

"ISRAEL BELONGS NOWHERE" --  
An Arab Taunt and Its Ancient History

The Yalkut tells us that the stones that Jacob used as a pillow during his lonely flight from Essau were the very ones upon which his father Isaac was offered up at the Akedah.

How history repeats itself! We today rest on pillows of stone. I did not sleep well this past week or two. What Jew did not experience difficulty in sleeping during this time? We had a hard, cold feeling, under and in our heads -- and in our hearts and in our stomachs. Make no mistake about it. Even as Jacob felt the stones and reminded himself of the near-death of Isaac, we feel today the specter of the Holocaust, the Akedah of the 20th century. It is a reality that lies just beneath the surface of all contemporary Jewish experience. So, like Jacob, we have the dread sensation of כִּי בֹא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, the sun is setting. Darkness is spreading and danger is abroad in the world.

How shall we respond to these worries? First, let us define the areas of concern. I find three such, amongst others: self-doubt, fear of the future, and loneliness.

In these critical moments, Jews both in Israel and in the Diaspora do entertain doubts about the justic and worthwhileness of our cause. Of course, I am not speaking about the New Left and Trotzkyite Jews. I unequivocally and unambiguously condemn such Jewish self-haters who are open-minded to Arabs, close-minded to Jews; who can understand sympathetically every nationalism -- except that of their own people. I do not refer to Communist Jews who slavishly follow Moscow's party line. They are an instance of psycho-pathology, the most pathetic example of political masochism in our times.

Rather, I refer to those Jews who are fully committed to the Jewish cause, who make their lives in Israel and put their lives on the line -- and yet, ask themselves whether we have acted properly all along, whether it is possible to reconcile our claims with Palestinian claims. Of course, every sane person recognizes that there can be no compromise with the PLO. You cannot reconcile the claims of life and death and end up with a condition that is neither one nor the other. But there is some incipient doubt as to whether our claim to all of Palestine is justified theoretically. And there is some nagging self-doubt as to whether it was all worth it,

Such doubts occurred to Father Jacob. When we meet him on that memorable night, he had his famous dream. And Abarbanel, who is the most psychologically oriented of all commentators, reminds us that dreams occur to people because of something that is stirring inside them. What was so disturbing Jacob that caused him to dream? Self-doubt, answers Abarbanel. The dream was a projection of his internal struggles and the divine prophetic response to them. Maybe, thought Jacob, I was wrong in taking away the blessings from Essau. True, he kept them only by deceit. True, had he gotten the blessings -- by which is meant the right of his posterity to the Land of Israel -- it would have been a tragic miscarriage of the divine intent. But maybe I had no right to take it away from him. **אולי לא יישר בעיני אלקים**. Maybe it was not right in the eyes of God. And maybe it was simply not worthwhile! Here I am, away from my parents, all alone, cold and hungry and frightened. Was it worth it?

And so the divine answer came in a dream, in the form of a vision: **סולם מוצב ארצה וראשו מגיע השמימה** the ladder placed on earth (which, according to the Midrash, held within itself, in concentrated form, all the Land of Israel) and its top reaching into the heavens. God was saying to Jacob: Despite all your self-doubt, despite all your questioning of the morality of your conduct, you are connected to God. Still your doubts, remove your hesitation, your questions are resolved. In life, one must often make tragic choices -- between a greater morality and a lesser morality, between a greater evil and a lesser evil. You chose in this manner -- and you were right, painful and tormenting though your deeds were.

I find it hard to understand the thought of a moral justification for the Palestinian claim -- especially when such claims are pressed by the likes of the PLO, who are nothing more than common gangsters. Nevertheless, Jews are morally sensitive, and if they are not, they ought to be. Therefore, even in upbuilding Eretz Israel, we know that its function must be to bring blessing to all humankind. No matter how much the majority of humanity seems arrayed against us, we shall never forfeit our function and our role of enhancing life for all men on earth. For so did God tell Jacob in that vision: **ויברכו בך כל משפחות האדמה ובניך** "and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your children."

The second area of concern is the simple apprehension of the future. We experience fear of the unknown. You will notice this if you visited Israel recently, if you talked to Israelis by phone or by mail or read their literature. We seem to be locked in an inexorable drive towards war. There is depression in Israel and in the Diaspora as well. We do not know how oil will affect our future. So we are caught in fear and in gloom and anxiety.

We are, indeed, in the position which Jacob anticipated for us: pursued, hated, frightened.

And so, in response, Jacob dreams his dream. According to Ramban, the dream consists primarily of angels, to teach Jacob the one most important principle: that all that is happening to him is **עֲשֵׂיִם**, the providential acts of Heaven. Nothing is mere happenstance. He must not feel that God has abandoned him, that he is at the mercy of purely mundane forces. The eye of God never closes. The angels are there.

I would add: the ways of God are mysterious and complex. The help He sends to His children does not come in straight lines, and in unimpeded spurts. There is advance and retreat, progress and pullback, triumph and defeat. The angels are **עֲשֵׂיִם וְיוֹרֵדִים**, they ascend and descend. First they are **עֲשֵׂיִם**, they go up -- leaving us here, on earth, with a feeling of being forsaken, abandoned, almost in despair. But eventually **יֹרְדִים**, they descend, and allow us to feel the direction of God's hand in history, the consolation of His presence.

So when we have these fears, when we worry about the future, when we are told by so-called realists to think the unthinkable thoughts about the bleak future of the State of Israel, we hear from across the centuries the comforting voice of God:

**הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שׁוֹכֵב עָלֶיהָ לִּי אֶתְּנֶנָּה**

"the land on which you lie, I have given it to you."

Eretz Israel will remain ours. We shall prevail!

If we succumb to despair, we are only satisfying our enemies and carrying out their plan. Let there be no **אֵין**, no despair. Let there be no divisiveness, no fighting of Jew against Jew. Let there be only hard work --and hope!

Finally, there is the element of loneliness. In every instance in recent weeks, in every international form, we have been outnumbered and outvoted and isolated. We have been silenced and excoriated at the UN.

We are even unsure of the United States -- and we certainly ought not take for granted a country whose highest military officer this past week delivered himself of a kind of anti-Semitic tirade which is appropriate for a small-town hick. Our leading soldier seems to be the kind of man who has obtained his philosophy of American society from the scrawlings on walls, and whose level of sophistication does not rise beyond that of the country-club locker-room.

Only a small handful of countries ever votes with us. Many others think that they are virtuous and heroic and pure if they abstain while the Arabs and communists and Third World gang up on us in the diplomatic equivalent of a gang rape.

The nadir was reached yesterday or the day before. It took place after the vote in UNESCO -- the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization -- which decided that Israel was the only country in the world which had to remain alone, and did not have the right to join with any region or bloc of nations. After this vote, the Lebanese delegate said the following: "Israel is a state which belongs nowhere, because it comes from nowhere."

We belong nowhere because we come from nowhere...

I confess, I was not completely shocked at this obscene taunt, at this cruel gloating. Outraged, yes; but not shocked.

I recognize it. Smell it carefully and you will detect the whiff of an ancient malodorous theory. We belong nowhere -- it is the old Christian canard condemning the Jewish people to eternal homelessness as "The Wandering Jew." We have here -- remarkably, in the words of a Lebanese Arab who represents a country evenly divided between Christian and Moslem -- the ultimate synthesis of discredited and evil Christian theology with malicious and manipulative Arab politics.

The old anti-Semitism has been resurrected in the halls of the UN. And the world fidgets, but does not raise its voice at this international replay of a Kitty Genovese murder.

So, "Israel is a state which belongs nowhere because it comes from nowhere!" How shall we answer that when our non-Jewish friends ask us whether there is anything to it? What should we say to those pathetically ignorant Jews who may be taken in by a statement of that sort?

Permit me to suggest the following answers.

Israel comes from the concentration camps of Western Europe -- which bloc it was not permitted to join by UNESCO.

Israel comes from the crematoria of Eastern Europe where the chimneys belched forth the smokey remains of six million men, women, and children -- and the governments of which today, all Communists, leeringly persecute the pitiful remainders of that unprecedented massacre.

Israel comes from horrendous ghettos, where we did not have almost limitless real estate, and endless oil, only to fight for



another piece of real estate -- but where all we wanted was one little place we can call our own, our home.

Israelis come from the mellahs and slums of Arab countries, where they experienced first-hand the blessings of what the Arabs mean by, "a democratic, secular state -- a fraternity of Christian, Jew, and Moslem." They learned quite intimately what it means to live in a democratic state -- such as Yemen or Syria; or a secular state -- like Lybira or Saudi Arabia...

Israel comes from the people which created a Talmud, the most marvelous compendium of law and morality and justice and civilized life, while the Arab states still had no name, and were nothing more than pagan savages riding through the desert with knives in their teeth and blood dripping from their fingers.

Modern Israel comes from that nation of prophets who blessed the world with the vision of a united humanity -- a vision distorted and profaned, made pornographic and obscene, by that organization which today condemns Israel to be the only country not permitted to participate in that same unity of nations.

Israel comes from and is a people who taught the world pity and compassion, civilization and art and music, morality and law and justice -- yes, and Education and Science and Culture -- when the so called Third World is still populated by the likes of Amin and gives thunderous ovations to an Arafat.

Israel is descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who taught the world what it needs to deserve survival. And, if, indeed, Israel does not belong to this world, maybe the world just does not deserve to go on.

But we do belong. We belong not to Western Europe and not the Communist bloc, not the Arabs and not the Afro-Asians. We do belong -- to the Creator of Heaven and Earth. He is One God -- "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God the Lord is One" -- and we are one people -- "who is like unto Thy people, one people upon the earth." We are one nation not permitted to join any bloc of peoples. And He is One God who is above all pantheons, and does not belong to any bloc of pagan idols.

And therefore, to us as to our Father Jacob before us, comes the word of God as we feel rejected by the society of nations:

עֵן , וְהִנֵּה אֲנִי עִמָּךְ , "behold I shall be with thee."

וְשָׁמַרְתִּיךָ בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ כִּי לֹא אֶעְזֹב , "and I will watch over thee in all the ways that thou goeth, for I will not forsake thee."

That is where we come from. That is whom we belong to.

The Wandering Jew has come home. Twenty six years ago.  
That is where he belongs.

And he shall not be driven out.

Ever.