

I'm reading a very interesting book right now, *Soldier of Peace*, a biography of Yitzhak Rabin by Dan Kurzman.

The story of Rabin who was born in Jerusalem in 1923 is one of those gossip; let's look at the real story behind the gloss books. It tells of the lives, the very big personalities and sometimes egos of those who created the Jewish State. It freely gives us a window into their great strengths and essential flaws.

This is truly a story that is awesome in its scope and purpose. We who were born and live in the US especially have no frame of reference for what the Jews accomplished between 1880 and 1949.

In just 70 years approximately two dozen military/political leaders (at that time both were usually the same) created and executed a plan to make something from nothing.

But in reality it was even harder than that.

When there is nothing, we have a *tabula rasa*, a completely clean slate to begin with. We can create anything on it without having to compete with what has come before. But the leaders of the new Israel had to contend with many existing problems: with the Arabs living on the land, the Ottoman Empire who was in control of the land until WWI and the British who had control of the land after WWI. Each of these groups had a political agenda and none of them including sharing the land with Jews.

The accomplishments of these legendary fighters are in direct contradiction to the opinions of two of our well-known Jewish philosophers. Baruch Spinoza, 17th century Italy and Moses Mendelsohn, 18th century Germany, both believed that the Jews were incapable of creating a state for themselves because Jews were basically a passive people. Spinoza believed that because of our religion, requiring many daily acts of subservience to God, Jews had become too subservient in general to assert themselves in other situations. Mendelsohn blamed Jewish passivity on the years of surviving as a hated and scorned people. Because Jews had to hide themselves to keep safe, they never learned to assert themselves in the world. Both of them said that passive Jews could not create a modern state of Israel.

Luckily the founders of Israel didn't accept that analysis. Yitzhak Rabin, David Ben Gurion, Yigal Allon, Moshe Dayan, Menachem Begin, Golda Meir to name just a few contradicted the very essence of the belief of the passive Jew.

As I read *Soldier of Peace*, I am continually impressed by the courage and vision of these men and women to fight for the State of Israel when they continually faced deprivation, disease and death. Attacks by Arabs were frequent, without warning or provocation. British soldiers stood by during the attacks, not helping the Jews to defend themselves. The British government made conflicting deals with the Arabs and the Jews, always leaning toward the Arabs.

And, of course, there was the sometime debilitating infighting among the Jewish leaders. All of this makes what they did even more admirable.

Of all the ways I admire these pioneers, what I admire most is the amount of sacrifice it took to make our Jewish state happen.

Our heroes sacrificed comfort and time with family. They watched their best friends killed in action. They struggled with each other to find the right strategy for the right battle.

The miracle of the creation of state of Israel cannot really be understood unless one lived through it. But reading *Soldier of Peace* I have a different and deeper understanding of how much strength, determination and vision it took to continue fighting when it so often seemed that all was lost. All of them could have chosen easier lives in American or England, where there was peace and prosperity. But for each of them, their *neshama*, their Jewish soul would not allow them to do that.

As I read about these heroes to whom I am greatly indebted, I wonder if I would be able to sacrifice so much. I wonder how many of us would be able to do that. It took enormous courage, ability and willingness for them to act in that time and they were always aware that they were doing it not so much for themselves but for the future of our people. May we bless them and praise them and then may we all take a trip to Israel.

Shabbat Shalom.