

Hitchens Was Wrong

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

I enjoy reading Christopher Hitchens, the Anglo-American gadfly journalist, even when he gets it completely wrong. Here is an example. In his autobiography, [Hitch-22](#), this is what he says about Israel:

“Suppose a man leaps out of a burning building...and lands on a bystander in the street below. Now make that burning building Europe and the luckless man the Palestinian Arabs. Is this a historical injustice? Has the man below been made a victim with infinite cause for complaint and indefinite justification for violent retaliation? The man leaping from the burning building must still make such restitution as he can to the man who broke his fall and must not pretend he that he never even landed on him. And he must base his case on the singularity and uniqueness of the original leap.” (Page 381)

Since the paperback edition has a preface dated 2011, it is reasonable to assume that, whatever else he may have revised or modified, Hitchens stands by that silly, misleading, and completely unworthy metaphor.

If Europe is the fire, which fire is Hitchens referring to? Medieval Europe with its ghastly record of torment and murder when, after continuing oppression, thousands of Jews trekked across Europe desperate to find peace of mind and body in the land they had always looked to and prayed for, for thousands of years? Is it the Expulsion from Spain in 1492 that led to mass migration of Jews to the Land of Israel? Then in fact the Ottoman Sultan welcomed Jews and encouraged them to settle in Safed and the North of Israel, where there was industry and agriculture to support them. Perhaps he meant the depredations of the Cossacks in 1648, when another wave of European Jews made their way to their Holy Land? He could have referred to the migrations of the nineteenth century in response to Russian anti-Semitism. Does Hitchens share with Obama the myth that Israel was simply the creation of the Holocaust? Does he believe the Jews referred to in the New Testament were really Arab Palestinians? Was there no history in between 70 and 1948?

How does he deal with thousands of Jews attacked, tortured, and killed after Israel declared independence, and the millions of Jews expelled from Arab lands without a penny to their names? Were they thrown out of the same window or a different one? Or was it a myth?

And if I stay with the analogy and agree that the Jews were thrown out of several houses over several periods, is there not a difference to their being thrown out into their own back garden as opposed to the street? What if the pedestrian had intentionally stood underneath the falling man instead of stepping aside or trying to break his fall instead of being an unwitting and

accidental victim? And what if the pedestrian had actually refused to allow the fire exits to be used and had blocked them up? Would he be so innocent then?

I recognize that history changes, rights change, often there are conflicting rights, and one must always do whatever one can to minimize human suffering and seek as equitable a solution as possible (provided of course both sides are prepared to negotiate). Ben Gurion gave a far better analogy—the analogy of two families claiming the same home. That is closer to reality. Many Arabs migrated into Palestine when Jewish immigration created jobs and opportunities. But still, if two people do share a home they can negotiate a settlement and agree to a partition. But what if one side resolutely refuses to partition the house, then claims foul when he is evicted and keeps on trying to climb back in?

I am not saying Israel was and is innocent of any fault. I am saying that accommodation was once possible and much easier than it is today. Indeed, that was the famous position of King Abdullah I, when he accepted the Peel Commission and partition, before he was assassinated by Arab nationalists who refused to share or even divide the house. Now Muslim fundamentalists unabashedly want the total eviction of all Jews from the house.

Neither am I saying the Jews were or are the perfect tenants. They did indeed take good care of their part and built on impressive extensions. But they also made a lot of noise. They were and are aggressive neighbors, quick to retaliate and overreact. Innocents have been killed. Yet, to be fair, they have given some of the extensions they built back to the original owners. They have encroached more and more into the parts of the house that even they agree should be inhabited by the other side. As for the others, they have stood by as their space is reduced and have refused to deal, expecting and hoping that one day the council would evict the other party and that would be the end of the story.

The Hitchens metaphor is an implicit denial of the rights of Jews under Islam, who were living in another burning house altogether, to find a haven in a home that, after all, they built first. If eviction is the criterion, what about earlier evictions? Is there a statute of limitations? Is Hitchens saying Jews from all over the known world never stayed in that house originally? If Arabs can claim back the place from which they were driven, why cannot Jews? If the objection is to conquest, then object to Arab conquest too. Is eviction the evil? Were not Jews evicted? Is religion the cause of the problem? Why not include all the religions that have coveted the land, and let each recognize the rights of the other. But where one religion refuses to countenance other and teaches its faithful to demand the eviction of the Jews, then it is the man in the street who started pushing people out but then complains when he himself finds he is on the outside.

This proves, once again, the old saying, "Where the heart wishes to go, the mind is sure to follow." It's not the finding fault with Israel I object to. On the contrary, it deserves opprobrium for its failures internal and external. That's how people grow. It is the now compulsive and politically correct radical Western (and many Jews too) hatred of anything Israeli has

become so pathological that it has spilled over into the Wall Street protests and even into Jewish protests against Jews as the following links illustrate. Hatred of Israel has become dogma and, as we know, against dogma there is no room for argument.

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More On The "Occupy" Movement:

['Occupy' protestors storm Israeli consulate](#)

[Young U.S. Jews aim 'occupy' movement at Birthright Israel](#)