

"P.L.O.: THE NOBLE ILLUSION, THE UGLY REALITY"

The conclusion is inescapable: this is a crazy world. Sometimes I question if we are not all in the grip of a mass psychosis, if we do not all live in a universal snakepit.

Consider the mad scene of international affairs: the United Nations, an organization supposedly devoted to the pursuit of world peace, hails a gun-toting gangster; the Third World, organized to make little countries independent of super-rich powers, favors the oil imperialists and gangs up on another little, lonely country; countries the likes of Sudan, which has butchered hundreds of thousands of Blacks, vote to declare that Zionism is racism; the first Jewish Secretary of State in 200 years of American history pressures Israel more than he does its foes; the Administration of this country is near hysteria because it is afraid that the Soviets will build a base in Angola, and yet they are beginning to push Israel to agree to a Palestinian state -- which will most certainly become a Soviet base that will threaten not only Israel, but Egypt and Jordan and Lebanon as well; many liberals, including some Jews, refuse to take seriously or literally the "Palestine Covenant," which declares it a stated aim of the P.L.O. to destroy Israel, and excuses it by saying that it is only propaganda -- when the same people have had the experience of Hitler not being taken seriously, and Nasser too, only to learn later that they meant exactly what they said.

The Talmud (Pes. 50a) teaches: R. Joseph the son of R. Joshua ben Levi became sick and fell into a coma. Then he was revived, and his father said to him, "What did you see?," what kind of pure vision did you behold as you are at the gates of that other, greater existence? The son answered, " עולם הפוך ראיתי, עלונים במטה יתחתונים למטה -- I saw a topsy-turvy world, in which what normally is at the bottom was at the top, and what usually is at the top was at the bottom." To which the father said, " עולם ברור ראיתי -- My son, what you saw was the sane world!" That other world -- that is the lucid one, whereas this world is the עולם הפוך, the crazy, mad, demented, topsy-turvy world!

And so I insist: the rational and reasonable world that we dream of, the one we assume ought to exist even if it be far short of perfection, that is the עולם ברור, the lucid world. The reality through which we are now living is unquestionably the עולם הפוך, the crazy and mad world.

But craziest of all is the near universal adulation received by the P.L.O. I understand Russia -- but why China? Why the Third World? Why Japan? Why Sweden? Why the abstention of England and France and Italy?

But, if so many nations reverence the P.L.O., then certainly there must be something to it. Let us be honest. The P.L.O. does seem to make a case. There is something compelling about its presentation. They are a dispossessed people, coming into their own, fighting for their own land, writing nationalistic poetry and drama, sacrificing, building a shadow government, scoring victories, and inspiring seemingly fair-minded people.

But of course, the answer is that all this is meretricious. It is the illusion of nobility disguising an ugly reality. It is the paint of innocence on the face of the harlot.

Let me mention to you a strange interpretation by the Tosaphists (in the מיושב זקנים, ed. Sasoon). At the conclusion of our Sidra we read of Amalek: ויבא עמלק וילחם עם ישראל ברפידים,

"And Amalek came and made war against Israel in Rephidim." Why, ask the Tosaphists, did Amalek take such chances? After all, Amalek had heard of all the miracles that had been performed for Israel in Egypt, of all the supernatural intervention on its behalf -- why then the risk of provoking a battle with Israel?

The answer they offer is almost mind-boggling: Because Amalek contemplated its own name, "עמלק", and discovered that the letters of this name are identical with the initial letters of four great Jews: Amram (אמראם), Moses (משה), Levi (לוי), and Kehat (קהת). Amalek assumed, since its name formed the ראשי תיבות or initial letters of these four Israelite spiritual giants, that it too would be endowed with supernatural triumph. But the mistake that Amalek made was that it failed to consider the סופי תיבות "concluding letters" of these four names. Rearranged, these letters spell the Hebrew word מיתה, "death!"

And this, they conclude, is the meaning of the verse (Nu. 24:20) by the Gentile Prophet Balaam: ראשית גוים עמלק ואחריתו עדי אובד, "The first of the nations is Amalek, and its end will be utter destruction." What Balaam meant was that Amalek may boast of "the first," that the first letters of the four Jewish heroes spell its own name, but its end or conclusion will be destruction -- because the last letters of those names spell מיתה, death.

Now, this sounds like an elaborate, artificial, playful word-game -- somewhat unreal, odd, and not a little fantastic. Surely it does not qualify as a lesson in Realpolitik. Yet -- it is just that! It is a brilliant, if Midrashically phrased, expose of the hypocrisy of Amalek in its numerous incarnations in the tortured history of our benighted species.

The P.L.O. -- Amalek has grabbed the ראשי תיבות, the initial letters of Jewish leadership. It is putting itself over before the world as the Arab version of Zionism or Jewish national liberation. If the Jews can do it, the Arabs can too -- and even better. Amalek too has its equivalents of Amram and Moses and Kehat and Levi. They have their national poets, their heroes, their Irgun and Stern groups, their claim to the land, an equivalent of sorts of the Jewish Agency and a shadow government and even a Diaspora...

But -- that is where the comparison ends! The world sees only the innocent face, the ראשי תיבות or initial letters; it ignores the סופי תיבות, the ugly reality that is beneath and at the end of Amalek, at its own peril.

Jewish nationalism began with Abraham, and Jews never denied it. Throughout the centuries, for every day, without cease, we knew that the Land of Israel is our land. But the Arabs, as recently as twenty years ago, were declaiming their assertion that there is no Palestine, that it is only Southern Syria -- a view which articulated well with the philosophy of history of the late and unlamented Arnold Toynbee.

Israel incorporated in its Declaration of Independence that it extends the hand of shalom, peace, to its neighbors. The P.L.O. bases its covenant upon the principle of death to Israel.

The Jews fought valiantly against the British -- their troops and their police. The P.L.O. has yet to encounter Israel upon the field of battle. It fights only against unarmed civilians -- men, women, and children.

Israel, for the sake of its own nationhood and peace, has suffered truncation and amputation from the very beginning of World War I. The article by Mrs. Golda

Meir in this week's New York Times is most compelling when she points out that of all the land taken from the Sultan after the First World War, only one per cent was put aside for a Jewish national homeland. Three quarters of what was left was then put aside for an artificial country, TransJordan. Jews then accepted the 1947 partition which cut off even more of what should have been ours. Indeed, if the Arabs are truly interested in only setting up a Palestinian State on the West Bank and in Gaza -- why did they not do that until 1967? The answer is, of course, that the P.L.O. means what it says: If it gets a state now on the West Bank and in Gaza, it is only an "interim state" until they can destroy Israel and rule over the entire area. Their goal is simple as it is cruel: politicide.

So of this Amalek too it may be said that it poses with the *רשעים תבנות* of virtue and greatness, but behind it all are the *כוח תבנות* of death and destruction.

The fact is that the blood brothers of this Amalek are cruel to their own kind. Compare the Jewish world-wide efforts via the UJA for Israel -- with all its disappointments, despite the fact that so many Jews give nothing, and that those who give usually give far less than they should -- compare this to the cruelty of the OPEC Arabs towards their Palestinian brothers. Only this week the United Nations released the statistics that the oil revenues of the OPEC states were in the vicinity of two hundred billion dollars. They paid out approximately a hundred billion dollars for imports. Hence, they had left a clear excess of pure profit in the vicinity of a hundred billion dollars. Of this, they gave no more than about seventy million dollars to the Palestinian refugees -- which comes to the merest fraction of one per cent of their excess cash!

The world sees only P.L.O.-Amalek in its "initial letters"; at best it treats Israel and the P.L.O. as two antagonists equally deserving of the world's solicitude and sympathy. But the same world has only begun to get a taste of the real P.L.O., of the death and destruction dealt out by this contemporary Amalek.

The Arabs, through the P.L.O., have taught that acts of random death are acceptable; they have removed all restraints from unbridled terrorism towards the rest of the world as well. Witness the kidnapping of the OPEC oil minister a while ago. And now, most recently, the Western-supported Angolans, threatened with military defeat, have warned the world that they are going to emulate the P.L.O. in all their barbaric methods of unconventional warfare. Those who have embraced this Amalek and have embarrassed the People of Israel will yet regret it --

*ואחריהם עדי אובד* !

I do not know, and neither does anyone else, whether or not Israel will be forced to accede to some kind of Palestinian State. I hope not. If it is, it will be patently unjust -- but it will not be the first such injustice in the world and certainly not in Jewish history. But one thing is certain. We American Jews, although there is no reason why we must blindly accept the program of either the government of Israel or its internal opposition, must not falter at this point. We must dissociate ourselves from the kind of unfortunate proposals as that by Arthur Waskow which appeared in the Op-Ed pages of The New York Times this week -- not because he is a dove, but because he writes as if Israel and the P.L.O. are co-legitimate adversaries...

We must not allow this Administration to use us in order to exert pressure on Israel in this matter.

But above all, despite tensions and threats and possibly coerced relinquishing of territory, we must never fear! Concern and caution, yes -- but not fear and not despair.

We read this morning: Pharaoh and his hordes drew near, and the Children of Israel lifted up their eyes and saw that the Egyptians were pursuing them -- *וַיִּרְאוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ה'*, "and they were greatly afraid and the Children of Israel called out -- prayed -- to the Lord." One normally assumes that the Children of Israel prayed because they were afraid, and their prayer was that they be saved from the clutches of Pharaoh. But the great Hasidic teacher, R. Samuel of Slonim, maintains that they prayed for forgiveness -- for being afraid in the first place...

The State of Israel, and Jews throughout the world, will have tough decisions to make in the days ahead. The situation will probably get worse before it gets better. But we must proceed with intelligence and understanding, even though with regret and possibly anger; without panic and impetuosity, without compromising on our ultimate goals -- but above all else, with hope and without fear.

We are a people that have encountered Amalek more than once in our long adventure. We have survived him and overcome his deadly threats.

And we shall do so again -- now and always. It is worth recording that promise and hearing it in our own ears once again today. *וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה כְּתֹב זֶה בְּסֵפֶר זִכְרוֹן* -- "And the Lord said to Moses, write this as a memorial in a book, and place it in the ears of Joshua" -- that the Lord Himself will vanquish Amalek, and Israel shall live forever.