

A Microscope's Journey Through Israel

Revealing Some Fine Details

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Featured image: Bassem Tamimi observing a flower through a loupe- a magnifying glass. 'Extraordinary,' he remarked. His wife Nariman and daughter Ahed are in an Israeli prison for resisting the military and settler occupation of their land by Israel. (Source: author)

I spent the month of March in the Palestinian city of Hebron, volunteering as an English teacher. Because I work as a botanist, I was interested in introducing Palestinian children to the pleasures of observing flowers, and for this reason I brought a cheap dissecting microscope with me. My plan was to leave it as a gift upon my departure, but plans often go astray. I signed in with the Israeli El Al airline in New York for the flight to Tel Aviv, but once the El Al personnel learned that I was going to Palestine, I was subjected to considerable scrutiny. This was magnified substantially when they encountered the little microscope, which they took away for a long inspection. Ultimately they confiscated it, and let me know that if it did not have explosives in it they would send on a later flight.

A few days later I received a telephone call in Hebron from a delivery company, who informed me that the microscope had made its way to Tel Aviv and they wanted to bring it to me. The glitch in this plan was that Hebron is Palestinian, and is closed to Israelis—except for the Israeli settlers and soldiers that live in enclaves in the city. There is a red sign at the highway turnoff that reads, “The Entrance For Israeli Citizens Is forbidden, Dangerous To Your Lives, And Is Against Israeli Law.”

The delivery service decided to drop it off at a hotel in Jerusalem, where I could presumably come pick it up. But the hotel had a policy to not even touch a package not addressed to them, so they certainly were not going to accept delivery. In the end the box with the microscope was sent back to the airport in Tel Aviv, where I was able to pick it up on my way out of the country, and after another hour of physical and X-ray inspection, bring it back to the United States with me.

The question is, what is going on here? Why are Israelis afraid of a microscope? What is the history of events that have put so much fear and trepidation into Israeli citizens? I had an analogous experience while hiking in a natural area near Hebron called Wadi al-Quff. I took a taxi out to the trailhead—by the time the 20-minute drive was completed the Palestinian driver had given me a children's book he himself had written and invited me to his home for a meal. I spent two hours hiking up a steep trail to the hilltop, where there proved to be a concrete bunker and a soldier pointing a machine gun at me. The site was Israeli military outpost, and the soldiers were completely shocked to see a human being out looking at flowers. The female soldier lowered her gun when I produced my American passport, but she repeatedly exclaimed, in English, how weird it was that anyone would be out observing

nature in Palestine, and that in her opinion any Palestinians that found me would kill me. There was a small irony here of course in that the only Palestinian I had encountered (the taxi driver) had given me a gift and invited me home for dinner. So again the question arises, what's going on here?

What is going on of course is that the Israelis and the Palestinians both claim the same small piece of the Earth to be their homeland. The actual history of the area that is often referred to as the Levant (the countries of the eastern Mediterranean; the word came into being in about 1500 from an Italian word for 'rising,' as in Italy the sun rises to the east, in the Levant) is long and complex. In the larger sweep of history both Israelis and Palestinians are merely bit players, present over the past 2500 years in one form or another in a land that has a 10,000 year tribal history and 100,000 year human history. Both are Semites, which is language group, not a race nor ethnicity. Genetic studies have shown that Mediterranean Jews (Sephardic) are identical to Palestinians, that is, they are the same people, while both are more distant genetically from European Jews (Ashkenazi).

An evolutionary (scientific) explanation for any religion is that it unites its adherents as being a 'chosen' people by the ruling god or gods of any given belief system. This is as true for Judaism as for any religion. A basic tenet of one of the Jewish religions books, the Kabala, is the absolute superiority of the Jewish soul and body over the non-Jewish soul and body. According to the Kabala, the world was created solely for the sake of Jews; the existence of non-Jews was subsidiary. A famous teacher of the Kabala, Rabbi Kook, stated, 'The difference between a Jewish soul and souls of non-Jew is greater and deeper than the difference between a human soul and the souls of cattle.' Exceptionalism can be said to be the very core of all religious belief, granting social identity, albeit imaginary, to the believer.

When the Zionist Jews decided to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine (a seminal date for this being the 1st International Zionist Conference in 1897), their sense of their own exceptionalism reduced the existing population of Muslims and Christians in Palestine to a sub-human, almost non-existent stature. Thus **Golda Meir** (the 4th Prime Minister of Israel) was able to pronounce in 1969, 'There is no such thing as a Palestinian people. It is not as if we came and threw them out and took their country. They didn't exist.'

In fact about one million people lived in Palestine at the turn of the 20th century, and Muslims and Christians made up 97% of that population. The only way for Palestine to become a Jewish state was to drive the non-Jews out. In December 1940 **Joseph Weitz**, responsible for Jewish colonization and a senior official of the Yishuv (settlement plan) wrote in his diary,

'It must be clear that there is no room in the country for both peoples . . . If the Arabs leave it, the country will become wide and spacious for us . . . The only solution is a Land of Israel, at least a western land of Israel, without Arabs. There is no room here for compromises.'

A common misconception about the formative years of Israel is that violence erupted between Arabs and Israelis after Israel declared independence on May 14, 1948. But in fact a series of Israel massacres of Palestinians were initiated the year before, the purpose of which was to drive the 'non-existent' Palestinians off of their land. The massacres were consciously executed to terrorize the Palestinian people.

The village of Deir Yassin became the most famous massacre because of the barbarity involved and the fact that over 20 villagers were taken to a nearby Jewish settlement, paraded as game and then killed. **Menachem Begin** gloated about the massacre, writing,

‘The legend in Deir Yassin helped us in particular in the saving of Tiberia and the conquest of Haifa... All the Jewish forces proceeded to advance through Haifa like a knife through butter. The Arabs began fleeing in panic, shouting Deir Yassin. Arabs throughout the country were seized by limitless panic and started to flee for their lives.’

The Red Cross representative who found the bodies at Deir Yassin arrived in time to see some of the killing in action. He wrote in his diary that Zionist militia members were still entering houses with guns and knives when he arrived. He saw one young Jewish woman carrying a blood-covered dagger and saw another stab an old couple in their doorway. The representative wrote that the scene reminded him of S.S. troops he had seen in Athens.



Village of Deir Yassin

Richard Catling, British assistant inspector general for the criminal investigation division, reported on ‘sexual atrocities’ committed by Zionist forces.

‘Many young school girls were raped and later slaughtered,’ he reported. ‘Old women were also molested.’

The Deir Yassin attack was perpetrated by two Zionist militias and coordinated with the main Zionist forces, whose elite unit participated in part of the operation. The heads of the two militias, Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, later became Prime Ministers of Israel. Begin, head of the Irgun militia, sent the following message to his troops about their victory at Deir Yassin:

‘Accept my congratulations on this splendid act of conquest. Convey my regards to all the commanders and soldiers. We shake your hands. We are all proud of the excellent leadership and the fighting spirit in this great attack. We stand to attention in memory of the slain. We lovingly shake the hands of the wounded. Tell the soldiers: you have made history in Israel with your attack

and your conquest. Continue thus until victory. As in Deir Yassin, so everywhere, we will attack and smite the enemy. God, God, Thou has chosen us for conquest.'

The British decision to give Palestine to the Zionists, formalized in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, is now understood have been calculated to help the British win World War I, to help keep Britain's route through the Suez Canal to its 'crown jewel' colony of India (where it was growing opium to unload on China) protected, and as an added bonus, to induce the messiah Jesus to come back to Earth. Seriously. This is the level of intelligence that drives most big government decisions (which really should make people question the existence of big governments).

By mid-1916 Britain was in danger of losing World War I. In the Battle of the Somme of that year it lost ½ million men killed or wounded, with nearly 60,000 lost in the first day of fighting. Wealthy Zionists offered to persuade the United States to enter the war on the side of Britain if given the gift of Palestine as 'homeland.' **President Woodrow Wilson**, who had won re-election in 1916 on a promise to keep the U.S. out of the war, then declared war on Germany in April of 1917. Thus it was the Jewish-Zionist community that engineered the defeat of Germany in that war (a fact not lost on the Germans after the war).

In addition, Britain's most lucrative colony in its worldwide empire was India, and access to and from India via the Suez Canal was vital to controlling the oppressed Indian people and keeping them working for British profits. In creating a 'Judeo-Christian enclave' in the Levant the British government felt it could better protect its shipping route through the canal. It is also the case that Arthur Balfour (the Foreign Secretary of Britain during World War I and one of the authors of the Balfour Declaration) was a fundamentalist Christian who believed with some others that certain passages in the bible indicated that Jesus would not return to Earth until 'the Jews were back in Jerusalem.' Which, if you think it through, means that the last 70 years conflict in the Holy Land has been in the name of the Prince of Peace. It has been said that god loves irony.

With this background information we can better understand the behavior of the Israelis that I encountered on my trip to Palestine. Because they terrorized the Palestinian people in 1947-48 and drove one million of them off of their land and into refugee camps, then stole the land and the dwellings and made them their own, because for 70 years now they have continued to usurp Palestinian land, brutalize the Palestinian people and have continued to try to drive them out of Palestine, because all of this nefarious behavior is based on power and dominance and mythology and lies- the Israelis have to constantly watch their backs. In fact 70 years after the creation of a Jewish state on Palestinian land, the most dangerous place in the world to be a Jew is in Israel.

There is a clear way out of this Gordian Knot and that is for the Israelis to abandon the pseudo-religious mythology of being somehow superior to the rest of humanity, to tear down the concrete walls they have built across the Holy Land and the concrete walls permeating their minds and hearts, and to create an egalitarian society based on human decency and perhaps even a measure of love, with the other inhabitants of the Levant, the Palestinian people, their genetic and geographic brothers and sisters.

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