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Truth, not "Narratives"

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

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It seems to have become "politically correct" to speak of narratives rather than to focus on historical truth. This tendency is blatantly evident in discussions about Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. We are told that each group has its own narrative, implying that each group clings to its own version of truth and should be respected for its views. This approach--seemingly objective and non-judgmental--actually leads to the distortion of facts and undermining of historic truth. It simply is not true to say--as some Palestinian spokespeople say in their narrative--that the land of Israel is the historic homeland of Palestinian Arabs. It isn't a "Jewish narrative" that Israel is the Jewish homeland; it is historically true. It has been true since biblical times; it was true during Temple days in antiquity; it was true through the nearly 2000 years of exile in which Jews prayed facing Jerusalem and yearned for the return to their holy land; it is true based on the ongoing presence of Jews in the land of Israel throughout the ages, based on archaeological evidence, based on archives, documents, photographs etc.

For there to be peace between Israel and its neighbors, it is essential to seek truth, not "narratives." Here are a few historical facts that must be understood.

The Muslim Ottoman Empire controlled the land of Israel for hundreds of years. Relatively few Jews lived in the holy land during those centuries. The Ottoman Empire could very easily have established a Muslim country in the land of Israel with Jerusalem as its capital city. The thought never occurred to them! "Palestine" was a poor backwater of little significance; Jerusalem was an old, decrepit city that no one (except Jews) cared very much about. There was no call for a "Palestinian State", and no claim that Jerusalem should be a capitol of a Muslim country.

Between 1948 and 1967, Jordan controlled the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem. Egypt controlled Gaza. Neither Jordan nor Egypt ceded one inch of territory to Palestinian Arab rule. Neither suggested the need for a Palestinian country, nor took any steps in the direction of creating a Palestinian State. Jordan did not declare Jerusalem as a capital city of Palestinians.

In June 1967, Israel defeated its implacable Arab enemies in the remarkable Six Days War. In the process, Israel took control of the Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Old

City of Jerusalem. In making peace with Egypt, Israel ceded the Sinai to Egypt. In attempting to create conciliatory gestures to Palestinian Arabs, Israel ceded much of the West Bank and Gaza to the Palestinian Authority. Israel is the only country in the world to have given territory to the Palestinian Arabs. Israel has a legitimate claim to much of this territory, but for the sake of peace decided to forego pressing its claims.

Although no Muslim or Arab nation, when having control of Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, created (or even suggested creating) a Palestinian State with a capital of Jerusalem--the current propaganda in the "politically correct" world is: the Palestinian Arabs have a right to their own State with Jerusalem as capital. Don't they all know that Israel's claim to Jerusalem and the land of Israel goes back 3000 years? Don't both Christianity and Islam recognize the sanctity of the Hebrew Bible--a Bible that highlights the centrality of the land of Israel and Jerusalem in so many texts?

If we are to have peace between Israel and the Palestinians (and the rest of the Arab world), it would be most helpful if people understood the historic context of the conflict. Misguided individuals and countries who forget history, who ignore or deny Israel's rights, who look the other way when Israel is maligned and attacked--such people are part of the problem, not the solution.

As for us, we must heed the words of Isaiah (62:1-2): “For the sake of Zion I will not hold my peace and for the sake of Jerusalem I will not be still, until her righteousness goes forth like radiance and her salvation like a burning torch.”