

{AUGUST 27, 2005}

DEAR SETTLERS

Dear Settlers —

“Dear” in the most literal sense.

At long last it must be spelled out, without hypocritical pity, without “if” and “but”.

We have paid billions of shekels in order to settle you in the Gaza Strip. We have paid billions to keep you there, and most of you have lived there at our expense. We paid billions to defend you, and dozens of soldiers, male and female, lost their lives doing this. Now we are paying billions (Eight? Ten? Twelve?) to get you out of there and pay you generous compensation.

But all this is not enough. Again you are shouting. Again you are being robbed. Again we owe you much, much more. Whole stretches of the country, preferably on the sea-shore, to be especially reserved for you, so that you can resettle “as whole communities”. So that you can live separately. So that you can have your own separate schools. So that you can draw government salaries as employees of the local council, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Defense.

I don’t know whether the Guinness Book of Records awards a title for champions of impertinence, cheek, impudence - in short, good old Jewishchutzpah. If so, you should win it hands down. In the past we only owed each of you a luxury villa for next to nothing, as well as a source of livelihood, land and water, now it seems we owe you everything. It is your right to help yourselves from the money needed for the sick, the elderly, the handicapped, the children, the unemployed. Because you are the best of the best. Because you are holding on to the beard of the Messiah. Because you were personally chosen by God.

I might have some sympathy for your plight, if you had uttered one word of compassion for the inhabitants of the 1500 Palestinian homes that were destroyed because of you, a greater number than all the homes of the settlers that are being destroyed now. If you had expressed any compassion for the children that were evicted from their homes within half an hour, without compensation, without hotels and

psychologists. For the thousands of trees uprooted in order to supply you with “security”.

As the good Rabbi Hillel said 2000 years ago, when he saw the skull floating down the river: “Because you have drowned others, you were drowned...”

And please remember: the bill is not being paid by “the State”, an anonymous body, but by me and the Israeli readers of this column, out of our own pockets.

To the “Yesha Council”, Shalom —

That’s it. The bluff is over. The bubble has burst.

For months now you have been terrifying us. You have bombarded us with imaginary figures. One hundred thousand demonstrators. One hundred fifty thousand. “All in all, we have mobilized two million people”. That means, almost 40% of all Israeli Jews.

And you told us: You ain’t seen nothing yet. At the right moment, hundreds of thousands will march on Gush Katif. Tens of thousands of soldiers and officers will refuse orders. All roads throughout the country will be blocked. The state will come to a standstill. The entire people will rise up and foil the evil designs of that man - that one, sole man - who wants to evict the redeemers of the land from the Gaza Strip.

So what happened? Heaven did not fall. Not a single road was blocked. Only a handful of soldiers refused orders - many less than the conscientious objectors of the peace camp. And unlike them, not one of you was faced with going to prison for a year or more.

And, most important: You have remained alone. Quite alone. That was obvious already from the first moment, in your big demonstrations, when there was almost nobody there who didn’t wear the knitted skullcap of the national-religious or the bigger caps of the Repentant Jews. No other sector of the public joined you: not the left, not the center, not the secular right-wing, not even the Orthodox. All the arrogant boasts that we heard mornings and evenings have burst like soap bubbles.

Nothing remains but the mother of all failures. Yet instead of disappearing from the stage in shame, to “search your soul” and absorb the failure, you remain at the height of chutzpah and just go on as if nothing has happened.

To the Media, Shalom —

Excuse me for addressing you as if you were one single person. True, you consist of many newspapers, radio stations and TV networks, but I address you in the singular form because during the last weeks that is what you indeed were. All of you spoke as

one person, in one style, one terminology. And all of you, except a select few, have betrayed your mission.

For weeks now you have provided a platform for the settlers' propaganda. All the papers. All the radio stations. All the TV networks. 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Every belch or grunt of a settler was hot news, if not a sensation. The voice of the peace camp was hardly heard, the most consistent opponents of the settlers were not heard at all.

You have drowned us in a sea of kitsch, hour upon hour of crying and weeping, simulated hysteria and real hysteria. An unending series of scenes that were carefully staged for television, with the stated intention of "burning into consciousness" and "creating a trauma". From the roof of the Sanur fortress, MK Aryeh Eldad ordered "cages" in order to stage-manage the tragic submission of the heroes, and not one single reporter quoted the old Yiddish saying: "Meshiggener, herub fun dach!" ("Madman, get down from the roof!") Instead of factual reporting, you poured out a flood of loaded words like "heart-rending sights", "terrible pain", "wonderful youth". (Only occasionally did a real truthful scene slip through, like the child praying with his mother and, perceiving that the evacuation didn't stop, exclaiming in wonderment: "Mama, it didn't help!")

While all this was going on, where was the investigative press? Why were we not told the real numbers of the demonstrators? Who is this "Yesha Council", who elected them, what is its legal status, where do the millions of dollars wasted on this campaign come from? Why did nobody investigate in which field these wild weeds grew up, what is happening in the autonomous "religious-state" education system that has produced - at our expense - these fanatical thugs?

And why has nobody exposed the farce of these so-called Stalingrads and Massadas, whose heroes knew full well that nobody would use tear gas or clubs against them, and that all those arrested would be free the next day?

To the Prime Minister, Shalom —

I apologize. I did not really believe that you would go the full distance in this story. But you have carried out what you promised to do, and it's not really important why - whether you were left without an alternative, or were carried away by your own momentum, or were compelled by the Americans to do so.

But your real test is only just beginning. Your actions during the next days will decide whether you have acquired an honorable place in history or will be remembered as a fool.

Another Prime Minister, the British statesman David Lloyd-George, while trying to justify his disengagement from Ireland, talked about the impossibility of jumping over an abyss in two strides. Now you are precisely in this situation. You have started your jump. The abyss is beneath you. If you stop, you will fall in.

If you do not progress quickly towards a historic compromise with the Palestinians, you yourself will realize the prophesy of doom made by Binyamin Netanyahu: a third intifada will break out and the Gaza Strip will turn into a platform for mortars and Qassam rockets.

This is not the time to think about the next elections, to worry about the Landaus and Netanyahus, Likud A and Likud B. This is the time to raise your eyes and do the historic thing.

This is your test, and only it will decide whether the withdrawal from Gaza was just another unimportant episode or a historic act.

Dear Appeasers —

There you are again, like the proverbial mushrooms after rain. You want to appease, to get the minds to meet, to “mend the rift within the people”.

There is no rift. On the contrary, in this affair the people are very united, in an impressive and even amazing way.

This is no “rift”, but an inevitable confrontation between the vast majority of the public and a small separatist sect. If proof were needed, here come the settlers themselves and demand separate localities in Israel, with separate schools - separate even from the general religious-Zionist sector.

The Israeli public, almost unanimously, wants a state based upon law, a democratic state, where the majority decides and the rights of the minority are respected. A sane, free and rational state. A state with borders and a constitution. A state belonging to progressive humanity. A state that respects all religions but is not subject to any religion.

Against this state, a fanatical sect has risen up, a sect that wants to establish a different state: a faith-based, nationalist and racist state, ruled by divine law as interpreted by their rabbis. A state whose task is to conquer all of the historic Land of Israel, to inherit it, to drive out its “foreign” (i.e. Arab) inhabitants and fill it with settlements.

Between these two concepts there can be no compromise, nor should there be a false one. Because the proposed compromise goes always in one direction, the surrender of the State of Israel. That would be the first step towards the liquidation of the Israeli

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democracy. The ideological ambiguity is a smoke screen, behind which the forces of destruction are at work. The very opposite is called for: to throw a bright, merciless light, so that every person in Israel will understand what the struggle is all about.

Not appeasement, but mobilization for the defense of our democracy.

Dear Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz, peace upon your soul —

You told me once that, when the followers of the Muslim preacher Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahab conquered Mecca, the first thing they did was to demolish the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad. So that the believers would not sanctify stones. Now it is being asserted that the demolishing of the Gush Katif synagogues, that were built only two or three years ago, would contravene some divine law.

With your sharp and biting tongue, you, an orthodox Jew, would have reduced these charlatans to ashes - as you did when you called the Western Wall “a religious discotheque.”

We are missing you.