

Borough Park Symposium IV

A Response to the Paper by Russ Resnik: *What should Messianic Jewish leaders be discussing within our own community about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict?*

Presented by Marty Waldman

“Thank you” to Russ Resnik for his excellent and thoughtful paper.

The well-known maxim: *“Treat others as you would have them treat you”* or, *“What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor”* is attributed to both Yeshua and Hillel.¹ This call to mutually idyllic treatment of one another has not always applied. For example, there were periods in Scriptural history when G-d called corporate Israel or Israelis to offensively or defensively enter into battle with other nations or individuals. Likewise, battles of heaven may be manifested on earth as witnessed by Satan’s pursuit of Israel’s destruction throughout history.² This response paper will reference National Israel and the Palestinian Authority’s Unity government with Hamas as well as giving consideration to individual Israelis and Palestinians.

One question for discussion: *What about the violence?* Given the fact that violence has occurred on both sides of the *Israeli/Palestinian* conflict it may be difficult, but not impossible, to discern a motivation for this long-term animosity. Admittedly, I begin with an apparently one-sided premise: Israel is motivated by “defense” for its survival but the PA and Hamas are motivated by “offense” for the destruction of Israel. Two National Charters that call for Israel’s destruction are The Palestinian National Charter: Resolutions of the Palestine National Council July 1-17, 1968³ and The Hamas Covenant of 1988.⁴ The sentiments expressed in these two charters declare an unceasing holy war on Israel. Unprovoked missiles from Gaza into population centers of Israel, suicide killing missions from Judah/Samaria and continuous threats of violence emanate from people bent on the destruction of Israel. Has Israel retaliated with violence? Yes. Although Israel has a record of extending humanitarian aid and desires peace, the nation’s pre-formation history was peppered with unprovoked violence against Arabs and the British. These attacks were attributed to various military Jewish organizations.⁵ The Jewish groups, such as Irgun and Lehi (*Stern Gang*), committed acts of terrorism (to secure Israel’s independence) that remain as open wounds to many.

Do parameters exist to Hillel’s most famous aphorism? “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?” The implied response is “no one.” But if we focus too much on ourselves we become selfishly myopic and refuse to diminish our own

¹ Matthew 7:12 and Tractate Shabbat 31a [cf. Lev. 19:18], *Babylonian Talmud*

² Revelation 12

³ Please see Yale’s School of Law library for the articles of the Palestinian Charter http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/plocov.asp

⁴ Hamas Covenant of 1988 http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp

⁵Jewish Self-Defense... http://terrorismexperts.org/terrorism_research_roots1.htm

egos, which may lead us to “separate ourselves in order to seek our own desire.”⁶ “If I am for myself only what am I?” If I am feeling secure in the preservation of my/our [Jewish] existence and identity I will begin to consider others. *If we lose ourselves in Yeshua we will find ourselves* but if we lose ourselves in others we may change, diminish or endanger my/our own identity – people and homeland. Yes, we must consider others and we must place a high value on human life and dignity outside of our own singular or collective identity. But at what point, if any, would our consideration of others endanger the welfare of our own people and nation?

“If not now, when?” As Jews, we must never cease to strengthen and encourage ourselves in our ancestral and G-d given identity and calling: ***to be a light to the Nations.*** As such, the time is always “now” to carry the light of G-d outside of our community. As Yeshua followers, each of us should recognize the fact that bearing the light of the Messiah [*the Light of the world*] is incumbent upon us within our community as well as beyond our own borders. Israel as a nation senses this call to help other nations in need by sending medical missions and supplies as well as educators to third world countries and disaster areas whether the ‘*other*’ favors Israel or not.⁷ Inherent in our Messianic community is the call to be “Ambassadors of the Messiah” for reconciliation – calling others to be reconciled to G-d in Messiah Yeshua. (2Corinthians 5:20)

Diaspora Messianic Jews are in a precarious position. Are we to be like the majority of diaspora Jews who critique Israel’s every move? Or, should we demonstrate solidarity with Israel during a time of unprecedented conflict and world criticism? Russ has rightly admonished us to reject positions that enflame polarization but we may encounter times and issues that compel us toward one side or another. As ambassadors for Yeshua should we consequentially refuse to take a stand because it may be deemed as prejudicial or polarizing? No. As the son of Holocaust survivors I thank HaShem for the people who adopted the polarizing position of saving Jews during the Nazi’s reign in Europe. I am alive today because of one such family. At great cost, Israel has absorbed millions of Jews from the Diaspora. One and a half million of those diaspora Jews fled from Muslim Arab countries since Israel’s rebirth in 1948.⁸

The double tragedy of three Jewish students being kidnapped and murdered earlier in 2014 with the corresponding kidnap and brutal murder of a Palestinian teenager ultimately precipitated the Israel/Hamas war during the summer of 2014. What motivated the murder of the three Jewish students? According to Avner Boskey, the Hamas Covenant and the Islamic Brotherhood’s

⁶ Proverbs 18:1

⁷ See Israel Foreign Affairs and MASHAV websites as well as the Jewish Press article listed here: <http://www.jewishpress.com/news/breaking-news/israel-sends-medical-shipments-to-fight-ebola/2014/11/16/>

⁸ Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries: http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/talking/jew_refugees.html

charter that calls for complete annihilation of Israel motivated the terrorists.⁹ Hamas continually portrays their terrorism against Israel as legitimate because they consider themselves to be freedom fighters that must liberate Palestine.¹⁰ What motivated the killers of the Palestinian teen? Revenge. Otherwise peace-loving people can be trapped by vengeance, which is antithetical to the teachings of Torah.¹¹ Israel's focus of last summer's war was Hamas in the Gaza Strip because they were responsible for the ceaseless and indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza into Israel's southern region. Hamas' missiles personally affected our family because our home is near Gaza. Also, little known and seldom reported in the press is the fact that Palestinian Christians have been severely persecuted and murdered by Hamas and other Palestinian Islamic extremists.¹² Inherent in the Palestinian Authority's unity government with Hamas is a call for all Arabs who live within Israel's territorial borders to fight against Israel in order to reclaim Palestine. However, many Palestinians may not agree with the PA's (and Hamas') decrees.

Calev Myers of the Jerusalem Institute of Justice reported on a survey that was taken among Palestinians during 2014:

*...based on research conducted by the Jerusalem Institute of Justice, that the vast majority of Palestinians living in the disputed territories, who do not receive a salary from the Palestinian Authority, would **prefer to be citizens of Israel**, rather than the proposed state of Palestine.¹³*

The reality of war – the constant threat of war against Israel causes a number of issues to arise concerning our discussion. “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?” The political atmosphere in Israel is changing; Israel will have early elections shortly after our BPS IV but rumors of war linger. Since Russ has called us to higher ground in this discussion, rather than focus on Israeli politics we should concentrate on prayer. Israel and the Palestinians need peace. G-d causes rulers to arise and fall (Daniel 2:21) so pray for all concerned during an opportune moment.

A shifting sentiment stimulated by continuous conflict is **a new openness** among Israelis concerning Yeshua. Messianic Israeli leaders in the Land sense a

⁹ Birth Pangs in the Midst of Jihad by Avner Boskey – July 13, 2014
<http://davidstent.com/birth-pangs-in-the-midst-of-jihad/>

¹⁰ "Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniya Reaffirms Hamas' Commitment to Armed Resistance and Says: **“We Will Liberate Palestine in Its Entirety**, from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River”. *Memri TV*. Retrieved 22 July 2014. Also see article 14 in the Hamas Covenant [Hamas Charter] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas_Covenant#cite_note-avalon-21

¹¹ Lev. 19:18; Rom. 12:17

¹² For an Arab perspective see: <http://theArabDailyNews.com/2014/05/24/campaign-silence-christians-challenge-arab-world-discrimination/>

¹³ Please see Jerusalem Institute of Justice study: <http://us5.campaign-archive1.com/?u=f90156f81e0ff7c8864d78183&id=16feac2e64&e=d797fac0d9>

heavenly shift and are seeing a greater spiritual hunger among *Sabras*¹⁴ for the Good News message of Yeshua. Hearing news of an increased spiritual hunger should cause us to increase our prayer focus for our own people and for the Palestinians. May *Avinu sh'ba- shammayim*¹⁵ draw our Israeli brothers and sisters to Yeshua in increased numbers and bring shalom to all of Israel! Like Rav Shaul, *my heart's desire and prayer is for Israel to be redeemed* (Romans 10:1). Palestinians need Yeshua's redemption as well. Jerry Rassamni, a former Muslim and author of the book, *From Jihad to Jesus*, believes that the sons of Ishmael shall be spiritually awakened to Yeshua because G-d will remember the covenant sign of circumcision also committed to Ishmael. Jerry is a personal friend who states that the new love for Yeshua *must* include a love for His people Israel.¹⁶

“If I am only for myself, what am I?” The love of G-d, especially expressed in Yeshua our Messiah, compels me/us to consider the plight of others outside of our Jewish community. This focus is especially relevant concerning our “neighbors” – for the purpose of this discussion the Palestinians. The Torah teacher asked Yeshua: “*Who is my neighbor?*”¹⁷ Israelis and Palestinians certainly live close enough in proximity to each other to be considered neighbors. But, what happens when a neighbor desires your destruction? Can my neighbor's desire to destroy me alter my way of thinking or responding to him? “If I'm not for myself, who will be for me?” A closer examination of Yeshua's parable about the Samaritan neighbor may be warranted. The Samaritan of Yeshua's day displayed extraordinary love toward a Jew. Most Jews despised Samaritans, which caused Yeshua's parable to shatter most normative thoughts about the definition of ‘neighbor.’ Fellow Jews averted entanglement by distancing themselves from the injured Jewish traveler while one from a ‘despised’ race expressed kindness. The defining element in being neighborly was and remains the showing of mercy to someone in need. Yeshua's parable also presents a dilemma for us since Palestinian leaders seek to destroy Israel as a nation. The prophetic truth expressed by Jeremiah (*Jer. 31:35-37*) and Rav Shaul (*Rom. 11:28-29*) concerning Israel's indestructible nature and calling in G-d's mercy may provide us with hope – perhaps enough hope to extend needed mercy to our neighbors. Would it be reasonable to hope for reciprocal sentiments among Palestinians?

So, how does Yeshua's exhortation apply to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict? Could it be that we are called to extend mercy when the opportunity arises? As Yeshua instructed in Matt. 6:44, “*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*” Messianic Jews should extend love and prayer. But, as Yeshua

¹⁴ *Sabra* is the Hebrew name for a Jew born in Israel

¹⁵ See **Hebrew prayer for Israel** - Although “*Our Father in heaven*” is the opening line of “The Lord's Prayer” (Matt. 6:9) this phrase begins a number of traditional prayers from Yeshua's day and has been incorporated into a traditional prayer for peace in Israel. <http://www.jr.co.il/prayers/hebrew-israel-prayer.htm>

¹⁶ www.FromJihadtoJesus.com or email jr@fromjihadtojesus.com

¹⁷ See Luke 10:25-37 for the entire conversation with Yeshua

also prophetically stated in Matt. 22:44, *“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a foot stool for your feet”* we should recognize the fact that enemies exist who are bent on the destruction of Israel – in this case the Palestinian leadership. Rarely does a day pass without news from Israel about unprovoked missile attacks from Gaza or suicide attackers in Jerusalem proper or from Judah and Samaria. How do I as a follower of Yeshua express compassion to these “neighbors?” I can pray for them as Yeshua prayed: *“Adonai, forgive them for they don’t know what they are doing.”* But, my confession in this paper is the struggle of my own heart and the struggle of many Jewish people: it’s hard. I have to so identify with Yeshua’s sacrificial death that I lose myself in Him.

Another issue concerning the Israel/Palestinian conflict is unity and reconciliation with my/our Palestinian brothers in Yeshua as well as the Arab Christians who are Israeli citizens. My reconciliation experience is so limited concerning Palestinian brothers and sisters in Yeshua that I will cling to Yeshua’s heart every step of the way. The difficult process of “hearing” one another is compounded by differing theologies – Most Messianic Jews believe that G-d’s promises to the sons of Jacob concerning Israel’s chosenness and the Land promises remain valid forever; many Palestinian Christians believe that Jews have no special claim on the Land but are occupiers and oppressors. These are challenging times and issues that demand the supernatural power and presence of Yeshua. May the “Helper”¹⁸ grant us grace and wisdom from our Father in heaven.

¹⁸ John 14:26