

MUTATING VIRUSES

Biological and Moral Masters of Deception – Part 2

Rabbi Doron Perez

A virus is a master of deception.

Its aim is to reproduce and multiply, but as it is only a simple microscopic clod of organic matter, it cannot do so on its own. The only way it can reproduce is to infiltrate a living organism with reproductive abilities and then hijack its reproductive mechanism – an ingenious yet diabolical double act of trickery and deception.

This is how biological viruses multiply and spread contagion. And this is precisely how the virus of antisemitism, and particularly today's mutation of anti-Zionism, works as well.¹

Let us analyze these dynamics of deception to gain a clearer understanding of their inner workings and to develop a strategy to counteract the virus of antisemitism in its current incarnation of Israel demonization.

Deception 1: infiltrating the host

The immune system is the body's tool to ensuring its physical health and survival. All living beings have varying degrees of sophisticated immunity networks to protect against harmful foreign bodies (pathogens) which can infect and spread disease. Viruses are pathogens and so must find a way to circumvent the immune system to gain entry. No way in? No chance of

survival and reproduction. Viruses have therefore evolved to become maestros of deception.

How does this deception work?

To enter the cell, a virus floats up to or lands on a cell and then attaches itself to a receptor. Receptors are proteins situated on the cell surface that act like protective locks, and only a specific key will fit these "locks." The duplicitous virus contains proteins shaped just like that key, which slot into the receptor. This starts a process that leads to the virus entering the cell whole or gradually injecting itself into the cell.

Like a Trojan horse, it can now unleash a surprise strike from the inside.

Deception 2: hijacking the host's production line

The virus' second act of trickery is hijacking and corrupting the cell's reproductive mechanism. While the cell is programmed to reproduce its cells, it 'unknowingly' becomes hijacked by the virus and instead of only producing its own cells, it produces the virus' infected cells.

The sneaky seizure takes place as follows. Every cell in our bodies is a tiny factory, constantly making proteins and reproducing new cells. Viruses and living cells use DNA and RNA, the two main molecules critical to genetic

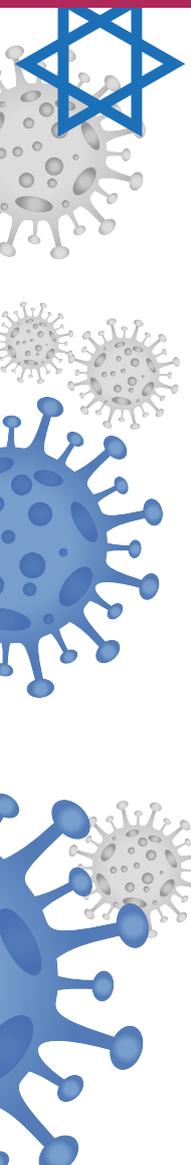
functioning. DNA provides the code for cell activity, while RNA converts that code into proteins to carry out cellular functions.

These molecules act like instructions, so when viruses bring their DNA and RNA instructions to the cell, they trick the cell into following them and generating all the necessary conditions for the virus to multiply. New copies of the virus can then be constructed inside the cell and the formerly vital cell now becomes an assembly line for new virus particles. The helpless cell is now serving the virus, manufacturing thousands of new particles which are released to continue corrupting countless more cells. Contagion awaits.

Antisemitism today: infiltration and hijacking the host

The same is true with antisemitism. Antisemitism is a virus of prejudice and discrimination that is relatively innocuous unless it can find a host. The host this virus requires is the human heart and mind, containing thoughts, emotions and motivations.

It is not easy for destructive ideas to penetrate the heart because human beings have a strong natural moral immune system: a conscience. Our ethical compass prods us to do good and to resist hateful and self-destructive behavior. This is why antisemitism must present itself in a morally



legitimate form. It can only circumvent the moral immune system and stimulate people to act if it can be morally justified. To be effective, evil must present itself as good.

The Pharaoh factor

Remarkably, this is precisely how the Ramban explains Pharaoh's perplexing strategy against the Jews in Egypt.

Pharaoh did not overtly decree the destruction of the Jews but instead devised covert and deceptive plans of evil: "Come let us deal shrewdly with them in case they increase, and if war breaks out they may join our enemies, fight against us and escape from the land."²

Why did the all-powerful leader need to hide his plans? Why did he present the Jews as a fifth column and a threat to national security to justify his intended genocide? Why demand their labor and then initiate the secretive scheme of midwives murdering babies at birth? What was he afraid of?

The answer, says the Ramban,³ was Pharaoh's need to bypass Egypt's moral defense mechanism on two levels. Firstly, it would be treasonous and immoral to murder a people without cause, particularly when they were welcomed into Egypt by a previous Pharaoh. Even corrupt rulers cannot suddenly exterminate people without any moral pretext and sense of justice. Secondly, many of his own people would simply not have agreed to participate in the massacre. Internal public opinion must be enlisted; otherwise, the indiscriminate slaughter of former friends and neighbors would not be tolerated. And so Pharaoh shrewdly found a way to penetrate the unsuspecting hearts of his own people.

When practitioners of evil believe they are acting for the preservation of their society and the sake of a greater good, all moral checks and balances can be sidestepped. The masses themselves become the very reproductive mechanism of the virus of hatred and bigotry.

Legitimizing hate: human rights and human wrongs⁴

Rabbi Sacks explains that antisemitism in all its mutations follows the very same mechanism of psychological and moral deception to inculcate perverse and prejudiced beliefs. The

hatred at the heart of antisemitism is the lowest form of evil, and so it requires legitimation from the highest sources of moral authority.

In the Middle Ages, the moral arbiter of the age was the Pope, and so we had Christian anti-Judaism. In post-Enlightenment Europe, it was science, which resulted in the twin foundations of Nazi ideology, Social Darwinism and the so-called Scientific Study of Race. Today, the highest source of moral authority is human rights. This is why Israel – the only fully functioning democracy in the Middle East with a free press and independent judiciary – is regularly accused of the five cardinal sins against human rights: racism, apartheid, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and attempted genocide.

The new antisemitism has mutated so that anyone can deny that he or she is an antisemite: "I'm not an antisemite. I have no problem with Jews or Judaism. I only have a problem with the State of Israel."

However, this defense does not hold water. There are currently 56 Muslim countries and 103 Christian majority nations, but only one Jewish State. Israel constitutes a mere one-quarter of 1% of the landmass of the Middle East. And yet Israel is the only one of the 193 member nations of the United Nations whose right to exist is regularly challenged, with Iran and many other powerful groups openly committed to its destruction. Anti-Zionism, which denies only the Jewish people a right to their own country, is merely another form of antisemitism, for it denies Jews the same rights as other peoples and demonizes them in the process.

As long as antisemites invoke human rights in their nefarious battle against the Jewish people, no matter how perversely they apply these arguments, the deception of the virus is complete. Vice masquerades as virtue and evil as ethical.

Celebrating vulnerability

Is there any hope? How can we possibly overcome the moral deception of antisemitism in our time? We feel so vulnerable to destructive forces beyond our control.

Perhaps Sukkot is the antidote. Sukkot is a celebration of vulnerability. The

sukkah itself is a flimsy and transient little booth, susceptible to the outside elements. Yet not only do we dwell in the *sukkah*, we rejoice in it! How can we possibly celebrate our vulnerability? Through the power of faith.

In Jewish mysticism, the *sukkah* is called the "Shadow of Faith." This "Shadow of Faith" is the immutable belief in Hashem, who created and runs the world for good, and our belief that we can and will overcome the challenges before us. It is the belief that good health and wellbeing will ultimately triumph over disease and illness. It is the belief in the inherent goodness of human beings, who are all created in the image of G-d. The "Shadow of Faith" is the understanding that even the brilliant life-giving light of the sun will cast many shadows on the earth below. It is believing that spiritual and moral light will ultimately supersede immoral darkness; that evil is transient, while G-d and goodness are permanent.

Let us rejoice together in life's inherent vulnerability in our "Shadow of Faith," knowing that we will one day see an end to antisemitism when the grandeur of the Jewish mission will be known to all.

¹ My last two articles in *HaMizrachi* have focused on antisemitism as a virus. The first cited the Vilna Gaon's novel idea that there are three mutations of antisemitism, each with biblical precedents. Moav, who opposed Jewish values and Judaism, Edom, who opposed the very existence of the Jewish people, and the Philistines, who opposed any Jewish sovereignty in Israel.

The second article focused on deepening the virus analogy and paralleled the spread of biological viruses and the virus of antisemitism over the last twenty years. There I discussed two traits of viruses: 1. the ability to mutate, and 2. to quickly spread contagion.

Here I focus on two more traits of viruses: their deceptive ability, 1. to circumvent the immune system, and 2. to corrupt the cellular reproductive mechanism.

² Shemot 1:10.

³ Ibid.

⁴ These paragraphs are based on Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' teachings in *Future Tense*, pp. 99–100.

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