

A Two Sapling Solution

By Daniel Brenner

My front yard is aglow with forsythia, hyacinths, and daffodils. The cherry blossoms in the park are also radiant--a spectacular burst of color after a long winter which I thought would never end. I am reminded of the blessing, first recorded in the Talmud, for seeing fruit trees: "Blessed is the Holy One for there is nothing lacking in creation, so many beautiful creatures and good trees that we are able to enjoy."

For these reasons, it is especially tragic that planting trees in Israel has been the latest arena of political in-fighting.

"Planting trees in Israel" has traditionally been associated with Keren Kayemet Yisrael, the Jewish National Fund, which for years has forested Israel, made the desert bloom, and even planted trees to replace those that were destroyed by Palestinian arsonists in Intifada I. Now, in an effort to sustain years of work toward peace, some leaders of the American Jewish left want to plant trees as well. In a recent New York Times advertisement, they called attention to nearly 3,000 olive trees that have been destroyed in the past eight months--most of them in or near Palestinian villages.

So, I ask myself--as someone who once applauded when Rabin and Arafat reluctantly shook hands--should I now send off my money to plant new trees around Palestinian villages?

A year ago, it would have been an easy check to write. Now I wonder what planting such trees truly means. I ask: Do such acts bolster the uprising - one that has already caused enough blood on both sides? Or do they help the Palestinian population understand that, counter to the extremists' propaganda, there are Jews in the world who wish for them to live in peace, in their own state? At a time when most Palestinians cheer when Sadaam Hussein says, "May Allah kill the Jews!" it isn't easy to answer these questions.

Yet over the past year, a small group of Israeli rabbis--Rabbis for Human Rights--has been part of the effort to meet with Palestinians and plant new trees. This effort continues despite the fact that acts of terror and aggression are escalating and the rabbis themselves have been threatened by Palestinians, settlers, and Israeli military personnel.

In reading their recent collection of writings, I find not a group of die-hard lefties who are ignorant or dismissive of Palestinian supported terror, but a group of sensible, rational, and appropriately compassionate men and women who understand that for Israel to have a future, there must be a two sapling solution.

So now I can't decide where it is best to plant trees.

It is wonderful to take out the certificates I have saved of all the trees I have planted in Israel over the years, or ones planted when my children were born. But the long-term thinker in me knows that trees need water, and without a peace agreement with Syria and a much-needed pipeline, Israel's water supply will dry up, and the trees will, too.

So as I witness the trees in bloom in my front yard and utter a blessing, I'll keep in mind that although the "peace process" has been cut down, the seeds for peace can and must be planted again.