

## The Big Lie

The roots and life-force of all anti-Semitism are nourished by falsehood. From the early church's "Teaching of Contempt" where the Jews were identified as Christ-killers, to the "blood libel" accusing Jews of murdering Christian babies to use their blood in the making of matzah, to the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" which proposed that Jews were involved in an international conspiracy to economically rule the world, the haters of the Jewish people have systematically employed The Lie as the foundation of their hatred.

Hitler and Nazism, of course, turned it into an art-form (if such malevolence can ever be associated with the beauty of what we call "art"). The Third Reich demonstrated to perfection how, if you tell a lie long enough and consistently, people will invariably embrace it as truth. Yet even more, what made—as Holocaust historian Lucy Dawidowicz termed it—Hitler's "War Against the Jews" so successful was how The Lie and its implementation was revealed gradually, in stages, so that by the time the demonic creed had been transformed into deed it was, as the world would discover, unfathomable. Unbelievable. But hardly deniable.

Such is the paradigm of *tragic irony*. That an evil, founded on two millennia of lies resulting in a genocide so unimaginable that it defies reason, could ultimately be labeled as—a lie. A demonic circle so complete that it elevates The Lie to a kind of Platonic level. By the same token, we can thank Hitler for enlightening most of the world sufficiently that they, like us, not simply reject The Lie but consider such ideas immoral. And yet as Hitler also demonstrated, the most incredible acts of inhumanity begin with the most incredible assertions. And there will always be those who will believe The Lie, no matter how absurd—because they want to.

We have good reason to fear the Holocaust Denial conference in Teheran last month. Not because it might convince people of their assertion that the *Shoah* is a hoax, but because it is yet another weapon in their arsenal against the State of Israel. Amid all the haze of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a truth often obscured: the anti-Israel sentiment that runs through the Arab world is less about their love of the Palestinian and more about their contempt of the Israeli. Long before there was a West Bank and a refugee problem, the Arab world sought the destruction of Israel. Hitler's dream of a *Judenrein* Europe was succeeded by Nasser's "...into the sea" vision. And while many in the Middle East have come to accept the reality of a Jewish state (albeit many of them reluctantly), the likes of Hizbullah and Hamas remain as faithful flag bearers.

And then there is Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He scares me. Perhaps the world will be able to keep him restrained, but then that's what most people thought about Hitler in 1933. To be sure there is no way to foretell what will be, and I am not wont to sound alarm, but there is something about this man and his obsession with Israel (just like Hitler) that gives me pause. Because he embraces The Lie. And because he has power.

The word in Hebrew for truth is *Emet* (אמת), spelled *alef-mem-tav*. The first, middle and last letters of the Hebrew *alef-bet*. Not only do they symbolize an expansive, all-encompassing balance (through their placement in the alphabet), but the bottoms of the letters all sit firmly on the line—as if to say, truth is stable (and stabilizing). By contrast comes *sheker* (שקר), falsehood, spelled *shin-kof-resh*. Its three letters are narrowly grouped together, sequential, near the end of the *alef-bet*. And the middle letter, the *kof*, has a long stem extending below the line, creating a teeter-totter. *Sheker* / falsehood is narrow-minded, unstable, rocking to and fro, as is the world that is founded on it.

If we have learned anything from our past, it must be that peace is founded on truth and that those who embrace The Lie bring only death and destruction. Of course we Jews are not the only ones to learn this lesson—but our history has impressed upon us that we must be its teacher. It's not that we have to prove the existence of the *Shoah* for the sake of its victims, but for the hope that they will not have perished in vain. On the memory of Auschwitz stands the future of humankind. And those who seek to erase that memory are none other than the harbingers of a

darkness we would like to—but cannot and must not—forget. As the *Ba'al Shem Tov* taught, “Memory is the gateway to salvation.”