

Kill the Messenger

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Two weeks ago I wrote [an article about corruption in the Jewish religious world](#). As I expected, the response from my target audience was to ignore it altogether, or that I must be a charlatan and a hypocrite, an enemy of Orthodoxy. Why didn't I focus on all the good things religious people do, and why not emphasize all the horrible and corrupt and far more serious crimes that others commit. It is the usual response I have come to expect. Do not address the issues, just kill the messenger.

I am not for one minute suggesting I come anywhere near the ankles of the great Biblical prophets. They too excoriated their coreligionists, their priestly leadership, and the corruption of Temple worship. Were they anti-Semites? When the Torah commands us to rebuke our neighbors, is it too anti-Orthodox? Proverbs says one should not try to correct a fool for he will only hate you.

Of course, one has to try one's best to ensure that the honest criticism one directs internally to one's own is not misused by others on the outside, nefariously. And it is all but impossible to control that nowadays. In the end, however, honest and sincere criticism is essential for anyone's morality. It is this that lies behind the Musar exercises and practices I was taught as a teenager in Beer Yaakov Yeshiva by the great proponent of Musar, Rabbi Shlomo Volbe, z"l. I am justified in criticizing Orthodoxy precisely because I love it and am fully aware of its good points, which indeed underpin and animate my life and work.

So despite everything, here I come again asking for more trouble. This time it is about Israel. I have kept my powder dry hitherto precisely because of the crescendo of attacks, the attempts to delegitimize Israel, and the unholy alliance between fundamentalists and left-wing loonies united only in their hatred of Israel and Jews. But eventually one has to express one's views, regardless.

I have always been strongly opposed to occupation. I agreed completely with the late Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz that occupation would have a deleterious impact on the values and humanity of the occupiers, however benevolent. That it has been accompanied by land grabs, theft, insensitivity, and bullying makes it worse (and it is no excuse to argue that all this happens constantly, every day, within and between Israelis). There are mitigating circumstances. Palestinian and Arab errors of judgment and policy may have been far worse; this does not excuse the evidence that, to many Israelis, Palestinians are untermenschen. Even if there is corruption and abuse in Palestinian society, the sad fact is that it exists in Israel too.

On the other hand, I have always believed in Land for Peace. When I was in yeshiva, all the major Charedi rabbis, both Sefardi and Ashkenazi, (with the exception of Lubavitch) were all of the same opinion. Important as land is,

essential as the Hills of Judea and Samaria may be to our heritage and past, human life and safety overrides all other considerations. And as much as I admire and revere the late Rav Abraham Isaac Kook's vision of Israel and the Jewish people, I did not identify with the cliques that surrounded his son the late Rav Zvi Yehuda and became the powerhouse of Settler ideology. We Jews have survived without any land for millennia, let alone without all parts of it.

I am not convinced there is a partner for peace and I think there is an agenda to see all of the Fertile Crescent in Muslim hands. Even if I do believe in the principle of Land for Peace, I do not therefore believe in submission or suicide. But this has nothing to do with the impossible conundrum of occupation, which by its very definition means subjugation.

As a completely unqualified, inexperienced commentator, it seems to me that withdrawing behind defensive barriers until such time as hatred diminishes has its attraction. It has certainly worked in stopping suicide bombers. Except that nowadays you can fire rockets over any barrier. In theory, the Palestinians should be responsible for their own security, but we have already seen how those same security forces can become the vehicles of aggression. And the numbers game is against Israel. Negotiation in other words offers more long term hope than inertia.

Individual Israelis have been guilty of war crimes. Some have been dealt with by Israel itself. Certain governmental and army policies have been wrong and self-defeating. It is necessary to keep on hammering away at abuses. That is the moral obligation of any moral human being. But that does not mean we should not fear the baseless hatred of Israel and Jews which infects not only the primitive reaches of our universe but the so-called sophisticated world too.

I am influenced by the famous line in Proverbs that "God rebukes those He Loves like a caring father." Criticism must come from those who are committed to Israel, committed to its survival, committed to Judaism. A parent who exercises no correction is a bad parent. A friend who does not point out failings is a bad friend. One must not ignore criticism from those who live in, work in, and love Israel. I hear the criticism that comes from other quarters too, but usually those critics have much bigger warts on their noses and it is a case of "doctor, heal thyself".

There is too little civilized debate and too much abuse and excoriation. An Anglo-Jewish magnate who objected to the opinions of an Israeli academic [emailed him](#):

"I saw your disgusting contribution to the Dispatches programme. I want nothing ever to do with you and will use whatever influence I have at BGU to have you thrown out. The only thing worse than an anti-Semitic gentile is a traitorous anti-Semitic Jew. I hope you perish and I curse you."

Hardly civilized debate, which goes to prove that money is no guarantee of common sense.

I criticize because I love. Love that will not criticize is not true love.