

## **To the Loyal Followers of Reuven Ben Shalom**

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Loyal followers of Reuven Ben Shalom's articles in the Post will remember his last one of 01/22/2015, "Good Palestinians, evil Israelis." In it he refers to a three hour luncheon he had with his father's teacher at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania 56 years ago. I am that teacher.

How strange, indeed how unusual that a young student and a slightly older teacher would reconnect 49 years later through the magic of internet, reconnect on different continents in circumstances uniquely different both physically, intellectually, and psychologically yet retain memories from another time and another place that created a bond between them. Now put yourself across the lunch table from that man's son, a veteran of 25 years in the IDF and now a writer for the Jerusalem Post. His life is uniquely different from his father's and certainly different from the father's teacher.

When his father was a student, the United States was in the midst of a citizens' revolution in Civil Rights, a revolution attempting to right the wrongs of a discriminated population, and that revolution expanded in time to ensure the rights of women and to disobedience against their government for a wrongful war in Vietnam. I mention this because my understanding of the American Jewish population was informed by the active participation of Jews in that movement on behalf of human rights, and some gave their lives for that commitment.

In 2001 George Bush and his Cheney led administration took America to war in the mid-east using lies as a pretext and in the process destroyed the principles upon which the American nation existed. And he did this in collusion with Ariel Sharon. I began my excursion into the "conflict" between the Israelis and the Palestinians as an anti-Bush Administration American. The American taxpayer was paying for Sharon's settlements and the wall, not to seek peace with the indigenous population, but to isolate them while they stole land under the guise of "security."

Truth is evasive; it is constructed with the mortar of words, and words are well used or abused depending on the temperament and principles of the user. There are many ways not to tell the truth: omission, deceit, lying, intentional deception, coercion, and absolute power among them. The ultimate truth is one: each and every life is sacred. Jews understand this as their engagement in the US revolution attests and as the True Torah Jews and the Jews for Peace in Palestine attests to day. Your own commandments, handed down by Moses, state this simple and everlasting truth and commands that all act in accordance with it, "Thou shalt not kill." How then explain what is taking place in Palestine?

The Plight of the Palestinians: a Long History of Destruction, (Macmillan publishers in 2010,) contains 32 chapters by world known authors detailing the continuation in the 21st century of "slow motion genocide" against the people of Palestine by the Zionist forces that rule in Israel. Interestingly, Reuven quotes from the English Department's biography of me as a professor at the university: (He) "refers to

Israel as the 51st state of the US, and calls it ‘an apartheid state determined to destroy the Palestinian people.’” What he does not include is the phrase that comes before that quoted piece, a sin of omission perhaps: “...the Zionist forces that have turned Israel into an apartheid state determined to destroy the Palestinian people.” That is an intentional distinction and its truth rests on the research that is referred to in the Introduction to that edited volume where the actions of the Zionists controlling the Jewish Agency in the 1930s and 1940s as they worked to undo the British Mandate in Palestine are revealed in their own words through documents seized by the Mandate Police and preserved in the archives of the Rhodes House collection in Oxford. The reason I was in Israel to meet with Reuven and his father was to research the Haganah Archives that hold a substantial number of Mandate Police records not available in the British Archives that I have also used.

My work depends on verification wherever I can find it. When generalizations are made about my work without references to where the data comes from or what rationale exists to substantiate it, truth vanishes: truth becomes a detractor’s opinion colored by his background and allegiances and indoctrination. Let me illustrate.

1. Reuven states: “He even believes that the kingdoms of David and Solomon ‘were and are but myths.’” But he fails to say that I referred to the works of Finkelstein and Silberman, two Israeli researchers, who describe the mythological reality in their works:

As Finkelstein and Silberman cite, the figure of David (shepherd, warrior, and divinely protected king) and of his son, Solomon (a great builder, wise judge, and serene ruler of a vast empire) have become timeless models of righteous leadership and God’s sanction. They contend that the archaeological discoveries of recent decades have shown “how far from the glamorous scriptural portraits the actual world of David and Solomon was.” They also posit that many of the famous episodes in the biblical story are highly exaggerated. Although it seems possible that David and Solomon were actual historical characters, they were very different from their scriptural portraits. Finkelstein and Silberman offer evidence that it is unlikely that David ever conquered land more than two days’ march from the heartland of Judah and that Solomon’s Jerusalem was “neither extensive nor impressive.” Their point is to show how the legends of David and Solomon developed and how they came to guide Western thinking and shape Western religious and political traditions in important ways. George Cohen

(David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible’s Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition— April 3, 2007. Israel Finkelstein and, Neil Asher Silberman). May I also note that these same authors, in *The Bible Unearthed*, disclose that the Exodus is not true but a tale used by the writers of the Exodus that comes from other civilizations. “The Bible is essentially a work of propaganda weaving, historical fragments, and myths of various Canaanite peoples into a powerful justification for Josiah’s rule and expansionist policies...

I personally draw a positive conclusion from this research. As an American-Jew, I have long struggled with the contradictions and problems of Zionism and the unjust policies of the State of Israel towards Palestinians. For those brave enough to seize this research in the right spirit, there is a solution in it for the problems of the Middle East. Simply stated, European Jews, Middle Eastern Jews, and Palestinians are brothers and sisters and share a common Canaanite ancestry. There were a small number of voices

amongst the early Zionists who were against the creation of a separate Jewish state in the region. They lost out to the bigger faction lead David Ben-Gurion, who suffered from the disease of European colonialism” (Larry Saltzman review).

As you can see, I am not alone in understanding the evidence that research offers. Why hide from it?

2. “The allegation of a massacre having taken place during the battle of Jenin in 2002 has long since been refuted by international organizations. But Bill Cook still talks of ‘the Jenin massacre’ as if it were a fact.” Reuven questions my use of the term “massacre.”

Yet a general definition of the word states: “the unnecessary, indiscriminate killing of a large number of human beings.” (Merriam Webster Dictionary). What is a large number? Are the numbers the only criteria? In my book, *The Rape of Palestine*, I explain how that term has evolved with the inclusion in the UN Charter of the meaning of “genocide” as it was adapted after the Holocaust as a means of preventing future actions of like kind by nations; it was the Jews experience that gave Raphael Lemkin his definition.

“The International Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide on December 9, 1948 set the United Nations definition of genocide: General Assembly Resolution 260A (III) Article 2.

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

Numbers are not mentioned even when “Genocide” is defined. Massacre is either used as a noun or a verb to depict actions against people. Every life is sacred; all 194 nations of the UN signed this definition and accepted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights when they joined that organization.

I wrote a one act morality play titled, *The Agony of Colin Powell* in 2004. If you go to my web log (Billcook’s web log) you can click on the “Study Guide” for the play. It contains references to the Jenin massacre because Powell was deeply involved in doing nothing about it. Read Robert Fisk’s article, a man who knows something about massacres since he reported on the Sabra and Shatila massacres as he stumbled on the partly buried bodies slaughtered by the Phalanges with the approval of Ariel Sharon as the Israeli Kahan Commission ruled. I might also point out that your own Simon Peres serving as Foreign Minister then worried about the “expected international reaction as soon as the world learns the details of the tough battle in the Jenin refugee camps where more than 100 Palestinians have already been killed...” Peres called this a massacre. (Aluf Benn and Amos Harel, Haaretz, 4/9/2).

3. I trust the above demonstrates that if one took the trouble to check they would find that my references to actions and events are constructed on solid evidence, not that they are, as Reuven suggests, “factually baseless or warped” ...” or “a multitude of false allegations, misunderstandings and things taken out of context or blown way out of proportion.” Even my literary works, *The Unreasoning Mask*, like *The Agony of Colin Powell* and *The Chronicles of Nefaria*, are built on factual matters and events. Should one care to they can find a Master’s thesis from a Moroccan graduate student that details the people, places and events in *Nefaria* as they depict real people or places or events. *Nefaria* is an allegory that was inspired by an article I wrote, “Life inside the Entombment Wall.” It is available in Arabic translation as well. It depicts a Prime Minister in a coma as he relives his life of wickedness, for he is the Prime Minister of Wickedness.

4. Let me end with this observation Reuven made: “It was an incredible lesson for me to see how someone can make something his life’s work, and end up with a completely distorted understanding of it. Bill came here searching for historic archives to prove Israel’s immorality, yet refused to accept my own living-history testimony as to our ethics and values.”

As a searcher for truth about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, I cannot expect to understand it listening to a person who speaks virtuously about his position and expects that he speaks for the nation of Israel. The people of the world have seen and been appalled by the 51 days of devastation inflicted on the people of Gaza by the Zionist power willingly using every advanced military device known to humans against a caged people who cannot run or fly or hide from that devastation, a treatment that goes beyond the pale of proportionate retaliation. How does the world know this? Evidence is everywhere : to those caught in the maelstrom of fire and brimstone in the streets of Gaza, to those opening the pages of their local papers everywhere but in America and witness the photographs that catch the horror, and to the evidence from B’tselem and Amnesty International and even the Palestinian Human Rights Council that publishes the names and ages of the dead. We certainly do not get it from the Zionist Prime Minister when he tried valiantly to transfer the blame to Hamas in an interview with Wolf Blitzer on CNN:

“...the pictures out of Gaza are heart wrenching and painful, the painful pictures of children dying... and the thousands of refugees. What goes through your mind when you see that?” Bibi’s answer is not the “banality of evil” that Hanna Arendt saw as she witnessed Eichmann’s answers at his trial, an evil of “stupidity” that excluded rational thought.

“Hamas targets civilians, we don’t... They want to pile up as many dead as they can...the more dead the better”

How explain this mindset? How controlled is this man by his own self-devoted professional promotion to believe he can convince the people of the world that his use of flechette bombs that explode above the ground spreading their steel needles into anything within striking distance, bombs designed to kill and mutilate living beings, mock his pretend weeping before Blitzer when asked “what goes through your mind?” and he says “Very sad,, we’re sad for every civilian casualty, they’re not intended...Hamas targets civilians...” But there he stands contradicted by the weaponry employed, yet he shows no signs

of remorse, no acceptance of his own guilt, no shame at the amorality of his actions, no mercy. (see "Transference of Evil," William A. Cook, August 24, 2914).

My research in the archives, including the Haganah archives named after a terrorist entity that blew up the King David Hotel in Jerusalem killing 91 innocent civilians in a false flag attack that put the blame on Arabs, testifies to the blind commitment of men, by oath to the death, to bring the state of Israel into existence. The Judaic faith does not condone murder of innocents; it rather strives for equity for all and for the rights of all. Zionism by contrast uses Judaism and its religious beliefs to lay claim to land given to them by the God of Abraham, but that abuse of religious faith has destroyed a people with impunity. The International Laws that govern the intent of the United Nations is defied by Israel and the US as the more than 100 resolutions passed by the UNGA testifies. Neither the people of Israel nor the people of the United States have the power to control their governments. We become hapless victims of silence to the evil wrought by those who have taken power in our respective nations.

My luncheon with Reuven touched me deeply. I had never expected or even thought about the possibility of having lunch with a former student, especially one I taught 56 years ago. Across from me sat a life renewed in the son, a blessing that endures generations. But for every Reuven that thrives there are sons who do not, and there are fathers in Gaza who have no sons to greet in the morning sun, no Mothers to embrace the returning son, no sister to grab his hand and sing. That luncheon made real for me the sacredness of life, each and every one.

Yet even as I write these words I can hear the guttural throat of the naysayer tell me "Get over it!" Life's a hell. Save yourself. But if it is that voice I must hear because they take control, and since they offer nothing to this world but unending war, I must reject their council which is a rejection of life. And indeed, if the council of Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, offered in the same issue of the Jerusalem Post that carried Reuven's column about our lunch, is to be heeded, the Jewish people would agree with me for the "role of the Jewish nation...is to be a 'light unto nations,' to lead all of humanity to faith and values of charity, justice and good deeds which we learn from the Torah, its stories, and its commandments."

For silence is complicity in that evil and it is the responsibility of the people, as Herman Melville cries in Moby Dick, to "speak truth to the face of falsehood."