

# Recipe for European disaster

Prof. Benzion Netanyahu observed that the most horrific anti-Jewish episodes in the Middle Ages occurred when clashes between Christianity and Islam intensified. For example, Spain in the 15th century, and during various Muslim invasions of Europe.

A new clash is brewing in Europe. After years of tensions between Europe's Christian and Muslim populations, the European conflict escalated last week to violence, triggered by the shooting of a Muslim teenager by French police. In less than a week, French police arrested over 3,000 people – mainly young Muslims.

As it so happened, during the same week, the BBC escalated its well-documented incitement against the Jewish state, reawakening the Middle Ages blood libel: "Israeli forces are happy to kill children."

This escalation was even steeper since this time, the BBC presenter did not allege that Israel targets civilians but that some of the terrorists who murder Israeli citizens are under 18, hence Israel's fighting them amounts to "Israel killing children."

Moreover, unlike in the Middle Ages, when Europeans were indoctrinated with rhetoric that Jews kill children, presumably "reluctantly" – they need their blood to make *matzot* – this generation of Europeans are apparently indoctrinated with a higher-level blood libel: The Jewish state is actually "happy" to kill children.

Herzl understood that whenever there are frustrations in Europe, Jews are in danger. While some last week breathed a sigh of relief that Muslim protesters did not target French Jews, the historical pattern is clear: Europeans direct their frustrations toward the most relevant aspect of Judaism – at Herzl's time, as both Europe and Jews turned secular, the opposition to Judaism shifted from being directed to the Jewish religion to being directed to the Jewish nation. Now, as we saw last week, it is directed to the Jewish state and Zionism – the new anchor of Judaism (Judaism 3.0).

## Christianity vs Islam or atheism vs monotheism?

European diplomats and pundits argue that the European conflict should not be framed as Christianity vs Islam but rather secularism vs religion. As evidence, some Europeans point to measures taken against the Jewish religion, such as attempts to restrict circumcision and kosher animal slaughter.

Indeed, after 1,500 years or so of being anchored in religion, Europe now champions zealous secularism and even anti-theism. Today's European democracy is a byproduct of the French Revolution, which was, among other things, a rebelling against God, even changing the seven-day week to 10 days to negate the view of the "old Europeans" that God created the world. (This is in sharp contrast to the American democracy, which is a byproduct of the American Revolution, rooted in faith: "one nation under God").

So if Europe's conflict is indeed with religion, where does this leave European Christians? Outside Paris, "Old Europeans" still practice religion and nationalism. Indeed, the "Paris vs France" mantra was a backdrop of the "Yellow Vest" protests of recent years.

And so, in coming decades, as lines of demarcation



MUSLIM MIGRANTS arrive in Munich, Germany, 2015. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images)

in the "Battle for Europe" are drawn, it is possible that the conflict on some level would turn to be atheism ("New Europeans") vs monotheism ("Old Europeans" and Muslim migrants). This relates to Europe's philosophical divide with Americanism and its 2,300-year-old opposition to Jerusalem (see EuropeandJerusalem.com).

This needs to be taken seriously. Not only due to Herzl's and Netanyahu's warnings about the dangerous ecosystem to Jews that such conflict generates but also because the European conflict has long-term global impact. The ancient global feud, monotheism vs paganism, which was dormant for over 1,300 years – ever since Europe accepted monotheism in the form of Christianity, and the Middle East in the form of Islam – now seems to re-emerge in a new arena: Europe.

## A preemptive European peace conference

As suggested in a previous *Magazine* article, Europe should convene a preemptive peace conference rather than follow the normal cycle of history: A sur-

## Conclusion and re-emergence of monotheism vs paganism

Moab's conflict with Israel is peculiar. Balak, king of Moab, hires Balaam to curse Israel, even though it is clear that Israel has no intention to invade Moab. We even learn that God prohibits this.

Similarly, Balak does not seem to fear that Israel would spread its faith in God to Moab. He himself believes in God, so does Balaam, so does Yitro, priest of Midian, and so do other nations, as we learn in the "Song of the Sea."

So what is the strategic threat that Balak identifies? Seemingly, it is monotheism!

The "world order" at the time is polytheism. Such order can contain "another Lord" – Moab can worship Israel's God, and Israel can worship Moab's pagan deities.

This pluralistic approach is evident when Bal-

prise massive European war every century, followed by a reactive peace conference that sets world order for the next century (1919, 1815), followed by an unexpected war.

Europe should embark on an honest conversation with itself, for its own sake and for the sake of the world, core to which should be finding ways to end Europe's disruptive intervention in Israeli-Palestinian affairs. The primary victims of Europe's obsessive intervention are Palestinians. Europe robs them of basic human rights, such as the right to decide if to be employed by Jewish-owned companies, while at the same time massively funds organizations that incite Palestinians against Israel. Such European funding should go down to zero. Imagine a foreign government funding organizations that incite European Muslims against France, or organizations that encourage French policemen to "break the silence" and report abuse of Muslims (3,000 arrests – each has its own story), and then disseminate this information to Muslim communities, leading to more violence and escalation. Europe should not tolerate foreign countries doing so in Europe, and it should stop engaging in such abusive behavior in the Jewish state.

It is important to recognize that such European reversal is difficult, if not impossible. Years of indoctrination take their toll. Herzl noted that "There is no use in suddenly announcing in the newspaper that starting tomorrow, all people are equal." Similarly, it is not simple reversing years of indoctrination that Israel is "happy to kill children," and commits a "massacre in Palestine" and "crimes against humanity."

The combination of Europeans being incited against the Jewish state and Europe's growing conflict with both its Muslim and Christian populations is a recipe for yet another European-sourced global disaster.

Will Europe have the courage to pivot and confront its issues? Or will Europe continue its trajectory toward "the War of European Succession"? This remains to be seen in coming decades. ■

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ak sends messengers to Balaam carrying pagan elements (*ksamim*), and in Balaam's using pagan tools in his first two attempts to curse Israel (it is stated that in the third attempt, he does not). Israel disrupts this world order with its message of monotheism – one God.

Israel itself is divided, as some, seemingly the "heads of the nation," worshiped Moab's Baal and invited a Midianite princess to worship Israel's God.

The monotheism vs paganism conflict lasted for centuries but came to its end by the 7th century CE: The Roman Empire accepts monotheism in the form of Christianity, and the Middle East in the form of Islam. Yet, in a stunning reversal of history, by the 21st century, this biblical conflict seems to renew in a new arena: Europe.

# Israel is not a start-up nation



JUDAISM & MODERNITY  
MOSHE TARAGIN

What happens when grand visions meet harsh realities? For hundreds of years, the Land of Israel was a shimmering dream buoying the spirits of an enslaved nation. Once that dream became a reality, however, everything seemed to go sideways. The scandal of the spies wrecked our first opportunity to achieve this dream, and we were condemned to an agonizing 40-year desert odyssey. Having recovered from that disaster, we stood at the doorstep of history, ready to convert those grand dreams into reality. Unfortunately, reality leaves a lot to the imagination; and dreams, when they finally materialize, lose much of their luster.

Just prior to our entry into Israel, two tribes petitioned Moses, asking to remain in the eastern bank of the Jordan River rather than enter Israel proper. Shocked by their request, Moses recalls the trauma of "spy-gate" 38 years earlier. Evidently, this nightmare is happening again. Additionally, Moses can't justify the moral calculus through which most of the nation battles for Israel, while two tribes sit on the sidelines, watching idly.

After failing to dissuade these tribes, Moses offers a compromise solution. He effectively contracts them to battle alongside the rest of the population. Once they hold up their end of the bargain, they can return to their homesteads in the lush green pastures of the east bank.

Given everything that has happened, Moses is understandably skeptical about the intentions of these mercenaries. Fearing their betrayal, he painstakingly stipulates the conditions of this arrangement, repeating the terms of the agreement and crafting a tightly wound verbal contract. Fascinatingly, Moses's stipulations serve as the template for any conditions in halachic legal sales and transactions. As the Talmud repeatedly remarks, "Any conditions that aren't crafted in the same fashion as these original stipulations aren't legally binding." Moses's bargaining with these two tribes becomes the model for all future transactions.

How tragic! A land of faith and vision has now become a clause in a legal contract. A land of history and heritage has become an addendum to a legal transaction. Instead of being bound to Israel through common destiny, these tribes are now obligated by a diplomatic treaty. This transactional relationship cannot last long.

Soon after we settled the Land of Israel, suspicions surfaced about the loyalties of this satellite population. Through last-minute statesmanship a civil war was narrowly averted, but distrust lingered. Unfortunately, these tribes were first to be exiled and to be amputated from Jewish history in the mainland. Ironically, by forging a purely transactional relationship, these tribes severed themselves from our common narrative and launched their own mental exile. To them, Israel was nothing more than a transaction.

## A transactional culture

Our own society is quickly morphing into a transactional culture. The shift is largely due to the disproportionate influence of capitalism. Free-market economics have altered our world, empowering each individual with economic rights and unlimited potential. Fortunately, capitalism has dramatically im-



TRANSACTIONS ARE faceless by nature. (Towfiq barbhuiya/Unsplash)

proved our standard of living and has all but eliminated hunger and poverty as a cause of death. We so deeply revere it that we seldom question its impact on other facets of the human imagination.

Capitalism is pivoted on financial transactions between two individuals, each seeking maximal value for minimal expenditure. Each individual party to a transaction acts purely out of personal interest and not altruistically. The other party in a transaction possesses no inherent value but is merely a trade partner helping to maximize one's own profit. Transactions are faceless; and the market, by definition, exhibits no moral values, no altruism, and certainly no respect for human dignity. Transactionalism may work well in the isolated world of free markets but is corrosive to other areas of human identity.

## Transactionalism has even wormed its way into religious consciousness

### Transactional politics

Regrettably, modern democracies are becoming transactional. Citizens of modern democracies view themselves as clients, paying taxes to receive government services. As in any transaction, a client seeks to pay as little as possible and receive as much as possible. Likewise, governments view themselves as service providers, receiving votes in exchange for the benefits they deliver. As transactions are always short-term interactions, transactional politics encourage short-term policy-making rather than long-term programming. Additionally, transactions occur between individuals, not between communities. Transactional politics casts each citizen as an individual customer rather than as a member of a larger unified group. Transactional politics fosters individualism rather than collectivism and common experience.

Over time, transactional democracies will wither, and we are witnessing the first warning signs of this deterioration.

### Transactional relationships

Our relationships have also become transactional. We ask ourselves how a relationship or affiliation benefits us and how much it will cost. Transactional

relationships focus on what we get and not on what we give. Genuine relationships are centered on generosity, compassion, and selflessness, not taking benefit. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote (*Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times*, Basic Books, chap. 23), "In a contract, two or more people come together, each pursuing their self-interest, to make a mutually advantageous exchange. In a covenant, two or more people, each respecting the dignity and integrity of the other, come together in a bond of loyalty and trust to do together what neither can achieve alone. It isn't an exchange; it's a moral commitment.... Contracts are about interests; covenants are about identity. Contracts benefit; covenants transform. Contracts are about Me and You; covenants are about Us."

### Transactional religion

Transactionalism has even wormed its way into religious consciousness. Of course, Jewish belief acknowledges reward and punishment, both in this world and the next. Yet, the Torah never explicitly mentions the afterlife, precisely to avoid casting religion as transactional. We don't adhere to divine will merely to receive reward or to avoid punishment. Religious experience is self-sufficient, and we should, as Maimonides claimed, "do what is right because it is right," without need of any external incentivization. By muting any overt mention of the afterlife, the Torah presents religious life as the highest and most noble lifestyle, even if there weren't any reward and punishment. Religious duties are not divine transactions but acts of devotion and piety to a God who loves us and chose us for lives of commandment, commitment, and covenant.

### A start-up nation

Like politics in other democracies, Israeli politics have become transactional. Additionally, during the past 20 years, Israel's emergence as a technological superpower has shifted our cultural narrative. A well-known book titled *Start-Up Nation* captured the spirit of our age and the dizzying pace of Israeli innovation, scientific discovery, and technological progress.

However, sadly, this story about "start-up" entrepreneurial Israel is replacing our original story about historical Israel. We didn't come to Israel to invent technology or to receive lavish financial buyouts, as beneficial as these may be. We gathered from across the globe, fleeing persecution and antisemitism hoping to construct a common Jewish homeland. History is our narrative, not entrepreneurialism. Entrepreneurial connection is transactional and fades once the costs outweigh the benefits. Historical connection to our homeland endures and outlasts hardships and adversity.

Watching Israelis abandon our country when the political winds shift is deeply troubling. In a transactional society, these decisions make sense: if a political policy is bad for profit or personally inconvenient, the overall transaction of living in Israel isn't worth it. However, we are not here for profit; we are here for history. We are not a start-up nation but a renaissance nation. Commitment to live in this country must transcend cost-benefit analysis. Not everything in life is a transaction. Israel certainly isn't. It is our heritage. ■

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