

A New Agenda for Israel

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In 1840 William Henry Harrison ran for President of the United States with his running mate John Tyler. Some genius came up with a campaign slogan "Tippecanoe and Tyler too." Twenty-nine years earlier when he was General Harrison, he had led his troops against the Indians at Tippecanoe River and routed them. The slogan that recalled this dubious victory caught on, became a household item and won for them the election. "Tippecanoe and Tyler too" is catchy, easily repeated, and it rhymes too. But it says nothing, and it means nothing. Someone wrote recently about this slogan that it is "an important century and a half old echo because it perhaps, marked the death of careful thought on the voter side of the election process".

A slogan can be very good or very bad.

A slogan captures the essence of an idea and encapsulates it into a few brief words. An effective slogan should have rhythm, charm, and very simple words; one or two syllables are preferable.

It may express succinctly what one has been thinking but couldn't put into words or it may introduce an entirely new idea. The slogan is easily and effortlessly absorbed into one's consciousness and usually stays there comfortably ensconced, unchallenged and quite impervious to reason. It simply engraves itself on one's heart and mind. Wendell Wilke said: "A good catchword can obscure analysis for fifty years."

A truly successful slogan is one that endows the one who adopts and embraces it with the feeling that he is championing a just cause and that he belongs to a very special club.

It may give him the aura of an intellectual, a liberal, a universal humanitarian, a left-winger or a right-winger. It offers one instant entrée into an exclusive club. So what if everybody else is parroting the same slogan; what's important is how does the sloganeer feel about himself.

It must be emphasized again that a slogan can be a powerful positive tool, or an absolutely deadly and lethal weapon.

The slogan must be small enough to fit onto a bumper sticker. However always keep in mind the immortal words of Charles M. Schulz: "There's a difference between a philosophy and a bumper sticker."

Slogans are usually between two to five words. I remember in Williamsburg during the Second World War there were large billboards with the frightening artistic portrayal of an American troop ship going down in the Atlantic with the four words "Loose Lips Sink Ships." The Brooklyn Navy Yard was part of Williamsburg and we all knew about the ships coming and going. The message was very powerful.

An historic two-word slogan became the battle cry of World War II: "Unconditional Surrender." The war would continue until the complete destruction of the enemy. No negotiations, no deals, no suing for peace — only unconditional surrender. Now if the Allied leaders would have known the common Israeli elitist wisdom: "There is no military solution," "Ayn pitaron tsvae," or the slogan policy that has cost us many dead and still continues to hold sway: "Restraint is strength," "Eepuk ze koach," they would not have destroyed evil utterly. The restraint nonsense gave Hizbollah six years to build up their destructive arsenals unchallenged and unhindered. The "restraint is strength" policy has permitted Fatah (and all the other terrorist organizations in Gaza) to rain some 6-7000 Kassams on Israel. No sane, responsible country in the world would tolerate such an assault on its citizenry without responding with all its military might.

These two slogans have convinced our enemies that we are weak, lacking in resolve, foolish, and that terror pays. "Cease Fire" has become a policy when in fact "Fire" should prevail. Our government continues to empower and encourage terrorism. Roosevelt, Churchill, et alia understood that evil must be fought and defeated, otherwise it's the good guys who will have to surrender unconditionally. The real response to the Kassams should be "Never Again!"

Slogans have their roots early in time. Cain's response to Hashem's query: "Where is your brother Hevel?" — "Hashomer Achi Anochi?" "Am I my brother's keeper?" is the first and one of the worst. The ruthlessness of that reply reverberates across the centuries until the present day. Are people truly tuned into the needs of others, even of coreligionists' distress? Isn't silence, disinterest, looking away, a Cain-like response? We may not be killing our brothers, but not helping them is the next worst thing. Torah's response to Cain is the words of Joseph to the man who meets him in the field: "Et achai anochi mevakesh," "I seek my brothers."

There are, of course, circumstances that bring an outpouring of concern such as a Tsunami, Katrina, and other natural disasters. But what about Darfur, or Jonathan Pollard, Israel's kidnapped soldiers — and yes, there was Gush Katif.

If I were to choose the greatest slogan of all times it is the one coined by G-d Himself. "When Israel was in Egyptland," so goes the spiritual, "tell old Pharaoh 'Let My people go.'" Those divine words have expressed the yearning for freedom throughout history. Those four words (and their continuation: "and they shall serve Me") have sparked, fired, and initiated every great movement for freedom from Israel in Egypt, to the battle for Soviet Jewry. During that great struggle, "Let My people go" resounded worldwide and ultimately brought down one of the most powerful empires in history. The Soviet Union came crumbling down like a pack of cards. That Divine slogan speaks of the dignity and infinite value of man created in the image of G-d.

It is the holy imperative to fight for freedom, cherish freedom and use freedom in the service of Hashem in all places and at all times. "Let my people go" calls on mankind never to enslave fellow men in any way. G-d speaks not only to tyrants but also to democratic governments, to employers, to educators, parents, youth, husbands and wives. No one has the right to limit another's freedom and impose his will on him.

One of the major failings of the last twenty or so years has been the mistaken notion that the solution to our situation here is enshrined in a few slogans.

Edward R. Murrow once said: "Our major obligation is not to mistake slogans for solutions."

One of the catchwords that have held sway over Israeli leadership and public has been "Land for Peace". The strength of the slogan is in the use or possibly abuse of the word "peace". It holds out the hope for that most cherished and longed for goal of mankind in general and the embattled people of Israel in particular. When "land" is uttered in the same breath as "peace," "land" becomes lifeless and insignificant.

"Land" describes something inanimate that certainly cannot be worth the risk and sacrifice of human life. "Land for Peace" also has the diabolical advantage of branding anyone who wants to retain land as obviously insensitive to human life and opposed to peace. Taken just a slight small step further, he who rejects "land for peace" is in favor of war.

We are now nearly fourteen years after Oslo and the myth of land for peace lies in ruins, having exacted a price of thousands of lives on both sides of the divide. We haven't even a piece of peace for any land that we foolishly relinquished. Southern Lebanon, the major cities in Yehuda and Shomron and Gush Katif were handed over to the enemy and peace is as distant as ever.

What "Land for Peace" does not clarify nor even address, is whose land is it anyway? Why do they want it? Do they have any historic claim to it? Can they deliver peace? Are they interested in peace? Do they only want land in order to more effectively wage war against us? Are they and the rest of the world laughing at us for being naïve and living in a dream world?

In 2007 the answer to all of the above question is that "Land for Peace" is an empty, destructive and dangerous slogan. The inescapable conclusion that must be reached is that the slogan is a lie that unfortunately has caused much pain and suffering to so many people. Only recently Dalia Itzik, the Speaker of the Knesset, who is a firmly entrenched "peacemaker" on the left side of the political divide, said incredulously: "It's not land for peace it's land for war." She's beginning to get it.

Events have clearly demonstrated that our enemies don't want peace and therefore, they won't deliver peace, that they want land in order to come closer to our heartland, in order to build terrorist bases, and turn whatever land is relinquished into staging grounds for war. It is no secret that the flow of arms and munitions, explosives rockets, Kassams, Katyushas, anti-tank missiles, and assorted other implements of war are flowing in large quantities to Gaza and Southern Lebanon.

"Land for Peace" should be amended to read "recklessly and irresponsibly relinquishing our homeland to sworn enemies so that they can more effectively wage war against us". It doesn't sound nearly as good, it's not catchy, it doesn't rhyme, but it is absolutely true.

There are other destructive slogans that have to go. "There is no military solution" belongs in the dustbin of history. It has prevented our leadership from allowing the IDF to do the job that has to be done.

"You make peace with enemies" is another dangerous mantra that has caused great harm. It's simply not true. You can make peace with enemies who want to be friends and long for and

cherish peace. You make peace with enemies who have learned that they will gain nothing from war, but you cannot make peace with sworn enemies.

"Restraint is strength" allowed our enemies to build up their arsenals of death unimpeded and with impunity. It gave them free rein to rain down Kassams and Katyushas for years without fear of reprisal.

To our enemies the motley collection of foolish and false slogans is clear indications of our weakness, our lack of resolve, and that we have doubts about our own rights to the land. The slogans have encouraged the global forces of terrorism committed to our destruction. The whole array of catchy phrases does not serve the interests of peace.

Another political axiom that keeps being repeated with an urgency that borders on desperation is that we dare not allow a "vacuum" to develop in the "peace process" (what peace process?). Political inactivity will impede the process or cause it to dissipate. There have to be talks, conferences, meetings, deliberations, negotiations, summits with anybody about anything. The conventional, politically correct wisdom cautions us to avoid a dreaded vacuum at all costs.

Therefore we are treated to endless visits of heads of state, secretaries of state, and a host of other lesser functionaries, who want to get involved in the ongoing saga of peace talks.

Every so often we are informed quite urgently that a "window of opportunity is open" (and I usually catch a cold) that calls for some generous peace gesture on Israel's part, like another major concession. In the event that talks have stalled, it becomes necessary to "jump-start the talks," and how crucial it is that when negotiations are in progress we have "to keep up the momentum." All this feverish flurry of frenzied activity takes place when in fact no window is open; there are no meaningful negotiations; there is no momentum because there have never been peace talks at all.

Summation and New Agenda

Now that all the slogans are finally exposed as empty, naked and divorced of any meaning, it is high time for Israel to change directions and adopt a new agenda. When we finally realize that "Tippecanoe and Tyler too" was catchy and cute but relatively harmless and no more than a summer camp color-war cry, but "Land for Peace" was and is devious, destructive and has caused great loss and pain, we had better change mental gears.

Following the tragic expulsion of 10,000 Jews from their homes in Gush Katif and the Northern Shomron, and the absolutely criminal and shameful way in which they have been treated, a process of regret, repentance, reconstruction, redress and renewal must become the foundation of the new national agenda. We have to concentrate our efforts on healing the nation's wounds by beginning an internal peace process. We must create an atmosphere of harmony and mutual respect which will enable Jews to live together and work together with a genuine commitment to Klal Yisroel and Eretz Yisroel.

The new agenda must include a strenuous effort in many areas of social welfare. A partial but certainly not exhaustive list calls for war against corruption in high and low places, the purging of Israeli society of organized crime, an intensive campaign to end the carnage on our roads, rebuilding an army weakened by hubris and expulsions, reorganizing an ailing police force, raising the standard of living in order to give hope to the poor, concern for the disadvantaged and handicapped, completely revamping the educational system to make Israeli schools Jewish and democratic, clipping the wings of a runaway judiciary, making government truly representative and bringing our boys home. The list goes on and on.

Israel will become a "light unto the nations" only by creating a beautiful moral society where Jews from all corners of the world live in harmony.

The mistakes of the last two decades have brought to the surface so many of the serious problems that have to be dealt with. Now is the time!

We will be able to face our enemies with *siyata dishmaya*, confidence and strength only when we have forged a unified Am Yisroel.

A model just and decent society here that will be the envy of our hostile neighbors may go a long way towards bringing some respite to this troubled region of the world.

Peace begins at home.