

In his article today in the Jerusalem Post, Rabbi Daniel Gordis tells of two recent conversations he had in Jerusalem. The first was with a Jewish lay leader from New York who told him that everything written in the Bible about Jewish claims to Israel is irrelevant. He went on to say:

“You’re losing us. Lots of deeply committed American Jews have just had it with Israel. They want to care, but they can’t. Ninety percent of America’s Jews are Reform and Conservative Jews, but the Jewish state spits on them, and then expects us to pretend that it’s rain. You never elect a prime minister with the guts to stand up to those thugs called chief rabbis. You really expect us to be loyal third-class citizens?”

“But then, you make us not only angry, but ashamed. Doesn’t anyone here give any consideration at all to how Israel’s policies play in our community? How are we supposed to defend policies that push the Palestinians off of more land and out of more neighborhoods, when the world’s decided that that’s simply abhorrent? And have you got a strategy? Do you want a two-state solution? Because if you do, you’d better start leaving them some land on which to create one. And if you don’t want a two-state solution, what do you plan to do with those millions of Arabs in Gaza and the West Bank? Kick them out? Make them non-citizens forever, and then prove that Jimmy Carter was right about the apartheid accusation all along? Are you still going to expect us to watch your backs then? Really, do you guys ever actually think?”

Rabbi Gordis said that he pushed back a little bit, corrected some of his factual claims but knew that what this Jewish leader said was the opinion of many Jews in America.

After that conversation he went to pick up his car that was being serviced and struck up a conversation with a man in the waiting room. Rabbi Gordis described him as ‘a blond gentleman in a tweed suit and a tie, speaking English with a thick European accent.’ He was from Scandinavia and worked for the European Union in, what the man called, ‘Palestine.’

Not looking forward to the conversation, Rabbi Gordis asked him about the people he works with in the Palestinian government.

Here is what they said.

“There are some good people but a lot of corruption. They have a long way to go before they’re ready for statehood.”

“So, are we eventually going to have peace here?” Rabbi Gordis asked.

“Well ‘eventually’ is a long time. But probably not in my lifetime, or yours.”

“So what should Israel do in the meantime?”

“Just what you are already doing. Keep on building your country, and keep building the settlements.”

“Build the settlements?” Rabbi Gordis was surprised.

“Absolutely. Some day, they’re going to be ready for serious talks. They’re going to make a huge concession, and recognize your right to exist. But they’re going to expect a similarly grand concession from you. Your concession can’t be recognizing their right to a state, because you’ve already done that. And you can’t compromise on the return of refugees, because then you have no Jewish state. So you need something massive that you can give up on - and that’s going to be the settlements. You’ll have to evacuate and destroy most of them in the end, but if you do that now, then what will you offer at the table? The settlements are your key to making peace eventually.”

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It's interesting to see these two reactions, one from a man who is emotionally and intellectually engaged in this issue and one from a man who seems to be intellectually, but much less emotionally, engaged. The Jewish fund raiser says, stop building settlements because the world sees this as 'abhorrent' and, we can assume he means, that those people in the world will see Jews as abhorrent. But a man who is actually working with the Palestinians says they aren't ready for real peace negotiations and when they are, the settlements are the perfect bargaining tools.

Rabbi Gordis titled this article, *Settlement Whiplash*. We're hearing exactly the opposite reactions from these two men from what many of us would think.

I'm not a betting person, but if I were, I'd put my money on the opinion of the Scandinavian who's working with the Palestinians.

We Jews have been hated for centuries. If we stop building settlements, the world will find another reason to hate us. At least with this reason, we might eventually get some bargaining power.