

Combatting antisemitism and ensuring that no one faces danger alone

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By: Rabbi Benjamin Goldschmidt

When I was a boy, an armed attack took place at my family's Moscow synagogue. In those early post-Soviet days, my mother wouldn't let me leave the house wearing my yarmulke, fearful I would be the target of slurs, or worse, against "dirty Jews."

As the son of the chief rabbi of Moscow, I personally felt the effect security concerns have on communal life. For centuries, persecution, expulsion, pogroms and mass murder left Jews around the world with the quiet expectation of antisemitism — a sense that hatred was an inevitable part of life. History taught my ancestors that reality meant being enslaved, denied rights and citizenship, and marched to gas chambers.

I was told, though, that it wasn't like that everywhere. That there was a place where all people were free and protected. Where Jews could walk the streets proudly without looking over their shoulders in fear. We all viewed America as the shining city on the hill: a place where Jews lived in peace, prosperity and more importantly — where they lived free from fear.

When I moved to the United States and later [became a rabbi](#) on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, I tasted freedom — but it was fleeting.

For my community, the promise of American liberty shattered along with the [rise of antisemitism](#) over the past few years. Within a week of the gruesome Hamas terrorist attacks of Oct. 7, hostile and angry demonstrators in Times Square celebrated the murder of Israelis and threatened violence against American Jews.

In the months that followed, a congregant was spit at while carrying his prayer shawl on the Upper East Side. A young man was punched at a rally by Hunter College, just two blocks from our synagogue. And young parents had to shut themselves inside with their children when a mob shouted antisemitic threats outside their Park Avenue windows.

Today, freedom from fear is no longer a collective guarantee for every New Yorker. For the Jews of the city, safety from violence and antisemitism has become a personal responsibility born by individuals.

This has led to some difficult decisions. Do we allocate synagogue resources to fund a teen holiday program or hire another security guard to prevent a shooting at services? How much more do you need to charge for Sabbath Dinner in order to cover security? How much of an [antisemitism tax](#) is warranted to be able to attend synagogue?

These are painful questions to answer. My congregation pays for armed guards every Sabbath and invests deeply in keeping our community safe. Most communities have added security fees to their membership dues. But we shouldn't have to. No New Yorker or American should have to purchase their peace of mind or pay for their sense of security.

I thought I'd left the fear and anguish of being a vulnerable Jew in Russia. But as I watch my congregants walking into our synagogue flanked by NYPD officers with guns, I catch my breath, as my mother did, back in Moscow. That scared intake of air is the most un-American sound I know.

But there's more that we can do to help New York City and cities across our country live up to its promise of freedom. We must insist on a reclamation of the values that make us who we are — the preservation of freedom and unity. We must demand policies that will help address antisemitism and protect our communities from hate, like increasing federal [security funding](#) for religious institutions to protect against terror and violence. In 2024, more than half of all requests were left unfunded, leaving the financial burden of safety on individual Jewish communities.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) should also move quickly to bring the [Antisemitism Awareness Act](#) to the Senate floor. Seventeen Jewish [Organizations](#) have urged passage of this legislation, which would clearly and accurately define antisemitism. United States Special Envoy for Monitoring and Combating Antisemitism Deborah Lipstadt [called the definition](#) “one of the most fundamental tools we have to combat” Jew hatred.

As we move forward, I am optimistic. I see people who never once voted in prior elections getting involved. I see people who only previously voted at the top of the ticket learning about candidates for district attorney, state legislature, school board and other local positions. I see a galvanized young generation of Jews who are willing to fight to make sure that we live up to the American promise where we not only survive, but we thrive.

Combatting hatred and ensuring that no one faces danger alone requires the collective spirit of America. When we embrace unity and shared responsibility, we strengthen the very vision of America that I was raised to admire — of liberty, justice and safety for all. Together, let us protect that vision and keep our city on the hill shining bright.

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