

Shabbat Shalom Fax

Parshat Shlach

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Insights into life, personal growth & Torah

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The Fax of Life

ת"וב

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GOOD MORNING! Thankfully, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as it were, has receded from being headline news. I have decided to try to examine some of what we have learned (or should have learned) from this awful situation.

Until now I have refrained from writing anything on this subject for several reasons: 1) A complete treatment of the subject would take many, many columns 2) There have been MANY outstanding articles on the subject from people who are FAR more knowledgeable than I 3) This column is written so far in advance that writing about current events is generally not going to be relevant to readers by the time it's published 4) The overwhelming majority of readers of the Shabbat Shalom Fax of Life are already on board and know the truth. To this group I do not really have to point out the outright lies, hypocrisy, and fact manipulation that are employed by the left leaning media and hateful elected officials seeking the demise of the State of Israel. In essence, I would be "preaching to the choir."

Yet, upon further consideration, I decided to write this column for the following reasons: 1) It is always appropriate to take a step back and examine what we have learned from difficult experiences 2) The Pew Research Center just published (May 21st) some VERY compelling statistics relating to Israel, of which everyone should be aware 3) There are some facts about the conflict that I found illuminating 4) This week's Torah portion contains one of the Jewish people's most painful episodes relating to the Land of Israel and is quite relevant and timely to this topic.

Finally, there is a TERRIFIC quote from author Gilbert Keith (G.K.) Chesterton that, in our context, actually takes on several layers of profundity: "I believe in preaching to the converted; for I have generally found that the converted do not understand their own religion."

To begin, I must point out that being anti-Israel or anti-Zionism is just plain old fashioned antisemitism. This is why Jews are being physically attacked and verbally assaulted all over the world and, quite terrifyingly, even in the USA. After all, what do the identifiably Jewish people in Times Square, at restaurants in LA and S. Florida, or outside a synagogue in Germany, have to do with the actions of the State of Israel? Nothing.

So why are people wearing or carrying Palestinian flags while beating and cursing these people for being Jews and threatening to rape their daughters? Why are Jews being assaulted in Brussels, London, and Toronto? The situation in Israel is merely a pretext to express their hatred for the Jewish people – plain old antisemitism (which, ironically, is what led to the creation of the State of Israel in the first place).

You see, the whole "conflict" is really just a diversion from the absolutely abhorrent leadership of the Palestinian Fatah faction – one that is so corrupt that they keep delaying elections because they know they will lose even more control. Hamas is fighting to undercut Fatah by uniting the Palestinians under their banner through shows of aggression and expressions of power against the State of Israel. It's simply a territorial war between two Palestinian groups and each is using the conflict to serve their selfish needs.

As we shall see, the whole Palestinian narrative is a lie; there is no "occupation," "colonialism," or "ethnic cleansing." The "inhumane" evictions in East Jerusalem, which supposedly began this issue, were merely run of the mill landlord evictions. The properties were legally owned by Jewish landlords who wished to get back their properties from Arab squatters.

Regarding the lie of "colonialism," Jews have been living in the Land of Israel for thousands of years. Israel has ALWAYS been a part of the collective Jewish consciousness – it's been in our daily prayers for thousands of years. For the last two millennia, Jews have been emigrating to the Land of Israel to escape persecution – the great Spanish scholar Nachmanides even moved to Israel and settled in Jerusalem in 1267. Jews have always been connected to the Land of Israel, it's in the Bible and it's in artifacts found all over the Land of Israel. The ancestral home of the Jewish people cannot be classified as "colonialism."

Regarding the "occupation," sixteen years ago Israel totally withdrew from Gaza. In fact, over 20 Jewish farming and agricultural towns were dismantled, disbanded, and given over to the Palestinian Authority (displacing many Jewish families). The closing of those towns almost tore the country apart, but in the end Israel decided that for the POSSIBILITY of peace they would abandon everything they had built and give the Palestinians self-rule and governance.

Have you ever looked at Gaza? It sits on a beautiful stretch of oceanfront property. Under proper and non-corrupt governance, it could have blossomed into resorts and tourist destinations like any number of Mediterranean oceanfront cities. What did the Arabs do? First, they destroyed all the farming infrastructure left behind (greenhouses, irrigation systems, etc.). Then the Fatah administration became so corrupt that the terrorist organization Hamas was able to take over by appealing to the heart of the Palestinians through food distributions and medical care. They self govern – there is no "occupation."

Regarding "ethnic cleansing," let's begin this conversation with understanding the history of the region. Over the last millennia Jews lived throughout the Mideast, in fact they occupied almost every country in the Mideast as late as the 20th century. I personally know Jews who came from Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Egypt.

Here are the statistics today. Jordan has ten million citizens and ZERO Jews. Lebanon has 7 million citizens and ZERO Jews. Syria has 17 million citizens and ZERO Jews. Iraq has 38 million citizens and FOUR Jews. Iran has 83 million citizens and about EIGHT THOUSAND Jews. Gaza has two million Palestinians and ZERO Jews. Egypt has 100 million citizens and TEN Jews. In Judea and Samaria (under Palestinian control) there are 2.7 million Palestinians and ZERO Jews.

By contrast, in Israel there are about 9 million people of which TWO MILLION are Arabs living as citizens with FULL civil rights. You can easily see where the "ethnic cleansing" has actually taken place – and it's not in Israel. Plus, with 2 million Arab citizens it is hardly an "apartheid state."

While the first part of the column should anger you, the rest of this column should really sadden you. Perhaps the most shocking revelation that I experienced was the widespread disconnect of 21st century Jews from the State of Israel. It is much more telling to break down their statistics by the religious affiliations of the respondents (though, sadly, almost one third have no religious affiliation).

According to the Pew Research Center (this was based on a 2019-20 polling of about 5,000 Jews across the entire United States): On the question – do you believe God gave Israel to the Jewish people? Among those that identified as: Orthodox 87% responded yes, Conservative: 46%, Reform 26%, the rest 19%. Strongly oppose BDS movement? Orthodox 65%, Conservative 51%, Reform 34% and the rest 18%. Feel somewhat or very attached to Israel? Orthodox 82%, Conservative 78%, Reform 58%, the rest 40%. Have a lot in common with the Jews in Israel? Orthodox 91%, Conservative 77%, Reform 61%, the rest 39%.

This leads me to another incident that both shocked and saddened me. At the beginning of this conflict, about two weeks ago, over 100 “rabbinical students” signed a petition accusing Israel of “violent suppression of human rights” and of being an “apartheid state” among other outlandish claims. Considering the statistics above you will not be surprised to learn that none of these students were Orthodox Jews.

Their accusations are just plain wrong (as shown above) and come from a liberal and left leaning disease of an agenda to lie and discredit the State of Israel. Their warped view of the situation in Israel means they care more about being “woke” than being in the right. It sickened me to see them quote sages of the Talmud who would be turning over in their graves had they seen the unforgivable betrayal of their own people to promote a warped sense of social justice. These students have joined the rest of the antisemites in the world. It’s a sad day indeed.

No treatment of this issue would be complete without a comment on the INCREDIBLE humanity of the Israeli army – the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). In trying to defend their countrymen from the over 4,000 rockets that were launched by Hamas at the civilian population, the IDF actually did everything they could to minimize casualties on the other side. In a heartbreaking recording made available by the IDF, an Israeli soldier is heard begging an Arab to clear the building that was about to be bombed so that there wouldn’t be any civilian deaths. The Arab refuses saying, “This is how we reveal your cruelty.” This underscores the difference in mentalities: The Israelis value lives, ALL lives. The Arabs value martyrdom. You can donate to the IDF by going to www.FIDF.org – they are VERY worthy of your support.

I will end this column by pointing out that in this week’s Torah reading we have the story of the 12 spies who explored the Land of Israel before the Jewish people entered the land. I had written about this unfortunate incident in last year’s Shabbat Shalom and many of the lessons of this story are both eternal and timely in 2021. If interested, you can find it here tinyurl.com/shlach.

But what really makes the story relevant to our discussion is that 10 of the 12 spies had an agenda. According to the sages, they were concerned that the nation, upon entering the Land of Israel, would appoint a king and they would lose their prestige and power. So they plotted to dissuade the Jewish people from wanting to enter the land. They lied and misconstrued what they had seen during their exploration to make it both unpalatable and very frightening to the people.

Unfortunately, the nation bought into their lies and they began to doubt God and His plan for them to enter the Land of Israel. They demanded to return to Egypt. God got very angry and decreed that they would never enter the Land of Israel and punished the nation by causing them to wander for 40 years until they all died. (Fascinatingly, according to our sages, this decree was only on the men aged 20 and up. The women were permitted to enter the land at the end of the 40 years because they “loved the land” and had never bought into the lies about the Land of Israel.)

TORAH PORTION: Shlach, Numbers 13:1 - 15:41

The Jewish people received the Torah on Mt. Sinai and were ready to enter the land of Israel. There was a consensus of opinion amongst the people that we should send spies to see if it was feasible to conquer the Land. Moses knew that the Almighty’s promise to give the Land included a guarantee to conquer it. However, one of the principles of life, which we learn from this portion, is: the Almighty allows each of us the free will to go in the direction we choose. Even though one man and the Almighty is a majority, Moses – by Divine decree – sent out the princes of the tribes (men of the highest caliber) to spy out the land.

Twelve spies were sent. Ten came back with a report of strong fortifications and giants; they rallied the people against going up to the Land. Joshua ben Nun and Calev ben Yefunah (Moses’ brother-in-law) tried to stem the rebellion, but did not succeed. The Almighty decreed 40 years of wandering in the desert, one year for each day they spied in the land of Israel. This happened on the 9th of Av, a date noted throughout Jewish history for tragedy.

SHABBAT LIGHTING: *Jerusalem* 7:06 Miami 7:51 Cape Town 5:26 Guatemala 6:11 Hong Kong 6:47 Honolulu 6:53

 Jo’Burg 5:05 LA 7:43 London 8:56 Melbourne 4:50 Mexico 7:54 Moscow 8:48 New York 8:05 Singapore 6:50 Toronto 8:36

“QUOTE OF THE WEEK”: When peace comes we will, perhaps, in time be able to forgive the Arabs for killing our sons. But it will be harder for us to forgive them for having forced us to kill their sons. — Golda Meir

Dedicated with Deep Appreciation to the Following People
**Joan Swirsky, Isaac Barr MD, and
Leon Kushner**



Shabbat Shalom,

Yitzchak Zweig

Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

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