

Part 1. RH Evening: Business

Chag Sa-mei-ach & welcome to Beth Shalom. As you get to know me, you will discover that one of my shticks is that I speak twice for short periods of time, rather than a single but longer sermon. The sermon will be later. What follows is the continuing 6-part series with 3 installments on RH & 3 on YK.

This year's topic is titled, "Anti-Semitic Stereotypes and Canards". Subjects to be covered include business successes, physical characteristics (especially noses), academic success and the doctor myth, the melding of anti-Israelism with anti-Semitism, Jews in banking & money lending; & finally, avarice or miserliness. To be sure, most of these canards, myths & ethnic stereotypes have some basis in fact which gets distorted by those trying to misuse them. With the huge spike in Anti-Semitism in the last few years, this might be the right time for this topic.

We start our series today looking at the myth that Jews are "good in business". Are Jews "good in business"? Many jokes exploit this alleged ethnic characteristic of Jews. The young Jewish soldier was a real nebbish in training camp. He just gets by. Within weeks of being shipped out, he brings back dozens of prisoners and wins medals for bravery.

When his sergeant is asked about the change, the sergeant replies, "I don't know. I just handed him his rifle and said, 'Moishe, you're in business for yourself.'" The truth is that humans are into survival & Jews are humans. Basic survival requires food and shelter. How does one get food and shelter?

One way is by farming – but Jews were often not allowed to own land and in places where we were allowed to own land, we often lived under threat of expulsion. As a result, Jews tended not to be farmers. If we were evicted the week before harvest, we'd be ruined.

Another common way to make a living is to work for someone else – but many of the guilds would not allow Jews to be members; in much of pre-1950 America, many factories and mines would not hire Jews.

So, if we can't live off the land and we can't work for someone else, how else are we going to acquire food and shelter? So, while the myth of a disproportionate number of Jews in business may be true, the reason for it was purely survival as opposed to a special Jewish aptitude! We'll continue tomorrow with Noses/Ethnic- racial characteristics.

Part 2. RH Morning: Noses/Ethnic-racial characteristics

Chag Sa-mei-ach & welcome to Beth Shalom. As you get to know me, you will discover that one of my shticks is that I speak twice for short periods of time, rather than a single but longer sermon. The sermon will be later. What follows is the continuing 6-part series with 3 installments on RH & 3 on YK.

Today, I continue the series with physical characteristics: A Jewish nose, a Jewish complexion, the concept of "racially Jewish": is there such a thing? Certainly, the Nazis believed there was. But in fact, most European Jews are plain-vanilla Caucasians.

So why do we look different? This is specifically related to "gene pool" issues. The key reason that Jews retained a characteristic physical appearance is that Jews did not marry into the European societies into which they moved.

While this was partially because Jews consciously chose not to "marry out", it was true that "Christian Society" was equally appalled by their 'good Christian children' marrying Jews. It is really only the last 50 years that intermarriage between Jews & Christians has become a serious threat to the continuity of Judaism.

As a collective group, we Jews came from the Mediterranean. Mediterranean populations have a tendency to be slightly darker skinned than those living in the more northerly climates of Europe. If you think you know someone who appears to be "racially Jewish"; find someone who appears to be "racially Italian" and you will most likely be unable to distinguish between them.

So, the bottom line on this one is simple. We moved to Europe from the Mediterranean; we married within our small communities; so, we retained the appearance of a Mediterranean people, even though we were now Ashkenazi Europeans.

We'll continue tomorrow morning, with the reason that Jews are disproportionately represented in medicine and the professions, such as lawyers, professors and engineers.

Part 3. RH AM Day 2: Medical/professions/academics

Le-sha-nah to-vah & welcome to Beth Shalom. This is part 3 of the continuing 6-part series with 3 installments on RH & 3 on YK. For this morning, I took the longest of the 6 parts and this part of the custom series and this will also be today's sermon.

We continue our series this morning looking at the myth that Jews are disproportionately represented in the fields of law and medicine.

Some of you may recall Archie Bunker reveling at the merits of Jewish doctors and Jewish lawyers. While he may have despised Jews, he was keenly aware of their competence in these professions.

We are only 2.0% of the general population of the USA and it is true: we are represented in disproportionately high numbers in medicine and law.

Why did this happen? Our ancestors grew up under threat that they would be dispossessed or evicted from the country in which they lived. During the Middle Ages we were forcibly evicted from England, Germany, Italy, Spain and Portugal – just to name a few. Therefore, we could not live off the land. As a professional, when you were forced to leave, you could take your professional skills with you. It was safe.

The tradition of Jewish doctors who were rabbis is very old: the 12th century Spanish rabbi/doctor Maimonides, the 15th century Italian rabbi/doctor Ovadia Sforno and many others.

Are Jews smarter than non-Jews? We are certainly more educated! I suspect that the average adult member of Beth Shalom has a Master's Degree or equivalent!

Remember, when you come to a synagogue, no one ever asks you to "check your brains at the door".

We have developed scientific ways of studying the Bible and have the Talmud, one of the most complicated documents ever generated.

From the time when we are or were young, we are taught the importance of education -- and not just "education as a trade school". We are highly represented in all the major arts.

For these reasons as well as anti-Semitism, as little as 50 years ago, many major universities in this country had quotas on the number of Jews whom they would admit. While the Jesuit school, St. Johns in NYC set their quota at 50%, places such as Harvard had a 5% quota. Yale has Hebrew on its logo. The old joke was, "if you could read the Yale logo, you couldn't get into Yale!"

Our Jewish ethnicity puts a premium on education. Our grandparents saw education as a vehicle to a better life and a way out of the sweat shops and most of our parents are well educated.

So, it is not that we are disproportionately smart. We are affected by our peer group and in many cases, we are just "following in our parents' footsteps" – which also happen to be – Jewish footsteps.

Jewish family values always prized education and Talmudic thinking honed the logical skills required to be a good physician or attorney. At this point in time where the Jewish family experience and the Talmudic methods are no longer routinely taught to our children, it is no surprise that we are being bypassed by the oriental

populations whose families seem to have picked up on what once were our uniquely Jewish values that led us to academic successes.

Want your kids to be as successful as earlier generations. Go back to stressing education and spiritual values within our families. Within a generation, we'll re-achieve the academic dominance that was routine among Jews and that furthered the myth that Jews are smart and disproportionately represented in medicine, in the professions and in academia.

Our Series continues at Kol Nidre with the myth that Judaism and Zionism are truly separate entities.

Part 4. Kol Nidre: The Melding of anti-Israelism with anti-Semitism

Chag Sa-mei-ach & welcome to Beth Shalom. The sermon will be later. What follows is the continuing 6-part series with 3 installments on RH & 3 on YK.

We continue our series this evening with “The Melding of anti-Israelism with anti-Semitism.”

Zionism is a philosophy that grew out of the anti-Semitism of 19th Century Europe. In light of the continued anti-Semitism following the so-called European enlightenment, which culminated 100+ years later in the Holocaust, Theodore Herzl and others realized that Jews needed a homeland and a safe haven. The canards associated with Israel are devastating and that most Jews, Americans and Christians can see through them, is commendable.

But the problem for this series is the melding of anti-Israelism with anti-Semitism. It’s worse in Europe, but the growing number of wealthy students from the Arab world in the United States are funding a growing number of anti-Semitic/anti-Israel professorships and are funding anti-Israel activism on college campuses. Since the Islamic world has actively advocated the killing of Jews and Americans because of Zionism, it begins to come into focus why the boundary between Zionism and Judaism is being blurred.

Islamic and Christian Arabs who are citizens of Israel are permitted to vote; they can be (and are) members of parliament; they can serve in the Israel Defense Force (aka the Army), one is currently a member of Israel’s Supreme Court – and yet there are those who describe Israel as an Apartheid nation. Either they don’t understand what Apartheid is – or they have learned from history, that if you repeat a lie often enough it will be believed as truth.

Arab birth rates are much higher than Israeli birth rates. As a result, the Arab population of Israel – as a percentage of the total population continues to grow – and yet Israel is falsely accused of “ethnic cleansing”.

Is there a basis for these canards and false claims? Probably.

There are many Arabs in Israel who have refused Israeli citizenship. In many cases, these people are a major security threat to Israel in general and Israelis in particular. There is no visual way to distinguish a citizen from a non-citizen without some ethnic profiling. Israel has no law against ethnic profiling, so instead of random checks where an 80-year-old woman is patted down at an airport as is done by TSA in the United States, Israel actually checks people who have a specific age & look that corresponds to those perpetrating terrorism. Naturally, this could be interpreted by some as discrimination.

The claims of ethnic cleansing go back to the formation of the State of Israel and were based on the fact that many Arabs abandoned their property when they were promised more when Israel was vanquished. Those who stayed did well.

The issue was compounded when at a later time it was revealed that for strategic military reasons; about 10% of Israeli Arabs leaving Israel in 1948 were forcibly relocated. This kind of strategic relocation of people was done routinely in that era, probably the best known is when the Asian sub-continent was split into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan there were many forced relocations of Hindus to India and Muslims to Pakistan.

At any rate, it is true that Israel receives special scrutiny in the press because Israel has a free press and because of Israel’s religious significance to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is also true that Israel has a unique

security problem which can best be dealt with by those who are directly threatened, namely the Israelis and yet, there doesn't seem to be anything that we can do to separate the anti-Israelism from anti-Semitism. There are however organizations that are actively trying to publicize the difference – and our supporting them is a good thing: CAMERA, Stand With Us, Americans for Peace and Tolerance are a few of these organizations.

Our series will continue tomorrow morning with “Jews in Banking and money lending.”

Part 5. YK AM: Avarice banking/money-lending

Chag Sa-mei-ach & welcome to Beth Shalom. The sermon will be later. What follows is the continuing 6-part series with 3 installments on RH & 3 on YK.

We continue our series today looking at the myth that Jews are the world's bankers. We start with the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion", an anti-Semitic forgery of the late 19th century, which would have its readers believe that Jews are world's bankers.

It's somewhat ironic that with this reputation, Jews were virtually shut out of American banking until the last half-century. There were a few Jewishly owned brokerage houses, Lehman Bro. – out of business after the 2007 meltdown, comes to mind, but in general, banking was not a place for Jews in America.

In Europe, the Rothschilds became synonymous with international banking, but again, Jewish bankers were a small minority.

The basis for the half-truth that Jews are into banking comes from medieval times. Christianity, which at that time was the Catholic Church, banned the loaning of money for interest – based on their interpretations of their scriptures; but since Jews were not faced with a similar ban, Jews became the petty loan officers of medieval Europe.

Who can be a more unsympathetic character than a bank or someone to whom you own money? When the banker forecloses on a loan, 90% of the time the bank is perceived to be the bad guy. We can see why if most of the moneylenders are Jews, the Jews would get a bad rap. Hence, the Shylock character in Shakespeare and while the anti-Semitic stereotype was set for all time, it is reported that Shakespeare never knew a Jew in his life!

In many ways, the reason that Jews were money-lenders is the same reason they went into business or the professions such as law and medicine. They needed to make a living but many of the guilds, factories and mines would not hire Jews. In this case, a profession came along where there was less competition and certainly no ban. And in some cases, Jews were invited into the countries to fill the need for moneylenders. It's no wonder we became money-lenders. We were allowed to be moneylenders because of anti-Semitism and the nature of the business of money lending served to engender more anti-Semitism!

We'll conclude this afternoon with the myth that Jews are avaricious, cheap or miserly.

Custom Series: Anti-Semitic Canards
(2001/5762: 2015/5776 , Congregation Betenu, Amherst, NH)
2022/5783; Congregation Beth Shalom, Clifton Park, NY

Part 6: YK PM: Avaricious, cheapness or miserliness

Chag Sa-mei-ach & welcome to Beth Shalom. The sermon will be later. What follows is the final installment on the 6-part series.

We conclude our series today looking at the myth that Jews are avaricious, cheap or miserly. From where would one get the idea that Jews are avaricious, cheap or miserly? A logical answer is: People who are deprived do become acquisitive if they come into money. The successful Jews lived in nice homes in the suburbs. Cadillacs became known as "Jew Canoes". These are hardly the signs of miserly people.

Statistics on college education indicates that a disproportionate number of Jewish kids go to private colleges that are expensive. Statistics show that Jews are disproportionately large donors of charitable contributions. I know my father would be shocked if he knew I paid a buck and a half for 12 ounces of water, but would think positively of a \$1000 donation to the Federation.

Perhaps the best explanation of the canard of avarice or miserliness comes from the text of Rod Steiger from the movie "The Pawnbroker."

Ortiz, a new immigrant from Puerto Rico, is trying to learn the pawnbroker business from the Pawnbroker, Mr. Nazerman, a holocaust survivor. Talking to Nazerman, Ortiz says, "I'm learning about business from a master. Tell me one thing. How come you Jews come to business so natural?"

Nazerman replies, *"You begin with several thousand years during which you have nothing except a great, bearded legend, nothing else. You have no land on which to grow food, no land on which to hunt, not even enough time in one place to have a geography or an army or a land myth. Only you have a little brain in your head and this bearded legend to sustain you and to convince you that there IS something special about you, even in your poverty. But this little brain, that is the real key. With it you obtain a small piece of cloth. You take this cloth and you cut it in two and sell the two pieces for a few pennies more than you paid for the one. With this money, you immediately go out and buy a still larger piece of cloth a slightly larger piece of cloth, which you now cut into three pieces and sell for a three-penny profit. But my friend, you must never succumb to buying an extra piece of bread or a luxury like a toy for your child. Immediately you go out and buy more cloth and repeat this process again and again, until there is no longer any temptation to dig in the earth and grow food, no longer any desire to own land. You repeat this process over and over for 2000 years. And then you discover – you have a mercantile heritage, you are a merchant, a man with secret resources, a usurer a pawnbroker, a witch, a sheeny and a kike!"*

As with most myths, there is a factual basis for its origin, but the myth quickly develops a life of its own. That concludes our series for this year.