

Context and Critique: A Closer Look at Greenberg's "Offensive" Speech

By David Kraemer

As a matter of communal policy, what should our position be concerning criticism of Israel? Should we insist that any criticism of Israel is "anti-Israel" or even "anti-Semitic?" Or should we allow criticism when the critic speaks in good faith, in a way that is both caring and balanced? The former, it seems to me, is the position of the self-appointed Zionist protectors of Israel's honor who castigated Yitz Greenberg for his comments at the G.A. in November. But the latter is the only ethical policy our community can support. It is those who spoke against Yitz, I would claim, who are the enemies of Zion, for they fail to understand that Zion without Jewish values is not Zion at all.

As I reviewed the transcript of Yitz's talk, the most "offensive" words I could find were these: "It is entirely possible, in my judgment, that they [Israeli police forces in the Galilee] overreacted, and that in the overreaction killed people unnecessarily, and as a serious violation of the Jewish ethic of power." Now, I admit that these are critical words. But they are offered in a larger context—one in which Yitz asks what a Jewish ("covenantal") exercise of power would mean. Yitz's answer to this question is long and, in the way of oral addresses, rambling, but it is also thoughtful and carefully nuanced. Among the suggestions Yitz makes are these: ·

"Jewish power is never self-validating, so we have to sit in continual judgment upon ourselves." · ·

"Given what cannot be changed... given the evil that cannot be avoided, there is still some best possible or least evil way of exercising power." · ·

"You have a continuous process of correction." ·

Each of these criteria emerges from long Jewish traditions of prophetic critique and rabbinic questioning. Without these traditions, there would have been no Jews longing for Zion and no Jewish competitors for the land they call Palestine.

So Yitz's critique asks what could be better given what cannot be. He recognizes that no exercise of power should be exempt from examination and critique, and he admits that errors will be made. The way to respond to these realities is, as he says, to have a continuous process of correction. In fact, in the section following the critique quoted above, Yitz praises Israel for offering a model in this regard, for a commission has already been created to investigate the shootings of Israeli Arabs. In other words, Israel has the ethical sense—and the procedures in place—to exercise power "covenantally." Since all governments will err in the exercise of

power from time to time, this can only be understood as high praise for Israel, for she goes one step further than most.

Another crucial component in Israel's "continuous process of correction" is her free press. And as anyone who followed that press in the weeks after the shooting knows, there were many Israeli voices that were far more critical of the shootings than was Yitz. Thank God, Israel doesn't have to depend on outsiders to express the ethical critiques. Her own citizens assume this responsibility on their own. But this doesn't mean that diaspora Jews such as Yitz should keep their mouths shut. The world Jewish community must also hear the critical, ethical voice. Otherwise, their ethical sensibilities would be dulled, and this too would be a tragedy.

So the claim that Yitz's comments were anti-Israel is simply absurd. But this absurdity highlights an important problem in the American Jewish dialogue. Questions about Israel have too often been derided as "anti-Israel," and spokespeople who disagree with "you" (whoever "you" are) have too often been castigated as enemies or worse. These tendencies are destructive to the fabric of our community conversation, and they must change. As a matter of course, we should assume that those who disagree with us are thoughtful, caring members of the community, whose disagreement emerges from a different judgment from our own. We should listen carefully to those who disagree because they may have something to teach us, no matter how much we believe their conclusions to be wrong. And we should assume that critics are motivated by the ethic of covenantal self-correction. They question because they care, and we must hear the wisdom in their questions.

What should the community's position be? Let the critics multiply! Caring critics will bring us closer to the world we all seek. Those who seek to stifle their voices are unfortunate impediments.

[See the ensuing pages to read the transcript of Greenberg's November talk at the General Assembly of the United Jewish Communities]

Full Text of Speech by

Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg

"The Ethics of Jewish Power Today"

(TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE)

I'd like to reflect with you really on the continuing saga because as I said in the description, in a way we somehow thought we were beyond some of these questions and that's part of the difficulty this moment in wrestling with the problem in the Middle East is that psychologically I think we're in a difference place. We sort of thought let's face the problems of peace together and maybe it's a little hard emotionally sometimes to accept the fact that it's not quite that simple. I want to start at the very beginning. We can never forget that because the Jewish people, I think, you have to remember your mission or your vision even when sometimes it doesn't look very present. There's that classic line of graffiti from the Shoah - I believe in the light even when there is none. And in a certain sense that is part of the challenge to always keep your vision, because at the heart there is a vision of what is not yet but which we insist will be. The revolutionary impact of the Jewish people in the world has been because we saw the world as it is and said it isn't quite good enough. We have a vision of what it can be, but the revolutionary impact was to say not just it can be, but it will be. We promise it will be if you will do your share.

So I start from the beginning, where it will be and what, in a sense, is the vision. The central category of our tradition is that we are living in a world in which good is going to win out over evil, believe it or not. More important, that life is going to win; that is the central claim of the Jewish people. You live in a world in which there is a struggle between life and death - it's an incredible struggle because it's all over. It's a universe that has an extraordinarily and powerful force for death. In nature itself, living things are constantly deteriorating; there are forces of destruction. Not only are there forces of life and death in the universe, there are also forces of life and death in the individual. In a very real sense, not only are we dying all the time as we live, but you might say there's almost a death tendency. We don't always do what is good for our life; or to put it in Jewish terms, it's a continuous challenge, and that is probably the main criteria of every behavior you do every day. You have to choose life. And the words, I think, are very deliberately chosen in the Torah; choose life means choose life. That is to say, you don't think of it that way but the truth is, every moment you have to make a choice. And most of the times when you don't make a choice, you are probably missing something. Because the words you say, the food you eat, the behavior pattern, the choice of where to go and what to do with your time, each of these is a continuous choice, and again the Jewish tradition, in a sense, its

vision is that if you become aware of this struggle, then a) you understand it is a struggle, and b) you will try to choose life.

Now what does it mean to choose life. Not in every case is it a pure life against death. In many cases, as we will see in a moment, it's a choice of a much more complex mixture where even choosing life brings in elements of death. It's almost like a cancer treatment sometimes. A cancer treatment involves putting a poison into you to kill certain cells in the hope that this will save the rest of the living capacity. So it's not always in life that it's a simple choice between life and death, but sometimes the very choice of life involves elements of taking on either risks of inflicting or actual pain or poison. That's the complexity of life.

But at the heart of the Jewish dream is the belief a) that life is going to win out; why and again we have a very clear measure of what it means life is going to win out. We're going to fill the world with life. We does not mean the Jewish people. We means humanity is going to fill the world with life. That's one of the central beliefs of Jewish tradition. From the beginning of life, God has a blessing for it - that blessing is: be fruitful and multiply. The highest form of life developed so far, the human being, has reached such a level of development that it's called in Torah image of God, tzelem elokim. When you look at a human being a) this person has God-like capacities. That is the incredible power of humanity. We can develop forces that can cure disease. We can decode DNA which is the code of life. So humans have God-like capacities. But the Torah also teaches that because humans have such God-like capacities, it also follows that they have dignities. And those dignities are the core of the meaning of existence. Every image of God has three fundamental dignities - infinite value (saving one life is like saving a whole world); equality (every image of God - that means Jew and Arab, or Jew and gentile, it means white or black, it means male or female) is equal; and uniqueness (every image of God is unique, is irreplaceable; there is no one else like this person in the world). So our claim is that before we are done, we live in a world which will not only be filled with life, it will be filled with human life as well, and we're making progress in that direction. And that human life will be treated like it's infinitely valuable, equal and unique, and that's where the hard part comes in.

So our prediction is that the world will be transformed and I will come back to the point that humans have real capacities. The world is not there now, it is a world that has enough money or food; there is food now but there is not enough money, to feed everybody properly, or there isn't the right distribution. But we predict before it's over there will be. So the key is, what will it take to create a world in which every person will be treated like they are equal, unique or valuable? And here the tradition adds that it won't happen overnight. Remember we told you you were given God-like capacities. They were given to you to use in this function. In other words, every gift you have, every talent you have, every ability you have does not simply belong to you; it was given to you to use

because of every human being. And even better, if human beings will get together and pool their resources, and conclude they are going to use these talents well, then they have the capacity; they can't do it alone, but they have the capacity to make it a world which fully sustains life and all its fullest dignities.

If you're with me so far, that's the central core, but how do you get there is the obvious question. Here again, a very simple introduction. There is a method, a classical Jewish method whereby we will achieve these goals. It's not enough to have a dream, you have to have a method, and the method I would divide into two parts. [Covenant - I.G.] The first part is: it starts with love and commitment. It takes love because you have to love life. You have to love people. First of all, only when you love them will you feel they are equal to you. If you don't love them, you may be stronger, you may be richer, you may be more powerful, you may be more whatever it is, and you can use that to subordinate them. So love is critical. You have to love life itself, because if you don't love it, you're not going to feel its full value. The more you love it, the more you feel its infinite value. And then the truth is: love alone is not good enough; you have to have commitment as well as love. You know why - because love comes and goes, because the moments of achievement come and go, because there are lots of periods of time when, as it were, if you didn't have commitment the love would go away. Even things you love, sometimes are terrible, or they're a pain in the neck. Or they are a great difficulty and you feel like walking away, but then you remind yourself, look I'm committed to this. I have an obligation, it's not just a favor. Sometimes your own will is weakening and you remind yourself - I made this commitment and I'm not going to walk away now. So the method involves you have to love this vision. You have to love what it will take to make this world happen, you have to make a commitment to carry it out. What's the commitment? What's your annual pledge under this system? The honest answer is the annual pledge is not a bad measure. When I say somebody's life is valuable, a very serious measure of that is how much money would you spend to help this person or to save their life? It's not at all to be laughed at. In a very real sense, that's what annual commitments are about. They're about a measure of how much I really believe in what I am saying. But the real commitment as it turns out, ironically enough, of course is your life. The truth is because if you're talking in terms of perfecting the world, if you're talking in terms of realizing a society that's full of life, unfortunately it's not a 9 to 5 job. It's what we now call, to be very trendy, 24/7. The truth is that 24/7 isn't enough time when you look at how much work have you done - so, - it's okay - I'm going to get up an hour earlier every day.

To come back to the point about, now what goes with the love and commitment? The second half, and this is critical, is limits, controls and obligations. Covenant, by its essence says the dream is oceanic, the dream is unlimited. But the dream is unlimited and the real world is limited. The dream is perfect but the real world is flawed. So the only way you can begin to realize the dream in the real world is

to accept this fact and work within it. That whatever, and as good as the dream is, it's got to be limited, it's got to be controlled, it's got to be applied in some realistic way. I'll give you the obvious example of life itself. Pleasure is wonderful, and you may love it, but if you have it, it's like those rats in that experiment. They train them to push a button - they walk on a treadmill - the button releases the drugs or whatever it is they love (cocaine) and they keep doing it until they die. You have pleasure in the end, but of course you die. In a sense the choice of life is that you have to put limits even there. Of course, the answer is it's a great way to die, I understand, but that doesn't quite answer it. If you are serious about it, you have to put limits. So what covenant says, for example, one of the obvious limits is that you can't do it alone; you can't do it yourself. So covenant, the very term covenant means partnership. It's interesting; covenant is initiated by God according to the Torah, so it really means the infinite, omniscient, unlimited, all-powerful God came to what conclusion? That you can't do it without limits. It's interesting. Even God cannot function without limits, without controls. Because, you know why, and it's obvious why; since God is all-powerful, all-everything, if God would let God go, there would be no room for anything else in the world. So the kabbala says God had to self-limit to make room for the world. The world cannot exist if you have too much God. That's why the Torah says if you see God, you die. It's the same idea. Pure, unrestrained God would kill you, just like pure unrestrained sugar or drugs would kill you - because it's so pure it is death.

So the key to making a force for life is to accept the idea of limits, controls; and that's what covenant is about. Covenant is one, partnership between God and humanity or partnership between living human beings, or partnership between the Jewish people and God, or partnership between Jewish people and each other. Whatever it is you are trying to accomplish, you should assume you can't do it alone, you have to have partners in this process. So the love and commitment is not just to the goal, it has to be to the partners, to those who work with you because you can't do it alone. So that's one limit. The second limit is whatever, and even the good things, are going to have to be limited; first of all limited by the fact that the real world may not let you do everything you want to do, even good. I'd like to go around and hug and kiss every Arab in Bethlehem, and say I love you, I want to live in the same country with you, I want to be friends with you. But if I would try to do that, I would probably not get back alive. So in a certain sense, you have to accept the real world of the limits of whatever you can do as part of the process. That's the background, if I can define it that way.

I'd like to turn to the specifics of where we stand. What's the issue that we face together? For the last 60 years, the Jewish people has sought to establish its own right, its own ability to live and create and build on the side of life. You all know what we have lived through in this period. After a long period of living in a state of powerlessness and marginality to society, the Jewish people ran into the

greatest disaster in its history; a disaster that essentially was made possible by its own powerlessness. And so we discovered that all our teaching about the dignity and value of life could not sustain itself in the real world because there wasn't enough power, enough capacity to make it stick in the real world. So when, in fact, others chose death for us, we didn't have enough power to stop it. When others chose to degrade the value of Jewish life, we didn't have enough power and influence to assert its value, to get people to commit money to buy Jewish captives who could have been saved, to get enough energy to bomb rail lines that would have stopped the construction, etc., etc. So in a certain sense the whole Jewish people came to a simple conclusion - that if we believe in our cause, and if we still believe in the future of life itself, and if we believe in the future of our dream, the only way we are going to change that dream fully is with national dignity. It can't be individual, because in the 20th century - and now the 21st - no human being's dignity is exercised alone. It's not just the Jews; the whole world concluded that if you want your full personal dignity, you have to be part of a larger unit, which is called a national unit which creates a society within which you can live properly and appropriately. And where your dignity might be established. Again, there are lots of nations where the dignity is not established. But most of the whole world came to the same conclusion. That whatever my function, whatever my capacity for this full dignity, I will need some society of like-minded people who share my values and are prepared to work with me to create living conditions under which I can achieve my full dignity. Now for the Jewish people, obviously Zionism had claimed this already, but it did not come to fruition until these last 60 years. But for 60 years now we have struggled with the fact that our recognition of this need, ourselves, took place in a world where there was no choice but to take power and to have a national structure. As you well know, it turned out that we are located, at least in Israel, in a neighborhood in which the Arab world around us did not agree necessarily on our right to national existence and dignity was compatible with theirs. There was a real impact, it's a spreading idea. What is spreading is the idea that I am entitled to my dignity; what is spreading is the idea that I am entitled to equality. But in a very real sense how I achieve that is still under conflict all over the world.

The Jewish self-definition that we can do it, we'll create a democracy. And not only will we create a democracy for ourselves, but we think we can make a society in which others can live in security and dignity, was itself at play. Because, for example, we're a majority raises the issue of how the minority lives in that framework. This is a worldwide challenge. In America too, there's a tremendous constant search now - how does the majority make room for the minority and without unintentionally (forget about intentionally) overriding, pushing, marginalizing, making it second class, etc. So again, it's not unique to Jewish people. The only thing we have always claimed in our history, not that we are unique in that way, but rather that our experience, we think, can serve as a model for others of how to wrestle with these questions.

When this struggle started 60 years ago, I think it's fair to say that there was no serious Palestinian national identity. And again, you can't claim this now, somehow it gets you off the hook. It's just the opposite - it shows the continuing spread of these values. And, in part, we can congratulate ourselves. In other words, the Jews having discovered that their dignity and their ability to create a better world depends on creating a national framework where their dignity is assured - the idea made a lot of sense. And to the Palestinians who had at first really did not think in these terms, became increasingly convinced: no maybe I should think in these terms. That their chance for culture and personal dignity depends on creating a nation in which they can express their own values, their own priorities and their own equality and dignity. So again, I say, ironically enough we should be complimented or feel complimented.

But of course the catch again, and this is the tragedy of the whole situation: from the beginning the Arab conclusion that their dignity and their equality, etc., depended on their world, have defined it that we have no business being in that world. We have no right to exist in that world. That was the heart of the problem. And since Palestinian national identity emerged in the same framework, came later, in essence the Palestinian national identity also came to a self-assertion in the context in which they believe that their dignity is compromised and not fully realizable if the Jewish state and the Jewish power exists.

Now, I want to be a little fair here. A Palestinian standing here would say that that is too self-serving a version; that in fact the Palestinians went through a catastrophe, namely the Israeli independence led to the flight and refugee status for hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs. Secondly, the Jewish answer...you have to try to hear the other person. If you believe they are equal and they are unique, you have to try to hear what they are saying. I know we could answer right back. You invited it upon yourself; you didn't let us live in peace; you tried to invade and destroy us; you invited people to flee. All that is true. But for the moment I am trying to hear what they would say if they were standing here. A) You came into being at a great setback to us. B) During this period of refugee status, we have suffered continuously because of inequalities and all kinds of persecution and suffering. Again, our answer was: you chose to stay in those camps; we offered to set you up; we offered help you resettle. A lot of those suffering came in the form of self-inflicted. I am not trying to load the picture either way. I am trying to give a framework for our judgments.

This is the exchange that has come to a head now in the last two decades in which the Palestinian self-definition matured, became ever more insistent. But it became very much more, ever-more, insistent under circumstances in which it was them against us and basically there was no trust, no confidence. That they are prepared to find room for our right to exist, and our dignity and our life in the context of an affirmation of their life and their dignity. It's interesting. I put this text before you. If you'll look for a moment, one side of the page is labeled "The

Ethics of Jewish Power." If you'll turn to the other side for a moment. [Pause] This was actually written in 1984. It's interesting to look back sometimes about the ethic of Jewish power. There are three sentences I wanted to read to you - again you have to keep in mind, there is a time factor here also. "The ethical idea would be a balance of power in the Middle East in which Israel cannot dominate the Arab nations and the Arab nations cannot dream of destroying Israel by force. Ideally the Palestinian Arabs should have their own state and should treat the Jews living on the West Bank with dignity. They should respect Jews' rights and cultures just as the internal Arab minority in the Jewish has a vital inner life and real political power to protect itself."

The second paragraph made the point there is a serious flaw in the statement of the ideal - namely that major elements were unreconciled to Jewish sovereignty and would destroy us if they could. I said then "a balance of power under these circumstances is not morally acceptable." The third point I want to make, in the third paragraph, was that "in the interim, Israel should seek maximum Arab autonomy in Judea and Samaria by encouraging the emergence of indigenous leadership. Let the word go out unequivocally that Palestinian Arabs can earn autonomy and even a state by seeking peace and taking risks. In theory, the PLO could also earn the status of a negotiating partner with Israel. The PLO would have to disavow its call for the destruction of Israel." The point, of course I am making is that there was a period, it was only 15 years ago, when the notion of a peace based on a Palestinian state and a PLO renunciation of destruction of Israel appeared to be at best a kind of fond hope, if not a far out possibility. So I think we have to keep that perspective together when you look at a major setback to that possibility and realize that time does play a role, and one should not assume that the present moment will go on forever and ever.

Now I'd like to turn with you to the question of how we reconcile and how we work through these issues in what context and what I have tried to describe is the ethic of Jewish power. If you turn back to the other sheet, second paragraph. "The principles of the Jewish ethic developed thus far can be summarized briefly: 1) for the sake of life, the assumption of power is mandatory. To practice tikkun olam, one must be alive. To choose powerlessness is a sin, an invitation for evil to triumph." So I start with that and again it's something we have to remind ourselves. What's the key major breakthrough of the past 60 years? What's the key major breakthrough of the last 20 years in particular? The key major breakthrough is that in fact the Jewish people has achieved a remarkable state of power. Now I don't want to exaggerate and I'm as fully aware as you are, I'm sure, that Iran is working on developing long range missiles, hoping to be able to destroy; that Iraq has developed mass agents of destruction including bacteria and that the people who came out of it, and you saw that testimony, when they discussed among themselves what's their rationale and justification for this, they said because we can and will use it against Israel. So I'm fully aware of that but

the fact is this is essential. Whatever depression we may feel at what appears to be a lost opportunity for peace, the fundamental truth is that Israel is too powerful for the Arab world to destroy at this time. In fact, and that's why in all candor I say (it's not 100% fair to the Arabs to put it that way but I believe it's correct) that's why the military option is, in fact, not being considered seriously at this time by the Arab world.

Now could it spin out of control, could there be...I'm fully aware of that too, but for the moment I think you can't lose sight of that too. And by the way it has a further moral consequence. Given the fact that we are not without power, I don't think we can automatically assume that there is no moral obligation to continue to try to figure out a way of making room for Palestinian dignity under these circumstances. Because if you are, in fact, totally in danger and your life is at stake and you may not be strong enough to take care of yourself, then you have a very different moral equation than when you are strong enough. And therefore this is a paradox. This is the covenantal model. God who is all-powerful must self-control to make room for humans.

(TAPE ONE - SIDE TWO)

....at this moment. That means we have to ask ourselves what self-limits and what controls are needed on our part, as well as on their part, to make possible an outcome that affirms our dignity and theirs as well. So that's the first breakthrough of the ethical power: that we in fact have power to gain. When I say we have power, not just Israel's army and strength, but economic strength which is, in its way, as powerful as military strength. But also of course American Jewish influence in America, which remains a central concern and we can't overlook and you can't look away. Since I'm not going to take political stands at this moment, obviously I have a lot of anxiety since I didn't feel myself that both candidates had equal, necessarily solid, concerns about Israel, but I believe it's not a question just of the personal feelings, and it's hard to measure. But to be equally crucial what's the political influence in this society? I think both parties have a high degree of receptivity to Jewish power, Jewish interests, have a high degree of Jewish participation, including fund-raising, and so therefore this again becomes our agenda. To intensify our capacity to influence both parties, whichever party wins, becomes a critical part of this agenda of Jewish power.

Second point of the ethics of course, and it's the hard one: Power must be exercised in the world of flawed reality in which vested interests, entrenched evil and human error all play a role. I'll give you an example again. Quite a number of important Israelis I have spoken to in the present situation, feel, in retrospect, that Israel should have moved, and I agree with them, should have moved much quicker, much stronger to shore up the relationship between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority in the state of Israel. That it's been building for 20-30 years as Arabs' self-assertion and definition has grown - a feeling that they are second class citizens: that on the average their income is lower, that on the average their

educational limits are lower, and again, it's not necessarily a matter even of conscious discrimination, and in part reflects the Arab culture itself and its failure to westernize and to make achievement and education, etc. and women, etc., etc., at the same level as the Jewish culture. But in retrospect, the outburst in the last two months exploded the kind of feeling that has been building, and which many important people feel, in retrospect, should have been dealt with earlier and better.

But having said that I come back to the point I just made. That power is exercised in the real world in which vested interests, entrenched evil and human error all play a role. The fact remains that Israel has been a full-time job for UJA as well as others, trying to build up its citizens, its capacity, its dignity; that it's been a struggle compounded by wars and by terrorism, etc., etc. and under those circumstances, it's not either shocking or out of the reasonable expectation that in fact Arabs would have had less economic, political or cultural development. So in the real world, you have to make those judgments which means, on the one hand it cannot therefore justify or permit Israeli Arabs to undermine or overthrow the country. Now again, I personally feel strongly that too many people jumped to conclusions after this last outburst, that were dismissive of Israeli Arabs - not reliable, fifth column. I think those are really bad judgments. I think there is a serious problem now because the growth of fundamentalism combined with the growth of expectations has led to significant alienation and, in that framework, I believe there will probably be more sabotage or more disloyalty than there was before. But the overwhelming truth is that for 50 or 55 years, the Arabs of Israel have in fact shown a remarkable degree of loyalty. If they did not, then life would have been a hundred times more miserable. There would have been far more terrorism, etc., etc. So one of the most critical things in the situation is to recognize both sides of the equation, that vested interests are real, that no country can perform perfectly, and on the other hand, one must be very, very careful not to let those weaknesses either justify the unjustifiable on either side, and to begin to resort to generalizations. The fundamental Jewish claim is that human beings are unique. They need the respect of being treated unique, and not being lumped together "all Arabs are... all Israeli Arabs are... all PLO people are..." etc., etc.

So we have to deal with the real world in which power links ultimate ends with proximate means. And here is the crucial point. Ethical use of power means maximizing possible good and life, and minimizing possible evil and death. That's why I said typically, the standard moral use of power is achieved on balance. That means typically no one exercises power perfectly. And no one, even a democracy, has a perfect democracy. [Inaudible] ...run an election, that's how weak democracies are sometimes, but in the real world that's what you try to do. You try to, on balance, attain the most moral use of all.

Now the third point, Jewish power is never self-validating so we have to sit in continual judgment upon ourselves. Fourth, given what cannot be changed, and this is the critical applied criterion, given the evil that cannot be avoided, there is still some best possible or least evil way of exercising power. In an ideal world, all people would be treated absolutely equally. In the real world, you distribute your priorities and in fact it may be that some people will get a shorter stick than others. What makes this moral is you try to do the best you can. Secondly, you have a continuous process of correction. In a democracy you have elections or you have a free press or other forms of correction, and therefore whatever flaws there are subject to further improvement and further correction. So you have to have both. And the criteria of the moral person is the one who consciously makes those kind of choices. Even when I have to do things like protect the state, for example, I will try to respect the process of law. We have to apply these principles, I'll try to do it with you in a moment shortly. So that means in the real world I may err trying to protect the security, overreact and even inflict pain or damage. The criteria of morality is I try to inflict as little as possible and I try to maximize the good. Keep in mind that's the balance wheel to the other principle, which is that we are only human and we can't be perfect so we are going to make some mistakes, which we are then going to go on and try to correct or try to have some mechanism of correction.

As I said, the fifth is, "in an imperfect world there would be inescapable evil or adverse side effects so the measure of morality is to limit wrong action and correct it. A moral society must incorporate checks on power and forces of self-criticism" and, of course, Israel has such things as "multiple parties with free elections, free press and media, the rule of law, and an independent judiciary, separation between civilian and military authority, and tohar haneshek [moral purity, use-of-arms principles - IG] in the army. These are major corrective forces, as are distinctive memories and Jewish traditions, such as recollection of slavery and exodus, of outside status and suffering, and of exile and Holocaust, which also powerfully regulate Jewish behavior. So let's, with this framework, try to apply it to our situation now as it is in Israel at this very moment.

Where do we stand? I would argue: one, that there are serious, continuous arguments in Israeli society itself, in the Jewish society particularly, in which there are significant but minority elements that believe that Israel, in fact, has a right to rule over not only Palestinian West Bank Arabs, but also over parts of the land which either for historical reasons or for possession reasons belong to Jewish people. I believe, however, that the majority of this society has come to the conclusion that, in fact, that would be a mistake. Given the conflict of Arab dignity and Arab search for national dignity, that it would be better to give back lands which include some lands which we have an enormous historical moral claim. I want to say personally - Chevron, the Jewish people has an overwhelming religious, historical moral claim to; aside from the fact that it's a

classic and central Jewish city of Jewish history and Jewish religion starting with Abraham. (You can't get any earlier than that in Jewish tradition.. Secondly, because Jewish settlement in Chevron was established in modern times and was ended by violent pogrom and massacre of the Jews living there, which means that, morally speaking, the notion of ending Jewish existence there on that basis is immoral. And therefore when the Jews came back after '67 and insisted on settling there, I thought that was a mistake, but I respect deeply why they feel this way. And I want to say one of the saddest tragic truths of these fifty years and of the mistakes that were made is that I believe that Jews will not be able to exist there. And therefore I believe that before we are done, they will evacuate Chevron. And therefore it will be an historical injustice. But again the classical principle is that you try to maximize the good and minimize injustice. The alternative I believe would be to station troops and have a continuous war in which in the end it will undermine both Israel's capacity to function, as well as the Palestinian Arabs to function. So in a certain sense, and this is the tragedy, that hatred and death will win this particular argument. But in the context of the larger argument, you could learn to live with those kinds of things.

Now the majority of the state of Israel, as expressed in the election of its government, made a decision that they are prepared to give back lands and therefore to withdraw from ruling over Pales - to make room for Palestinian national existence. You all know...I don't have to repeat to you...the Camp David offer. What it is, it seems to me is central to how we judge the moral situation. Israel is the strongest. It is perceived by the Palestinians as occupying because they want to be independent, and one could make a case that from their perspective, it is occupation. I think one can make a reasonable case that it's occupation. The Jewish answer to that is I'm occupying you because you are trying to kill me and I have a right to protect myself. And I think one can make an equally reasonable strong moral case therefore the occupation is moral. But it is occupation. So the majority of the Jewish people in Israel and Jews worldwide support the government made a decision, one, to give back 92% plus of the West Bank, to share sovereignty over Jerusalem (although they tried to say that as softly as they could), to share the Old City and to share sovereignty over the Temple Mount, if that would make peace possible. I think it's a remarkable offer. And I think one could feel very comfortable in saying that by the standard of trying to make room for others' dignity at the same time as mine, we have more than met the obligation. I also want to say, to be fair to the other side here for a moment, is that from the other side's point of view, they were not prepared - not just because I think there's a serious group that's unreconciled to Israel's existence, but there has not been a long process whereby they come to grips with what it means from their side to surrender their dreams of controlling Jerusalem too. Now here again I don't want to equate the two claims - simply because we all know in actual history, in actual culture, Jerusalem is central to the Jewish people, far beyond its importance in the Arab or Islam world. And every attempt to equate the two is a threat and dishonest. One of the more

disturbing things about the press coverage in general is this kind of continuous moral equivalence in which these fine points are either obscured or totally hidden away. You read any report about Temple Mount and you see kind of this continuous, really dishonest, kind of, here's Al Aqsa, which is obviously a very holy place and here's also Temple Mount which the Jews would like to pray on also. Which doesn't come to grips with the centrality of Jerusalem in Jewish tradition as compared to Islam. But as I say in the end the issue is not winning a perfect victory here, the issue is making room for the dignity of both.

Given that peace offer, I believe, overwhelmingly, there is the moral strength of feeling that we have met the first criterion of the ethic of power, which is to minimize the evil side effects of your own dignity and your own need for security as against the Arab need or Palestinian needs for their own dignity, their own standard.

Secondly, central to this thing is of course - with the rejection of that offer, came, of course, the outburst of violence which we are now living through. Demonstrations, continuing demonstrations, in which Israel or Israeli soldiers have protected themselves. Now again the press continually reports the death toll, which the last time I saw was about 200, of which the overwhelming majority, about 180, are Palestinians or Arabs. There are a small group of Israeli Arabs in that group also. Now here again I think as Jews trying to do the moral thing we have to weigh these things carefully. The principle of power ethically exercises you try to do the minimum damage for the maximum security and dignity of life. Israel and its army, at least - as it announced - is trying to minimize casualties. And you know the policy is you try not to fire; and then if you fire, you fire rubber bullets and you fire low, that is to say below, the lower half of the body in the hope of not causing death.

The obvious question then is why there are 180 deaths of which many have been young or younger children. The answer in part is because in fact if you ever lived through it - and I have talked to Israeli soldiers who have lived through it - when you are being assaulted by people who are throwing rocks and in the present situation, if you've seen those rocks, it's not pebbles, there's a serious danger to life and personal safety. Secondly, equally important and devastating, is that in this round they have been frequently backed by people who have guns and there is shooting. And many times the shooting starts (from we now know) our Palestinian policemen in violation of the peace agreement so far. So again the soldier has to make judgments as people get closer: Are they coming just to throw rocks? Will the rocks kill me? Are they coming with people in there who when they get close enough will shoot? Are they coming actually with the gun to shoot? Under these circumstances, for people to stay cool and never to shoot and kill, is I think not only unreasonable, but it's impossible.

Having said that one has to continually monitor what's happened. For example again, and to me the criterion is what Israeli - what ethical power we practice here. The outburst of Israeli-Arab demonstrations during this period led to very severe clashes with police in the course of which some 13-14 Arabs were killed. My own personal judgment [it] is very questionable. It surprised me, I must say, and it's easy to say because obviously here I'm defending a much larger death toll. I was very surprised; I think there have been internal demonstrations as far as I could tell and I wasn't there, severe ones in the past which have not led to such a loss of life. And I am happy to report because to me I'm back to my issue. It is entirely possible in my judgment that they overreacted, and in that overreaction killed people unnecessarily, and as a serious violation of the Jewish ethic of power.

But my answer to that is the judgment of a moral country is what? If you've done that you investigate and decide. The government has appointed a serious commission. I've talked to people, including members of the commission. It will get a serious investigation. There's some opposition. There was some fear this will undermine Israel's position; this will make the government look bad. This will play into Arab propaganda and I realize we are dealing with ethics in the real world. One of the dangers of what I am saying here too is some of the stuff could be easily played out and used to undermine them. As I say when the other side is out to destroy you, a moral balance of power that's just as balanced as possible is not moral, because it shouldn't be a balance where one side who wants to destroy you might push a little extra luck and get away with it. So having said that, I come back to what I'm saying. There's a serious commission of inquiry and I believe we will find out if in fact the police either overreacted because they didn't take Arab life as seriously as Jewish life, or because they were not trained properly and didn't expect this, or because all of the above was true; or it's not at all, that they tried their best and under circumstances of difficulty, in fact to defend themselves, shot back and killed people.

Now the same holds true on the question of the 180 Palestinian Arabs. It will be established, and there is a constant review whether the army was trained enough, whether there were methods, not rubber bullets, not regular bullets, that might have had lesser loss of life, and I would not be shocked if 5% or 10% of those casualties are either - or 20% - are scared soldiers or people overreacting. That's the measure of our morality, that we are able to evaluate and assess and carry it on. But the heart of it is, as far as I am concerned, is what is the evidence so far. The evidence so far is that the army is in fact instructed and is trying (and I've talked to people), it's trying to seriously minimize casualties and death and under much more difficult circumstances than the previous intefada because there is now serious weapons on the other side.

Here again, I was talking to a soldier who said to me, you know it's very nice to talk theoretically, but half the time you are worried also about suicide bombers.

He said it's very nice to sit here and talk theoretically but when a person is coming at you, you don't know. When a child is coming at you, or a person holding a child is coming at you, you know you have all of 14 seconds or 3 seconds to decide: what is this? And who is this person? And why are they coming? Why do they keep coming at me? Why didn't they stop when I said to stop? So it's very easy to make judgments, and I can predict in advance that there will be some errors or some soldiers who will be gun-happy, but the bottom line is the continuing attempt to keep that controlled, and to keep it under moral guidance. So the capacity both to review the use of force and to correct it, is I think essential to this continuing ethic of power.

Third, facts speak for themselves and Jewish tradition has never said one romanticizes peace and makes it an absolute ideal, ignoring the human reality. The human reality is that the key partner on the other side has acted so badly as to destroy the trust and the confidence in them as a full peace partner. And that also cannot be denied. In other words, whatever self-criticism one can make, one is going to have to live with that reality.

My own personal guess is there'll be a government turnover. In other words that there will be a new election and this government will lose; not because they were wrong, because I tell people if they made a mistake, they made the right mistake. They tried in every way possible to come up with a peace agreement, but the turnover is because in a moral society, in a free society, altogether you are accountable for your behavior. A risk was taken, a bet was made that this partner would come through, and all kinds of concessions and risks were taken based on that, and since the partner has not come through, what happens in democracies in a moral society is that you replace that with somebody who'll try out the method. The question is: what is that method? I'll come to that next, but the central point is we cannot fudge the fact of the loss of trust because this is a democracy. It's paradoxical enough. If you have a dictatorship, then you can make a second choice; you know this is cynical but it will work. You can have a good deal with these people. But in a democracy you have to have credibility with your people, and there has been a serious loss, of erosion in trust, that there is a serious partner on the other side.

Also, what is the alternative for the next phase if one is trying to judge this in Jewish terms? I would say there are two essential steps. Three, I'm sorry. The first of course is your life, protecting your life, Jewish life, comes first. It's a fundamental Jewish law. So whatever attempt we make to be moral and to be peaceful, must do justice to that - or it's immoral - because in the end what you are doing is sacrificing people's lives who have no right to be sacrificed. Second step is you seek to find peace again. And how do you do that? The second step means not to demonize all Arabs. Now when I say not demonize, how much worse can it get than I described the actual behavior? So the honest answer is it doesn't matter. It's not demonizing if you describe the wrong behavior. It is

demonizing when you begin to say "all Arabs" or "they'll never be" or "anything goes because they're all animals".

(TAPE TWO - SIDE ONE)

...[When you see the] videos of the Israeli soldiers [being lynched] it would be a very honest understatement to say they are animals, but if one would say they, meaning all Palestinian Arabs, are in fact animals and should be treated that way from here on in, that's where it violates the fundamental assertion of Jewish tradition that every human is an image of God, that they are unique and equal and deserve to be treated in their own right, and not lumped together, particularly not in degrading images that would make it easier to mistreat them next time. Keep in mind moral statements are not just theoretical statements. If I think they are animals, I am much less willing to be sensitive to their requests, sensitive to their humiliations or their slights, sensitive to their legitimate requests, and I am going to be much less worried if I accidentally or deliberately overshoot or overkill. So the key to preserving Jewish moral dignity is a continuous process of one, not demonizing the Arabs. It's bad enough when they are not demonized. I'm not saying we should paper it over. When I describe what they are doing, what they are saying, but not seek to evoke in the people or in ourselves a kind of a hopeless generalization you can't trust any of them, you can't deal with them, they don't keep their word, so anything goes. Now it's a very thin line to walk, and I realize it's difficult, but we are trying to explore together what I think would be an adequate moral response to this moment.

Last but not least, I believe - and I think the prime minister should say it every day - he should say - in fact, it's in Israel's declaration of independence. What they said in the declaration was: here we are surrounded, being invaded. At a time of war and threat. We hold out our hand in peace and friendship to all the Arab peoples of the Middle East and ask them and offer them partnership and peace. I think the Prime Minister should every day - there's nothing more heartbreaking in my job every day than to come to the office and realize that you don't make peace with us so we can't make peace with you. It's heartbreaking to me every day that soldiers (remember Golda Meir's famous old line) we'll forgive you for our soldiers that you killed, we'll never forgive you for making our soldiers kill others. I think that has to be said every day to ourselves and to the Arabs; even if they don't listen.

Now I do believe that as long as we're strong enough and as long as we keep our political support high enough, the Palestinian Arabs will have to come to grips with the fact that they are going to have to live with Israel if they intend to seek their own dignity. At moments like this there is clearly an upsurge of hope on their part that they don't have to, but I believe our strength is such that they will have to, and therefore the most likely prospect is that we're in for a few years where there seems to be no obvious outlet, no obvious breakthrough possible, even

though I think we have to continuously offer to negotiate. And the key will be (this is the covenantal plan I started with) not just love but commitment. You have to have enough commitment to hang in there and not to let despair take over. Because when despair takes over you start lashing out and you start degrading and you start doing awful things.

I'm sorry, I didn't think I would talk this long because I want to give you a chance for comments, questions and responses, but I do want to allow myself just three minutes about American Jews' relationship to Israel. I have spoken the whole time - it's a covenantal ethic of power. Covenant starts with love and commitment, but Rabbi Soloveitchik about 40 years ago wrote an essay in which he tried to define what does it mean when we share a covenant together. What is my obligation under the covenant to the person who is my partner? He said the Jewish covenant/brit has four elements. If you share those four elements then you are truly observing the covenant. He said one is shared history, meaning that when something happens to a Jew somewhere else, I don't say that's their history, I say it's my history. The Holocaust didn't happen to them in Europe; it's my personal history and I identify with what happened and I'm committed to keep it alive. I'm committed to learn the lessons, I'm committed to make others come to grips with what happened there. So shared history. Secondly, he said shared suffering. If a Jew is in trouble, I share their pain. If Israel is tormented politically or morally struggling, I share that pain. I don't say they are making a mistake or they are doing wrong. I take this personally and I share in that responsibility, which is why I have an obligation to give feedback as best I can. So shared pain. But I can go a step further. Shared pain means if Jews are in danger, I don't say well I'm lucky, they're thousands of miles away so I'm not in danger. I'm willing to share that danger. I'm going to come back to that. Third, there is shared responsibility. In other words, if they are in trouble and need help, I feel that responsibility even though I myself may not be directly in danger. Fourth, shared action. I actually act on that responsibility. I don't just talk, I do something. That's concrete.

Now I want to speak directly to the shared pain and to shared action. The hotels, I am told, are 10% full right now in Israel and obviously there has been a collapse of tourism. I understand why Christian tourism should stop because people when they go off on tourism they are having fun and they don't want to have to worry about security issues. But I would argue that Jewish tourism cannot collapse under those circumstances because that means you are just another tourist. But in fact the central point is shared pain and shared action. So I would argue that the community really has to ask not, (and by the way many communities have done this - it's wonderful to send solidarity missions) but I don't think that quite cuts it. What we are really talking about is mass tourism. And again I understand. I didn't go because I'm very busy right now, but I made plans, we'll go in a month or two. So that's real also. It's not going to go away in a month or two.

My last example here (and I was told not to say it, but I'm going to say it anyway) we have this Birthright Israel program which you may have heard about. There are 7,500 college students registered to go in December, with 17,500 on the waiting list, and so far there are very few cancellations. Now it's true, people tell me it's because they don't forfeit their deposit for another 3-4 weeks, so it will probably happen in December. But I honestly don't believe so. I'm counting on three things - one is that maybe they're a lot more Jewish than we give them credit for in understanding what I'm saying about sharing faith. I'm counting on the fact that when you're in college you don't listen to your parents. So when your parents tell you not to go, to spite you will go. I'm counting on that secondly. And thirdly, I'm counting on the fact that if the first group drops out, there's 2 ½ times that on the waiting list. I'm counting that between all three, we'll get there in a full complement. I was told what else I shouldn't say and it is my complaint.

Someone made an obvious suggestion - the community should stand up and say well I think if 7,500 go, it's an incredible statement of solidarity right there. We should announce that we're going to raise money and we're going to provide for another 2,000 or 5,000 students to go so it won't be 7,000, it will be 12,000.

[Applause] I appreciate your applause but the overwhelming bulk of the execs said don't even bring it up. As it is there's a big fight going on, you know Birthright is taking too much money. You're not going to loosen them; you're talking to the wall. But I really think it's wrong. I really do. I feel it's not like, thank God, I'm not speaking in the tone of that they are about to be wiped out. Thank God we're not at that point, so I understand people don't feel quite the same urgency as after the Yom Kippur war when Israel came that close to being destroyed. But are they in danger; really of a different kind? Not of destruction, but of isolation? Of losing the sense of hope? Of the capacity - are these actual dangers? The answer is obviously yes. And under those circumstances it seems to me that there is a kind of a moral obligation; or, to put it another way, Jews of Diaspora have to decide are we lucky and do we want to exploit that we are not on the firing line? Or in some sense in Jewish history, is there a way in which every Jew who shares the covenantal commitment is on the firing line? Again, I don't want to make a comparison. It's a great firing line to have to stay at the King David Hotel. I can think of slightly less ideal circumstances in the Israeli Army or some other army so I don't want to be over dramatic, but sometimes it doesn't need dramatic drama, it doesn't need life risk to express the fundamental point. The ethic of Jewish power in the end will depend on our capacity as Jews to draw upon moral reserves. A) to keep the dream strong because we still believe that peace and life win out. And at some point if we're strong enough there will emerge a partner who will understand that that's the way to go. Secondly, if we have strong moral reserves during the period of frustration, defeat and setback one will not go out of control but will exercise the most prudent, responsible, flawed but moral behaviors and that takes reserves. And last but not least C) to continue to proceed when there is no clear immediate promise of a good outcome.

I wanted to finish with that point. I can never get over the wonder of this. For 1800 years, Jews said next year in Jerusalem. I understand the first year they said it - after - in the year 71 - I understand why they said it. I understand by the year 80. But I often asked myself by the year 100 or by the year 200 or by the year 1000, did nobody ever get up and say what do you mean next year in Jerusalem? I mean, based on statistical probability, it hasn't happened. They said this now for 879 years; we've said it now for 1922 years and it still hasn't happened and why do you still say it? That's what I mean by commitment, where love is backed by commitment. The obvious answer is, and you know as well as I, that 1978 years later, it actually came true. Or to put it another way, there are times when the ultimate strength comes from having the inner hope and the inner confidence to proceed without losing our values and our goals and I believe eventually you get there.