

THRU OTHER EYES

VICTIMS NO MORE - AN OPEN LETTER TO MY JEWISH BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Dear Friends,

Thank you very much for the [video](#) you sent me. Although we have sharply differing views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general and perhaps even more divergent perspectives on the most recent war in Gaza, my respect and love for you always lead me to listen to your views with an open mind.

The video you sent me, with its catalogue of many of the most heinous dignities we Jews have faced through the centuries, is frankly a not too subtle playing of the 'anti-Semite card.' Apparently in your opinion, and from what I have seen and heard over the last three weeks, in the opinion of Israel, most of her citizens and much of world Jewry, what we have witnessed in Gaza, the events that led up to it and the reaction of many people and media around the world can best be viewed in the context of age-old and still present global anti-Semitism.

If I would sum up this view in one line it would go something like this: the world has always hated us, they still hate us and they still dream of annihilating us. As the video itself says at its conclusion: "And since we know that the Arabs-Palestinians daily dream of that extinction, we will do everything possible to remain alive in our own land. If that bothers you, dear world, well - think of how many times in the past you bothered us. In any event, dear world, if you are bothered by us, here is one Jew in Israel who could not care less."

The video and what has happened the last three weeks has made me think very deeply about the value and validity of playing the "anti-Semite card" anno 2009. The anti-Semite card goes hand in hand with presenting ourselves to the world as the victims in this conflict and therein lies for me the true problem.

I believe that this view, that we are the victims here, is an honest conviction among many of our people, both inside and outside of Israel. Some may say it is a PR stunt but I don't buy that. So why does this view fail to resonate amongst so much of the world. I know your answer is because the world always has been and still is filled with so much anti-Semitism. But let me give you another possibility.

Any PR effort, no matter how well funded, how well coordinated, regardless of its level of sophistication or articulation, will not resonate when at its core it attempts to push an inauthentic truth. Perhaps we really see ourselves as the victim but because it is such a ludicrous idea - that we are the victims - that any PR effort is going to come across as contrived and transparent. Israel is not the victim. How can Israel be the victim?

Think about it for a moment. Which party to this conflict has the most resources? Which has by far the larger, more sophisticated and more technologically advanced economy? Which has more and far better functioning civil institutions, world class universities and research institutes? Who has the larger military and security capabilities by any measure: budget, technology, equipment, training,

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sophistication and organization? Which party to this conflict has its own country?

Who has been treated by the other in the fashion so eloquently and accurately described in Saree Makdisee's [book](#) 'Palestine Inside Out: An Everyday Occupation':

Tending one's fields, visiting a relative, going to the hospital: for ordinary Palestinians, such everyday activities require negotiating permits and passes, curfews and closures, "sterile roads" and "seam zones"... In devastating detail, Saree Makdisee reveals how the "peace process" institutionalized Palestinians' loss of control over their inner and outer lives... Through eye-opening statistics and day-by-day reports, we learn how Palestinians have seen their hopes for freedom and statehood culminate in the creation of abject "territories"...

We can bring all kinds of explanations, reasons and excuses why this has been the situation of the Palestinians for the last 41 years under Israeli control, but the fact remains that this is the situation of the Palestinians under Israeli control for the past 41 years. For some, for the past 61 years even.

Many of the Palestinians we have just bombed the hell out of used to live where we now live. This is a fact. When you see on TV an older Palestinian man or woman crying and screaming in what to us is such an exaggerated emotional style, let me tell you, it is not exaggerated. Not at all. No my friends, as deep as our grief can be at our own losses, I wonder if we can imagine the depths of their grief. This isn't the first time they have been on the receiving end of what they experienced these last 22 days. It's neither the second, nor the third or fourth, or even fifth or sixth. This is the umpteenth time they have had to go through this, on the receiving end of us. Think about it for a minute. How can we be the victims?

At some point in time, maybe from the very beginning, I don't know, but at some point in time our conflict with the Palestinians - the indigenous population of the lands on which we now also live - became a zero-sum game. And we have always won the game and they have always remained with zero.

And not only zero from us, by and large from the Arab world as well. And when it comes to meaningful and timely action from the international community, they still largely get a big fat zero. The Palestinians are admittedly getting a lot of support from the international 'street' in this conflict but not from their governments. So if we are going to talk about a victim, how can we be the victims here?

And when other people see the Palestinians as the 'victims,' as the David and Israel as the Goliath, we can get incredibly indignant. "Anti-Semites!" we scream. "We are the victims, not they," we protest. But why, and importantly, what is the effect of holding onto this victim's viewpoint?

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Avram Burg, a former Speaker of the Knesset in Israel addressed this in his [book](#), 'The Holocaust Is Over; We Must Rise From its Ashes:'

Burg argues that the Jewish nation has been traumatized and has lost the ability to trust itself, its neighbors or the world around it. He shows that this is one of the causes for the growing nationalism and violence that are plaguing Israeli society... Burg uses his own family history--his parents were Holocaust survivors--to inform his innovative views on what the Jewish people need to do to move on and eventually live in peace with their Arab neighbors and feel comfortable in the world at large.

We have to stop feeling like and 'being' victims. How can we have a bright national future if our national psyche is so immobilized in our past? And you want to know what's really crazy about our situation? There is a way to let go of the past, not forgetting it or ceasing to honor it or even stopping to be inspired by it in positive ways, but of letting go of it so we can move forward. There is one way, perhaps one way only, and that way leads through the Palestinians.

My friends, we have our homeland with all its good and bad, triumphs and troubles, but we have our homeland. And we can no longer hide from the fact that the way in which we have developed our homeland over the past many decades has played a significant contributing role in precluding the Palestinians from moving any closer to their own dream of a homeland.

We must also face the fact that there is no way to justify the point of view that we have more right to a homeland than the Palestinians. Many of them used to live right here, and many of them still live 'here' in pieces of territory that we have under our control.

These facts in no way add up to 'delegitimizing' the State of Israel, so please, I beg you, don't go there. Sure, there are people who feel that way, and it may take a long time before those views become a lot less. But the community of nations, today including almost all the Arab and Muslim countries, longs for Israel to become just another regular country, just one of the gang, living in peace and security next to its neighbors, a country that behaves within the normal bandwidth of what the community of nations has to offer. This is something we must learn to accept.

No my friends, given the facts there's only one place where we can be the victims in this conflict, when we have our homeland, when we hold almost all the cards that really matter. With the balance of power between us and the Palestinians, the only one place where we can actually be the victims is in our own heads. And until our victim-mentality dies off, we aren't going to get very far on the road to living in peace and security, like a normal country, like one other nation among nations, like one people among peoples.

You remember our forefathers had to wander 40 years in the desert after a terrible 400-year sojourn in Egypt, victims of slavery. Those forty years were

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needed to lose the slave mentality and become ready to take possession of our new land. Do we have to wait 250 years after our 2500-year sojourn as victims of anti-Semitism in the Diaspora before we are ready to dwell in a Promised Land? I for one am not willing to wait another 189 years and I'm sure the Palestinians don't want to wait even another five years! So we're going to have to move this process along if we don't want to see more and more violence, more and more hatred and more and more of all of our blood being spilt.

There's only one way to let go of our tortured past and move on to a new future. And yes, that road lies through the Palestinians. By reaching out to them, truly reaching out with two open hands, we will discover that we have let go of the past. To get to the other side of the river, my friends, one must let go of the shore.

We are not the victims, not any more. We have our homeland while the Palestinians are still struggling to reach their's. They have exactly the same inalienable rights as we do to a country as viable and as fine as ours. A wrong has been committed, and like it or not, we have been a party to that wrong, through action and inaction, knowingly and unknowingly, intentionally and by accident, consciously and unconsciously. Yes, our karma is connected to a wrong and we have it in our power to help right that wrong.

My friends, if we were to reach out in this way then we would no longer be thinking or acting like victims. Reaching out to the Palestinians with sincerity, generosity of spirit and dare I say even love would be the actions of a strong, self-confident, future-focused and vigorous people.

Only when we stop being the victims can we move forward to the bright future we all dream of. Only by moving forward to the bright future we all dream of can we stop being victims. And we can only do it with the Palestinians.

Ironic isn't it?

With much love,

Lennybruce