

ISRAEL NEWS
A collection of the week's news from Israel
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Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation

Commentary...



Jerusalem 4:41 Toronto 5:22

From the PA Media...

New Hamas Video: Gaza Withdrawal Leads to Haifa

By Itamar Marcus and Barbara Crook

The Palestinians have concluded from Israel's withdrawal from Gaza that violence, not negotiations, is effective in their ongoing effort to weaken and eventually destroy Israel. This is according to a new video just released on the official Hamas Web site.

Images of Israelis being evacuated from Gaza and destroyed Israeli buildings are shown while these words are sung:

"The invaders fled. The army of the Jews has been defeated

The home and homeland is returning through blood

Not through negotiations, surrender or promises"

These last words - rejecting negotiations - are sung over the famous images of agreements being signed by Shimon Peres and Ariel Sharon with Palestinian leaders.

While the words, the "homeland is returning," are sung, an image of the Israeli city of Haifa is displayed, stressing that the Palestinians see all of Israel as their "homeland" to be targeted.

The words, "Let the enemies leave the entire land! And take their holy books which are all black," are sung while images of Jews in prayer are shown.

The clear message to the Palestinian viewer is that the Gaza withdrawal is both the defeat of Israel through terror, and a precedent for the future. Accordingly, neither the Palestinians' means nor goals have changed: Violence and terror are seen as leading to Israel's continued withdrawals and eventual destruction.

Seeing the Gaza withdrawal as a justification for terror is a dominant sentiment in the PA in general and another article appeared in today's PA daily expressing the same opinion:

"The smashing victory of the Palestinian Islamic resistance movement Hamas in the PLC elections... confirms that this people believes only in the option of resistance only, as a single way for the liberation of Palestine from the Zionist colonialism..."

"What was liberated from the land of Palestine in Gaza was done only through the heroes and the Jihad warriors, not through futile negotiations for peace and nor by head bowing..." [Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, February 4, 2006]

The transcript of the clip is as follows:

The invaders fled [Gaza]

The army of the Jews was defeated

The home and the homeland is returning through [Palestinian] blood

Not through negotiations, surrender, or promises

Allah the Great, be pleased by the sound of thunder...!

We will never accept the enemies in the land of our fathers...

The invaders fled [Gaza]

The army of the Jews was defeated

The home and the homeland is returning through [Palestinian] blood

Not through negotiations, surrender, or promises...

Let the enemies leave the entire land!

And take their holy books, which are all black!

Our flag was raised and spread out, O Jihad...!

The invaders fled [Gaza]

The army of the Jews was defeated

The home and the homeland is returning through blood [Hamas website, February 2006] (Palestinian Media Watch Feb 6)

Trauma in Amona By Shlomo Blass

It was 11:15 a.m. Wednesday when I received the call from my brother in Jerusalem: "Abba was hurt, do you know anything about his condition?"

I was in Amona that morning in my capacity as a journalist. I knew my father, Jonathan Blass, who serves as

rabbi of Neveh Tzuf, would be in Amona. Only a few days before he had delivered a sermon in the synagogue in which he called upon the adults to join the protest in Amona. He wanted them to participate not only in order to protest the demolition of Jewish homes but also to serve as a mature and calming force among the many teenagers who were expected on the scene.

I had been greatly concerned for my father's safety because as soon as I arrived I saw the police storming the houses, beating the protesters surrounding them. The police gave no warning or ultimatum before they began their onslaught. They came to the houses, billy clubs brandished, and commenced beating people with blow following blow. I saw a 19-year-old fellow I know break out of a group of protesters standing outside one of the houses. He told me, "They surrounded us from all sides. People who wanted to couldn't retreat."

Even as he told me this, I still thought and hoped that the police would act differently toward clearly non-violent adult protesters.

Little did I know...

MY BROTHER'S call came after he heard Pinchas Wallerstein, head of the Binyamin Regional Council, on the radio describing how my father, standing near him, had been clubbed on the head by a mounted policeman. He assumed I was at the scene for work and immediately phoned me.

I raced from place to place trying to find my father, who was not answering his mobile phone. I met a neighbor. He told me he had been standing close to my father but had been separated from him when the police cavalry charged into them, clubbing every person they approached.

At a certain point, walking inside a tent overflowing with wounded protesters, most of whom were suffering from head injuries, I ran into a paramedic who knew my father. He informed me that he saw him being evacuated, conscious, in a military ambulance.

Twenty minutes later, I finally succeeded in reaching my father on his cell phone. Although the connection was bad, I received the impression that he was safe.

Just as our conversation ended, a 16-year-old, seeing my press card, approached me.

"I just want to let you know that I volunteer in the civil guard, but I am leaving my volunteer card here on this hill."

"Why is that?" I asked.

"I saw a policeman purposely club a 12-year-old boy on his kneecap. I understand that some force is required to get control of the situation here. But that was just plain, gratuitous cruelty. He's a little squirt. The policeman could have easily just picked him up and carried him away."

I finally found my father walking out of one of the tents, where he had been examined by a doctor. He held an ice pack to a bump on his head the size of my fist. He described how he and a group of adults had been standing outside one of the houses when the policemen rammed into them without warning.

A European journalist, standing nearby, overheard our conversation and could not help but ask my father, "They beat you on the head - an adult with a white beard and all?"

"I was relatively lucky," my father replied. "A person standing next to me was struck in the eye after receiving a blow on the head." It was later reported that Yechiam Eyal, 15, was hospitalized in serious condition after receiving similar blows.

ON THE way back to Jerusalem on the noon news broadcast I heard Yisrael Yitzhak, the police commander in the area, respond to anchorwoman Yael Dan's question regarding the police's orders and behavior at Amona. Brazenly, Yitzhak claimed: "Policemen did not beat protesters on the head."

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Yitzhak lied because he knew he could get away with it when the object of his lie was the settlers. He knew most of the reporters were little more than government spokesmen, incapable of discerning where reportage ends and spin begins. He knew he was living in a country where the only two radio channels are controlled by the army and the government, and he also knew that in Israel 2006 lying is acceptable. After all, it worked for the prime minister, who lied to his voters, and for the defense minister, who lied to the Knesset Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee.

It is true that the protesters also resorted to violence. It is true that on Wednesday the 4,000 protesters were bereft of leadership capable of restraining a minority of hotheaded youth who insisted on throwing rocks at policemen.

But this fact does not mitigate the evil reality that unfolded: A force of 2,000 well-organized, highly-trained policemen with a clear chain of command stormed a crowd of protesters, most of whom were motivated by the love of Israel and live by the highest moral standards, who had come to Amona to exert passive resistance and demonstrate their empathy with the families whose homes were set to be destroyed.

As a journalist and loyal Israeli citizen I came away deeply disturbed by the organized police violence masked with lies and enabled by an anemic and supportive local media. (Jerusalem Post Feb 6)

The writer is a freelance journalist and producer working with foreign press and Makor Rishon.

Handing Jerusalem to Hamas By Naomi Ragen

I have an Arab village a five-minute walk across a wadi (valley) from my home, which is a ten-minute drive from the heart of Jerusalem. This village is called Beit Ikksa.

During the Six Day War, the villagers fled. Moshe Dayan begged them to come back and promised no harm would come to them. They did. It is now situated between two Jewish neighborhoods, Ramot and Mevasseret, that have about 50,000 or more Jews living in each one. It is also near one of Jerusalem's major highways, Route One.

While it was well known that villagers were involved in hundreds of break-ins and thefts in both Ramot and Mevasseret, our police did nothing. During the Intifada, villagers regularly walk across the wadi and up the steps past my home to work in construction jobs in Ramot and elsewhere. This, even after terrorists were found with suicide belts in Ramot, and admitted they were planning to blow up a synagogue and a public bus.

The police never check these workers. No one ever stops them, despite repeated phone calls and warnings. During the Oslo days, when we were marking villages as Area A (completely under the control of Palestinian Authority and their thugs) and Area B (under the security control of the Israeli army), Beit Ikksa became a "B".

Recently, a newspaper article in Haaretz revealed that the security fence around Jerusalem is slated to be between Ramot and Beit Ikksa. What this means, is that instead of fencing off Beit Ikksa from terrorist infiltrations, they have made Ramot (and probably Mevasseret) the new border with Hamas, now slated to move into Beit Ikksa.

In a tour of the area the other day, Benjamin Netanyahu said it was outrageous. When he entered Beit Ikksa, there were already armed Palestinian guards waiting for him there. Ehud Olmert, who is now making the decisions, even though no one elected him to be the head of the government after his failed stint as a corrupt Jerusalem mayor, said clearly: "We are not changing the fence."

And so, area B now becomes Area A, without discussion or protest, and two peaceful communities of thousands of Jews are now sitting with Hamas on their doorstep. And for those of you who have hopes that our good relations with Beit Ikksa will prevent this, I have some other news:

In the elections, Beit Ikksa voted one-hundred percent for Hamas.

Please understand what I am telling you. If Mr. Olmert gets in as prime minister, we Jews of Jerusalem are going to have to move.

And so the perfidy begins, with no one to even understand how it is happening. It creeps along slowly and gently, without much fanfare. Remember what I am telling you today, because in the future, don't say you didn't know about it. I am going to make an effort to organize my community against this. But I'm just one person, and frankly, I'm tired. I'm tired of fighting the people who are running this country into the ground. I'm tired of one wrong decision following another at a disastrous pace and no one ever paying the price for it.

Now that everything that opponents of the Disengagement said would happen has come true, where are those responsible? I'll tell you. They are making the decisions for the next disaster-in-the-making. What I'm wondering, though, is how many bad decisions can we make and still survive. Interesting question.

For those of you outside the country, if you'd like to discuss this with the Israeli government, such as it is, I have no doubt you can Google some addresses. I wish I had the heart to do it for you, but you know what? I just don't feel up to it today.

And so, this is how we turn Jerusalem into a Hamas stronghold. (Israel National News Feb 1)

Sympathy for Those Who Draw Anne Frank in Bed with Hitler?

By Tom Gross

Veteran Middle East correspondent on what passes for "good taste" in Arab papers

There is a strong case for saying that the Danish cartoons of Mohammed, which have caused so much uproar, are fair comment. Certainly those who haven't seen them can rest assured that they are relatively tame in comparison with many cartoons on other subjects which regularly appear in the European press. Even so, non-Muslims might have more sympathy with Muslims who find them offensive, if it weren't for the astonishing double standards and hypocrisy of the Muslim world when it comes to accepting and applauding truly vicious slanders against Jews, and to a lesser extent Christians.

The arguments from Muslims - though not the fanatical, violent manner of many of their protests - would no doubt be taken more seriously if they had also objected to the depiction on Syrian television of rabbis as cannibals. Or if last Saturday, Britain's Muslim Weekly had not published a caricature of a hooked-nose Ehud Olmert.

Or if last Friday, "Valley of the Wolves," the most expensive movie ever made in Turkey, had not opened to great local acclaim. In the film, American soldiers in Iraq crash a wedding and pump a little boy full of lead in front of his mother. They kill dozens of innocent people with random machine gunfire, shoot the groom in the head, and drag those left alive to prison, where a Jewish doctor cuts out their organs, and sells them to rich people in New York, London and Tel Aviv.

Or if a Belgian and Dutch Muslim group hadn't last week posted on its website pictures of Anne Frank in bed with Hitler. Or if the mere display of a cross or a Star of David in Saudi Arabia wasn't illegal.

And when it comes to newspaper cartoons - the subject of the present unrest - Muslim countries are world leaders in stirring up hate, without a peep of protest elsewhere, let alone the torching of buildings, threats to behead European tourists, and the burning of the Danish flag (which incidentally bears a Christian symbol, the cross). So much for religious respect.

The cartoons published last September in Jyllands Posten, a paper that hardly anyone outside Denmark, one of Europe's smallest countries, had ever heard of, are mild when compared to cartoons routinely produced about Jews in the countries where some of the worst anti-Danish protests are now being staged.

Arabic Jew-baiting is not - as Israel's enemies in the West often try to argue - limited to political attacks on Zionism. They are directed against Jews in general, and are as loathsome and dehumanizing as those produced under the Nazis.

We might expect such demonic images from a country led by a Holocaust-denier like Iran, or a rogue regime like Syria. But these vile images are to be found in the media of supposedly moderate, pro-Western states like Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain and Egypt.

Al-Watan (Oman) has run Nazi-type caricatures of Jews with hooked noses and hunched backs, not wearing shoes, and sweating profusely.

Akhbar Al-Khalij (Bahrain) has shown anti-Semitic caricatures of black-hatted Jews spitting and sweating as they manipulate America to do their bidding.

Al-Ahram, one of Egypt's leading dailies, has published cartoons of Jews laughing while they drink blood. (The U.S. senate has approved a \$1.84 billion aid package for Egypt for 2006, the second highest in the world.)

The official cartoonist of the Palestinian Authority has portrayed Jews in the form of snakes, a historic motif of medieval European anti-Semitism. The PA website has posted cartoons repeating the ancient blood libel that Jews murder non-Jewish children.

Some of the cartoons don't just resemble those published by the Nazis. They are literally copied from Nazi originals. For instance, a cartoon from Arab News (an English-language Saudi daily regarded as one of the more moderate publications in the Arab world), depicts rats wearing Stars of David and skullcaps, scurrying backwards and forwards through holes in the wall of a building called "Palestine House." The imagery used is almost identical to a well-known scene from the Nazi film "Jew Sues" - a scene in which Jews are depicted as vermin to be eradicated by mass extermination.

At other times the Jews are the Nazis. The Jordanian newspaper, Ad-Dustur, for example, ran a cartoon showing the railroad to the death camp at

Auschwitz-Birkenau - but with Israeli flags replacing the Nazi ones, and a sign which read "The Israeli Annihilation Camp." Jordan is supposedly a moderate country at peace with Israel.

To mark the UN designation of January 27 as Holocaust memorial day, the cartoonist for Al-Yawm (Saudi Arabia) superimposed the Nazi swastika on the Star of David.

Nor is Judaism spared. The Daily Star in Beirut ran a cartoon showing a large Talmud with a bayonet sticking out of it shooting an elderly man in Arab headdress who then has red blood gushing out of him. Other Arab cartoons have shown Jews with money bags, spreading death, terror and disease.

The relatively mild Danish cartoons have been republished in several European papers so readers can discover what all the fuss is about. (It is hard for readers to judge the story without seeing them.) But not in papers in Britain or in any major publications in the US, countries that are now apparently too intimidated to run the risks that might go with reproducing them.

At the same time, whereas editors from both the Guardian and Independent in London, for example, have appeared on the BBC saying they wouldn't dream of publishing cartoons that Muslims find offensive, these papers have not hesitated to publish cartoons offensive to Jews (Arab blood being smeared on the Western Wall in The Guardian, the flesh of Palestinian babies being eaten by Ariel Sharon in The Independent, and so on.)

The New York Times rushed to praise a frivolous Broadway play showing Jesus having gay sex with Judas, yet hasn't dared to reproduce a Danish cartoon making a serious point about the misuse of the teachings of the prophet Mohamed by Islamist terrorists.

With demonstrators on the streets of London last Friday chanting in unison "Europe you will pay, your 9/11 is on its way" and holding signs reading "Behold those who insult Islam," and "Prepare for the REAL Holocaust," it is perhaps not surprising that weak spirits in the West are cowed.

Yet this is an issue that goes far beyond cartoons, and if they want Western freedoms to survive, moderate Muslims and non-Muslims alike have to stop caving into threats. Yesterday, JWR's Mark Steyn reminded us of the best-known words of a famous fictional Dane: "To be or not to be, that is the question." Exactly. (Jewish World Review Feb 7)

The writer is a former Jerusalem correspondent for London's Sunday Telegraph.

Canada's Islamist Seat By Charlotte West

Despite the Conservative victory in Canada, the Liberals can boast a new member of parliament, Omar Alghabra from the suburban Toronto riding of Erindale-Mississauga. Even before his election, Alghabra's nomination victory made news because of the Islamic supremacist statements made then.

The event featured declarations such as "This is a victory for Islam! Islam won! Islam won! ... Islamic power is extending into Canadian politics!" as reported by Arab attendees, even those who had voted for Alghabra. Many said that Alghabra's key supporter, councilor and Liberal party member Khalid Usman who came from Markham, took the podium with Alghabra, announcing, "We have the East, we have the West, and now we have Mississauga!" Outgoing Liberal MP Carolyn Parrish confirmed she heard several pro-Islamic remarks from Usman, that "made it sound like [Muslims] were taking over. It was extremely inappropriate." A Liberal party official, Elias Hazineh, heard Usman say, "this is a victory for Muslims". Usman onstage crowed to the crowd "although Mr. Hazineh (the riding president) keeps telling me he is a Christian I am telling him that he better be a Muslim," one witness reported. The Toronto Star reported that Alghabra supporters came from outside the riding and some were urging people to "vote for the Muslim, not the infidel."

When it remained unverified that Alghabra had personally made any of the statements, he vehemently denied any involvement, protesting that he did not agree with mixing politics and religion. He and the Liberal Party then threatened to sue anyone who said otherwise and the story was hushed up, suggesting that as long as Alghabra himself said nothing, no problem exists.

Maybe. But maybe not. Seems prudent to find out who Omar Alghabra is. His official Liberal bio reveals he is an unmarried 36-year-old, Saudi-born Syrian who came to Canada at age 19 alone (his family remained in the Middle East), got an engineering degree from Ryerson University, and an MBA from York University. Some of his community work is mentioned - he sat on the Toronto Star's unpaid community editorial board in 2003-04 and was president of the Canadian Arab Federation in 2004-05.

But some community work is left out: He was not only a member of, but a speaker for Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights, a radical campus network urging corporate "divestment" from Israel. This organization also circulated anti-Jewish "bioweapon conspiracy" literature which helped incite the Concordia University riots in 2002. SPHR, which supports the "right of

resistance" without denouncing suicide bombing, remains a group Alghabra defends in his writings and supports. Although many characterize the swastika-employing SPHR as more hate group than human rights group, and their members and activities are often barred from campuses, Alghabra invokes the right of "free speech" to pave their way.

He is also involved with the Islamic Society of North America. Upon his nomination victory, attendee Galal Abdelmessih noted that Alghabra thanked the Islamic Society of North America for supporting him. ISNA is being investigated in the United States for ties to terrorism. Its Toronto elementary school in 2004 received SR 1.03 million (about \$350,000 Cdn.) from Saudi Arabia's Islamic Development Bank, known for funding radical Wahabbiism.

Alghabra's record also contains troubling elements: In 2002 the Canadian Arab Federation stated it did not consider Hamas, Hezbollah, or Islamic Jihad terrorist organizations and strongly pressured the Canadian government against criminalizing them. It lost and Ottawa did outlaw Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad and Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade. As CAF president in 2004, however, Alghabra still defended terrorist groups, to the point of condemning CanWest media as "biased" for calling them "terrorist."

Asked if he would specifically denounce suicide bombers, Alghabra would not comment, but complained that he was being "trapped." His name appears on an August 2004 listing of Canadians who openly support terrorism. Yet Alghabra maintains that racist discrimination is the sole reason why since 2003 he has been denied U.S. entry unless he passes a security check which includes finger printing.

Alghabra denounced as "offensive" Bill C-7, the Public Safety Act to impede terrorist activities, calling security concerns a "pretext" to suspend rights. He charges it would use "shoddy intelligence" to support "power abuse" providing as example the 21 Muslims questioned upon returning from a Toronto conference. However, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Assistant Commissioner, Kristi Clemens, explains: "We had ongoing, credible intelligence that conferences such as this one in Toronto had been used, are being used, and will be used by terrorists to transmit fraudulent documents, to fundraise, and also to mask the travel of terrorists. Based on that information, we decided to have individuals verify they were who they said they were."

Although Alghabra smoothly says, "universities should be responsible when dealing with potentially confrontational and provocative issues," he contradicts himself in practice. When programs featuring accused Holocaust deniers or groups seeking Israel's elimination trigger administrative delays, room changes, or extra security costs, he likens Canada to "dictatorial regimes" and charges universities with "muzzling" free speech.

Alghabra strongly denounces Canadian Security Intelligence Service and Royal Canadian Mounted Police practices as discriminatory, demanding ever more "safeguards" against what he calls their "mistakes and biases". However, CSIS is already one of the most open and accountable security intelligence organizations in the world.

Alghabra supported the Niagara Palestinian Association in their Formal Policy Complaint against an Ontario Provincial Police Chiefs' terror prevention and management skills exchange trip to Israel. The complainants denigrated Canada's recognition of Israel's world renown in terror management and demanded the OPP learn from the Palestinians too. NPA president, Burhan Azzeh, was arrested when co-workers reported his threatening at work: "Maybe it's time to blow up some Jews". His wife, NPA co-president Susan Howard Azzeh, organized a 2003 march against the Jewish state and its leader, featuring the swastika and Hitler.

Alghabra says he finds "any mixing of religion and politics offensive" yet supported the application of sharia in Canada, lamenting in Arabic that "the problem was ... we [Muslims] who were divided among ourselves and disunited in our ranks."

Alghabra claims to be "puzzled" that the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission requires that broadcaster Al Jazeera be edited to conform to Canadian hate laws, while allowing Fox News into Canada unrestricted. He insists the CRTC must grant the same privileges to a broadcaster routinely breaking Canadian laws by airing material that CRTC chairman Charles Dalfen said exposed people to "hatred and contempt on the basis of religion", as one that does not.

Alghabra has denounced numerous Canadian organizations or their practices including those of the RCMP, CSIS, the OPP, the CRTC, CanWest media, Canadian university administrations, the Public Safety Act, and government officials that are in place to fight terrorism and keep Canadians safe. Still he won't denounce suicide bombers. Instead, he relentlessly demands freedoms for terrorist organizations, extremist groups, campus intimidations, and anti-Semitic media. He positions himself as a moderate; indeed, he speaks like a moderate, yet he consistently subordinates Canadian security norms and values to individual freedoms in order to advance militant Islam's standard positions and causes.

It's little wonder his supporters babbled with glee that Islamic power is extending into Canadian politics. (FrontPageMagazine.com Jan 31)

I Just Don't Understand By Goel Jasper

What? Are you kidding me? How can it be?

How can it be that after all this time, after all this fighting, scratching, clawing - 2,000 years of battling our way back to Eretz Yisrael - how can it be that so many people are doubting the prospects of Aliyah now, "just" because of the horrors we witnessed in Amona last week?

I simply don't understand it.

I mean, check out Arutz Sheva's comments section. It's crazy. Comment after comment talking about wanting to make Aliyah, but now, after Amona and Gush Katif, this place, this state, this land of ours is not what they thought it was.

Give me a break. What do you think this is? This is not your favorite team trading away its best player. It's not a character leaving your favorite sitcom. This is your homeland.

But rather than take you through the rationale for moving here, and explaining that you will then be able to change the system, and that by making Aliyah, you will have a vote and can make of this country whatever you want, etc. etc., I've decided to not waste your valuable time (although all that is true!). I have a different line of thinking regarding this. Wanna' hear it? Yeah? Okay. Here goes:

You're all full of baloney. Because you don't really want to live in the land promised to our forefathers. You want to live here if it's easy. And you don't really believe that we are knee-deep in a very serious process of redemption here, that we are feeling the birth pangs of the arrival of the Mashiach. You'd rather leave that kind of "weird" spiritual thinking to the lunatics who already moved here.

I know what you're thinking because I was one of you. I worked for an Internet start-up in 1999-2000, and I said to family and friends, "If we go public and I make \$10 million, then I'm moving to Israel." And you know what? I meant it. And this dot-com had a chance. But I knew it was unlikely to happen. So, I convinced myself to feel good about my Zionism. After all, as long as Wall Street cooperated, I had committed myself to making Aliyah. But I also had an out. And when that dot-com tanked, and I was out of a job (never mind out the \$10 million), Aliyah was gone as well.

So, I've been there. I've put forth the "effort" to investigate Aliyah, only to walk away from it as soon as something didn't go the right way. And guess what, far greater men than I have been there, too. Far greater. And they had their reasons, too. You may have heard about it.

You know what they said? They said the existing inhabitants of the land were powerful giants. They said the cities were surrounded by high walls, and that the land devours its inhabitants.

So, here we are, 3,000-plus years later, and we're doing it all over again. But there's a major difference this time around. This time, some of us live here. And we can tell you the truth. So listen up.

The spies were right. People like Ehud Olmert are giants, as are the miserable human beings he sent into Amona last week. And the cities are once again surrounded by high walls, this time for supposed "security". And this place, well, what can I tell you. When you live here, you are gobbled up by the land. Gobbled up by the politics, by the religious polarization, by the culture, by the food. It's an unbelievably intense place.

And when you live in a place that is this intense, that has this kind of meaning, things happen. Big things happen. Some very good, like watching my kids growing up fluent in Hebrew, which will enable them to learn as much Torah as they want with no language barriers; and like how beautiful it is to watch your child's birthday being celebrated in school. And some very bad, like the events of this summer and last week.

Because when you live in a meaningful place, a land with real depth, you don't have to manufacture intensity. There is no Super Bowl Sunday here, where us vs. them is manufactured. No Valentine's Day, where love is manufactured. No Thanksgiving Day, where family relationships are manufactured.

There's just reality. And it's intense. And it's sometimes horrible. And it takes its toll.

But I have to tell you, after 2,000 years, after generation upon generation wishing, dreaming, shouting to HaShem, after so many Jewish deaths because we didn't have a land of our own, we olim will take the land as it is - because it's ours, because we see our kids growing up happy, because we can read the prayers without feeling like hypocrites; but especially because we've heard how this story ends. (IsraelNationalNews.com Feb 7)

Left Comes to Hebron By Judy Lash Balint

While events in Amona seem destined to accentuate the great divide between secular Israelis and the national-religious public, an astonishing event in Hebron some days ago brought together these two sectors of Israeli society generally portrayed by the media as being strongly antagonistic toward one another.

As a compromise over the fate of the homes of nine Jewish families living in the old market area of Hebron was being worked out behind the scenes, several hundred kibbutz members, secular professors and members of secular Labor Zionist youth movements took part in a first-of-its-kind solidarity conference in Hebron. But this ground-breaking confluence of secular socialists and religious settlers took place with absolutely no media coverage. While politicians and rabbis constantly talk about the need for unity, no one seems to pay any attention when it actually occurs.

The secular group that convened in Hebron is headed by Tsafrir Ronen, a member of Kibbutz Ein Harod (Meuhad), who convened the Nahalal Conference to demonstrate that "there's no difference between our kind of settlement and what's happening here in Hebron."

Nahalal was the biblical name of the first secular moshav in Israel, founded in 1920, Ronen adds. "We believe in the connection between the people and the land - what stronger connection is there than to Hebron?"

Residents of Hebron mingled with bare-headed men and women wearing pants in the Shalhevet Gate area of the city as speaker after speaker with impeccable Labor Zionist credentials rose to express their solidarity. Hebron pioneer Rabbi Moshe Levinger and Kedumim activist Daniella Weiss chatted warmly with secular student leader Liron Zeyden. Levinger hugged kibbutznik Yossi Tzur - a David Ben-Gurion look-alike.

Ronen, a former Rabin campaign adviser, respectfully asked Kiryat Arba and Hebron Rabbi Dov Lior to bestow his blessing on the meeting.

Several speakers struggled to be heard over the loud call for evening prayer that rang out from the nearby muezzin, but the strong message of solidarity in the lengthy poem read by Netanya writer Esti Schneerson resonated with the crowd.

Moshe Peled from Kibbutz Beit Hashita recited the names of kibbutzim and moshavim founded in the early 20th century and said his generation had been raised on the ethos of settlement and couldn't understand why it had now become a dirty word.

LAW PROFESSOR Dafna Netanyahu, sister-in-law of Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu, slammed the legal basis for declaring both the market property in Hebron and the Amona outposts as illegal. Netanyahu questioned why the same legal principles aren't being used to evict Beduin and Arabs from illegal buildings all over Israel.

I LOOKED on in disbelief as Liron Zeyden, leader of the Orange student movement made up of mostly secular university students, told the crowd he was "looking for the extremists portrayed in the media. But all I see is people who love the Land of Israel."

Zeyden, who served in the IDF as a captain in the Golani Brigade, questioned whether Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert isn't the real extremist. "Olmert, who wasn't elected by anyone, hates the religious public and the settlers," Zeyden asserted. "He thinks he'll get votes by these evictions - we have to show him that he'll lose by throwing Jews off their land."

The student leader announced that his group had founded a Faculty of Zionism to impart Zionist history and values among Israeli students. "They have no idea who Hanna Szenes was or the significance of the 29th of November."

Even more astonishing was the message from Rani Sneh, 18, a member of the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement from Nahariya, who told the audience he had traveled to Hebron to declare, "anyone who weakens Hebron weakens us all." Sneh admitted that "it's not 'in' to be pro-Israel amongst my peers."

Other speakers from staunchly secular backgrounds included veteran kibbutznik Yossi Tzur, a founder of Kibbutz Shuvai in the Negev, Gen. (res.) Moshe Leshem and Prof. Arieh Zaritsky of Ben-Gurion University. A message of support was read on behalf of Likud Knesset candidate Natan Sharansky.

At the end of the evening, as the frozen participants piled back on their buses to Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem after sitting side by side with their fellow settlers in Hebron for more than three hours, there was an overwhelming sense of strength and unity. Too bad that no one else took any notice. (Jerusalem Post Feb. 8)

The writer is the Jerusalem-based author of Jerusalem Diaries: In Tense Times and the forthcoming So What's Really Happening in Israel, Anyway?
