to Israel that are not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Comparing the policies of the Israeli government to Nazi policies and beliefs.
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for the actions of the State of Israel.

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## Q WHAT DOES ANTISEMITISM LOOK LIKE IN MODERN DAY POLITICS?

**A Hatred of Jews exists on the extreme right and on the extreme left.**

On the far right wing, that was once considered fringe, Jews can be seen as a separate and inferior race to white Christians. There is a fear that Jews pose a threat to the white community and will ultimately try to replace it. Xenophobia contributes to the concept of Jews as foreigners who pose a threat to the majority.

On the far left, Jews are seen as part of white, privileged communities. Jews are perceived to hold outsized power and to benefit from white supremacy. Jews and Israel are labeled as colonialists that seek to harm dark-skinned Palestinians. In this belief system, Jews everywhere are often perceived as extensions of Israeli behavior and held accountable for the actions of the Israeli government.

**“Hatred of Jews is not solely a problem for the Jewish community.”**

## Q WHY DOES ANTISEMITISM PERSIST?

**A Hatred of Jews is rooted in hate itself.** This is a part of human nature and can never be eradicated. However, hatred of Jews can be mitigated by building greater awareness through education to make it socially and morally unacceptable in the 21st century. Just like racism is not solely a problem for Black or brown people, homophobia is not solely a problem for the LGBTQ+ community, and Islamophobia is not solely a problem for the Muslim community, hatred of Jews is not solely a problem for the Jewish community. These harmful “isms” can be combatted through building human connection, empathy, and educating us to respect and accept our differences.

## Q IF I'M NOT JEWISH, WHY SHOULD I CARE?

**A** Antisemitism is a sign of an intolerant society. By ignoring it, we grant society a broader license to hate. Everyone who cares about building a compassionate society committed to the value of human dignity should care about antisemitism. Making hatred of Jews socially unacceptable requires both Jews and non-Jews to work side by side.