

Judaism versus Zionism

Neturei Karta International

يهود ضد الصهيونية

Jews United Against Zionism



Judaism versus Zionism

by: Rabbi Ahron Cohen

Approximate Transcript of Talk given by **Rabbi Ahron Cohen** to "The Second Conference on The Palestinian People's Right of Return to Their Homeland" being held in Beirut Lebanon 23rd - 25th February '05

1. **Honourable Parliamentarians and all members of this outstanding conference. It is my honour and privilege to have the opportunity of addressing you here today.**
2. I and my colleagues of Neturei Karta have travelled to Beirut to take part in these discussions because we feel that we have both a **religious and humanitarian duty** to publicise our message as much as possible. **So I hope and pray that with the Creator's help my words and our discussions here today may be correct and true in their content and conclusions.**
3. My friends, I bring you today a short simple message from Orthodox Jewry. Zionism and Judaism are total opposites, incompatible and diametrically opposed. Zionists can in no way represent Jewry. Anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism. It is in the light of this statement that I wish to put over to you today the Orthodox Jewish approach to the question of the 'Right of Return for the Palestinians'.
4. Firstly what is an orthodox Jew? An Orthodox Jew is a Jew who endeavours to live his life completely in accordance with the Jewish religion. The Jewish Religion absolutely forbids Zionism both on grounds of religious belief and on grounds of Jewish Religious values of humanitarianism as I hope to explain. This of course has a tremendous impact on the subject of this conference namely 'The Palestinian People's Right of Return.
5. Even if you see and hear on the media what appears to be Orthodox Jews supporting Zionism. Rest assured, as I will explain, their approach is an aberration and a distortion of Judaism, an absolute departure from the teaching that has been handed down to us through the generations.
6. **Zionism** has the ideal, and has always had the ideal, of imposing - let's face it - a 'sectarian' State over the heads of the Palestinians, the indigenous population. This has resulted in a terrible confrontation, a confrontation which has cost many lives both Palestinian and Jewish with no end in sight unless there is a very radical change.
7. True Orthodox Jews **absolutely sympathise with the Palestinian cause**, and we protest vehemently against the terrible wrongs being perpetrated against the Palestinian People by the Zionist illegitimate regime in Palestine.
8. I would wish to add that although we absolutely sympathise with the Palestinian **cause** and in no way are we qualified to tell the Palestinians how they should further and achieve their cause, nevertheless we hope that we would not be criticised if we would only wish and hope and pray that the **means** of achieving this cause should be non violent. I would very humbly suggest that this is possible and perhaps even more likely to succeed and this is a matter I would like to come back to later.
9. The spearhead group among us who are involved actively in this matter on a regular basis are called Neturei Karta, which can be loosely translated as **Guardians of the Faith**. We are not a separate party or organisation but basically a philosophy representative of a large section of orthodox Jewry.

10. The question must surely arise in the minds of many of you here today that there appears to be a **paradox**. After all everyone knows that Zionists are Jews and that Zionism is for the benefit of Jews. The Palestinians are the enemies of the Zionists. How come then that I, a Jew, can sympathise with the Palestinian cause.
11. As I mentioned earlier I would like to try to answer this question on two levels, on the level of **religious belief and on the level of humanitarianism. Bearing in mind that to be humanitarian is also a basic religious requirement.**
12. Firstly from a Jewish religious belief point of view. One has to take a look at some aspects of the **history of the Jewish people** and at their basic belief in the Al-mighty's control of our destiny and what the Al-mighty wants of us. All as set out in our Religious teachings, our Torah, and as taught to us through the generations by our great religious leaders. Against this we also have to look at the **history of Zionism**, how it developed, what are its aims.
13. **Our religion is for us a total way of life.** Showing us how to live a life in the service of the Al-mighty. It affects every aspect of our life from the cradle to the grave. We are taught that it was revealed to us by Divine Revelation, as described in the Bible, some three and a half thousand years ago, and that is when the Jewish People came in to being. All of our religious requirements, practical and philosophical, are set out in the Torah which comprises the Bible (the old testament) and a vast code of Oral Teaching **handed down to us through the generations.**
14. It may be relevant for you to understand that Judaism does not have a missionary ideal. We do not expect the whole world to adopt the Jewish Religion. If one differentiates between the Jewish Belief (i.e. the belief in one G-d) and the Jewish Religion (i.e. the practical requirements of the Jewish Religion) one can say that we would hope that the whole world would have the Belief (which in general they do, but expanded into other religions) whereas we are taught that the Jewish practical religion was given only to the Jews.
15. As mentioned, our religion is a total way of life covering every aspect of our life. One area of our religion is that **subject to certain conditions we will be given a land**, the Holy Land, now known as Palestine, in which to live and carry out various parts of our service of the Al-mighty.
16. Now I mentioned earlier that we were given a land but under certain conditions. The conditions were basically that we had to maintain the highest of moral, ethical and religious standards. The Jewish People did have the land for approximately the first one thousand five hundred years of their existence. However, regretfully, the conditions were not fulfilled to the required degree and the Jews were exiled from their land. For the last two thousand years or so the Jewish people have been in a **state of exile decreed by the A-lmighty** because they did not maintain the standards expected of them. As was foretold in our Torah. This state of exile is the situation that exists right up to the present day. **It is a basic part of our belief to accept**

willingly the Heavenly decree of exile and not to try and fight against it or to end it by our own hands. To do so would constitute a rebellion against the wishes of the Almighty.

17. Now, before I go any further, I wish to point out something which is very basic to understanding the difference between Judaism and Zionism and that is that the **orthodox Jewish concept of nationhood is very different to the concept of nationhood held by most peoples.** Most peoples understand a nation to be a specific people living in a specific land. The land is essential for the identity of the nation. They may or may not have a religion, but the religion is immaterial to the national identity. The orthodox Jewish concept of nationhood however, is a specific people with a specific religion. It is the religion that establishes the national identity. They may or may not have a land, the land is immaterial to the Jewish national identity.
18. This is borne out by the fact that the Jewish nation has been without a land for 2000 years, but as long as they retained their religion **they retained their identity.**
19. In practical terms, although we have maintained our Jewish identity by virtue of our attachment to our religion, never the less we are in exile. Exile means for us firstly that Jews must be **loyal subjects of the countries** in which they live and not attempt to rule over the established indigenous populations of those countries. Our task is to remain politically neutral and not to impose demands. Secondly, that we may **not attempt to set up a State** of our own in Palestine. This would apply even if the land would be unoccupied and it certainly applies when, as is the case, there is an existing indigenous population. **This prohibition is a basic part of our teaching and we are forsworn not to contravene it and we are warned of the dire consequences of doing so. This is what has been taught to us through the generations.**
20. It follows, therefore, that from a 'belief' point of view **Jews have no right to rule today in Palestine.**
21. Now let us consider the Zionist movement. This was founded approximately 100 years ago mostly by secular people who were discarding their religion but still retained what they considered as the stigma of being Jews in exile. They considered that our **state of exile** was due to our own subservient attitude - 'the Golus (exile) mentality' - and **not by Divine Decree.** They wanted to throw off the constraints of exile and to try and establish a new form of Jewish identity. **Not religion based but land based.** It was based on a typical, emotion driven, secular nationalistic aim, similar to that of most other nations. Their policy had as its centre pin the aim of setting up a specifically Jewish State in Palestine. **But they were forging a new kind of Jew. In fact not a Jew at all- but a Zionist.**
22. This Zionist movement was a **complete abandonment of our religious teachings** and faith - in general - and in particular an abandonment of our approach to our state of exile and our attitude to the peoples among whom we live.
23. The practical outcome of Zionism in the form of the **State known as 'Israel' is completely alien to Judaism and the Jewish Faith.** The very name "Israel" which originally meant what

are known as the Children of Israel i.e. the Jewish People was usurped by the Zionists. For this reason many orthodox Jews avoid referring to the Zionist State by the name 'Israel'.

24. The ideology of Zionism is **not to rely on divine providence but to take the law into ones own hands** and to try to force the outcome in the form of a State. This is completely contrary to the approach to the matter of exile which our Torah requires us to adopt, as handed down to us by our great religious teachers.
25. I have spoken till now from the religious belief point of view. But let us consider the **humanitarian point of view** (and to do so is also a religious requirement as I mentioned earlier). The Zionist ideology was and is to force the aim of a State irrespective of the cost in life and property to anyone who stands in the way. The Palestinians stood in the way. We have a fact that in order to achieve an ill conceived nationalistic ambition, a shocking contravention of humanitarian justice was committed by the Zionists in setting up an illegitimate regime in Palestine completely against the wishes of the established population, the Palestinians, depriving them of their self determination in the land they had lived in for centuries and which almost inevitably had to be based on large scale theft and loss of life.
26. The Religious view however is that one must have compassion and consideration for ones fellow man. Depriving a people of their home and country is totally contrary to this requirement.
27. So there you have the two approaches - Zionist and Orthodox Jewish. Most Orthodox Jews accept the Neturei Karta view to the extent that they do not agree in principle to the existence of the Zionist State and would not 'shed a tear' if it came to an end. There are however a range of opinions as to how to deal with the fact that for the time being the Zionist State exists. These opinions range from positive cooperation to pragmatic acceptance to total opposition in every way. The latter being the Neturei Karta approach.
28. There was and is however, an additional Zionist phenomenon as I mentioned earlier which confuses the picture. That is the **Religious Zionists**. These are people who claim to be faithful to the Jewish Religion but they have been influenced by the Zionist secular nationalistic philosophy and have added a new dimension to Judaism - Zionism, i.e. the aim of setting up now and expanding a State in Palestine. This they try to fulfil with great fervour. **(I call it Judaism-plus)** They claim that this is inherent to the Jewish religion. But the fact is as explained earlier that this is absolutely contrary to the teachings of our great religious teachers handed down through the generations.
29. Furthermore, from a humanitarian point of view, the Religious Zionist ideology too is to force their aim irrespective of the cost in life and property to anyone who stands in the way. The Palestinians are standing in the way. This is all the more **shocking as it is done in the name of religion**. Whereas in reality there is a totally contrary requirement of our religion and that is to treat all peoples with compassion.

30. To sum up. According to the Torah and Jewish faith, the present **Palestinian Arab claim to rule in Palestine is right and just**. The **Zionist claim is wrong and criminal**. Our attitude to Israel is that the whole concept is flawed and illegitimate.
31. We have another problem and that is that the Zionists have made themselves to appear as the representatives and spokespeople of all Jews thus, with their actions, arousing animosity against the Jews, and then those who harbour this animosity are accused of anti-Semitism. However, what has to be made abundantly clear is that **Zionism is not Judaism**. Zionists cannot speak in the name of Jews. Zionists may have been born as Jews, but to be a Jew also requires adherence to the Jewish belief and religion. So what becomes abundantly clear is that **opposition to Zionism and its crimes does not imply hatred of Jews or 'anti-Semitism'**. On the contrary Zionism itself and its deeds are the biggest threat to Jews and Judaism and the biggest cause of anti-Semitism.
32. The general **strife between Arab and Jew in Palestine only began when the first Zionist pioneers came to Palestine** with the express aim of forming a State over the heads of the indigenous Arab population. That strife has continued until this very day and has cost and continues to cost thousands and thousands of lives. The oppression, abuse and murder in Palestine is a tragedy for both the Palestinians and for the Jewish people as well.
33. **I wish to add that the connection between Arab and Jew goes right back into ancient history**. Mostly the relationship was friendly and mutually beneficial. Historically, the situation frequently was that when Jews were being persecuted in Europe they found refuge in the various Arab countries. Our attitude to Arabs can only be one of friendliness and respect.
34. **We consider the Palestinians as the people with the right to govern in Palestine**.
35. **The Zionist State known as "Israel" is a regime that has no right to exist. Its continuing existence is the underlying cause of the strife in Palestine**.
36. **Which brings us back to the question of the Right of Return. This matter goes right to the core of the Zionist Palestinian conflict and we all know that if the Zionists would concede the Right of Return this would spell the end of the Zionist regime (i.e. a State for a particular ethnic group) due to the total demographic change which would come about in favour of the Palestinians. It is therefore obvious that the Zionists will not willingly concede this matter**.
37. **I would say that from the Palestinian point of view, the aim of pressing for the Right of Return is tantamount to pressing for the dissolution of the Zionist State. Orthodox Jewry would go along with this entirely**.
38. **The big question is 'How can this be achieved?' and I would add 'How can it be achieved without further bloodshed?'**
39. **At this point I usually stop. We are not politicians and I can only say that we pray for a peaceful solution to the terrible and tragic impasse that exists**.

40. **However I would ask the audience today to allow me to make an exception and allow me to humbly delve a little into the field of politics. I would stress that that I realise our total inexperience in this field and recognise that in no way are we qualified to tell the Palestinians how to further their cause.**
41. **We unequivocally support the Palestinian cause but would humbly plead, hope and pray that the means to be pursued should be peaceful.**
42. **I would like to refer everyone to the experience in South Africa where the mighty South African apartheid regime was brought down by moral, political and economic pressures imposed by the nations of the world. With very little bloodshed. When I was a young man the popular view was that the Apartheid regime would not topple without a blood bath. Events proved otherwise.**
43. **This of course only came about when the nations of the world almost universally appreciated the innate evil inequity of the Apartheid regime. My friends, I would humbly suggest that this is what we have to aim for from now on. A powerful propaganda war to persuade the nations of the world of the innate evil of the Zionist regime. Once this is achieved then the Zionist regime can be toppled. If it worked in South Africa it can work in Palestine.**
44. **It constantly amazes me how countries like the United States and United Kingdom can consider the Zionist regime as democratic when this is absolutely and patently not so when it comes to dealing with the Palestinians. It could be that they consider their support of the Zionist State as a means of salving their consciences for not doing enough to help the Jewish People in the period of the Holocaust. Whether they are obliged to salve their consciences or not is not a matter for discussion to day. However one thing is certain and that is that helping the Zionist Regime does not help Jews or Judaism it only antagonises the world against them.**
45. **My friends - out of politics and back to prayer. We pray for an end to bloodshed and an end to the suffering of all innocent people - Jew and non-Jew alike - worldwide.**
46. **I would like to finish with the following words. We want to tell the world, especially our Arab neighbours, that there is **no hatred or animosity between Jew and Arab**. We wish to live together as friends and neighbours as we have done mostly over hundreds even thousands of years in all the Arab countries. It was only the **advent of the Zionists and Zionism which upset this age old relationship**.**
47. **We are waiting for the **annulment of Zionism and the dismantling of the Zionist regime**, which will bring about an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people. We would welcome the opportunity to dwell in peace in the holy land under a rule which is entirely in accordance with the wishes and aspirations of the Palestinian People.**
48. **May we soon merit the time when all mankind will be at peace with each other.**

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