

## Israel at 62: Will it make it to 70?

By Sarah N. Stern

We recently celebrated the 62<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel. The scratchy video tape of that momentous vote in the United Nations will be forever etched on the collective memories of our generation.

And as you can recall, there was that brief moment of ecstasy, of dancing on the streets of Tel Aviv, followed almost immediately by a call to arms to defend the tiny, embattled Yishuv against the surrounding Arab invading armies, determined to eviscerate the Jewish presence in the land.

The miracle of that birth born out of the remnants of the most systematic, premeditated attempt at genocide in history, and of Israel's continuous survival, can never, ever be over-estimated

That fragile fragment of our people went on to create Israel, a vibrant Jewish state, a thriving bastion of Western democracy, governed by the rule of law and respect for human rights within the Middle East, while being surrounded by a sea of brutal, tyrannical dictatorships that are becoming dominated increasingly by the forces of radical Islam.

Many, if not all of the Arab nations surrounding Israel have never abandoned their determination to eradicate the Jewish State...not for a single nanosecond. Their methodology has simply grown more sophisticated and cunning, and their weapons have become much more lethal.

Yet, Israel grew, despite all the years of conflict, from being an impoverished, weak nation to an utter Oasis of high tech , of advances in medicine pharmacology and health care...And one of the few nations whose Stock Market actually did well over the last several years of global recession.

And all of watched with pride this winter, as Israel, once again, was the first to arrive on the scene at yet another disaster area. This time, pulling people from the rubble from the earthquake in Haiti. Yet again, with hard-earned knowledge Israel has gained through its many conflicts, with speed and efficiency, setting up field hospitals, saving lives and delivering babies.

But what I am most worried about, is that people in the generations that will follow ours will no longer have those morally clear and unambiguous memories.

The role that memory has played in sustaining our people through the darkest days of our exile can never be overstated. It is the thread of our narrative that we read each week when we convene here, in shul, that has helped to keep us alive, as a people.

There is a Gemurrah that says that Yousef had two children in Mtizrayim: Ephraim and Maneshe. The meaning of Maneshe is that G-d has caused me to forget my travail. And the meaning of Ephraim is G-d has caused me to be fruitful.

But productivity and a high stock market is not sufficient for the survival of our people if we do not couple it with remembering who we are as a people and where we come from. If all we have is fruitfulness and forgetfulness, then we have no moral compass.

The name of my talk is Israel at 62: Will it survive until 70?

The answer is simple: If we do not remember where we come from, then we have no idea where we are going.

And if we don't know where we are going, we cannot appreciate it, once we have arrived.

So it all depends on sustaining the thread of our collective memories.

Israel, during the Oslo years, went through a period of temporary amnesia, where they wanted to forget who they were, they wanted "normalcy", to be a people like any other people and to deny the painful reality of life for the Jewish state in the Middle East.

And they felt that if we were just a people "like any other people" the world would just love us.

In the '90's many in Israel went through a period where the intellectual elite and the academic world had been dominated by "Post Zionists" and the "New Historians" .

And in their hope for a (quote) "New Middle East" they went back into the old Zionist archives and tried to unearth any sort of inequity that might possibly have ever been done to any Arab living on Israeli soil and highlight that.

In fact, a "Peace Curriculum" had been instituted within the Israeli school system. While in the old textbooks, maps of Israel had arrows drawn into it showing where the Arab nations invaded the Yishuv from, in the new textbooks arrows were drawn in the *opposite* direction,

going out of the state, showing where the Arab villages living within Israel fled to.

Empathy is a lovely emotion, but not at the expense of our survival.

Because this occurred at precisely the *same* moment in history when Yassar Arafat had embarked upon a serious brainwashing campaign, using every means possible, television shows for children, textbooks, sermons from PA appointed Imams in the mosques and articles in newspapers teaching that all of Israel, not just the post-1967 boundaries, but Haifa and Tel Aviv, will one day be theirs, inciting children to violence and glorifying Shihads and martyrdom

The Palestinian Authority, has never, to this very day abandoned these efforts to their children. And if you doubt this, I would suggest that you take a close look at the MEMRI or Palestinian Media Watch website.

This was all occurring while our children, both here and in Israel, had become mired down by moral ambiguity about the rightness of the claim to the land.

The beautiful narrative of the return of our people to their ancient homeland, had become systemically drummed out by an almost deafening cacophony of political correctness and moral relativism.

And nature abhors a vacuum. In the world of ideas, if one side is convinced about the rightness of their claim to the land, and the other is ambivalent whose ideas will ultimately prevail?

It is just basic psychology that if you make yourself a doormat, people step all over you.

Israel had gone through a period that I refer to as “the politics of fatigue and exhaustion.” Because of all of the years of wars, as Shimon Peres had said, “Our people have gotten tired of fighting...” Like in the Stockholm Syndrome, they began identifying with their oppressors, and seeing peaceful mirages in the desert. Our guard was down, and all the antisemitic cockroaches throughout the world, all sensed that.

Israeli Noble Prize Laureate, Robert Albaum, once compared Israel during that period to someone who was walking in the snow, in a deep blizzard, so cold, tired and so fatigued, so exhausted..that he thought he would just lie down and take a nap for a little bit, and then just get up...

But can you get up, when you lie down and fall asleep in the midst of a blizzard?

And while we were asleep at the wheel of history, during that blizzard, our enemies have become empowered.

Friends: I sometimes feel like a Jew living in America is 1939.

We are being confronted today with a despot coming out of Iran who denies the existence of the Holocaust as he steadfastly works to create another one.

The government of Ahmadinejad now has 6,000 centrifuges spinning enriching uranium, and he claims he will have 60,000 soon.

Recent U S intelligence reports now estimate Iran has enough enriched uranium to produce at least one nuclear bomb and will have the delivery mechanism within one year. Israeli estimates are shorter. And Ahmadinejad boasts that he will be ready to join the “nuclear club” this coming May.

Iran’s Shab 3 and Selij ballistic missiles possess a range of more than 2,000 kilometers enabling them to reach all of Israel, the Middle East, Turkey and much of Southern Europe.

Meanwhile, according to a story appearing in last Sunday’s New York Times, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates wrote a three page memo to the White House, saying that this administration lacks a coherent plan to deal with Iran.

When running for office, President Obama had said that he would give diplomacy a limited amount of time. It has been 15 months..We have given the Iranians valuable time that they have used as a smokescreen behind which they are laboring furiously for a nuclear bomb.

Last winter, both the House and the Senate had passed separate versions of the Iran Petroleum Sanctions Act, but so far staffers on the Hill have told me that the administration has delayed the bills from

going to conference committee so there will be one, unified law of the land.

And on the international scene, the administration is watering down the sanctions in order to get Russia and Red China on board, reducing them to the lowest common denominator, so that they are virtually toothless.

Ahmadinejad, in language that is eerily reminiscent of another dictator has repeatedly vowed to wipe Israel off the map, calling Israel “a filthy microbe”, a “dried rotten tree” and a “stinking corpse.”

Where is the sense of urgency among our people? Where is the outcry?

If there is ONE thing that our people have had to learn from our long and bitter history, it is that when our enemies speak, they mean business. We have got to learn to read the writing on the wall, and to take what it is that they say at Face Value.

Meanwhile Syria, this past week, recently announced that have given Hizbullah advanced Scud missile, enabling the terrorist group to reach every single city in Israel from its base in Southern Lebanon.

And meanwhile, in all of the high and mighty institutions of international jurisdiction, and in the parlors of polite society, Israel is being held up to a standard of conduct that would be impossible for any other nation to live up to, given the same circumstances.

This is twenty-first century antisemitism, the new, polite sort of antisemitism, which often results in the not so polite shedding of innocent, Jewish blood.

This new antisemitism has reached into the United Nations, where last year, they issued 86 human rights resolutions, and 36 of the 86 were condemning of Israel, much more than the number of resolutions focusing on the Sudan, Somalia and Saudi Arabia, where young girls who have been raped are stoned in honor killings by their own families.

The antisemitism reaches into Europe where many universities refuse to cooperate with Israeli academicians, and where foods from the territories carry special labels that are boycotted on grocery shelves.

It reaches to England where last week, **The British Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) criticized Israel for including pictures of the Western Wall in a tourism advertisement, claiming that the Kotel is technically not located within the Israeli borders.**

It reaches into our American academic institutions where “Divest from Israel campaigns” are in full gear in many of our nation’s campuses, ranging from Columbia in New York to Harvard and MIT in Boston to Stanford and Berkeley in the West, and very close to home at University of California at Irvine where Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren was almost prevented from uttering a single sentence, recently without hostile interruption.

It reaches into our very own House of Representatives where Congressmen such as Brian Bard, Dennis Kucinich and Keith Ellison constantly hold seminars on the moral illegitimacy of the state of Israel and its army. An army which according to Col Richard Kemp, the Commander of the British Forces in Afghanistan is “the most moral Army in the world.”

**And it reaches world wide where antisemitic incidents are reported to have doubled in 2009 since the previous year.**

In 1993, when Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin shook hands with Yasir Arafat on the White House Lawn there was a flicker of hope. However, as the death toll of Israeli blood continued to mount, did any of the talking heads and sophisticates inside the Beltway ever bother to ask the simple question: Is this Oslo process actually getting us any closer to the goalpost of peace?

I don't know about you, but I would not exactly define "peace" as people dying on the streets. Never before in Israel's history have there been so many civilians killed in acts of terrorism then in the ensuing years since Oslo. Yet, people tended to euphemize the extraordinarily high amounts of civilian deaths as quote "Sacrifices for Peace."

Does anyone possess the intellectual honesty and integrity to think outside of the box? To examine whether or not Israel is better off today than it was in 1993?

I vividly remember when Nachshom Waxman was kidnapped and held for several days, right after the White House lawn signing ceremony on September 13, 1993. Everybody was glued to the television sets to learn of his fate. Every body knew his name.

And one of the most tragic consequences of Oslo is that the victims mounted so rapidly that they were no longer names with stories ...They have been reduced to mere statistics.

And with each new successive land withdrawal, whether it be from Southern Lebanon in the North which had become a stronghold of

Hizballah, an Iranian proxy, to Gaza in the South, which has become a stronghold of Hamas, an Iranian proxy, each successive land withdrawal has simply wet the appetite of radical Islamist for more.

They intend to make as much of the world as possible into an Islamic caliphate.

Many have stated that there is a linkage between Israel's willingness to cede land for peace and whether or not she will have to go it alone against Iran.

That linkage has, in reality, been turned on its head against Israel, in more ways than the obvious.

That is because of the simple fact that both Hamas and Hizballah are Iranian PROXIES. So Iran is only empowered either way.

Now that we *HAVE* the empirical evidence of the withdrawal from Gaza, which culminated in 10,000 missiles raining down on Southern Israel and the neighboring city of Sderot, why would any rational Israeli want to withdraw from the West Bank?

This withdrawal would leave every single Israeli city within easy Kassam missile range, as well as Ben Gurion airport. Just one missile on a plane to or from Ben Gurion airport would cut off Israel from all air transport and physically isolate the Jewish state.

And in the most ironic twist of history, Israel now is being demanded to make further withdrawals to display "Confidence Building Measures for the Peace Process"?

Friends: This is not linkage. This is blackmail. This is a choice between death at a million blows or instant death in one fell swoop.

I was in Israel during the period of the Gaza withdrawal. It was probably the most heartbreaking thing I have ever witnessed. In an internally divisive and gut-wrenching decision, young IDF soldiers who joined the army to fight Israel's enemies were taught to be like robots, not to feel any pain, as they ripped Jews from their homes. I remember listening to the radio and hearing one mother saying. "Mr Prime Minister, Will you uproot the tree I planted in memory of my son that was killed in Jenin? I have not been able to go into his room ever since. Can you pack up his room for me?"

People were trying to convince themselves that this will be *the* opportunity for the Palestinians to prove to the world, once and for all that they could govern themselves in peace.

Wealthy Jews bought the greenhouses so that the fledgling Palestinian state would have an economic infrastructure and Rabbis in Jerusalem were debating whether the shuls should remain, after all, argued one particularly prominent rabbi, "We all pray to the same God".

As soon as the last IDF soldier locked the gate and the Israeli flag was lowered those greenhouses and synagogues were destroyed in a frenzied atmosphere of nihilism and hatred.

We know about the free and open democratic election of Hamas by the people of Gaza that following January.

We know about the more than 10,000 Kassam rockets raining down upon southern Israel.

We know about the 15 seconds that the children of Sderot had to run for their lives when they heard the wail of the siren, “Seva Adom, Seva Adom.”

We know about the painstaking decision to finally go back into Gaza that the IDF was forced to make in the winter of 2008. A decision that was made because, under article 51 of the United Nations Charter, the very first obligation of every nation state is to defend the lives of her civilians.

We know about the young IDF soldiers who were buried, who lost their lives because the IDF decided not to risk the Palestinian collateral damage of an air campaign.

And we also know about the asymmetry of the conflict. We know about Hamas using of women and children as human shields. We know about their use of Red Crescent ambulances to smuggle weapons and 5, 6, 7, terrorists at a time; about the tunnels smuggling weapons in from Egypt.

We know about their hiding in civilian population centers. About their use of schools, mosques, playgrounds and hospitals as bases to launch their weapons. All of this was done, in a sinister calculation of maximizing their own civilian deaths, all done in order to make the Jewish state look bad in the court of public opinion.

And we know that all of this culminated in the notorious Goldstone Report, put out by a sacrosanct UN Human Rights Council...

And NOW our enemies are preparing to go into the United Nations and demand a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood, and Israel is supposed to withdraw the pre-1967, indefensible borders, which was dubbed by Ambassador Abba Eban of the Labor Party as “The Auschwitz lines”?

Prior to the birth of Israel, we were known as the people of the book, of ideas and of words. However, Hitler taught us that ideas and words were not sufficient to survive...That sometimes we have to use force.. and now our enemies have been using words and ideas to delegitimize the existence of the Jewish state.

Ladies and Gentleman, we have absolutely nothing to apologize for and nothing to be defensive about. Israel has tried, in good faith to sacrifice “land for peace”. They have given the land...Now, may I ask, where is the peace?

I have to leave you with one more story. I was in the Washington Institute on July 25<sup>th</sup> 2000. That was the day the Camp David Two talks, with Prime Minister Barak, President Clinton and Yassir Arafat had had broken up. Then Attorney General Eliyakim Rubenstein had come to address the group, and this is what he said:

He said: I could look everyone in the eye and I can tell you that we went as far as any Israeli government could possibly go. There are people right now, in the limousines driving back to the airport who are stunned and crying. They felt if we actually made Chariman Arafat an offer that was too good to refuse, he simply wouldn't.

What they had to offer was division of Jerusalem, with the Palestinians taking control of the Temple Mount and the Israelis controlling the Western Wall, a quote “Right of Return” of thousands of refugees and some sort of financial compensatory package for those that Israel couldn’t absorb, a full withdrawal from Gaza and a ninety-seven percent withdrawal from Judea and Samaria, or the West Bank, if you will.

Arafat did not say yes and he did not say no. He simply walked away from the table. And his response came a few months later in the form of a renewed intifada.

And the Israelis, saying that this was a once or never offer, did not write this down anywhere.

And now we have books, such as that written by President Obama’s friend and advisor, Rashid Khalidi of Columbia University entitled, “Resurrecting Empire”, which is used in college classes all over the United States and which says and I quote: “that what the Israelis had to offer at Camp David was so flimsy it was laughable.”

We have GOT to reclaim ourselves as the People of the Book, again. We have got to get engaged in the Battle of Ideas, and we have got to record and to remember just how far Israel has been willing to go for the sake of peace and where it has brought us.

It is time for us, once and for all, to stop being so apologetic , and to stop being so defensive. We have got to remember our history, INCLUDING OUR Recent History. We have to remember what has happened to us as a people, before, during and since the birth of Israel, all of the struggles Israel has gone through to survive, and and how far

Israel had been willing to go for peace. We have got to tell our story over and over and over again.

As the Czech novelist, Milan Kundwa had written in the Book of Laughter and Forgetting, “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”

Or as Sir Winston Churchill said, “Never give in..Never, Never, Never, Never Give In...Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.”

Thank you very much