

## SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

## The Rise and Fall of Anti-Semitism



Jews worldwide are experiencing a rise in anti-Semitism. Whether physical or verbal, the threats are dangerous and distressing.

One painful anti-Semitic trope against Jews is that we are hypocrites. Historians point out that this stereotype gained credibility because it was repeated numerous times in the Christian New Testament.

For example, in Matthew 23, the apostle Matthew presents a sweeping attack on the rabbinic religious authorities, branding the entire institution

as hypocritical at least six times. Eventually, this false accusation was leveled at all Jews.

Interestingly, even though Matthew accused the rabbis of being hypocrites, he also acknowledged their authority when he said, *“The scribes and the Pharisees [rabbis] sit in the seat of Moses, therefore all that they tell you, do and observe”* (Matthew 23:2).

Despite Matthew’s negative stereotype of rabbinical Judaism, the rabbis disdained hypocrisy and promoted serving God with sincerity and truth.

In fact, the sages stressed that *“the seal of the Holy One, Blessed be He, is truth”* (Shabbat 55a).

Concerning hypocrisy, the sages of the Talmud (Pesachim 113b) denounce it as one of the things God hates. Additionally, our sages quote Proverbs 17:16 as a source for criticizing Torah scholars *“who lack a fear of heaven”* (Yoma 72b) and do not practice what they preach.

In practice, the Rambam [Maimonides] says *“One may not say one thing with his mouth and think a different thing in his heart”* (Laws of Personal Development 2:6).

With this in mind, it is not surprising that the Midrash points to the pig as the personification of hypocrisy. Although kosher animals must chew their cud and have split hooves, the pig *“stretches forth its cloven hoofs [in front of its mouth], as if to say, ‘See, I am kosher’ even though it does not chew its cud.”* (Genesis Rabbah 65:1).

I grew up in a kosher home in which ham and bacon were not allowed. For me, keeping kosher was never a burden; it was a way of life. At the time, I accepted this without realizing the profound spiritual message contained in the commandment of keeping kosher.

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In addition to pork representing hypocrisy, keeping kosher provides valuable lessons about self-control, responsibility, and the recognition that the world is not ours to do with as we please. We are, so to speak, “guardians of the galaxy” entrusted with the responsibility to protect our natural resources, including our bodies.

Furthermore, keeping kosher is a constant reminder that, “*the earth is God's*” (Psalm 24:1) and God grants us permission to use the world according to His will. In doing so, we fulfill God’s desire to transform the world into a better and more spiritual place.

Meditating on this principle is humbling and helps us recognize and appreciate the true meaning of life.

There is another lesson we can learn from the laws of kosher. In this week’s Torah portion Matot-Massei (Numbers 30:2–36:13), we are instructed in a method of purifying [koshering] vessels that become contaminated.

For example, if a pot is placed on a fire with non-kosher food in it, the pot needs to be purged with fire to purify it. As it says, “*everything that comes into fire, you will pass through fire, and it will be purified*” (Number 31:23).

This general rule, known as “*k'balo kach palto,*” teaches that “the way something became impure is the same way we purify it.”

The same principle applies in our pursuit of a spiritually meaningful life.

If someone is attracted to another religion through an emotional and warm embrace, which is usually the case, we need to correct this with a similar approach. We can help them return to Judaism by presenting Judaism in a warm, spiritual, and friendly manner.

Additionally, this week’s portion speaks about Cities of Refuge (Number 35:11), where an unintentional murderer can find protection from the victim’s family seeking revenge. So too, our homes must be warm and open places of refuge for people who are trying to reconnect to Judaism.

May this Shabbat provide opportunities to welcome the warmth of Jewish spirituality into our lives and see the fall of negative forces that threaten Jews and Judaism.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

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[jewsforjudaism.org](http://jewsforjudaism.org)

P.O. Box 351235, Los Angeles, CA 90035 • 310-556-3344

[info@JewsforJudaism.org](mailto:info@JewsforJudaism.org) • [www.jewsforjudaism.org/donate](http://www.jewsforjudaism.org/donate) • [www.SMARTalks.com](http://www.SMARTalks.com)