

Why are Jews afraid?

Are Jewish fears over the top?

May 10, 2024 By [Jeffrey Salkin](#)



President Joe Biden, left, and Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, R-La., stand to honor the memory of the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust during the annual Days of Remembrance ceremony, at the Capitol in Washington, May 7, 2024. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)

(RNS) — Perhaps you have seen it, a Facebook meme that is making an appearance on countless pages.

“I don’t know a single Jewish person who hasn’t at one point asked: ‘Which one of my friends who aren’t Jewish would hide me?’”

Do I ask that question?

No.

Not yet.

At this particular time, I do not believe American Jews are in imminent danger. I do not believe American Jews are about to become modern equivalents of Anne Frank and her family — needing to find sympathetic gentiles, who can provide them with attics and basements in which to hide.

But, in truth, yes: American Jews have every reason to worry.

What scares me?

I keep on returning to the text in the Book of Exodus, which describes how the Sea of Reeds parted: “And the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left” (Exodus 14:22).

First, there is the wall on the right.

I am afraid that a Donald Trump victory will empower gangs of right-wing militants, Christian nationalists and white supremacists. I am afraid that regardless of the election outcome (which Trump himself has said he might not accept), his more radical and violent supporters will take to the streets. I believe they will attack visible Jewish targets — both institutions and people.

Because the Jews are not white enough for them. Because Jews vote, overwhelmingly, Democratic. Because Jews represent the elite, moneyed, intellectual class. With Trump himself betraying contempt for the rule of law (promising to pardon the insurrectionists of Jan. 6), those miscreants would have every reason to be so emboldened.

Then, there is the wall on the left — the cultural and intellectual far left — progressive groups and the universities.

Because, for them, the Jews are too white, too privileged, too Zionist.

So, what does this Jew fear?

Those of us who are centrists, or who are center-left (i.e., classic liberals), are, or should be, deeply concerned. We are witnessing the eroding of that middle path and we are crashing into the walls on either side, especially because those walls are closing in on us.

Welcome to Europe, circa 1930s: Jews trapped between the forces of the left and of the right, between the communists and the fascists/Nazis.

Let us return to American Jewish fears.

Some of my friends go all out with their fears. They speak of a future that includes roundups, detention camps and worse.

Are those fears valid? If they are, the targets will not be Jews. Hardly — Trump himself has said that, if he wins, there will be roundups and detention camps for undocumented immigrants.

It should not be Jews posting memes, asking: “Who would hide me?”

Rather, refugees from Central America might be asking that question — and validly so. So, yes, that is what Jews, and others, should fear.

Not that they will come for us, but that they will come for others. But, I keep returning to that wall on the left — especially, ivy-covered walls. Campus anti-Israel bullies are trying to force Jewish students into hiding. Those students fear physical violence, but also, a deeper kind of violence. They fear a moral and intellectual violence against the very core of their being.

They are hearing: “It’s not that we don’t like Jews. We just don’t like certain types of Jews (i.e., Zionist Jews).”

Young Jews on college campuses will not need to ask: “Who will hide me?”

They will need to ask: “Who will urge me not to go into hiding — from my own Jewish and Zionist identity?” “Who will defend me — intellectually and spiritually?” “Who will stick up for me, when I fear for my physical and moral safety on campus?” “Who will encourage me to stick to my Jewish identity?”

Yes, of course, Hillel and other Jewish student organizations, but who else? Who will be our allies?

The good news, anecdotally, we are hearing that Jews on campus are leaning into their Jewish and Israel-connected identities, and they are resisting the attempts to curate those identities.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov put it this way: “The whole world is a very narrow bridge, and the issue is not to be afraid.”

Yes, American politics today is a very narrow bridge.

But, we do not walk that narrow bridge alone.

I know who would hide me.

My list includes: friends from high school, friends from college, and Christian and Muslim clergy. They are also the friends who have been there for me since Oct. 7, who have encouraged me, who have inspired me, who have been my shelter from the storms of the current crisis.

For them, and for so many of you, I am deeply grateful.