



“We have to stand up and speak up.”

With a Jewish population that dwarfs that of other Diaspora communities, New York City has long been the hub of American Jewish life and a stronghold of Religious Zionism in the United States. But this year New Yorkers have experienced an unprecedented wave of antisemitic attacks and tension with local government officials.

NEW YORK



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For generations, Jews have felt at home in New York City. Have recent events changed the way you feel about the city?

This past year has definitely been *the* hardest year we’ve ever experienced here, between the pandemic, crime and hate crime in New York City, but I don’t think it’s really changed how I feel about New York. Antisemitic attacks are in no way limited to New York City.

Yes, we’ve seen an increase in these attacks, but that is likely because we have an extensive and robust Jewish community here.

For me, personally, it raises a larger question about this country. A Chabad rabbi was stabbed in Boston a few weeks ago, and we all know what happened in Jersey City, Poway and Pittsburgh.

These attacks are happening across the country, not just in New York.

In New York, we feel a little more shocked when these attacks occur; we

might expect antisemitism in places where the KKK (Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist hate group) was historically strong, but not in New York City, where Jews have felt at home for so long. But I really believe that this is a country-wide epidemic.

I also believe that the place where it is most rampant, and most dangerous, is not in a particular geographic location, but in the virtual space.

The virtual space is where much of this violence is instigated, and from which it can really mushroom into something much more terrifying.

How has the rise in antisemitism impacted your community?

People are certainly worried. Quite a few people asked for our opinions and advice, and sometimes even help, in buying real estate in Israel. This past year, especially when the borders were closed (and they are still closed to most

American Jews), I felt a sort of dull, constant panic that we can't get in, unless we make *Aliyah*. The feeling that we can't just go there whenever we want is very painful.

Many people are also rethinking things. If you're stuck in one place, where do you want to be? Where's that one place that you want to be? I've seen quite a few families end up buying homes in Israel this past year, even without seeing it and considering *Aliyah* more seriously.



That being said, I don't think people are moving en masse out of New York City, specifically. People are weighing their options. There has been financial instability and Covid questions, so it's not just antisemitism pushing people to make these decisions. It's one of several factors.

Mayor Bill de Blasio strongly criticized and singled out the New York Jewish community during the Covid pandemic, eliciting an angry response from many Jews. Do you believe that his statements were rooted in antisemitism?

I do not believe his statements are rooted in antisemitism, and I say this because I know his history. Look at New York City politics over the last few years. You'll see that before he became mayor, he had a solid relationship not only with the Jewish community generally but with the Orthodox Jewish community

as well. If you talk to a lot of *askanim* in the Orthodox community, off the record, they have quite positive memories of working with him, of situations where he had their back on various things. This past year, shockingly, looked very different. He posted a critical tweet about the Jewish community after thousands of Chassidim attended an outdoor funeral for their Rebbe. He attacked the community for it.

But even so, I don't think it was due to antisemitism.

emboldened over the last few years because of the political climate in the United States.

With more considerable economic instabilities, identity politics and nationalism on the rise, it's not surprising to any student of history that antisemitism is on the rise here as well. I think it is here to stay, and it is here to stay in New York as well. It is painful, but we have to understand that this is the reality of being a Jew in a time of *galut*.

Mayor Bill de Blasio @NYCMayor

My message to the Jewish community, and all communities, is this simple: the time for warnings has passed. I have instructed the NYPD to proceed immediately to summons or even arrest those who gather in large groups. This is about stopping this disease and saving lives. Period.

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I think it was a terrible and poorly worded statement, and it was undoubtedly dangerous in that it could incite more hatred. But I don't think it came from hatred itself.

At the same time, I don't think de Blasio has been the smartest person in the way he's run New York City. It's a general failure of leadership. And one of the ways it manifests itself is through his poor decisions regarding minority communities like the Orthodox community.

Do you believe that the rise in antisemitism will pass, or is antisemitism in New York here to stay?

I am a daughter of Soviet Jewish immigrants, so I was always raised with this feeling and awareness that antisemitism is not going anywhere. Before this past year, I was always conscious of it and knew that it existed under the surface. It's just that it has been far more

Those of us who imagined that America would forever be different were being slightly delusional and naive.

We are not the first Jews to be welcomed by foreign countries, experience golden ages in the Diaspora, and imagine ourselves finally stable, comfortable, and fully integrated.

This story has played out before. I'm very mindful of that.

And so we must trust in G-d and figure out the best way to protect ourselves.

When we see disturbing things happening in the public arena, we have to stand up and speak up.

Over the last few years, I've been talking more and more about what it's like to be a visibly Jewish person walking in New York City; what it means to be an Orthodox Jew in this city, where you are wearing a target on your back. It's crucial that these realities are voiced. ■