

## Resources for Understanding Antisemitism

**Dr. Brian Levitt, Psy.D., C.Psych.**

I offer here a relatively brief list of resources on antisemitism, a sample of what I have read and found meaningful. There are certainly many other good resources. My list is by no means exhaustive. Also, you will find a great many of them focus on antisemitism on the Progressive Left – this is purposeful. Many folks find it easy to see antisemitism on the Far Right, but it gets ignored on the Left, where it is currently quite dangerous. The Left is where many of us in the field, myself included, seem to align, and where I think the most important conversations need to be held. Also, there are many wonderful resources that offer insight into Jewish history, culture, identity, and values that are enriching. Understanding Jews should not be limited to understanding antisemitism. That would be a sadly narrow approach to diversity. I have read far more over the years than my list might suggest, but I offer these as carefully considered starting points:

Jewish Pride: Rebuilding a People by Ben M. Freeman – Ben M. Freeman, like me, is a gay Jew, and proud of being gay and proud of being a Jew. This book is directed towards Jews but non-Jews can still learn a lot here. He found that the lessons learned in becoming proud as gay were relevant to being a proud Jew. From personal experience I agree. In the process he offers a handful of interviews with a diverse group of Jews, highlighting pride in their identities as Jews and also showing that there is a great deal of diversity among Jews, Half of us are not “white” by North American standards, and some of us, like me, are queer. He also notes the importance of Jews defining ourselves and what is and is not antisemitic – in other words: *if you are not a Jew, you do not get to define us or antisemitism.* Period.

Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition by David Nirenberg – This is a heady book and not a quick read. Nirenberg’s thesis is that antisemitism shape shifts over time and across cultures, but the common core is that Jews represent what people in any given time and place find to be evil. Today in North America and Europe, that evil on the Left is seen as genocide, colonialism and white supremacy, and these are attached to Jews without question.

The Genius of Judaism by Bernard-Henri Levy - I don't know if non-Jews will take to this book the way that I did, or even if other Jews will be similarly touched. I do think any Jew who continues to question (can you be a Jew and not question things?) and tries to understand their identity within an overwhelmingly Christian world in the "West," will find an amazing path towards further self-discovery in this book. It begins with a brilliant exploration of the way antisemitism has evolved and expressed itself over millennia (with the current strain being seen most dangerously in anti-Zionism) - one of the most lucid accounts I have seen. Levy also explores through most of his book the prophecy of Jonah, and it is a very rich exploration that includes an awareness of the importance of Levinas' work on encountering the Other. By the end, I was stunned by how validating this book was and how much more clearly I feel I can see myself as a Jew and still a stranger in a strange land. His language soars at times, and I was carried along by it. I also love that he is unapologetically Jewish and captures the beauty of our way of being, whether secular or spiritual. That

goes a long way with me. On an even more personal note – Levy is a true writer, and reading him helped me break through my own writer’s block, allowing me to find confidence in my own voice as a writer and making my most recent book possible about 5 years ago.

How to Fight Antisemitism by Bari Weiss – my husband gave this to me as a Christmas gift (him giving me Jewish books on Christmas is one of our traditions in our interracial and interfaith household). This book has one of the most lucid descriptions of antisemitism as it is found on the far Right, the far Left, and in radical Islam (not all of Islam of course). Explorations of antisemitism in Christianity are easily found elsewhere. Her account of the origin of anti-Zionism as a form of antisemitism in Stalinist Russia (and continued on the Left, in Woke discourse, and in radical Islam which also combines it with Holocaust inversion) is particularly helpful.

The Lions’ Den: Zionism and the Left from Hannah Arendt to Noam Chomsky by Susie Linfield - Linfield is a Yale professor and this book is meticulously researched. She explores how major figures on the Left have become focused on anti-Zionism. It is unflinching and helps to explain how anti-Zionism is actually antisemitism. As I have noted, I have included a number of books exploring Leftist antisemitism because that is where I think it is least understood in today’s conversations and likely most needed (most folks recognize Nazi antisemitism for example).

People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present by Dara Horn – The title is provocative and her premise is powerful. People prefer Jews to be weak and cowering, not strong and able to take care of ourselves. Only when we are dead (like Anne Frank) do many people seem to actually love and admire us as Jews. Of course, the most loved dead Jew is Jesus.

Jews Don’t Count by David Badiel – a British comedian takes on antisemitism in this very readable and powerful little book. One of the most important aspects of antisemitism he gets at is that antisemitism simply does not count for many people as a form of racism, which it is. Many of my British friends get this more readily than friends on this side of the Atlantic.

Strange Hate: Antisemitism, Racism, and the Limits of Diversity by Keith Kahn – this book is a deep dive into antisemitism on the Labour Left in the UK. I have many friends in the UK, most of whom are on the Labour Left. Some of them found it eye opening. Some of them got defensive over this book because anti-racism is a core value on the Labour Left, and antisemitism on the Left would suggest some are not so anti-racist. It is insightful nonetheless, and very on target.

Woke Antisemitism: How a Progressive Ideology Harms Jews by David L. Bernstein – The title really says it. Wokism, a fairly recent expression of the progressive left here in North America, is fuelling the current rise in antisemitism. This book explains how and does so concisely. The foreword is written by Natan Sharansky, which also says a lot about this book – and the foreword is well worth reading because Sharansky, a Jew and former Soviet dissident who was imprisoned in the Gulag for a decade, is always worth reading.

Uncomfortable Conversations with a Jew by Emmanuel Acho and Noa Tishby – I am in the middle of this one but still put it on my list. It comes at the right time and in a highly accessible conversational format. Tishby takes on very fair questions by Acho that many folks are afraid to ask. Acho is brave to ask them. Tishby is open and clear in her responses.

Night by Elie Wiesel – This is a firsthand account of life in the Nazi death camps by a survivor. Wiesel was a brilliant writer, and this work is deeply personal and harrowing. Unfortunately, the original Yiddish version, initially titled And the World Was Silent, was toned down to make it easier for non-Jews to take in. Still, many who read it credit this book as their aha moment with respect to antisemitism and its deadly nature.

The Finkler Question by Howard Jacobson – Yes, a Novel. Jacobson won the Booker for this. It is brilliant. The multifaceted nature of antisemitism is seen through the characters in their daily lives, including the central character, Julian Treslove, who is a non-Jew.

Israel Alone by Bernard-Henri Levy – a headier (but shorter) read than his Genius of the Jews, and also, amazingly, written in the wake of October 7. I can not imagine the strength it took the write this following such a traumatizing event for Jews. Levy is a Jewish French journalist of many decades, who has focused much of his work in the Middle East. Among other things, he has championed the cause of the Kurds and has not shied away from reporting in war torn areas. He is a brave human being on many levels. Levy knows Israel intimately. His exploration of the meaning of October 7 for Israel and for Jews in diaspora like myself in the context of antisemitism is profound and disturbing, including how quickly and easily the pogrom itself has been erased by so many. He addresses the many vehicles of antisemitism we see today, and the many tropes and stereotypes that inhabit the thoughts and actions of so many. His voice across a brief 150 pages is increasingly compelling, and it soars as it did in The Genius of Judaism. Levy helps to make clear why so many of us are shaken and traumatized, and why the world will never be the same for us - there was before October 7, and now there is after. And here we are as Jews, your clients, your colleagues, your friends, and the friends you have not met yet.