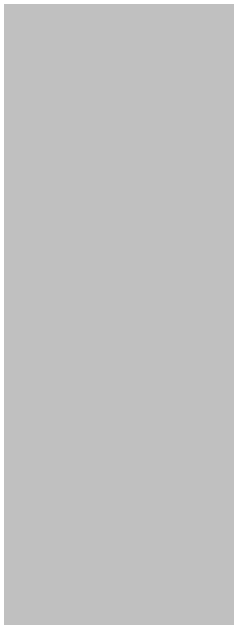


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## February 2003

The following excerpts from the **Lamp** are available for your review:

[Rabbi's Desk](#)

[Cantor's Notes](#)

[Back to top](#)

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### From the Desk of Rabbi David E. Fass Ed Koch Bloomberg Radio Commentary December 7, 2002

[Although I don't necessarily agree with every single word of this piece by former NYC mayor Ed Koch, I find it a valuable and thought provoking message. I wanted to share it with all of you, just as a number of people were kind enough to share it with me.]

We are now going through the most virulent anti-Semitic period since Hitler and Stalin. Nearly 60 years after the end of World War II almost every country on the European continent, including England, France, Germany, Holland, Belgium and the Scandinavian countries, has seen major outbreaks of physical violence against their Jewish citizens, and against Jewish institutions, including synagogues and cemeteries. At the same time, open hostility toward the State of Israel is at an all-time high.

Only in the United States have we seen a full acceptance of Jews as citizens and the Jewish state treated as a friend and ally by an overwhelming number of fellow citizens. In the U.S., Jews have been permitted to rise and fall based on their individual talents, virtues and faults. In one elite bastion after another, Jews have been selected to head institutions heretofore seen as beyond their reach. Today the presidents of Harvard and Yale Universities are Jews, as are recent former presidents of Columbia and Princeton. Having been elected three times as mayor of the City of New York, I have been the beneficiary of this country's generosity and freedom from bigotry, and I will be eternally grateful.

Americans traditionally make New Year's resolutions. Before I list my own resolutions, I want to thank President George W. Bush and his advisers, Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice for their support of the State of Israel. They could

easily have jettisoned Israel as a liability in their efforts to forge an international coalition against worldwide terrorism. I will be forever grateful to them, and I hope that many other supporters of the State of Israel will recognize and appreciate what they have done.

Fortunately for Jews and the State of Israel, American support of the Jewish nation has been bipartisan. Particularly helpful has been the Democratic leadership in both houses including Senator Tom Daschle, outgoing Minority Leader Dick Gephardt, as well as former President Bill Clinton and Senator Hillary Clinton. There are many others on both sides of the political aisle who deserve similar praise.

In the religious sector, I am grateful to the Reverends Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, both of whom have stood up time and again in support and defense of the Jewish nation. Regrettably, there have been many clergy who have unfairly attacked Israel for attempting to defend itself against near-daily terrorist acts against its citizens. We were made privy to the true thoughts of Rev. Billy Graham caught on tape telling President Nixon his real feelings about Jews and Israel. He has since apologized, but what is an apology without contrition and efforts to right the wrong done? Worthless.

Now to my personal New Year's resolutions. I will avoid France as a place to vacation. France leads those countries in the Security Council who are the enemies of the State of Israel. So too is Mexico, joining as a consistent supporter of resolutions unfairly denouncing Israel at the U.N. Security Council.

I will not support National Public Radio in any way. NPR's reporters and management delight in unfairly attacking Israel.

I will no longer lend financial support to New York's Channel Thirteen public television station. That station recently showed a documentary that was blatantly biased against Israel and has refused to acknowledge the bias or to try to correct it.

I will not watch ABC's World News Tonight anchored by Peter Jennings. For many years, Jennings has specialized in vicious and unfair portrayals of Israel intended to injure the Jewish state and lionize Palestinians.

BBC News is horrifically anti-Israel and I will shun it completely.

Susan Sontag will occupy the Ninth Circle of Hell for her outrageous assaults on Israel. I will no longer read her works.

[Back to top](#)

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## **Cantor's Notes**

I am writing this article right after returning from my trip to Israel. As you know, I lived in Israel for many years and since then have visited many times. However, I never felt so wanted there as I did this time. Israel needs us. It needs us badly. I spent most of my time in Jerusalem, which I found even more beautiful than ever. But it was heartbreaking to see many Judaica stores in the center and in the Old City closed. They went out of business because we were not there; and we have not been there for a long time.

When we (my wife Lena, Ziv and I) went to some of the stores that are still open the owners, almost with tears in their eyes, told us that we were the first clients for the entire day. Later on in our trip we started to meet groups of American teenagers brought to Israel by Birthright (an organization that brings Jewish teenagers from the USA and other countries for free for the first time in their lives). The majority of these kids were from the modern Orthodox Congregations.

For a short time the Old City even looked like it used to several years ago: crowded and

happy. I had a conversation with a leader of one of these groups. He told me that when he and his group buy food or Judaic items they try to pay more. They pay for themselves and for the virtual tourist that did not come this year. It is not a secret that Israel's tourism depends mostly on American Jewish tourists. It was interesting to observe that there were quite a few groups of Christian pilgrims who came to celebrate Christmas in Jerusalem. But Israel needs us! By no means do I want to blame those of us who have chosen not to go to Israel now. It is totally understandable since the TV news does not encourage and inspire travel to Israel. But it is not as bad as it looks in the media. You just have to know where to go and where not to. Stores, restaurants, and shopping malls are very well guarded by security personnel. What one has to avoid are crowded areas where you cannot see who is around you. Tel Aviv's old bus station, public transportation, discos and of course settlements in the West Bank where recent attacks took place would not be the places that you would attend. What I want to say is that if you were planning to go to Israel for the past two years, but you were afraid to go, please think twice before you cancel your trip. It is OK to go to Israel now and if you do go you will definitely enjoy it.

Judaica stores are just a sample of what condition the Israeli economy is in. It has been hit tremendously. All people in Israel have felt the impact of this change. Please, do not abandon Israel. Find your way to help it.

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<a href="#">Home</a>	<a href="#">Contacts</a>	<a href="#">Newsletter</a>	<a href="#">Calendar</a>	<a href="#">Rabbi</a>	<a href="#">President</a>	<a href="#">Brotherhood</a>
<a href="#">School</a>	<a href="#">Nursery</a>	<a href="#">Lamp Archives</a>	<a href="#">Simply Simchas</a>	<a href="#">Cantor</a>	<a href="#">Jewish Links</a>	<a href="#">Sisterhood</a>
<a href="#">Youth</a>		<a href="#">Bereavement</a>	<a href="#">Recovery</a>	<a href="#">Sponsors</a>	<a href="#">ChaiSociety</a>	<a href="#">Membership</a>
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