

**SHABBAT SERMON**  
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*J Street is a Dead end; Jewish Critics of Israel*

“Patience is a virtue” ... but not a Jewish one! It’s been said that if the Arabs were smart in their desire to destroy Israel, they don’t need any missiles or bombs, all they have to do is come one night to all the major intersections in Israel and put up four way stop signs. The idea that three Israeli drivers would just wait patiently and allow the fourth driver to proceed is beyond the realm of possibility.

You spend a few hours in Israel and you will see how you can be pushed out of the way to get a seat on the bus, drivers go through stop signs, people park their supermarket carts by the cashier to reserve their place in line while they complete their shopping. The car in back of you starts honking while the traffic light is still red and people are constantly trying to get in front of you in line. In the Post Office in Israel you now have to take a number to keep people from trying to cut in line. I am reminded of a story involving Rabbi Yaakov Rosenberg who was a leading Conservative rabbi who moved to Israel. Rosenberg was a big man – physically *very* big, very rotund, *vi mir zokt* – and the story is told that one day he was waiting in line at the Post Office in Jerusalem when a young Israeli girl darted in front of him to get to the counter first. Rosenberg tapped her on the shoulder and said, “Excuse me, but I was here first.” To which the girl replied, “Oh, I’m sorry ... I didn’t see you!” Joyfully, Rabbi Rosenberg let her stay in front of him in line!

This impatience on the part of our people finds one of its early roots in today’s Torah portion where the Jews are on the threshold of entering the Promised Land. In next week’s Torah portion spies are sent to scout the land, but the Jews can’t wait, they lose patience despite the fact that they have mannah from heaven to feed them and the clouds of glory to protect them. The Jews can’t take this wilderness traveling for another day. They lose patience and despair.

I speak of this unfortunate aspect of our DNA because a manifestation of it today has the possibility of causing great harm to the Jewish people.

There is an extremely dangerous momentum taking hold amongst American Jews these days. It is a rising tide of criticism of Israeli policy and a call to pressure Israel for concessions – all coming from American Jews. Sometimes it goes under the guise of Americans for Peace Now, other times under the name New Israel Fund, and recently the new kid on the scene, J Street – calling itself “pro-Israel, pro-peace,” a leftist-dovish alternative to AIPAC. The position of all these groups, more or less, finds its clearest expression in a much discussed article in the New York Review of Books by Peter Beinart. Beinart is the former editor of the pro-Israel New Republic and from his writings, you would know that Beinart is a supporter of Israel. He belongs to an Orthodox congregation and from his article it seems that his children attended day schools. Peter Beinart’s article entitled, “The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment,” has caused an uproar amongst Jewish intellectuals. Simply put, Beinart’s thesis is that the major failure of the American Jewish community is that it has not been critical enough of Israel; it has not encouraged criticism of Israel. And he goes on to list every conceivable reason why Israel is

worthy of criticism. Now, Mr. Beinart – and all his fellow critics – are entitled to their opinion! I just don't share it! I just don't believe that after waiting 2000 years for a Jewish state, I – part of that generation to witness the greatest moment in modern Jewish history – was put here to criticize it! But I understand that everyone is entitled to their opinion, and I also understand that one can be a supporter of Israel and still disagree with some of its policies. I'll give you an example: what American Jew comes to mind as being the best-known, most active, outspoken supporter of Israel? If you think about it, a name that certainly would come to mind is Alan Dershowitz. He has written best selling books in support of Israel. He appears on television and on college campuses in support of Israel. And he makes such a good case that he was reportedly offered the opportunity to be Israel's ambassador to the United Nations. No one would question Mr. Dershowitz's Israel credentials. But you know what? For the past 30 years he has disagreed with Israel's settlement policies. But he does not place the onus for there not being peace on the settlements! And he most certainly would never come out in favor of America pressuring Israel on the settlements. Remember, Jewish critics of Israel don't simply disagree with some of Israel's policies. I disagree with some. I don't like Avigdor Lieberman being Foreign Minister. I don't like the power given to the religious parties. I don't like it, but I don't try to force my opinion on the people living in Israel! Remember, Jewish critics of Israel – if nothing else – are saying that they know what's better for Israel than a majority of the Israelis people. Remember, Jewish critics of Israel – if nothing else – are certainly giving Israel's enemies some hope. J Street may call itself "pro-Israel" but it certainly does not support the policies of the elected government of Israel. What J Street is "pro" is J Street! And let me ask you: how can anyone from *here* be so sure of what should be done *there*? How do these American Jewish critics know for sure that they would feel the same way if they were living on the West Bank instead of the West Side of New York?

Let me give you an example of what I mean. A few months ago the Israeli government announced that it would be giving out a new kind of gas mask to its citizens ... gas masks designed especially for children. An Israel Defense Force website writes, "We are the only country in the world that produces gas masks for children." And then goes on to say that the masks come with "a connector to a pacifier and a bottle, especially appropriate for infants." While here in America, when a child leaves the hospital, parents are given for that child some diapers and baby powder and baby oil, in Israel, after a baby is born and the child is about to leave the hospital, the parents are given some diapers, baby powder, baby oil . . . and a gas mask! Can we possibly understand how that feels? What it means to be introduced to the world in such a manner? Now let me ask you: if you were an Israeli parent and that's the way life started off for your child - with an immediate reminder of the threat that this child will face from Arab terrorism, if you were such a parent, when they gave you that gas mask for your child, would that make you more hawkish or more dovish? Would that make you say to yourself: we have to do everything possible for peace because this is no way to live. Or would you say: any people who could threaten to gas children can never be trusted and we must make no concessions. Would you say peace with the Palestinians must come at all costs, or would you say the gamble is too great, the cost is too high and we've paid enough? If you knew that that child, when he or she is 18 years old, would be going into the army for three years defending the borders of Israel on the Golan Heights against the threat of an attack from Hezbollah or Syria, or on the border of Gaza where he might be kidnapped. If you knew that child was coming into a world where mad ayatollahs who call for Israel's destruction might have a nuclear bomb ... If that was your child, would you say: Let's give the Arabs what they want for a promise of peace, or would you say let's never give anything back because it keeps us safer than all their promises? What would you say? How would you feel? Would you vote Labor or Likud, Barak or Netanyahu, hawk or dove or Kadima somewhere in between? How would you have felt when this past Wednesday sirens went off throughout Israel, a drill to prepare Israelis for a possible missile attack with chemical

warheads? How would you feel if you were there? You don't know? You can't be sure? Of course you don't know. Of course you can't be sure. Because they are there and we are here. Our children are not being given gas masks, our children are not standing guard on the borders. Our children are not being threatened by Iran. We as American Jews must accept that fact once and for all. Yes, we are partners with Israel but Rabbi Harold Schulweis put it so well when he once wrote: "Between Israeli and Diaspora Jewry there exists, at best, a limited partnership. That partnership enjoys the cultural and spiritual projects of the investment. But the Diaspora partners assume no risk for the liability the partnership may incur! A limited partnership is not a full partnership. Diaspora Jewry immune to the risks of the partnership has no right to impose its will on the management of the Israeli State. To blur the distinction between kinds of partnership is to empower people who do not make Aliyah, who do not serve in Israel's Defense Forces, who do not pay its taxes, and who are not subject to its government, with the same privileges, duties and rights as Israeli citizens own, to maintain or alter the policies of a Democratic government." Or to put it differently: you know the story of the chicken and the pig who are walking down the street when they see a sign in the restaurant window: "Ham and eggs for breakfast." The chicken is calm but the pig panics. The chicken asks the pig why he is so upset and the pig explains: from you they want a donation; from me they want a commitment! Yes, American Jews make the donation, but it's the Jews of Israel who have made the commitment to put their lives on the line. We owe it to them to support from here what they have chosen to do there. It is the people of Israel who have made the total commitment and it should be left in their hands to make decisions by which they and their children will live or, God forbid, die.

Does this mean that the American Jewish critics of Israel, that those who seek to have the U.S. pressure Israel for concessions, are self-hating Jews? Some! The Noam Chomskys and Henry Siegman and Tony Judts. Does it mean that they are just plain stupid? Some ... like Michael Lerner whose Tikkun Magazine recently gave its annual Ethics Award to Judge Richard Goldstone. Does this mean that there are Jews who wish Israel harm? I am sure there are some, like a Bobby Fisher or Ilan Pappé. But I tell you ... Rahm Emanuel does not wish Israel harm. And David Axlerod does not wish Israel harm. And Richard Beinart does not wish Israel harm. And Amos Oz and David Grossman and Yossi Beilin and the other critics of Israel – in Israel itself – they don't wish Israel harm. Then what is their problem? Well, I think one of their problems is that they have no patience. After more than 60 years of war, after seeing Israel being criticized by the world community, after having their own liberal credentials questioned ... they have lost patience and they are willing to try anything!

Every time someone comes up with a new idea, they agree to it! There has never been a peace plan they didn't like! There have been countless U.N. resolutions – there was the Rogers Plan, the Madrid Peace Conference, the Oslo Accords, the Wye Accords, the Camp David Accords, the Geneva Accords, the Saudi Plan, the Sharm-el Sheikh Agreement, the Zinni Plan, The Mitchell Plan, the Roadmap ... but none of them has led to peace.

You know, so many people say that everyone knows what the final peace deal will be ... Israel will have to give back the West Bank. It will keep the big settlements and trade some of its land with the Arabs. The Palestinians, in turn, will have to give up the "right of return" and Jerusalem will be divided. It's just a matter of getting everyone to agree. Believe me, I wish it were as simple as that! But let's say Israel and the Palestinians agreed, and did just that. But what happens if Hamas takes over in the West Bank as it did in the Gaza Strip, and now has rockets aimed at Tel Aviv and Ben Gurion airport. What would Israel do then – retaliate? Well, let me tell you, Israel has had some very bad experiences with just this scenario. Ten years ago Israel pulled out of southern Lebanon, believing that Hezbollah now had no more issues with Israel. In return Hezbollah kidnapped Israeli soldiers and shot rockets and when Israel retaliated,

the world condemned them. Five years ago Israel pulled out of Gaza and said: Here Palestinians, start building your state. We ask nothing in return. And in return the Palestinians built rocket launchers, shooting 8000 rockets into Israel. And when Israel retaliated, it got condemned by the world. This is no simple matter that lends itself to a simple solution. Aaron David Miller was involved as an American delegate to peace negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians through the Reagan, Bush, Clinton and second Bush administrations and oftentimes criticized Israel's position. But in a cover story of this month's Foreign Policy Magazine his headline is: "For 30 years Mid East peace was my religion. I'm not a believer now!" Yes, it may very well have to take more time and we Jews are going to have to learn the art of patience.

And we can learn it from Aaron – our first high priest – who at the beginning of today's Torah portion is given the special privilege of lighting the menorah – the candelabra that was made for the Tabernacle. The Torah tells us in minute detail the exact instructions Aaron was given on how to do this, and then the Torah tells us: "*Vayaas kein Aharon* – and Aaron did so." To which the Biblical commentator, Rashi, adds the words: "*L'haged shevocho shel Aharon shelo shina.*" These words, "And Aaron did so" come to show us the merit of Aaron ... he did as he was told and did not change anything. This shows us the merit of Aaron? He did exactly as God told him? That's considered meritorious, deserving a special mention ... he did as he was told and he didn't change anything? There is something more involved here. Put yourself in Aaron's place ... you've been given the honor to kindle the menorah. Imagine the excitement you have the first day, what a spiritual experience and what a sense of ecstasy that must have been. And then you do it the second day, the third day, the fourth ... and after a while, what are you doing? The alarm clock goes off and you don't feel like getting out of bed, you're losing patience with the same old thing and you're starting to think that you have a better way of doing it. But not for Aaron! "*Vayaas kein Aharon* – and Aaron did so. These words teach us the merit of Aaron." He never lost patience, even though it seemed to be nothing but more of the same. And he never thought that he had a better way of doing things. And he never weakened in his enthusiasm for something he loved!

We as Jews dare not lose patience with Israel, because you know what? You've got to hand it to the Arabs ... they don't lose patience! Islam teaches that Allah calls upon his believers to bear the trials of life with "patience, perseverance and prayer." And they do it! They keep "sticking to it." Faisal Hussein, who was one of the most prominent and moderate members of the PLO, shortly before he died said that the Oslo Accords were the Palestinian's Trojan Horse, and said – these are his exact words – "If we agree to declare our state over what is now only 22% of Palestine (meaning the West Bank and Gaza) our ultimate goal is still the liberation of all historic Palestine from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, even if this means that the conflict will last for another thousand years or for many generations." That's the Arab approach! They don't get worn out. And neither must Israel! Israel is only 62 years old ... that's like an infant in the life span of a nation. And look how much it has accomplished! Israel has turned itself into a major economic, social and military power. Just think of what America was like 60 years after its birth ... cowboys and Indians were still killing each other out West. Half of the 50 states, like Florida, Texas and California were still not part of the United States. Our borders were still not finalized. Or better yet, think of this: this weekend we commemorate Memorial Day. Why was this time at the end of May chosen for this sacred day? According to historians this day marked the end of the Civil War ... the first Memorial Day was observed by enslaved black people in Charleston, South Carolina. I'm sure those black people felt that now they were free ... now they were equal. But you and I know that this was not so. It would take more than another 100 years for equality to truly become the law of our land. Will it take more than another 100 years for peace to come to our people's homeland? There is no way of knowing for sure. The borders of Israel for the next thousand years, and the peace and security that come with them

are now open to negotiation. Let us have patience; let us not give in to despair. And let us be very, very, very careful about criticizing from *here* what our people are doing *there*. They have enough critics ... they need our support. Franz Kafka once wrote, “There are two cardinal sins from which all others spring: impatience and laziness.” The Israelis certainly have not been lazy. And we must not be impatient. *Hashem oz l’amo yitein Hashem yevarech et amo bashalom* – the Lord has blessed his people with strength, may He bless us with peace.” Amen.

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