

Israel: If Only They Knew

*Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt
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Fueled by a media that more often than not portrays Israel in a negative light, efforts to delegitimize the state of Israel occur regularly in the halls of the United Nations, as evidenced by this past week's proceedings.

Humorist Jake Novak speculated what news headlines would be like if reporters covered other news stories and events the same way that Israel is presented in most newspapers.

The article about the World Cup Match would read – HARMLESS SOOCER BALL BOOTED MERCILESSLY

JEWISH BAGEL MERCHANTS CHARGE FULL PRICE FOR BREAD WITH HOLES

DEFENSELESS GAS STATION SIGN ADJUSTERS EXHAUSTED BY FREQUENT PRICE HIKES

“PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN” BRUTALLY OCCUPIES TOP SPOT AT THE BOX OFFICE.

FAMILY OF CONVICTED SERIAL KILLER MISSES HIM; DEMANDS HIS RELEASE

SANTA CLAUS RUDELY TURNED AWAY FROM JEWISH HOMES ON CHRISTMAS

AIRPLANE HIJACKERS PROVOKED BY LEGITIMATE COMPLAINT OF INSUFFICIENT LEGROOM

ROBERT DOWNEY JR ARREST SPELLS DISASTER FOR HARD-WORKING COCAINE FARMERS

The constant demonization of Israel, portraying it as an aggressor or occupier, and as the source of all the ills in the Middle East and world, inevitably distorts and affects people's perceptions despite the truth and justness of its cause.

Academics and academic institutions are not immune to the influence of Israel hate mongers. In fact, they are the locale and source of much of the activity most damaging to Israel. Two professors, John Mearsheimer, a political scientist at the University of Chicago, and Stephen Walt of the Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University, caused a stir in March of this year when they came out with an article entitled, “The Israel Lobby.” Their thesis is that a small cabal determines American foreign policy on the basis of what is good for Israel. Seeking to undermine the right of

Jewish supporters of Israel to lobby on behalf of the Jewish state, they blur the distinction between a lobby and a conspiracy. As a result, they contend that American security is held hostage to the interests of Israel. Despite their protestations to the contrary, their drivel can be summed up as saying that Jews control what happens in the world.

Although these scholars object when they are called anti-semitic, the concept is not new. It first appeared in print a century ago in an infamous forgery called, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." Speaking at a conference sponsored by an anti-Israel group, they try to inoculate themselves to any criticism of their thesis by claiming that criticism of Israel is not tolerated. What they really are doing is intimidating anyone who criticizes their work by saying that they are unfairly being silenced by those who unfairly label them as anti-semitic.

I, for one, fail to see the distinction and have never bought into the notion that people can hide behind the cloak of claiming they are not anti-semitic, merely anti-Zionist, or critics of Israel. I will recognize that they are not anti-semitic when these well intentioned people, who are so concerned about injustice against Arabs, express the same outrage over conditions and repression in the Arab and Muslim dictatorships as they do over any and every Israeli infraction. Millions more Arabs are oppressed and wronged every single day by the 21 Arab regimes than Israel could ever possibly be in contact with.

Hiding behind the guise of free speech they mask the true agenda of the anti-Israel lobby. If it were only these two guys, prestigious as the institutions they are associated with may be, that would be worrisome enough. But regrettably they are not alone.

In June, members of an academic association in England voted to encourage a boycott of Israeli universities and faculty. In certain respects, the mood on college campuses should not be so surprising. I recently read an interesting article about the widespread support enjoyed by most of the dictators of the 20th century -- Castro, Nasser, Stalin and Mao Tse Tung, even Hitler and Mussolini -- among college professors. Sadly, were Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Hassan Nasrallah or Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to appear on a college campus, (assuming Olmert would get the invite), who do you think would be met with protests and demonstrations and who would be welcomed and cheered.

Even more troubling, though, is the participation of Jews in the Israel-bashing festivities.

A Canadian professor lodged a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Commission alleging that York University discriminates against non-Jewish students because it cancels classes on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The same professor has also distributed fliers attacking the pro-Israel lobby at the university. And by the way, he happens to be Jewish, as were some of the leaders of the initiative in England and Europe. About a year ago Rutgers University was the scene of a vicious anti-Israel seminar, also organized primarily by Jewish professors.

What is it about some Jews that causes them to go out of their way to be critical of Israel? Are they and other critics not aware of how much Israel desires peace, the risks it takes, and all it does on behalf of peace?

Just last summer, Israel evacuated settlements, neighborhoods, schools and community centers, uprooting its residents from Gaza and turning the entire area over to the Palestinian Authority. Profitable greenhouses and agricultural fields were left intact to allow for economic development. We were told that Gaza is the most densely populated place on earth. So what has happened now that there are no longer any Jews there? Did they use the greenhouses? No, instead they destroyed them, as well as the community centers. Did they build any apartment buildings or housing on any of the land? Has one school been established there? If you consider a training base for terrorist operations a school, then the answer would be yes. One of the few things they have built is an extensive network of tunnels to smuggle in weapons to use against Israel. Instead of using this opportunity to show the world what they can create, they show us their capacity for destruction and their true intentions, using it as a launching pad for kassam rockets into nearby Jewish cities.

Are people not aware of this when they embrace the Arab cause?

Are they not aware of the nature of Israeli society – which in a heartbeat, despite all this would still give up even more land if only it would lead to peace and peaceful relations with their neighbors?

It feels as if Israel is constantly saying the old Henny Youngman line. Henny used to say, “Take my wife, please.” On numerous occasions, Israel has offered, “Take my land, please.” Only there are no takers. One has to stop and ask why the Palestinians refuse to accept such generous offers. There are two simple, not very oblique reasons. One -- because it better serves the interests of extremists and dictatorships to maintain a state of hostility than to solve the problem. And secondly -- because their true goal, as they have stated on numerous occasions is not a state of their own, but the destruction and demise, one way or another, of the Jewish state.

Amnon Rubenstein represents the feeling of most Israelis when he wrote, “The Palestinians are deserving of self-determination in a political entity of their own and to live in a free and democratic society, even if most of them have opted for rule by a fanatical, anti-democratic and racist movement....but we should not forget that the Palestinians' suffering has been caused by their own leadership, the Arab countries, and, in particular, because so many of them continue to cling to the futile idea of destroying Israel.”

Are the nations who so hastily condemn Israel not aware of the nature of Israelis and Israeli society and of their yearning for peace? Israeli doctors routinely give equal treatment to both Palestinian and Israeli victims of violence. Hadassah Hospital's gene therapy institute is engaged in research to cure a blood disease prevalent in the Palestinian population.

If only they knew of the fabrications, manipulations and distortions.

By now many of us are familiar with the doctored photos, of the same woman shlepped before the cameras to cry before different apartment buildings, of the same child's toy meticulously placed on top of different piles of rubble for dramatic effect, of the "corpse" being carried away, but which fell off a gurney, and as the cameras were rolling jumped back on, of the ambulance whose roof was torn off by an Israeli shell, but miraculously whose floor was intact, and of the massacres they cite that upon further investigation never actually occurred.

Just a few weeks ago several newsmen kidnapped in Gaza suddenly converted to Islam and were freed the next day. (I can only imagine what the "conversion course" must have been like.) Begging that they not be harmed, the wife of one of them appealed to the captors before their release, "They are friends of the Palestinians." And we are supposed to rely on the objectivity of the information supplied to us by journalists living under such threats and terror?

Remember the scenes of Hezbollah peeling off and distributing crisp U.S. one hundred dollar bills to Lebanese civilians to compensate them for their damages? I thought I was watching an All State Farm Insurance commercial. The only problem is that it turns out they were distributing millions of dollars of counterfeit American currency. So we should not be so surprised or naïve when we learn that Hezbollah and other tyrannical regimes and terrorist organizations lie, distort, manipulate and deceive the media. The problem is when what they tell us is accepted as fact. If only people realized how transparent and disingenuous the Arab efforts at manipulating public opinion are.

If only they knew the extent of the hatred. I have heard and read some of the translations of sermons from mosques calling Jews descendants of pigs and monkeys, and of the anti-semitic diatribes and images in the Arab media and school textbooks which make Nazi propaganda appear mild.

After decades of excluding Israel's version of the Red Cross, the Magen David Adom (the Red Star of David) from the International Red Cross, a compromise was reached. Finally after years of negotiations, this past summer an agreement was reached. The Star of David could be displayed inside of a red diamond and, at the same time, reversing previous policy of only allowing nations to join, the Palestinian Red Crescent was to be admitted as well. Despite the special exemption they made to allow the Palestinian organization to join, every Arab and Muslim nation voted against the motion because they were opposed to allowing the Jewish organization to be a member.

It is difficult for us to fathom the extent of this pathological hatred, because that is not our nature. In our open society we are not used to such rampant, blatant and brutal intolerance. But no amount of wishful thinking can change reality. We naively assume that all people and leaders are rational, even when they declare their intent to the contrary. As recently as over the last few days, we see how this dance unfolds. Hamas

leader Ismail Haniyeh unequivocally states that Hamas will never recognize Israel. Its charter calls for all Jews to be expelled from the Land of Israel or forcibly converted to Islam in the course of the global jihad. Yet world leaders are currently busy trying to explain that he really doesn't exactly mean what he has said, and will soon start to apply pressure to Israel to accept Hamas even though it has not renounced its desire to destroy Israel.

Despite the mindless repetition of the mantra, the Israeli-Palestinian problem is not the root cause of all evil in the world, or in the Middle East. It is the hatred and the fanaticism. This is an even bigger and more implacable problem to solve, and this is why the Arab nations always prefer to shift the focus away from discussion of their bigotry. They prefer to bring up the Palestinian issue to deflect attention away from the repression and oppression in their countries and to keep the pressure on Israel for fear people will realize how responsible they are for creating an environment of intransigence.

Some courageous Muslims have spoken out about the need for reform in their society for there to be any progress. One extraordinarily brave woman, Wafa Sultan spoke on Arabic television about the underlying causes of the conflict. Among other things, she told her audience that "before the barrier, there was the bomber."

Even if the Palestinian issue were to go away, there still would be considerable tensions. The intense animosity between the Sunnis and Shiites is the cause of a significant amount of the violence and bloodshed in the Middle East.

If only they knew.

In the recent war, Hezbollah displayed no hesitancy to bomb civilian targets. They operated without any constraints of conscience. They knew they could set up their launching pads in the midst of populated areas without any risk. Israel would be reluctant to take out the launchers since it would entail killing civilians, and the wrath of the world would come down on Israel. So if Israel attacked, Israel would be condemned, and if it did not, then they could continue to launch their rockets.

4,000 of them in a period of one month! Fired without any warning. No leaflets urging people to leave prior to an imminent attack. No attempt to avoid or limit casualties. And most of all, let us not forget, no provocation or justification! Israel had fully withdrawn six years ago from Lebanese territory and even had a "*hechsher*" (certification of the status of something as kosher) from the United Nations.

How can the world not make a distinction between a nation that defends itself from attacks and a terrorist group that launches the attacks? How can it not distinguish between a nation that is pained by every death on either side and takes extraordinary, unheard of precautions to limit loss of life on the side of its enemy, and an organization that seeks to cause as many civilian deaths as possible?

Just to show you the kind of enemy Israel is fighting -- Hassan Nasrallah has demanded the release of Samir Kuntar in any exchange for the three Israeli soldiers they kidnapped. In 1979, Samir Kuntar led a terrorist cell from Lebanon into Nahariya where he shot a policeman and then took over an apartment. He dragged a father and his daughter out to the beach where he shot the father at close range in front of his daughter and drowned him in the sea to be sure he was dead. Surrounded by police, with no possibility of escaping, police pleaded with him to let the little girl go. Instead he smashed the four year old girl's head on a rock and crushed her skull with the butt of his rifle. Meanwhile, the mother, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, was still hiding in the apartment. She had been holding her hand over the mouth of her other infant daughter so she would not make a sound and give away their hiding place. Tragically, she wound up accidentally suffocating her child. Keep this in mind when you hear about the demand for the release of prisoners held by Israel.

Is the world not aware of these things? If only they knew.

I am as confused as I am sure you are about the outcome of this summer's war. One day I read an article conclusively stating that Israel won the war and achieved its military objectives, that Hezbollah has been destroyed as a fighting force and will not pose a threat to Israel, and that the Lebanese are upset with Hezbollah for the havoc wreaked on their recovering economy and nation. The next day I read that Nasrallah's resistance against Israel was an unprecedented victory which will embolden other extremists to feel they can lash out at Israel. The debate will rage for some to come, for there is probably an element of truth in both perspectives.

Among the conclusions that need to be reconsidered though, is the notion of land for peace. In Gaza and Lebanon, Israel gave up land, and received no peace. Instead the vacated territories were turned into breeding grounds for terrorist activities and repositories and storehouses for offensive weaponry. Another notion that needs to be shattered and put to rest is the idea that poverty causes terrorism. It actually is the other way around, terrorism causes poverty.

One thing about this war was no different than any other one Israel has fought. It was not over borders, settlements, occupation, or refugees. It was about Israel's very existence.

In light of the predicament Israel is in and the neighborhood it lives in, it must continue to take extraordinary security precautions to protect its citizens and borders. No other country in the world lets outsiders dictate its fundamental issues of national security. Why should Israel? -- Especially not Israel.

At the beginning of the summer, when planning my sermons for the holidays, I had originally not planned to speak about the situation in Israel this year. Things appeared to be relatively quiet and calm. Even though Hamas had won the election, things seemed on the surface, at least to be relatively peaceful. What we did not realize that under the surface, armaments were being built up and fortified. With the outbreak of this summer's

war and the harping on Israel's "disproportionate" response, I felt compelled to put things into perspective, for after all what you hear here will not be heard in most other venues.

A story in the midrash characterizes how I feel. An old man in Sodom and Gomorrah went throughout the city every day condemning the evil of the society all around him. People laughed, mocked and scorned him for the futility of his efforts. One day, someone stopped and spoke with him and said, "Old man. Don't you realize there is no point to what you are doing? Your rantings obviously do not have any impact on the people of the town. You cannot get them to change their ways."

The man replied with frustration and resignation, "Long ago I gave up on trying to change those around me. Now I continue to speak out to be sure that they do not change me."

There are times when I feel like the man in the story. I speak out about the precarious situation of our brothers and sisters in Israel who are surrounded by a sea of hatred, in part, to be sure that those who seek its demise and bear ill will towards it do not change me or diminish our support for the homeland of the Jewish people.

Jerusalem Post columnist Caroline Glick wrote on the eve of this New Year about the state of the home of the largest Jewish community in the world and reminds us that it is one of the most stunning successes of Jewish history. More Jews live in Israel today than at any other time in our history: "..... And the state in which we live is one of the most vibrant, optimistic, "happening" countries in the world. We have the highest birthrate in the Western world. Rates of entrepreneurship are among the highest in the world.

We are one of the most highly educated societies in the world. Over the past fifteen years, more than a dozen colleges have been established in Israel...

Israelis are among the most patriotic citizens in the world. In the recent war, tens of thousands of reservists willingly left their families and jobs to take up arms to defend the country and hundreds of thousands of Israelis volunteered to help our one million brothers and sisters whose homes were targeted by rockets, missiles and mortars."

Incidentally, while watching on television the steady flow of Arab refugees from Lebanon, I wondered why similar scenes of Israelis were not being shown. I later learned it was because most of them were taken in by relatives, or even by strangers in other parts of the country.

Glick continues in part, "Jewish life blossoms in Israel as it has nowhere else in our history. The rates of literacy in Jewish learning in Israel are higher than they have ever been anywhere in our history. Israel's success stems from its serving as a vehicle that allows us to express our heritage in all facets of society. And our Jewish heritage is one of the most precious heritages known to man. The Jewish people gave humanity the concepts of G-d, liberty and law. Our understanding of the fallibility of mankind has

prevented us from being tempted by false prophets who promise us heaven on Earth, and has allowed us to take practical steps towards improving our lot and our world.

Our willingness to retain our loyalty to our identity and our heritage has been the key to our survival throughout the ages in the face of countless foes who sought to destroy us both spiritually and physically.

The fact that hatred of Jews has endured for so long says nothing about the nature of the Jewish people. What does speak volumes about the nature of the Jewish people is that our fortunes throughout the ages have been directly related to our ability to spurn our enemies' distorted portraits of the Jewish people and our willingness to endure and progress as Jews in the midst of that hatred.”

She is right. The rest of the world may not know these things, but we need to know them. Let us embrace our identity as Jews, our heritage, history and culture and commitment to our collective destiny, and may our support for Israel never waver.

*Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt
Congregation B'nai Tzedek
Potomac, Maryland
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potomacrebbe@bnaitzedek.org*