

“Jewish Space Lasers:” No Laughing Matter

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Rabbi Barry H. Block

“Where do I sign up for **my** space laser?” Ever since news reports emerged that Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene had suggested that lasers, controlled by wealthy Jews, had caused California wildfires, people have made light of the accusation. That’s understandable. The allegation is absurd. Also, throughout our history, Jews have utilized humor as a survival technique even in times of the gravest persecution.

Jeremy Dauber, author of *Jewish Comedy: A Serious History*, tells this one:

“An anti-Semitic king threatens the Jews of his kingdom with persecution and expulsion. The Jewish community sends their leader...to meet with the king and plead their case. The rabbi...stands before the king...and says to him, ..., ‘Your Highness, I can’t help but notice the magnificent monkey perched next to you.’

“The king...nods.

“‘I assume it talks,’ the rabbi continued.

“The king’s brow clouds. ‘Are you attempting to mock me, Jew? ...Monkeys do not talk.’

“‘I beg to differ, Your Highness. Many of them do not, but they can. If they have the right teacher.’ ...

“The king stared. ‘Do you mean to tell me that you, a simple rabbi, can accomplish a feat beyond the imaginings of the wisest of my councilors?’

“The rabbi shrugged, modestly. ‘All I ask is the chance to please Your Majesty—and, of course, to help my people.’

“The king considered. ‘All right,’ he said, at last. ‘Let us make an arrangement. If you can teach the monkey to speak, your community will be welcome in my kingdom for as long as my reign shall last. If you cannot, however, not only will you be banished, but your property will be forfeit as well.’

“The rabbi bowed, accepting the terms. ‘However, there is one minor matter,’ he said. ‘It is hardly feasible to accomplish something this noteworthy immediately. It usually takes me approximately five years.’

“‘Very well, very well,’ the king grumbled. ‘We shall meet, in this room, five years from today. And for your sake—and for your people’s—I hope to see results.’

“The rabbi bowed once more, and left the room. His fellow sages...turned to him. ‘Have you gone mad? You know very well you’ve promised something impossible!’

“The rabbi turned to them and smiled. ‘I know. But a lot can happen in five years. The king could die. The **monkey** could die. And who knows? Maybe it’ll even learn to talk.’”ⁱ

Dauber explains: “The joke...has a lot to say about Jewish life in...the diaspora over the centuries. Constantly fraught, balanced on a knife’s edge, with the possibility of sudden persecution...always hovering in the air. What options are there? In a traditional mindset..., maybe the allegorical prospect of a talking monkey seems like an act of faith, of trust in God’s providence. But for those who believe that the Redemption may not come any time soon—or fear, at least, that it won’t come soon enough—then the first part of the punchline resonates, too. The Jews wait, and in waiting, live and survive. By their wits, as it turns out; the one advantage they have in their disempowered state.”ⁱⁱ

So yes, Jewish humor is a great legacy. Some, like Dauber, even argue that humor has saved us from cruel potential fates.

In America, though, we are faced with no expulsion or mass persecution. Jews have experienced unprecedented freedom and prosperity in here. Our new Secretary of State is Jewish, as was the Secretary of the Treasury in the last administration. At such a time, humor is far from the strongest or most appropriate arrow in our quiver when confronted with antisemitism.

And confronted we are, from the extreme right and the extreme left. Antisemitism in 21st century America includes Charlottesville tiki-torch bearers chanting “Jews will not replace us,” as it does Congresswoman Ilhan Omar’s tweet that congressional support for Israel is “all about the Benjamins, baby.”ⁱⁱⁱ Antisemitism on the extreme right turned deadly in the Tree of Life massacre in 2018 in Pittsburgh, and we cannot assume that its left-wing incarnation will remain confined to twitter.

In the United States, Jewish community leaders are in positions to speak boldly, and with effect, when antisemitism erupts. When Congresswoman Omar issued her offensive tweet two years ago this week, the *Washington Post* reported: “House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the entire Democratic leadership on Monday

condemned Rep. Ilhan Omar for suggesting that Israel's allies in American politics were motivated by money rather than principle, an extraordinary rebuke of a House freshman in the vanguard of the party's left flank."^{iv} Jews of course, are among House leaders in both parties, and Jewish voices helped to bring about that response. Though many still argue that the response was insufficient, Congresswoman Omar said, "I unequivocally apologize."^v

So now we turn to Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene and "Jewish space lasers." Unlike much of her social media wrongdoing, "space lasers" was not merely a case of "liking" or retweeting somebody else's post. In the wake of the "horrific" 2018 California Camp Fire, which killed 85 people, Greene wrote in her own Facebook post that "there are too many coincidences to ignore," and continued that she was writing based on "some research I've done." Her claim is convoluted, but she suggests nefarious deeds by "Roger Kimmel[, who is] on the board of ...PG&E [and] is also Vice Chairman of Rothschild Inc, international investment banking firm." Somehow, together with Richard Blum, husband of Sen. Dianne Feinstein, Kimmel is supposed to have engineered PG&E to "launch into space...solar generators [to] collect the suns [sic] energy and then beam it back to Earth to a transmitter to convert to electricity." She goes on to suggest that the beam "missed," causing the devastating forest fire and enriching "whoever was able to buy that PG&E stock at the bottom before the announcement was made when stock rallied," presumably these Jewish investors, who supposedly care more about profit than human life, control the beams from space.^{vi}

Yes, Greene's conspiracy theory is ridiculous. It would be laughable if it were not so dangerous. *Vox* explains that Greene's is "the latest in a long line of conspiracies about the Rothschild family, and those conspiracies are always, at root, anti-Semitic: Since the 19th century, people have used claims that this one particular wealthy family controls the world to cast aspersions on Jews in general."^{vii} I need not tell you that, in the past, these conspiracy theories have been deadly for our people.

In the Torah this week, we learn of the relatively light punishment meted out to the owner of an ox that gores another ox to death.^{viii} Then, however, Torah goes on to prescribe a much harsher penalty if "it is known that the ox was in the habit of goring."^{ix} We know that conspiracy theories, such as the one propagated by Rep. Greene, are deadly. The congresswoman and her calumnies are like oxen in the habit of goring. They must be stopped.

Jewish Americans in high places, including the Republican Jewish Coalition, spoke out strongly in opposition to Rep. Greene.^x Congress stripped her of power by removing her from committees, though none of our Arkansas representatives

supported that penalty. Notably, Rep. Greene renounced some of her wrongdoing on social media but did not apologize.^{xi}

An oft-shared meme on Facebook exclaims, “marked safe from Jewish space lasers.” Indeed, that’s true: Nobody is endangered by Jewish-controlled beams from outer space. However, given our history, as recent as 2018, we cannot claim to be safe from the extremist conspiracy theories. “Jewish space lasers” is therefore no laughing matter. Instead, like generations before us, let us pray that, with God’s guidance, good people will join us in denouncing antisemitic conspiracy theories. Let us pray that, alongside security measures that we have taken since the Pittsburgh massacre, God’s shelter of peace will keep us safe.

Amen.

ⁱ Jeremy Dauber, “Jewish Comedy as a Means of Survival,” Jewish Book Council, October 30, 2017. Emphasis Dauber’s. [Jewish Comedy as a Means of Survival | Jewish Book Council](#).

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Amir Tibon, “Ilhan Omar Tweets that U.S. Politicians’ Support for Israel is ‘All About the Benjamins,’” *Ha-Aretz*, February 11, 2019, [Ilhan Omar tweets that U.S. politicians' support for Israel is 'all about the Benjamins' - U.S. News - Haaretz.com](#).

^{iv} Mike DeBonis and Rachael Bade, “Rep. Omar apologizes after House Democratic leadership condemns her comments as ‘anti-Semitic tropes,’” *Washington Post*, February 11, 2018, [Democratic Rep. Ilhan Omar apologizes over anti-Semitic comments, 'It's all about the Benjamins' - The Washington Post](#).

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Eric Hananoki, “Marjorie Taylor Greene penned conspiracy theory that a laser beam from space started deadly 2018 California wildfire,” *Media Matters*, January 28, 2021, [Marjorie Taylor Greene penned conspiracy theory that a laser beam from space started deadly 2018 California wildfire | Media Matters for America](#).

^{vii} Zack Beauchamp, “Marjorie Taylor Greene’s space laser and the age-old problem of blaming the Jews,” *Vox*, January 30, 2021, [Marjorie Taylor Greene’s space laser and the age-old problem of blaming the Jews - Vox](#).

^{viii} Exodus 21:35.

^{ix} Exodus 21:36.

^x “RJC Statement on Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene,” January 29, 2021, [RJC Statement on Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene - Republican Jewish Coalition \(rjchq.org\)](#).

^{xi} Billy House, “Greene Walks Back Pro-QAnon Remarks Before House Vote,” *Bloomberg*, February 4, 2021, [Marjorie Taylor Greene Walks Back Some QAnon, 9/11, School Shooting Comments - Bloomberg](#).