

The non-love that dare not speak its name

Baron Frankal

Yes, this article is about israel. Yes, it is not a glowing endorsement. No, please don't pick up the rude letter pen just yet. The real purpose is to test our capability as a community – menorah, manchester, anglo-jewry – for rational reflection.

Like probably most members, I am conflicted, coming from a traditional hovevei zion jewish background, with close relatives there. I have lived in tel aviv and recently took friends and family to jerusalem for a big simcha. And yet. These have not been kind decades to humanists and progressives.

I spent a formative period at united nations headquarters in geneva, where good people do the good work of human rights, aid, peace and justice. As a jew my cheers were loud when whilst there the yugoslavian tribunal was established in the hague to prosecute war criminals and genocide: never again, no impunity. And yet. Those in the middle of the venn diagram of our community and worldly humanitarian

values find it awkward to apply the same lens, principles and systems to israel. All have special circumstances, but we are poignantly aware of our own.

In 1967, two decades after so many died to create a precarious jewish state, israel's astounding victory brought the rest of biblical israel within its boundaries, alongside its palestinians. Two more decades on, israel had contravened international law to annex east jerusalem and the golan heights, but had neither integrated and given civil rights to that west bank arab population nor been able to act on its hope and expectation of swapping that land for peace.

Many progressives, especially jews, accepted the need to hold on a few years more while working out whether to incorporate the palestinians into israel's democracy (like golan) or to pull out (like sinai) in a way that wouldn't threaten israel's survival in a vicious neighbourhood. Those two decades later the occupation became part of the status quo. That arab population, now some 4 million, had neither equal, or indeed any, israeli civil rights, nor their own state; a third generation of stateless limbo that was the backdrop to the first intifada, and the second, and gaza, and the third, and gaza again. Etc.



The community can rationalise the settlements: the rotten apple of bad in israel's broader barrow of good. And yet. It was the left that created the first, the kfar etzion kibbutz. The allon plan was named for a labour prime-minister; his successor, yitzhak rabin, accelerated. Coming to power in 1977 the right proclaimed the west bank an inalienable part of israel: a one state solution. By the time two states were back in vogue in the 1990s, there were already 100,000 settlers. Today, well over 500,000, excluding east jerusalem. On our watch this thickening of the status quo, the segregated road, power and utility networks, military installations and broader construction and economic effects

instituted to support it, at some point turned a two-state solution from being extremely difficult to being effectively impossible.

How does a community, modern, humanist and progressive elsewhere, deal with those seeking to apply universal values and rules to our communal centrality, when to do so may split the community and shame israel or even threaten its survival? Not so well; the cantankerous uncle probably needs confining to the cellar.

And yet. The best friends are fearless truth-tellers. There are only three possibilities. One-state gives everyone the equal rights of democracy, state and law. Two-states sees something like the west bank and gaza become a state. The status quo draws an arbitrary line between an overwhelmingly jewish half that gets the votes and laws package and half which is occupied, passportless, broadly poor and subject to arbitrary justice, armed incursion and the occasional brutal bombardment.

The survival of a jewish state seems to depend on stopping a large group of would-be citizens under our control having the equal rights jews have demanded throughout modernity and which form the core belief of any right-minded, let alone progressive, community. We have got here by turning the other cheek. We need to shout from the rooftops when we see wrong.

[Baron deliberately writes with lowercase letters. His aim is clear and efficient communication. After consideration, Shofar has retained Baron's style for his piece. Ed]