

LET'S TALK TURKEY
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Many people expressed the desire for me to speak about the Gaza Flotilla incident where Israeli forces were lowered by helicopter onto a ship seeking to break Israel and Egypt's blockade of Gaza. When the Israeli troops were attacked, they fired back leading to the death of nine people and the world going crazy. When people asked me to speak about this, my reaction was – “what's there to say? We're right, the world's wrong. It's as simple as that.” But you know what? – it's not as simple as that! This incident, with its worldwide condemnation, requires more careful thought on our part and that's a lesson we learn from Moses in this week's Torah portion.

Our Torah portion this morning describes the revolt that Korach led against Moses and Aaron. At first Moses is stunned and you know what he does? The Torah tells us he fell on his face in prayer. The great Chasidic master, the Baal Hatanya, points out that Moses should have answered Korach at once with the anger he deserved, but you know why he fell on his face and prayed? Says the Baal Hatanya, because Moses thought maybe Korach was doing this for the people's good, maybe Korach is a messenger of G-d – maybe Korach's right. So Moses first fell on his face for self reflection, asking of himself: maybe Korach is right or at least partly right.

And so before speaking about this Flotilla incident, I wanted to give myself some time; with the whole world against us, I wanted to reflect on the possibility that maybe they are right or maybe they are partially right. And I've done that and I've come to the conclusion: Israel was right and the world is wrong – so what's there to talk about? So I'm not going to talk about it. I'm going to let others do the talking. This morning I want to share with you some quotes that I have come across from others discussing the Flotilla incident and I leave it for you to decide.

My first quote comes from Aaron David Miller, the man who was part of the America's mid-East negotiations beginning from the Reagan presidency until the Obama one. In the call for an independent commission to investigate the incident, Mr. Miller said, “You can have an independent commission spend three or four months studying this thing and come out with something that is stunningly clear and factual but it doesn't matter. People knew where they were before this episode started.” I love that line, “People knew where they were before this whole episode started.” Mr. Miller might not know it but what he said explains words we read toward the conclusion of last week's Torah portion. In speaking of the tzitzit, the fringes Jews are to wear, we are told: “velo tasuru achrei levavchem v'achrei eineichem – you shall not stray after your heart and after your eyes.” A great commentator asks, it really should say – don't follow your eyes and the “ don't follow your heart” – not the reverse. After all, first we see something and then our heart reacts to it. But no, writes this commentator – the Torah got it just right. The heart comes first. It is our heart that tells us what we want to see. We see where our heart directs us.

All of Israel's usual critics immediately criticized Israel, even before the facts were clear but that's because they can't be bothered by the facts when their heart has a dark spot for Israel. How else to explain this quote from Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights when he said, "We need to establish exactly what happened... I unequivocally condemn what appears to be disproportionate use of force resulting in the killing of so many people." You see, he didn't even know for sure what happened. The only thing he knew for sure was that it was Israel's fault.

You know who else was pretty sure that it was Israel's fault? Our own Baltimore Sun. From it's perspective the whole situation in Gaza is Israel's fault. Not the Palestinian's fault for shooting thousands of rockets at Israel but Israel's fault for embargoing Gaza leading to what the Sun said in its editorial, "That's why humanitarian aid is so desperately needed there." We hear a lot about humanitarian aid needed in Gaza. Israel's critics make it seem as if people are dying in the streets from hunger. That there's poverty in Gaza? There's no question. There's poverty in all the Arab countries. Indeed 20% of the Israeli people live below the poverty level. But a humanitarian crisis? Well listen to these two quotes. One comes from the Economist, a widely respected magazine and no friend for Israel which tells us, and I quote, "Today thanks to the tunnels Gaza's shop shelves are brimming with goods that often arrive cheaper and faster than when Israel opened the gates." And if that's not good enough – listen to these words from a Washington Post article describing the situation in Gaza, "If you walk down Gaza City's main thoroughfare Salah al Din Street... grocery stores are stocked wall to wall with everything from fresh Israeli yogurts and hummus to Coco Puffs smuggled in from Egypt. Pharmacies look as well supplied as a typical Rite Aid from the United States." Did you know that? Does anyone know that? Not if you follow your heart and not your eyes.

Anthony Cordesman from the Center for Strategic and International Studies writes an article this week, "Israel has become a strategic liability." That's the new mantra these days. That used to be the view from the extreme right and extreme left fringes -but now it's become mainstream thinking. And the truth is – Israel and the United States don't see eye to eye on every subject. But you know who else doesn't? A country named Turkey! Beginning with the Iraq War when Turkey wouldn't let American planes land on its soil to recent events when the leader of Turkey has embraced the leaders of Syria and Iran both of which the U.S. labels as supporters of terrorism, to working with Brazil to undermine the United States efforts to bring sanction against Iran, to this weeks meeting of the leaders of Turkey, Russia and Iran. It's this same Turkey which allowed this ship to sail from Turkey knowing it would cause a confrontation... Did you hear anyone questioning whether Turkey is a strategic liability to the United States? To date, I have heard very little criticism of Turkey's behavior here in the United States. You know where I did read of it? In the Turkish newspaper, the English language Daily News where one of its writers, Burak Bekdil, had this to say, "Why do the Turks have the "Palestine fetish" even though most of them can't point the Palestinian territories out on a map? Why did they not raise a finger when, for instance, the mullahs killed dissident Iranian Muslims? Why did the Turks not raise a finger when non-Muslim occupying forces killed a million Iraqi Muslims? Why did we not hear one single Turkish voice protesting the death of 300,000 Muslims in Darfur?... How many Turks protested when there were civil wars in Algeria? How many volunteered for humanitarian aid missions for Sudan?... What makes nine Gaza martyrs more sacred than any of the other martyrs?" And he concludes: "Subconsciously [and sadly] the

Muslim-Turkish thinking tolerate it if Muslim kill Muslims; ... but is programmed to turn the world upside down when Jews kill Muslims.” The Wall Street Journal reports that throughout Turkey there are many questioning Turkish behavior. But for the rest of the world, there is only questioning of Israel’s behavior.

But all’s not lost. At least one good thing has come out of the Flotilla incident. Indirectly, it led to the downfall of Helen Thomas. The well known correspondent for the Hearst Newspaper came up with quite a quote last week when she said that the Jews should “Get the hell out of Palestine” which they are “occupying” and go home to “Poland, Germany and America and everywhere else.” Those who carefully follow the news were not surprised by Ms. Thomas’ outburst. My mother, of blessed memory, was a regular watcher of the MacNeill-Lehrer Report and Cspan. She knew who Helen Thomas was and she had one word she would use to describe Helen Thomas. The word was “machashefa” which means a “witch.” Besides her words being so ugly, Helen Thomas was speaking for many, certainly most Arabs and Palestinians, who believe that before the Holocaust there were no Jews in Israel, that we just came there and occupied the Palestinian land. Forgive me for saying it but there is someone else whose words could lead to such a misconception – they were the words spoken by President Barack Obama in his famous Cairo speech. In discussing the Israeli Palestinian conflict, Mr. Obama said “Around the world the Jewish people were persecuted for centuries and anti-Semitism in Europe culminated in an unprecedented Holocaust... six million Jews were killed – more than the entire Jewish population of Israel today. Denying that fact is baseless, it is ignorant and it is hateful.” And then the President went on and said “On the other hand it is also undeniable that the Palestinian people – Muslims and Christians there have suffered in pursuit of a homeland for more than sixty years. They have endured the pain of dislocation... they endure the daily humiliations – large and small – that come with occupation.” With the President not making any mention of the Jews historic links to Israel, of King David having established Jerusalem as our capital 3,000 years ago, with our two Temples having been destroyed there and our being exiled, he led many to think that he, too, believes that Israel came about only because of the Holocaust and that the Palestinians have paid the price for that. Is that what the President really meant? I don’t know, I’d like to believe not. But his words and Helen Thomas’ words remind us of how careful we have to be with everything we say.

And it is with this in mind that I was appalled by the reaction of J Street, the so called “pro-Israel” lobby and I say “so called” because on the very day that the Israeli soldiers were beaten, stabbed, thrown overboard and almost lynched – J Street expressed “our condolences to the families of those killed” and used this as an opportunity to express “this shocking outcome of an effort to bring humanitarian relief to the people of Gaza is in part a consequence of the ongoing counterproductive Israeli blockade of Gaza. J Street has been and continues to be opposed to the blockade – believing that there are better ways to insure Israel’s security and to prevent weapons smuggling than a complete closure of the Gaza strip.” There are better ways? – like what? While Israel is being criticized and attacked the world over, accused of “piracy” “banditry” “barbarism” and having committed “a massacre” and “an open attack on civilized society, you Mr. J Street who call yourself “pro-Israel” join in the criticism and attack before the facts were even clear? What would you have done differently if you were “anti-Israel?” Sure, there are aspects of this incident for which Israel is worthy of criticism. The lack of advance intelligence, the fact that the commandoes were sent in with paintball guns. But it’s one thing to

be a critic of Israel. It's quite another to work to undermine the government of Israel. That's what made the incident with Korach the dangerous one that it was, the one requiring a response different from other seemingly similar incidents. The Jews had complained before Korach came along. They complained about the food and the water and, of course, from the people's perspective, some of these complaints were certainly understandable. But, Korach and his crew didn't simply complain. They wanted to bring about a revolution and throw Moses out. J Street doesn't just criticize, it really works to undermine the leadership of Israel. The chutzpah to call itself "pro-Israel" when you kick your own people while they are down. Couldn't you find anything supportive to say? Couldn't you have a little "rachmonis" for your own people? Shame on you!

So like I said, I have nothing to say about this Flotilla incident. Israel was right and the world is wrong and you don't have to take my word for it. I think the words of others that I quoted today makes that very same point. Kofi Annan the former Secretary General of the United Nations once asked regarding Israel: "Can the whole world be wrong and the Jewish people be right?" And the answer is: of course, it is possible. It's happened so many times before. For nearly 2000 years the world said that the Jewish people cause plagues and kill children for their blood. During World War II, when Jewish leaders begged the White House and the allied forces to do something to save the Jews, the allies said: first let's save democracy, then we'll save the Jews. They were wrong! By the time they saved democracy, 6 million Jews were gone. In 1981, when Israel's Prime Minister Menachem Begin, directed the Israeli Air Force to destroy Iraq's nuclear reactor, the whole world criticized him and said he was wrong. Ten years later during the Gulf War they realized *they* were wrong. In 2002 the whole world joined in a chorus proclaiming that Israel had committed a massacre in Jenin. The world still doesn't want to admit it, but they were wrong! When it comes to the Jews, the world has been wrong again and again and again. Don't get me wrong. We've made our mistakes! But that's just what they are – mistakes! We've killed innocent Palestinians by accident. They kill innocent Israelis on purpose! Yes, we may not be letting some chocolate into Gaza but they are not letting Gilad Shalit out of Gaza.

All this, the world overlooks but we know the truth and someday so will they. You know Korach, that very evil man who was swallowed up by the ground, well you know what? Our tradition tells us "u'bnei Korach lo maitu, the children of Korach did not die." They realized how wrong their father was, so too let us pray that a generation of leaders will come that will know the truth and not commit the sins of the fathers. Eventually Korach's descendents reach such great spiritual heights that they were able to compose magnificent Psalms that were sung in the Temple. One of their Psalms, the 46th one, offered hope and comfort then and still does today. "Hashem tzvaot imunu misgav lanu Elokei Yaakov selah. The Lord of Hosts is with us. The G-d of Jacob is our high tower." As G-d has been with us in the past so may He be with us in the present and the future until the end of time. Amen

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