

Israeli protesters, I can no longer keep silent



Israelis protest outside the Knesset at Jerusalem, February 13, 2023. AP/Ohad Zwigenberg

by Phyllis Chesler

I may not be a lawyer or a legal scholar, but I have been an organizer, an activist, a leader who has acted on behalf of civil and human rights—especially women’s rights. But I have never acted in the way that Israeli rioters are now acting: Not stopping, threatening to continue until they’ve brought down an entire country.

These leftists/progressives/“good people” (my former people) seem to be behaving the same way that pro-Palestinian/pro-jihad students behave in the streets and classrooms of America. They are like hecklers in the classroom who will not allow a speaker with whom they disagree to speak, trying to

chase them out of the lecture hall. These rioters are aiming to abolish a lawful and democratic election because they despise and fear the people's choice. They aim to make their country odious in the eyes of the world.

Do they not understand that Israel is already defamed, that the noose has tightened around the Jewish neck globally, that Israel is already hated everywhere? Do they think that by standing for civil rights, women's rights, gay rights, minority and Arab rights (all important issues) they will be seen as the "good" Israel, the "good" Jew and will be sent to the gas chambers last?

Do they not see that their style of protesting, however righteously intended, resembles a Black Lives Matter demonstration, a jihadist uprising, a Jan. 6 storming of the American Capitol or an adolescent tantrum? Do they not see that they are enacting their own form of BDS?

Do they not understand that they reside in a neighborhood where such a dangerous riot would be put down with live bullets, prison, torture, execution, perhaps even chemical warfare? Do they not understand that they are lucky to live in a country that does not do such things? Do they have no better way to protest what they view as dangerous and awful as a "tyranny of the majority?"

I am not in favor of abolishing women's rights, gay rights or minority rights in Israel. My record speaks for itself. And for the record, please allow me to note that the overly hallowed Israeli Supreme Court—yes, even under Menachem Elon and Aharon Barak—which the demonstrators/protestors/rioters believe has been so just, even holy, utterly failed to do justice for the Women of the Wall or the Original Women of the Wall, who want to pray with women only and at the Kotel proper, not at Robinson's Arch in mixed gender minyanim.

Yes, I understand that the haredim, who may have voted for the

new government, also opposed us with contemptuous violence. Nevertheless, I refused to write about any of this in the major North American press; not while Israel was under siege.

As Jew-hatred in the West keeps rising; as physical, even murderous attacks on visible Jews both in the diaspora and in Israel keep rising; as more and more Israelis, including Israel's president, are being treated shamefully; as more and more Jewish students and professors are being harassed, even persecuted in America—what is going on in Israel right now is very dangerous, beyond disheartening.

I understand: The secularists/modernists/atheists are overly righteous, but they are also terrified lest they be subjected to religious law and prejudices about women, minorities and Arabs. They do not wish to live in a theocratic and misogynist state. They genuinely fear that their civil rights will be lost. They have a point—but they are also out of touch with reality.

The religious nationalists believe that only those who are God-fearing can save the Jews and have the moral right to preside over the only Jewish state. They are also focused on Jewish survival in an increasingly dangerous neighborhood and world. Iran is uppermost on their minds, plus the Arab terrorist attacks and the world media diabolically turning reality upside down. Then there is the E.U. funding of Palestinian terrorism and the U.N. passing an unending number of anti-Israel resolutions. As I wrote, the noose is tightening, the Jew of the world is now everywhere defamed.

Is this also a fight between Sephardim/Mizrahim and the Western-centric Ashkenazim? Between post-enlightenment modernists and traditionalists? Brethren: Were we not all at Sinai?

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