

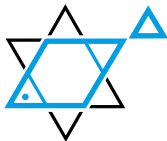
# **Exposing myths – Overcoming prejudices**



Why are antisemitic myths and misconceptions so tenacious?

Why do people still talk disparagingly about Jews although they've never seen or met a Jew?

Why is there still too little talk in Germany about what antisemitism actually is?



## Foreword

Prejudices and stereotypes quickly become established. Whether it is things said about other religions or how we see groups whose customs and traditions are unfamiliar to us. Prejudices about 'the Jews' usually have a very long history; they have become engraved in people's minds in the course of thousands of years. People seldom question them. There is an urgent need for facts.

The aim of this brochure is to help dispel antisemitic myths and misconceptions and sharpen awareness for the spread of antisemitic stereotypes and language in society. It is addressed to young people, teachers, educators and trainers as well as interested adults who wish to confront the everyday open or hidden antisemitism in our society.

**Antisemitism is the overall term for all kinds of anti-Jewish feeling or behaviour (dislike, rejection, condemnation, hatred and persecution)**

## Jesus and the Jews

## “The Jews killed Jesus”

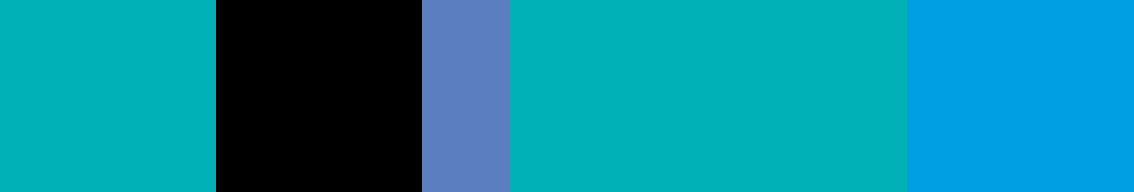


This allegation is historically incorrect. Nevertheless it is familiar to almost everyone. It has put a strain on the relationship between Christians and Jews for centuries. The historical fact is that, although Jewish elders and members of the Jewish council were involved in the trial against Jesus, and a “crowd” is said to have applauded, Jesus was crucified under the Roman governor Pontius Pilate according to Roman law. Therefore it is an historical and theologically untenable simplification and falsification to hold “the Jews” responsible for the death of Jesus.

Nevertheless Christian theologians – with reference to parts of the New Testament – have repeatedly claimed that the Jewish people were to blame for the crucifixion of Jesus and even that this guilt is passed down to future generations.

**Circumcision** of boys, removal of the foreskin, is practised in many cultures and religions. In the USA, for example, most newborn boys (irrespective of their religion) are circumcised soon after birth for reasons of medical hygiene. In Islam there are various traditions as to when boys are circumcised, usually by the age of 13. In Judaism circumcision (brit mila) is traditionally performed on the 8th day after birth. If the child is too weak or sick it is postponed until the boy is healthy again.



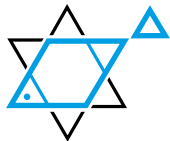


Circumcision has a long tradition in Judaism. It has been practised at least since the Babylonian exile (6th century before the Christian era) and is regarded as a sign of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants. In the bible we read, "God further said to Abraham, 'As for you, you and your offspring to come throughout the ages shall keep My covenant. Such shall be the covenant between Me and you and your offspring to follow which you shall keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. And throughout the generations, every male among you shall be circumcised at the age of eight days.'" (Genesis 17, 9-12). Therefore circumcision in the Jewish tradition is an important identity marker and a sign of belonging to the Jewish people and to God. It is performed by a religiously and medically trained specialist known as a mohel.

Circumcision of boys for religious reasons was not regulated by law in Germany until 2012. In 2012 there was public debate lasting months following a ruling by the Cologne regional court that circumcision of boys for religious reasons constituted bodily harm, a criminal act subject to prosecution. However, performed correctly circumcision has no effect on physical or sexual functions and is thus clearly different from the mutilating circumcision of girls. The German Bundestag therefore decided in 2012 that circumcision of boys for religious reasons would continue to be permitted provided that certain medical standards were adhered to (see Art 1631d of the German Civil Code).



“An eye for an eye – a tooth for a tooth” – scarcely any bible citation is even today so wrongly interpreted as this teaching from the book of Leviticus (24/20).





**"An eye for an eye – a tooth for a tooth"** is often quoted to claim an alleged Jewish principle of "revenge and unforgivingness" in the figure of a vengeful Old-Testament God and to contrast this with the principle of Christian charity embodied by Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

However, the statement has nothing to do with revenge. If it is read in context it becomes clear that it is about compensation for the injured party, a directive that reparation should be appropriate to the deed and the possibilities of the perpetrator but should never go beyond the damage inflicted. The only case where this rule does not apply is premeditated murder. The bible verse is therefore actually evidence of a great cultural achievement: the containment of violence, punishment and retaliation. In modern legal terms we would call this a prohibition of disproportionate measures.





Today the phrase sometimes comes up in connection with the Holocaust. Notwithstanding the mass murder of the Jews under National Socialist rule in Europe and all the terrible things done to the Jews in the Third Reich, the Jews themselves are accused of being vengeance-seeking persecutors who do not want to let go of the past, while the Germans want to just carry on living “normally”. The conclusion that the Jews are thus themselves to blame for the perpetuation of antisemitism is a perversion and reversal of the victim-perpetrator relationship.

In the media and in politics “an eye for an eye – a tooth for a tooth” is also often quoted wrongly as evidence of a call for vengeance and retaliation, particularly in connection with the actions of the Israeli state in response to Palestinian terror attacks. Here it is important to say that modern states act according to their secular national interests. The idea that Israeli politics are governed by ancient biblical principles is absurd.

Jewish religious slaughter or **shechita**, also called ritual slaughter, is a method of slaughter in which a specially trained person cuts through the carotid artery and the windpipe with a single incision using a very sharp knife. The animal is then suspended head-down so that all the blood drains out. This type of slaughter is based on a biblical command which forbids Jews to consume blood (Leviticus 17, 1 ff) because blood means life.

Criticism of ritual slaughter can easily acquire anti-Jewish undertones. Campaigns against this form of slaughter, although often motivated by concerns for animal welfare, tend to become ideological and aggressive and then latently or even openly antisemitic. Antisemitic polemics have been fuelled since time immemorial by criticism of ritual slaughter accusing the Jews collectively of cruelty to animals. However, in fact the opposite is true. Cherishing humans and animals as creatures of God, and life as a gift of God, are values that are deeply rooted in the Jewish religion and tradition.






## The myth of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy

A particularly widespread myth claiming the existence of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy is the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion'. The text, which appeared around 1898 – there were various precursors – is a propaganda pamphlet which was commissioned by the czarist secret police of Russia. It contains fabricated conversations between alleged Jewish conspirators which were purported to have taken place on the Jewish cemetery in Prague. The 'Protocols' were intended as proof that 'the Jews' were secretly plotting a scheme for world domination under 'a king from the house of Zion'. However, the conspiracy purportedly documented in the Protocols did not exist, nor were there any other secret Jewish conspiracies of the alleged kind.

In the German-speaking world the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' were disseminated widely in völkisch-nationalist<sup>1</sup> circles from July 1919 onwards. The ninth edition was published in 1929 by the Nazi party's publishing house, which had bought the rights and made the text into a document of National Socialist propaganda against the Jews. After the seizure of power by the National Socialists the Protocols of the Elders of Zion were designated official teaching material in schools (decree of the Reich Minister of Science, Education and National Culture of 13.10.1934).

<sup>1</sup>The Völkisch movement was a German ethno-nationalist movement active from the 1900s onwards through the Nazi era



The rapid spread of the conspiracy fantasies could not be halted either by detailed analyses exposing the Protocols as a forgery (e.g. The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Critically Illuminated [Berlin 1924] by the German-Jewish journalist Benjamin Segel), or by the well-substantiated ruling of a Swiss court which declared in 1935 that the Protocols were “obvious forgeries”, “libellous” and “ridiculous nonsense”. In 1921 the London Times presented conclusive proof that the Protocols were a “clumsy plagiarism” and in 1964 the US Senate issued a report declaring that the Protocols were “fabricated”. Nevertheless, even today the Protocols are still circulated worldwide via the internet so that we can speak of an antisemitic conspiracy fantasy. In Germany the legend is perpetuated in extreme right wing, nationalist, racist and Islamist circles and more recently in Islamist propaganda against Israel.

Since the terror attacks on the New York World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 new antisemitic conspiracy theories have arisen. Via the internet the rumour was spread that the attack was carried out by the Israeli secret service. It was also alleged that there were no Jews amongst the victims, an allegation which was immediately shown to be false on the basis of the list of those who died.

## Modern conspiracy theories

Nevertheless the fantasy of a Jewish conspiracy to control the world is surfacing again – not infrequently still with reference to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. For example, it was alleged that “Jewish advisers” drove President George W. Bush into the Iraq war – just as the Jews are repeatedly held responsible for negative developments or for events which strike fear into a lot of people.



**“Jews are greedy and avaricious.”**  
**“Jews control the international financial markets.”**



This antisemitic prejudice has its historic roots in the fact that for centuries – from the Middle ages into the 19th century – the Jews were barred from all trades and professions and were not allowed to purchase land. The only thing left for them to make a living from was commerce, particularly moneylending, an occupation which was despised but willingly used by Christians. This, combined with resentment and jealousy, led to the collective defamation of Jews as money-hungry usurers. In addition, as a result of a total lack of understanding of the transnational connections of the financial markets, this led to the stereotype accusation that the Jews control world banking. This socio-economic antisemitism appeared mainly in times of economic crisis and continues to do so today.

In such times the Jews are accused of being responsible for inflation or depression or general economic mismanagement, for collective or personal hardship, for poverty and unemployment. Stereotypes such as “Jewish financial capital”, “Jewish capitalists” or “Jewish economic imperialism” then abound. Everyday accusations that one might hear are that Jews “have too much influence”, “can’t get enough” or “make money whenever and wherever they can”.



Such defamatory and jealous slander was common in the early 1950s when the Federal Republic of Germany was negotiating with the State of Israel about financial compensation for the murderous injustice of the Holocaust ('reparations'). Today it surfaces again when Jewish heirs demand the restitution of their property –real estate or works of art, for example – stolen or dispossessed during the Third Reich. The Jews are then collectively accused of exploiting the memory of the Holocaust for their financial gain; the malicious expression used is that of 'Holocaust profiteers', even though they are only trying to get back their own property. It is currently the most vile variant of the thousand-year-old stereotype of the greedy, money-grabbing Jew.



## The Auschwitz lie – Holocaust denial

Auschwitz (Polish Oświęcim) is a small town in Poland, not far from Kraków. Here the Nazis, under the command of the Reichsführer of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, set up a huge concentration camp, first as a labour camp ("Main Camp") which was then extended by addition of an extermination camp in Birkenau (Brzezinka). By the time of its liberation on 27.01.1945 the camp had become the biggest extermination camp of the Third Reich. Thus 'Auschwitz' came to be a symbol of the Shoah, the mass murder of six million Jews in the Third Reich.

The expression 'Auschwitz lie' stands for the denial that this genocide of the Jews took place. People who propagate this holocaust denial are generally called 'holocaust revisionists'. A revisionist in this sense is a person who tries to use pseudo-scientific proof to deny that the National Socialist liquidation of the Jews and particularly the murder apparatus of Auschwitz ever existed. They do this by ignoring and deliberately falsely interpreting historical documents, testimonies by witnesses and survivors, and the results of historical research.



The holocaust deniers dispute the singularity of the NS mass murder of the Jews as well as the sheer number of victims: in the large extermination camps Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka and Majdanek almost three million Jews were murdered. Another 2.5 million Jews died in ghettos and concentration camps. Around 535,000 Jews died at the hands of the Einsatzgruppen (Nazi killing units) of the SS.


**Since 1985 denial of the mass murder of the Jews has been punishable in Germany as defamation of the victims under the “Law against the Auschwitz Lie”. Since 1994 denial of the holocaust has been punishable as incitement to hatred and violence against a segment of the population (Art. 130 of the German Criminal Code).**



## Reparation

The German word for reparation is 'Wiedergutmachung' which literally means 'making good again'. The term is now generally avoided because of the recognition that no form of compensation can undo the suffering of the Nazi victims. Since 1945 the Jews have been accused of profiting from the Holocaust and demanding inordinately large sums of money as compensation. Here we see the cynical combination of a refusal to accept guilt with the trope of the "money-grabbing" and "secretly influential Jew" using his financial and media power to exert political influence particularly on the USA but also on Europe. This often comes together with a call to finally draw a line under the past. People have understandably become confused as to what this so-called 'Wiedergutmachung' is really about. It is in fact about the restitution of property and assets where this was possible and, far more importantly, about compensation for those who suffered racial, religious and political persecution under Nazi rule in Europe.





For this purpose the Federal Republic on the one hand signed collective compensation agreements with affected countries, awarding each a fixed sum for distribution to nationals of the respective countries who had suffered persecution. The first of these agreements was drawn up in 1952 and specified payment of 3.5 billion DM to the Jewish people, represented by Israel and the Jewish Claims Conference (as representative of the Jews not living in Israel). Similar collective agreements with European countries whose citizens had suffered under Nazi rule followed. On the other hand the Federal Compensation Law also provided the basis for compensation to individuals. However, insensitive processing and time-consuming expert's reports meant that such claims were often an arduous and unpleasant procedure which usually ended in the payment of modest and inappropriate amounts of compensation. These were in no way commensurate with the value of the stolen property and assets or with the physical and mental suffering endured. The compensation for a month in a concentration camp, for example, was DM 150. Pensions awarded for permanent health damage were extremely small.

**Reparation  
is the attempt to  
make up for a wrong  
by removal or mitigation  
of its consequences  
through restitution  
or compensation.**



## Criticism of Israel

It is legitimate to criticise the politics of the Israeli government towards the Palestinians. There should be no question about that; such criticism is also voiced by the Israeli population. But when such criticism is mixed with traditional prejudices against “the Jews” it becomes clear that this is antisemitism masquerading as criticism of Israel. A typical example is when a comparison is drawn between Nazis and Israelis by equating current Israeli politics towards the Palestinians with the Nazi politics of extermination of the Jews; this challenges the right of the State of Israel to exist.

Criticism of Israel should follow the same criteria as criticism of other states; the security needs of the State of Israel should also be taken into account. Equating Zionism and racism oversteps the boundary of legitimate criticism. The same goes for the comparison of Zionism and colonialism which denies the right of Jews to a state of their own.

Finally it is antisemitic to hold every Jew responsible for the politics of the Israeli government, especially as a Jew is not automatically also an Israeli citizen.



## Jewish life today



### Jewish life in Germany is diverse and alive again

Since the end of the 1980s a large Jewish community has become established in Germany again, thanks particularly to the immigration of Jews and their numerous non-Jewish family members from the former Soviet Union, most of whom live in North Rhine-Westphalia. This unique opportunity for ensuring the survival of the Jewish congregations and the Jewish community as a whole was also a result of the particularly good and close relationships between Jewish leaders and politicians of various parties.

On the occasion of the inauguration of the new synagogue in Recklinghausen in 1997 the then Prime Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia Johannes Rau, who went on to be German President, quoted Salomon Korn's words: "A person who builds a house intends to stay". At the opening ceremony for the synagogue in Gelsenkirchen in 2007, Jürgen Rüttgers, the then Prime Minister of North Rhine Westphalia, went further and said: "A person who builds a synagogue also wants his children and grandchildren to stay." But they want more than this. They want to give life a direction, convey values, live and pass on a culture. This is import-



ant for cohesion in a pluralistic democratic society. It is precisely this challenge which some 22 Jewish congregations in NRW and more than 100 congregations in the whole of Germany are taking up.

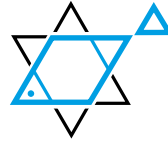
No expression describes the achievements of these congregations better than “from the cradle to the grave” – they cater for the religious, social and cultural needs of their members, from childhood to old age. As a result of this welcome growth, many congregations have opened new kindergartens, in particular, and expanded already existing facilities. For example, at the time of writing (2018) the Jewish kindergarten in Düsseldorf is currently the largest institution of its kind in the city. Jewish primary schools have also successfully gone into operation, and the Albert-Einstein-Gymnasium in Düsseldorf, which opened at the beginning of the school year 2016/2017, was the first secondary school to be established by a Jewish community in the history of North Rhine-Westphalia.





The state supported integration bureaus, which have been in operation for several years, not only look after members of the Jewish communities but also counsel other citizens well as refugees in matters related to integration. Their tasks and the associated challenges regarding manpower, infrastructure and financing are growing as a result of new services offered to young people and families, social services for older members (for example sheltered housing, old people's homes, dealing with dementia, inclusion of people with disabilities) and services in matters related to education and religious practice.

The state of repair of synagogues and community centres makes extensions and renovation work necessary. Many of the synagogues and community centres were built in the post-war years – and originally for far fewer community members. According to statistics of the British military authorities, in 1946 there were 2994 Jews living in the territory of what is today North Rhine-Westphalia, including 53 children under the age of 16. Many Jewish



cemeteries are now full – in Judaism graves are for eternity – which inevitably necessitates the purchase of new cemetery land and the creation of the necessary infrastructure such as prayer halls and mortuaries.

On account of the demographic structure of the communities there are two groups which require major input: old people and youth. Among the latter, there is increasing emphasis on promoting future leaders and attractive programmes for adolescents and young adults – after all, they are the future of a stable and innovative Jewish community in Germany. In addition, the communities are pressing ahead with professionalization of their work, but the existing broad volunteer base remains an indispensable pillar in the Jewish communities and their daily work.

**The present and the future of the Jewish communities in this country are undoubtedly at once both an opportunity and a challenge.**



## Islam and Judaism





There are no general anti-Jewish teachings in Islam. However, its holy book, the Quran, does contain passages expressing hostility toward Jews and Jewish tribes which the Prophet Mohammed himself regarded as a threat to his young community. This tradition of early political-religious self-assertion and the political emancipation from excessive "Western" influence in the 20th century have recently led to the rise of radical political and dictatorial Islamic doctrines. The proponents of these doctrines regard all those, including Muslims, as enemies who do not accept their fundamentalist convictions as the basis for the only true and valid world order. They accuse them aggressively of blasphemy and claim the right to kill these "blasphemers" – particularly Jews, Christians and Muslims of different persuasions – in a holy war (Jihad).

However, this Islamism stands in contradiction to the fundamental teaching of Islam, according to which Allah alone is the judge of human beings and in which Allah is addressed in the obligatory prayers as "the Most Merciful", "the Most Compassionate". Therefore, killing people who follow other religions or political-social convictions "in the name of Allah" would appear itself to be a blasphemous presumption.

## Closing words





**Resist  
indiscriminate  
prejudices like  
“The Jews have...”  
“The Jews are...”**

The hallmark of a prejudice or stereotype is that all members of a group – a religion, a people, a sex, an age group – are collectively defamed. A person who makes such careless statements does not try to form an impartial and reasoned judgement. He or she is more interested in a rapid condemnation. But a verbal condemnation can easily turn into physical action – even into murder and killing. Intolerance, antisemitism and xenophobia destroy our social fabric and our democracy.

**Ask insistently about where such prejudices and stereotypes come from:**

- “How do you know that Jews are money-grabbing?”
- “Have you ever met a Jew and spoken to him or her?”
- If you hear vague clichés or sweeping allegations, even those reported by hearsay, ask for concrete details:  
“When? Where? Who? Were you there?”



**Contradict loudly and audibly when you hear clichés and prejudices! Show moral courage.**

- In discussions with know-it-alls and ideologists you need good and solid information to expose their prejudices; get this information.
- Don't be discouraged if you encounter opinionated people you can't convince even with the best of arguments. It's better to concentrate on people who are undecided and who you are more likely to reach and convince with your commitment and your arguments.
- Get together with like-minded citizens and democrats in societies, groups, action groups/citizens' initiatives or political parties. There's strength in numbers.
- Speak out against any antisemitism in web forums; demand the removal of antisemitic pages and antisemitic agitation.



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[www.linguistik.tu-berlin.de/fileadmin/fg72/Antisemitismus\\_2-0\\_Lang.pdf](http://www.linguistik.tu-berlin.de/fileadmin/fg72/Antisemitismus_2-0_Lang.pdf)

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