

## Rabbi Ahron Cohen

[PART 1]

(00:00 – 01:13)

It is really a privilege to have the opportunity of talking to you today and I thank the organizers of these various movements immensely for the opportunity of being able to do so. I am under the impression that most of the people here, or everybody here, are students, so I myself, having been active in senior education, find it particularly pleasing to be talking to a student body. Can you hear me?

[Audience replies] Yes

I and my colleagues of Neturei Karta value greatly occasions such as this because we feel that we have both a religious and humanitarian duty – a religion-based humanitarian duty – to publicize our message as much as possible. So I hope and pray that with the Creator's help, my words and our discussions here this afternoon may be correct and true in their content and in their conclusions.

Just by way of introductions: I am what is known as an orthodox Jew. That is a Jew who endeavors to live his life completely in accordance with Judaism, which is the age old religion and way of life. I am here, as the chairlady has already said, under the banner of the group known as Neturei Karta, which she translated as Guardians of the City, but which can be more loosely translated to get the meaning of it as Guardians of the Faith. We are not a separate party or organization, but Neturei Karta is basically the name of those who propagate the philosophy held by a large section of orthodox Jewry and this philosophy highlights the authentic, orthodox Jewry's opposition to Zionism. Zionism is the philosophy and movement which brought into being the state known as Israel. But Neturei Karta propagate the original and authentic Jewish opposition to that movement and moving to that course as we go along.

The title of my talk is Anti-Zionism is not Anti-Semitism, meaning of course, by implication, that anti-Semitism is not to be approved of, whereas anti-Zionism is something to be applauded and that's what I hope to explain why. This subject is particularly relevant to us nowadays in the light of the current situation in Palestine and the Zionist claim that there is a rise in anti-Semitism. And the other point is that because in the eyes of the world, Zionists are equated with Jews and Zionism is equated with Judaism – and that is how the world observes us – implying that anti-Zionism would equate with anti-Semitism. And it is the error of this assumption which I would like to dwell upon today.

Discussion and debate on the subject is important, because the matter tends to be highly confusing, not only to non-Jewish people but also to many Jewish people. And On the other hand, the discussion and debate tend to be stifled because, particularly to some Jews, the subject is very emotive, very difficult sometimes to have an objective discussion on the subject.

The background to this subject today, as I mentioned earlier, is overshadowed by the ongoing tragic situation in Palestine, of the West Bank and in Gaza, and this is a sore that has been festering, really, for a hundred years or more. It's not something new, it goes back, really, a hundred years.

But let's get on with our subject. We have to understand that anti-Semitism shows itself in two forms. One form of anti-Semitism is an irrational, bigoted dislike or hatred of the Jewish people. A hatred of a particular section of society. This hatred – happily not so prevalent nowadays – is directed at the Jewish people and not at the religion. Where we do find that in addition there is an opposition to or hatred of the Jewish religion, it is only an extension or manifestation of the irrational, bigoted hatred of the people. That is how one can sum up anti-Semitism.

We do find instances where there is a peculiar hatred of the religion that has nothing to do with the hatred of the people. But this is something a bit different. This is a form of bigoted religious intolerance, whereby believers in one religion will not tolerate belief in any other religion and in this case the intolerance is usually directed not only against Judaism but against all other religions. Not specifically anti-Jewish and it has nothing to do with anti-Semitism.

So therefore, anti-Semitism is basically an illogical bigotry. Anti-Zionism, on the other hand, is very logical and an understandable opposition to the philosophy and ideals of Zionism. So here, the opposition is directed, at least initially, at the idea rather than at the people.

So, old-fashioned anti-Semitism, which although it has existed for as long as the Jewish people have existed, is an illogical bigotry and thankfully far less prevalent today than it has been in past eras. Anti-Zionism, however, is a perfectly logical opposition, based on very sound reasoning to the particular idea and aim of Zionism.

In order to understand further the statement 'Anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism', we have to understand a bit more by what we mean by Zionism and what we mean by, it is called Semitism, but really the word Semitism is a misnomer; we are talking about Judaism. Some people have remarked that the word 'Semite' applies to a larger group than just Jews, it applies to most Arab people as well, so it wouldn't be right to say.. It's a misnomer to say anti-Semitism, but could be a word used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, I can't remember by who, some German philosopher, I think, and particularly he means anti-Judaism.

So, if we understand a bit more about Zionism and Judaism, only then can we understand the statement 'Anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism'. So, what is Judaism and what is Zionism? Very (... 09:32) but obviously I have to be concise. Judaism is a very wide ranging and far reaching concept, religion and way of life. Zionism is a narrow and restricted concept, just concentrating on one particular.. The positive side of Zionism anyway, concentrates on one particular aim.

So I will try to give you today an overview of both Zionism and Judaism and try to bring out some of the aspects of Judaism which are relevant to the question of Zionism. First, let me state quite categorically that Judaism and Zionism are not only different, but incompatible. We are talking here of authentic age-old Judaism going back through generations. Judaism and Zionism are incompatible, they are mutually exclusive concepts. This statement may appear to you to be a paradox but it can be better understood if we compare Judaism and Zionism both at a general level and in some particular aspects.

Looking at Judaism in general. Judaism for us, the Jewish people, is an all-embracing way of life, showing us.. we accept it as something that shows us how to live a moral, ethical and religious life in the service of the Almighty. It affects every aspect of our life from the cradle to the grave. We are taught and we believe that it was revealed to us by divine revelation as described in the Scriptures some 3500 years ago and that was when the Jewish people came into being. All of our religious requirements, practical and philosophical, are set out in our religious teachings, which is known as the Torah, and the Torah comprises the Scriptures, the Bible, but that is only the tip of the iceberg, together with that, there is a vast code of oral teaching based on what is known as the Talmud – you might have heard the expression – and that has been handed down to us through the generations. So there you have an overview of Judaism and the literature of which we take our teachings.

Zionism on the other hand, before looking at its specific positive aim, is in general a secular, irreligious philosophy, an abandonment of religion, and engendered approximately one hundred years ago by some secular Jews, that is Jews who had, in the main, cast off their connections with their Jewish way of life which had been handed down to them through generations.

So there you have the first general difference between Zionism and Judaism. Zionism is secularism, materialism, no particular religious belief, no particular moral or ethical obligation. That is Zionism. Judaism is godliness, morality, ethical standards, and religious belief. So obviously, a logical based opposition to Zionist secularism, anti-Zionism, would have no connection with a bigoted opposition to the people, who adhere to or have a connection with Judaism. So there you have on the general level the immediate difference between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism.

But let's look at some specific aspects of Judaism which have relevance to Zionism. The first of these, very relevant of course, is the question of a land or a country for the Jewish people, both in the past and in the present.

[PART 2]

So let's look first of all at how the authentic orthodox community looks at that question. I mentioned earlier, that our religion is a total way of life, covering every aspect of our life. Included among those aspects is the question of a land, where the Jewish people should live.

Now right from the beginning, going back 3500 years ago, our Torah taught us that subject – and this is important – certain conditions we would be given land, the Holy Land, now known as Palestine, in which to live our lives in the service of the Almighty.

That was how it was then. What were those conditions? The conditions were basically that we had to maintain the highest of moral, ethical and religious standards. And we were taught, and it was foretold in our teachings that if the conditions were not fulfilled, then the Jewish people would be sent into exile.

So, what happened? We did have the land for approximately the first 1500 years of our existence. However, regretfully, the conditions required were not fulfilled to the required degree and the Jews were exiled from their land. And, as history confirms, for the last 2000 years or so, the Jewish people have been in a state of exile and our teaching is that this is a state of exile heavenly decreed by the Almighty because they did not maintain the standards expected of them. This we confirmed from Jewish people we spoke to from all over the world, and this state of exile is the situation that exists right up to the present day.

Now, what follows on from that and which is important for the mainly orthodox Jewish point of view, that is a basic part of our belief to accept willingly the Heavenly decree of exile and not try and fight against it or end it by the efforts of our own hands. Judaism teaches that we are forbidden under oath to attempt to come out of this exile by our own efforts or to form a state of our own in Palestine or in the world and certainly not by force. Furthermore, we are taught that the terms or conditions of exile means acceptance of the authority of the governing power of the countries in which we live, which would include Palestine.

Living after the exile, there has always been a small Jewish indigenous community in Palestine, but they were subject to the authority then in charge of Palestine.

And we have to accept the authority of the people of the ... countries including Palestine and not rebel against their authority, but only to support the well-being of that authority.

Finally, we are taught that non-compliance, if we try and fight against these prohibitions, that would constitute a rebellion against the wishes of the Almighty and would produce dire consequences.

So, there you have the orthodox Jewish approach: divinely decreed exile, acceptance of the conditions in which we live, and a prohibition of fighting against it, and the understanding that if we do fight against it, there would be dire consequences.

So it is clear that authentic Judaism forbids the idea of a land for the Jewish people. What does Zionism have to say on the matter? I stated earlier that Zionism is a secular nationalistic movement founded approximately 100 years ago mostly by secular people and they were discarding their religion, but they still retained by what they considered as the stigma of being Jews in exile. They did not disregard the idea of being Jews in exile. They considered that our state of exile was due to our own subservient attitude. They called it the Golus mentality – Golus is the Hebrew word for exile –

and did not accept that it was by divine decree. And their aim was to propagate the new idea among the Jews and that was to form a Jewish state in a Jewish homeland.

And, so. The land they chose for their aim was Palestine. And I was saying, not for any religious reason, this is important. Remember they were a completely secular group. The founder of Zionism, Theodore Herzl was absolutely secular, he had no connection whatsoever with anything religious. Completely secular proof, but. So why did they choose Palestine? Probably because of the historical and cultural attachment to Palestine which has been held by the Jewish people and thereby they hoped to attract the Jewish masses to their new idea. In principle, they were prepared to consider any land, and in fact, at one time Uganda was suggested by the United Kingdom.

The underlying philosophy of their aim was that they wished to force their way out of exile by their own efforts. So, it will be clear that this Zionist ideology flies completely in the face of the authentic Jewish religious attitude to exile which I outlined above and is entirely incompatible with Jewish teaching. And in fact, as soon as the Zionist ideology was appreciated, going back a hundred odd years ago, when it first started, at the inception of Zionism, it was pronounced as total heresy by the great Jewish religious authorities of the time.

So here again, anti-Zionism, that is opposition to the Zionist idea or aim of forming a state for the Jews is certainly not anti-Semitism, since Judaism itself is in total opposition to this aim, as I explained.

So, we've gone through a couple of areas. Now more. A further aspect of Judaism relevant to Zionism is the question of Jewish identity and Jewish nationality. This is a very interesting one. The age-old way of life of Judaism is in fact the only measure of the Jewish national identity. That might sound surprising, because I would say that it is demonstrably true that the identity of a Jew. That is a member of the Jewish people, is established by his or her attachment to Judaism, and not, as with most nations, an attachment to a particular land or country. This is borne out by the fact that the Jewish people have been without a land for 2000 years, as history confirms, and have been dispersed to the four corners of the globe, but have retained their identity by virtue of their attachment to Judaism.

Although, many will argue that we see that the majority of Jews today, sadly even those in the Diaspora, i.e. those who don't have an attachment to a land, who have nothing to do with modern day Israel, for instance. Also do not appear to have an attachment to Judaism and yet have retained a Jewish identity. Of course, that would tend to go against the statement I made earlier. But you find that they only have to go back three or four generations at the most and they will find that their forbears were practicing Orthodox Jews.

In other words, they have retained a degree of Jewish identity only by virtue of the continuing, but fading effect of their forbears' attachment to Judaism. I say fading because the continuing effect does fade away. You won't find people aware of their Jewish identity today if they are descendants of Jews who left the Jewish way of life say, five or six hundred years ago.

So that's on the one hand again the orthodox Jewish side. The Zionist concept of Jewish identity is something completely different, it is a secular, typically nationalistic identity based on a land. But that is not a Jewish identity; it's a Zionist or Israeli identity, which is something completely different.

So once again, it will be apparent that to be anti the Zionist harsh nationalistic identity is totally different to being anti the Jewish religious identity, since the two are totally different concepts.

Up to now, I have spoken about aspects of Judaism, which may be somewhat intangible and strange to the everyday non-Jewish person. Perhaps most of you here today. It's only theological theories to you. However, there is a further aspect of Judaism relevant to Zionism, with which I believe most people can identify and that is the question of Jewish religious values of humanitarianism. The Jewish teaching on basic humanitarian values is, as understandably by all people, compassion and consideration for one's fellow man and scrupulous respect for the rights and property and of course lives of one's fellow men. And this would quite rightly imply that Orthodox Judaism is in total

sympathy with the Palestinian cause in Palestine today and protests vehemently against the wrongs done to them by Zionists

Zionism is the exact antithesis of these values. Zionism is determined and always has been determined to further its aim of a state, irrespective of the effect on those standing in its way, whether Palestinians and even Jews. In fact, it is very well documented in the writings of the founding Zionists and recorded in their public statement – and this goes right back to the founders – that they fully intended to implement their aim of achieving a land and state, irrespective of its effect on the indigenous population, the Palestinian people.

The lives, property and right to self-determination of the Palestinians were of no relevance to them whatsoever against the idea and aim of forming their state. And to a significant degree, even the lives and well-being of their own Jewish brethren, whether physical or spiritual, are secondary to the aim of forming and maintaining a state. This is something very basic. Zionism places the idea of a state above the value of human life. It is well known that with this philosophy the Zionists eventually achieved the formation of their state, but this philosophy, which exhibits a shocking contravention of humanitarian values, continues right up to this very day and in fact it is the underlying cause of the strife and bloodshed in Palestine, that's it. The nations of the world try various peace efforts and so on, but the underlying cause of the strife and bloodshed in Palestine is the very idea of a state imposed on other people, nothing else.

Zionism has the ideal, and has always had the ideal, of imposing a sectarian state over the heads of the Palestinians, the indigenous population and this has resulted -or has come out as- in a terrible confrontation. This confrontation, as we all know, has resulted in horrific bloodshed and brutality, up to this day, with no end in sight unless there is a very radical change.

Paradoxically, because of the bloodshed of both Jewish and Palestinian, caused by Zionism, the Zionist state is very far from being the so-called safe haven for Jews which supporters of Zionism claim it to be.

[PART 3]

So, here again it will be very clear that the very logical and reasonable opposition to the anti-humanitarian attitude of Zionism has no relevance whatsoever to the old bigotry of anti-Semitism. So, anti-Zionism is a logical opposition to a flawed, racist, fascist-like, totally unacceptable philosophy, which is held by some apparent members of the Jewish people. I say apparent because they have strayed from the Jewish religion and way of life which would qualify them to be called Jews. That's anti-Zionism.

Anti-Semitism, on the other hand, is an irrational and illogical bigotry and dislike of a whole people or an irrational and illogical religious intolerance. So I would say that it is very obvious that anti-Zionism is not by any stretch of the imagination the same as anti-Semitism.

I mentioned earlier and I think it became clearer as I continued that Judaism and Zionism are incompatible and mutually exclusive. So we can see that the Zionist movement is a complete abandonment of our religious teachings and faith in general, and, in particular, an abandonment of our approach to our state of exile and our attitude to the peoples among whom we live. The practical outcome of Zionism in the form of the state known as Israel is completely alien to Judaism and the Jewish faith.

The ideology of Zionism, which is not to rely on divine providence but to take the law into one's own hands and to try to force the outcome in the form of a state is completely contrary to the approach to the matter of exile, which our Torah requires us to adopt, as handed down to us by our great religious teachers. Furthermore, Zionism flouts completely the basic Jewish values of humanitarianism in its treatment of the Palestinian people.

There was and is, however, an additional Zionist Phenomenon which confuses the picture. That is what is known as the religious Zionists. You've probably seen it on television: people looking not a lot different from myself, who are very staunch supporters of the Zionist state. But, these are people who claim to be faithful to the Jewish religion but they have been influenced by the Zionist secular nationalistic philosophy and have added a new, distorted dimension to Judaism, known as Zionism, which is the nationalistic aim of setting up and expanding a Jewish state in Palestine.

They have adopted this aim and added it all to Judaism – I call it Judaism-plus – and because they are religious, they try to fulfill this part of their aim with great religious fervor. And they claim, fallaciously, that their nationalistic philosophy is inherent in the Jewish religion, but this is a distortion, and erroneous interpretation of religious sources and they've gone away from the religious teachings which have been handed down through the generations. What I'm saying to you today has the authority of history as far as Judaism is concerned.

And this phenomenon of religious Zionism which has developed mainly since and perhaps because of the Second World War, but it is a total departure from Orthodox Judaism throughout the ages. And, one has to remember that even though they are religious Zionists, they also flout completely the basic Jewish values of humanitarianism in their treatment of the Palestinian people.

And we have a further problem and that is that the Zionists have made themselves to appear as the representatives and spokespeople of all Jews that they have a tremendous propaganda organization and system, and with their actions they arouse animosity against all Jews. Because people equate Jews and Zionists. And then those who harbor this animosity are accused of anti-Semitism. So, although it is abundantly clear that opposition to Zionism and its crimes does not imply hatred of Jews or anti-Semitism, however the wrongs of Zionism are a cause of antagonism to Jews which is then confused with old fashioned anti-Semitism.

Paradoxically, Zionism itself and its deeds, instead of being a remedy for anti-Semitism, are in fact the biggest cause of modern anti-Semitism. And, one has to mention, that Zionism actually feeds on this so-called anti-Semitism by using it as a means of attracting more immigrants to its state, to the state of Israel, offering them as it were refuge from anti-Semitism which they have actually caused.

I'm coming towards the end now, I just want to sum up. The confusion between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism actually reaches up to the highest levels of government. And is the only explanation I can give for something that amazes me constantly and that is when I observe the protestation of nations such as the USA and the UK that Israel is a democratic state which has to be protected and preserved. When actually the whole concept of Israel was and is patently non-democratic. Democratic for its own citizens, for the Jews, for Zionists, but not for other people. And when by a short look back in history, it can be seen that the whole Zionist state was begat by the very violence, and the UK was a victim of this violence. The great violence against which these countries now protest. The UK, the USA protesting against violence, but really Zionists were the forerunners in the use of violence. The free world waged the Second World War in order to eradicate the kind of policies which they are now condoning by supporting the state of Israel. It's amazing when you think about it.

To sum up. According to the Torah and the Jewish faith, the present Palestinian Arab claim to rule in Palestine is right and just. The Zionist claim is wrong and criminal. Our attitude to Israel is that the whole concept is flawed and illegitimate. So anti-Zionism is certainly not anti-Semitism.

I would like to finish with the following words. It is often said that Jew and Muslim and Arab cannot live together. We want to tell the world, especially our Muslim and Arab neighbors, that there is no hatred or animosity between Jew and Arab. We would wish to live together as friends and neighbors as we have done mostly over hundreds and even thousands of years in all the Arab countries. I mentioned earlier, there was a small indigenous Jewish population in Palestine long before the Zionists have lived, which lived peacefully alongside the larger indigenous Palestinian population. It was only the advent of the Zionist and Zionism, which upset this age-old relationship. Historically, the situation frequently was that when Jews were being persecuted in Europe, where did they find refuge? In the various Arab countries. Our attitude to Arabs should only be one of friendliness and respect.

The Zionist state known as Israel is a regime that has no right to exist. (... 09:40?). Its continuing existence, as I mentioned earlier, is the underlying cause of the strife in Palestine. We pray – we don't have a solution because it is a problem -it is an impasse-, but we pray for a peaceful solution to the terrible and tragic impasse that exists. Perhaps based on old results brought about by moral, political and economic pressures imposed by the nations of the world. Although we don't have to tell the Almighty how to go about his job, when we look down and see all the turmoil that is taking place in the Middle-East –you know the land is very closely connected to hopefully a peaceful dismantling of this entity known as Israel.

We pray for an end to bloodshed, and an end to the suffering of all innocent people – Jew and non-Jew alike – worldwide. We are awaiting the annulment of Zionism and the peaceful dismantling of the Zionist regime, which will bring about an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people. We would welcome the opportunity to dwell in peace in the holy land, under a rule which is entirely in accordance with the wishes and aspirations of the Palestinian people. May we soon live in the time when the glory of the Almighty will be revealed over the whole universe and all mankind will be at peace with each other.

Thank you very much.