

The Question of Questions

by

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The settlers in Judea, Samaria and Gaza are becoming increasingly concerned that the plan to disengage from Gaza and parts of Samaria – together with construction of a security fence that is being built progressively closer to the Green Line – represent a dangerous omen that may signal the eventual ruin of all that they have labored to build since the seventies.

The settlers claim that there is no one to talk to on the other side, and they are correct. There are no Palestinian leaders in any major position of authority that are interested in putting an end to the slaughter, to publicly and officially relinquishing the dream of return, to living in peace and harmony alongside us in an independent state of their own. When the settlers claim that the Palestinians will translate our abandonment of settlements in Gaza as a victory, they are right again. The Palestinians partook in four years of inhuman atrocities against us – which also led their own society halfway back to the stone-age – until the government of Israel budged in the direction of disengagement.

Still, the decision to disengage must ultimately be based on what is good for Israel and nothing else. Beyond the long-run implications of disengagement, it should be very clear that settlements situated deep in hostile territory do not provide security for the country in general – but the opposite. The need to defend them requires thinning out the already limited military force that is available to us.

The sentiment of being cheated that many settlers have is also accurate. One bright day, their leader changed his position by 180 degrees. Either he viewed the settlers over the past few decades as guinea pigs, to be eventually used as disposable human bargaining chips, or that he erred – big time – since the seventies and does not feel any compunction to apologize today for the tragic outcomes of his mistake. The fact that Sharon ignored the results of the referendum, that he himself initiated, only compounds the settler's feeling of being had.

However valid these arguments may be, they cannot serve as excuses for ignoring the big picture and its consequences. The solution that the settlers are vehemently pushing us collectively toward emanates from a narrow view that may help alleviate personal feelings of imminent ruin that many of them currently have – but it is liable to bring down upon all of us a much greater devastation in the future.

If the settlers want to convince – rather than coerce – the consensus here to adopt their vision as our guiding light for the future, then we need to know exactly what it really is. What should the State of Israel be like, according to their vision, in another 50 years? That is the question of questions.

In light of the fact that we have reached one of our most critical junctures since attaining independence, it is imperative that democracy's watchdog, the press, give no quarter in pursuit of a truthful response from them. This answer contains the actual bottom line – the unfiltered, ultimate, goal of the settler movement. My guess is that it is no coincidence that the settler leaders circumvent this question in public.

Does the settler's vision lead us to a Jewish-democratic state, or not? If yes, then it is high time that they put their road map on the public table so that all of us will be able to understand how exactly the settlers plan to achieve this goal – and what they intend to do with nearly half of the population that lives between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean Sea that is not Jewish and is not going to evaporate on its own.

If their vision does not lead to a Jewish-democratic state, then it is incumbent on the settlers to explain who they believe will want to stay here and live in such a country – other than settlers and Palestinians – and how, in the conditions that will subsequently be created, will Israel be able to survive in this neighborhood with the human and physical resources that will remain at its disposal.

There does not exist a middle road of non-decision, since it should be clear that the default outcome is the non-Jewish-democratic state. This is the eventuality that has been developing under our noses since the seventies as a result of the combination of high Palestinian fertility rates and the policy of settling the areas where the Palestinians live. Those who believe that the Palestinians living here be allowed to cast their votes only in Jordan or Egypt, need to take another look in their old civics schoolbooks to recall how the word “democracy” is defined.

So what do they wish for us, these people who are not willing to give up any portion of the land of our forefathers? The answer cannot be “be’ezrat hashem” (God willing), the modern Jewish version of the nominal Israeli put-off “yi’hiye be’seder” (everything will be OK). We created this country after 2,000 years of being at the mercy of others, precisely because the Jewish people decided to take an active role in determining their future and their destiny.

There is no doubt that the great majority of settlers are true patriots. But as a result of narrow interests, their movement chooses the path that prevents Israel from taking any step that increases our ability to eternally preserve the Jewish character of this country through moral and legal means.

Dear settlers, the time has come for you to begin to deal seriously and honestly with the inevitable ramifications of your vision. Otherwise, you may succeed in avoiding a personal sense of ruin, but the resulting legacy that you will be eternally responsible for may be a national catastrophe – the loss of the third temple.