

Gaza: The remaining 99.5 percent

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“I want to ask you as a Jew to a Jewess,” the young man said a few days ago. In these days, a beginning such as this invites a dialogue of the kind in which we have been drowning for several weeks now – a dialogue in which the definition “Jew” has been appropriated to describe some type of unique entity, one that is set apart from the other human species, a superior one. Sometimes it’s the Jewish boy with his arms raised from the Warsaw Ghetto; sometimes it’s the young girl whose orange shirt bears the slogan, “We won’t forget and we won’t forgive;” and sometimes it’s the soldier who refuses to evacuate a Jew. A unique entity of ties of blood, sacredness and land.

“As a Jew to a Jewess,” said the young man, who turned out to be a tourist from South America who has family in Israel and also understands Hebrew. It was at the Erez crossing, among the barbed-wire fencing, the locked gates, the revolving gates, the intimidating guard towers, the soldiers using special cameras to keep an eye on the handful of individuals passing through, and the booming loudspeakers through which they bark out their orders in Hebrew to women who have been waiting in the heat for five hours to go visit their sons imprisoned at the Be’er Sheva jail.

“Is it possible,” he continued with his question, “that the Israelis, who are so nice and good – after all, I have family here – are unaware of the injustice they have caused here?” The images of destruction left behind by Israel in Palestinian Gaza and witnessed by him in the past few days have left a look of shock in his eyes. “I am a Jew, and my father is a Holocaust survivor, and I grew up on totally different values of Judaism – social justice, equality and concern for one’s fellow man. As naive as it may have been, the question was like a breath of fresh air. Here was a Jew who was voicing his opinion on the fate of 1,300,000 people, while the entire world appeared to be focused on every one of the 8,000 Jews who are moving house. Here was a Jew who was moved by what have become dry numbers – 1,719 Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip from the end of September 2000 until today; and according to various estimates, some two-thirds of them were unarmed and were not killed in battles or during the course of attempts to attack a military position or a settlement.

Based on figures from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, of those killed, 379 were children under the age of 18; 236 were younger than 16; 96 were women; and 102 were the objectives of targeted liquidations during the course of which the Israel Defense Forces also killed another 95 individuals who, according to the military too, were “innocent bystanders.”

Some 9,000 Gaza residents were injured; 2,704 homes to some 20,000 people were razed by the IDF’s bulldozers and assault helicopters; 2,187 were partially destroyed. Some 31,650 dunams of agricultural land were left scorched.

The Israeli responses to these numbers are standard: They invited it upon themselves, or: What do they expect when they fire Qassams at children and peaceful homes, or try to infiltrate and murder citizens in their houses – that the IDF won't come to their defense?

A direct line is drawn between these questions, which expressed the public's support for the Israeli assault policy, and participating in the sorrow of the evacuees and the wonderment at this "magnificent chapter" in the history of the Zionist settlement enterprise – a direct line of fundamental belief in the Jews' super-rights in this land. Indeed, one can join those who are amazed by the settlers in general, and the Gaza Strip settlers in particular.

What talent it takes to live for 35 years in a flourishing park and splendid villas just 20 meters from overcrowded, suffocated refugee camps. What talent it takes to turn on the sprinklers on the lawns, while just across the way, 20,000 other people are dependent on the distribution of drinking water in tankers; to know that you deserve it, that your government will pave magnificent roads for you and neglect (prior to Oslo, before 1994) to the point of destruction the Palestinian infrastructure. What skill it takes to step out of your well-cared-for greenhouse and walk unmoved past 60-year-old fruit-bearing date trees that are uprooted for you, roads that are blocked for you, homes that are demolished for you, the children who are shelled from helicopters and tanks and buried alongside you, for the sake of the safety of your children and the preservation of your super-rights.

For the sake of about half a percent of the population of the Gaza Strip, a Jewish half-percent, the lives of the remaining 99.5 percent were totally disrupted and destroyed – worthy of wonderment indeed. And also amazing is how most of the other Israelis, who did not go themselves to settle the homeland, suffered this reality and did not demand that their government put an end to it – before the Qassams.

A big, well-fed goat was removed from the Gaza Strip this week. And therefore, the sense of relief felt by many of the 99.5 percent is understandable – although it is a far cry from the reality emerging from the so-superficial media reports that are focusing on the celebrations of Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. In the words last week in the Khan Yunis refugee camp of a former worker at one of the settlements: "The settlements divided the Strip into three or four prisons. Now, we will live in one big prison – a more comfortable one, but a prison nevertheless."

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