Baseless Hatred

Thought for the Day
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This week is the beginning of a period of semi-mourning in the Jewish calendar that recalls the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the exile of the Jewish nation by the Babylonians some two and a half thousand years ago. The exiles were eventually allowed to return and rebuild the Temple – as the New Testament narrative attests! But that too was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70, on the very same date.

The Talmud, which was composed around this time, speaks about the ancient rabbis' fraught relationship with the Roman authorities. One story tells how a petty squabble about a wedding invitation escalated – the aggrieved guest complained to the Romans, the Temple authorities became involved, and ultimately, as the Talmud comments, the Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred.

I was reminded of this when I saw three worrying headlines on the same day: the Scottish Parliament report on the level of Islamophobia especially against Muslim women; the highest ever monthly figures for antisemitic incidents from the Community Security Trust; and the assault on Chris Whitty, the Chief Medical Officer for England.

How did we get here? How did we get to a place where more than three quarters of some communities say they don't feel safe on our streets, where people are abused for doing their jobs, where democratic processes and institutions are attacked by people who don't like the result? We need not just to keep people safe, but to keep them *feeling* safe – and too many people, especially in minority groups, sadly do not.

So perhaps in these virtually full days, when we may not have met a single person outside our 'bubble' for more than a year, we need to remind ourselves more than ever that we are all the 'other' to others, and be alert to the rise of baseless hatred. As Hillel, one of the great rabbis of the Roman era, taught: *Whatever is hateful to you, do not do unto others.*