

Justin Bieber & Palestine

“AS LONG AS YOU GUYS ARE HAPPY, I’M HAPPY.”

So spake Justin Bieber. It’s his distinctive view on how to compute the elements of “a good first date”. Although, it is not clear to me that Justin has ever had a ‘date’, he surely knows what he looks for in a girl: she’s got to have a “good smile”, she’s “definitely got to have a good personality”, and finally, “I like a girl that can make me laugh.” (He is not forthcoming on the question of whether he expects to be able to make her laugh.) Like Paris, the son of Priam, he clearly expects to be the one judging the maidens, rather than being judged. Which is just as it should be.

His appeal is the appeal shared by all boy stars since before we had boy bands - what is offered is the fantasy of having sex while remaining a virgin, eroticism unsullied by sweat and other bodily fluids. The appeal is not dissimilar from those good looking vampires who despite promising much, do not bite, and are certainly never going to drink your blood. It’s a delicious offer of risk without jeopardy, of desire without the danger of consummation. The minute Justin looks like a man who might fuck you his magic will be lost; the boy will have to move on.

Justin and his Mum are past masters at managing this paradox; they will delay the inevitable for as long as they can. In a similar vein they understand that Justin must be unsullied by other realities which is why they refused the invitation issued by Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, for Justin to meet Jewish Israeli children who had just had a lucky escape from a Hamas rocket attack.

Netanyahu should have hosted a party for teenage Israelis, Arabs and Jews, to meet Justin and his Mum; but no, he had to spoil everything by talking about the War. Justin wasn’t going to fall for that. So Netanyahu missed a vital opportunity to present his country as a

normal, fun-loving country, in which all kids are equally cherished. Clearly, Netanyahu is not as well endowed with political acumen as Justin.

One can see from this incident why Israel is having such difficulty in being anything other than a pariah state. Israel insists that it is “the only democracy in the region”, and, consequently, that it’s Arab citizens have the same rights as its Jewish citizens, but this is belied by the Prime Minister’s first instinct, which is to present Jewish children as victims of Palestinian violence, when everybody knows that kids on all sides are the hapless victims of the War. The fact that the Prime Minister’s office thinks it can use Justin Bieber to focus attention on the situation of children and teenagers from the western Negev who live with the threat of Kassam rockets fired from Gaza, without regard to the predicament of Palestinian children in the War, reveals a serious failure of imagination among Israel’s military and political elite.

Justin and his Mum just want to enjoy the adulation of fans in Tel Aviv, see the sites of the Holy Land, and have some fun. They do not want to be besieged by the paparazzi or to be “dragged into politics”. The subsequent denials by Netanyahu’s aides, and of the children who had escaped from the bombed out school bus, that they had ever been invited to the Prime Minister’s office to meet Justin Bieber are pointless; the damage has been done. Netanyahu has demonstrated that he cannot manage public relations with a teen idol’s entourage.

Some might say that this is the least of his problems, but I’m not so sure. You cannot canvas the idea that Israel is an essentially benign, enlightened, and democratic power, and yet at every twist and turn reject any responsibility for the sixty-three years of murder and mayhem Jews have shared with Arabs in Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon. Similarly, the Palestinians, whose organizations are past masters at presenting themselves as victims, have recently scored an own goal by murdering Vittorio Arrigoni because he came from an “infidel state” and had entered Palestine in order “to spread corruption”.

Vittorio Arrigoni was throttled to death by Salafists, people steeped in the virtue of the first generations after the life and death of the Prophet. They have been condemned on all sides, but this will do nothing to undermine the sense that Palestinians are Islamists simply committed to the destruction of Israel, and indeed, to the destruction of anybody who disagrees with them. The problems here are more than problems of presentation. Justin Bieber can easily refuse engagement, but nobody else who lives there can refuse to be “dragged into politics”. They are all steeped in politics whether they like it or not.

For Netanyahu and his political allies the problem is clear - how to get the Palestinians peacefully to accept the annexation of Jerusalem, and of large swathes of Samaria and Judea (West Bank), by Israel. For the Palestinians the issue is how to retain a presence in Jerusalem and clear the Israelis out of as much of the West Bank (Samaria and Judea) as possible. Both want the same territory, and both want peace and security for their respective peoples.

This situation is not unique. In the mid-nineties Croatian generals, Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markac, used murder and mayhem to drive 200,000 Serbs out of the Krajina during Croatia’s Homeland War. There are numerous other examples in which states have founded themselves in the midst of efforts to clear territories of people whose ethnicity, race, language, or religion, did not fit the profile desired by the prevailing political and military authorities. However, what is unusual, if not unique, about Israel’s efforts to annex Jerusalem and the West Bank since 1967 is its use of a graduated concoction of planning regulations, land purchases, policing, and security measures, to squeeze Arabs progressively out of more and more of the Old City, and out of more and more of Samaria and Judea.

This mixture of litigation and police repression has been driven by Israel’s need to keep the Americans on board and by their need to maintain an air of legality and innocence over their actions. They cannot sweep down burning and killing in a terror campaign to clear out the

Arabs. Consequently, they merely demolish Arab housing that has been built contrary to planning laws, engage in a combination of compulsory and commercial land purchases, set up road blocks, and use soldiers, police posts, and road closures, to protect Jewish settlers and Jewish settlements, scattered throughout the West Bank. Simultaneously, they strenuously offer to negotiate with whoever will listen, because, after all, all Israel wants is peace.

This is not a stalemate, nor is it the defence of the *status quo*. With every year that passes there are more Jewish settlers and settlements on the West Bank, more of Arab Jerusalem has been nibbled away, more young Jewish Israelis have the less than edifying experience of militarily protecting the religious zealots and racists who insist that there is no such thing as a "Palestinian", and that consequently, all Arabs must be driven out of the land of *Eretz Yisrael Ha-Shlema* - or the "Whole Land of Israel".

However, Benjamin Netanyahu is not an unreasonable man; unlike the settlers he so resolutely protects, he is prepared to offer full or partial control of at least forty per cent of the West Bank to the Arabs. He simply cannot grasp why the Palestinians do not enthusiastically grab such a generous offer with both hands. The incomprehension is mutual.

Things cannot go on like this. Despite the best efforts of Tzipi Livni and other leading politicians in Israel the question of the settlements bars all attempts at a negotiated peace. The refusal of the State of Israel to fix her own borders with the West Bank has merely encouraged those Jewish groups who manoeuvre for the annexation of everything west of the Jordan, and wish to encourage the Arabs, by all means at their disposal, to leave Israel by crossing the river.

Now, the Israelis have to contemplate the possibility that the United Nations General Assembly will unilaterally recognise a Palestinian State as early as September. Israel will then be confronted by having to accept an eastern border imposed by the UN or face the prospect of refusing to recognise the frontier of a neighbouring

member of the United Nations. The truism that Israel can find no peace *without* a Palestinian State will then be joined with the observation that she can find no peace *with* a Palestinian state.

Instead of walling themselves in, or walling the Palestinians out, the Israelis will have to participate in the construction of a viable Palestinian state. This means helping to stimulate the economy and investment by guaranteeing freedom of movement around the West Bank, and by relaxing security restrictions on cross border trade in labour, products, and services. Most importantly, it means making it clear to the settlers that they will have to either accept full citizenship accorded to them by the new State of Palestine, or, if they wish to enjoy the protection of the State of Israel, they will have to abandon their settlements, cross Israel's eastern border, and return to Israel proper. It must mean a decisive end to the aggression perpetrated by settler communities in which the police and armed forces of Israel are hustled into protecting them - by the fear that the Arabs will simply massacre the Jews on their territory.

Israel is no longer an innocent boy David with a sligshot, but a grown man with heavy armour, rockets, and nuclear weapons, capable of fucking all comers. For this reason protestations of innocence and victimhood will no longer suffice. Tzipi Livni, Benjamin Netanyahu, and the rest of them in the Knesset need to come to grips with the situation and help establish the sovereign State of Palestine right now.