

“The idea of designating ‘seven wonders of the [ancient] world’ dates back to Herodotus (484 – 425 BCE). [Of the original seven wonders,] only the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt is still standing.”

Did you know that recently there was a worldwide popularity poll on the Internet to decide on the seven wonders of the modern world? “The Swiss based New Open World Corporation claims more than 100 million votes were cast through the Internet or by telephone.”

In alphabetical order, the 7 New Wonders of the World are: [Chichen Itza](#) (Mexico), [Christ the Redeemer](#) (Brazil), the [Great Wall of China](#), [Machu Picchu](#) (Peru), [Petra](#) (Jordan), the Roman [Colosseum](#), and the [Taj Mahal](#) (India).

As one might imagine, reactions to such a contest were mixed. My favorite: “Egyptian commentators have viewed it as competition to the status of the Great Pyramid of Giza, the only surviving monument of the original Ancient Wonders. “This is probably a conspiracy against Egypt, its civilization and monuments,” wrote editorialist Al-Sayed al-Naggar in a leading state-owned daily.”

Clearly, tens of millions of people are interested in these magnificent human accomplishments. Of course, those tens of millions do not include two of my children. Last summer, our family was in Mexico on vacation and even before being designated as one of the world’s new seven wonders, Toby and I had heard of [Chichen Itza](#). We were only hours away and so we decided to sacrifice one day of sun and fun, to see the Mayan ruins and learn about the Mayan people and their culture. It was admittedly a beastly hot and humid day. But Toby, Adam and I still enjoyed the tour while our other

unnamed children complained bitterly about the heat and the absence of their comfortable surroundings at the swimming pool. Of particular interest, besides the main tower at Chichen Itza, was a ball court. According to our tour guide, who spoke with great authority, the winner of whatever game was played there was sacrificed. I found it an intriguing concept that the winner was killed, while the loser walked away. Talk about a Pyrrhic victory! But according to more authoritative sources than the tour guide, very little is known about the game played on the field at Chichen Itza. Jeeni Criscenzo writes: “Some say the winners were sacrificed! Think about the non-logic of that idea! If the winners were killed, then the quality of playing would keep getting worse as you killed off your best players.” It seems like a valid point, because otherwise, the winners of the game would really be the big losers in life. Where in the world does one punish the winners and reward the losers? Unfortunately, such things do happen to the Jewish homeland, to the State of Israel.

This past June was the fortieth anniversary of the Six Day War. As I have recounted in the past, I had just finished my freshman year of college. I remember the days and weeks leading up to the war vividly. Doubtless some of you do as well, although anyone who is in their early forties or younger does not. I don't know what the objective military and political realities of May and June 1967 really were, but I and many other Jews feared a second Holocaust. It really felt as though Israel could be “pushed into the sea.”

The following appeared in HAARETZ, one of Israel's newspapers. It was part of an article on the Six Day War written by Yoel Marcus.

“...As Haaretz's correspondent in Paris, I was at the Israeli Embassy when half a million people rallied in the streets to show their solidarity with Israel.

There was a sense that the Arabs were about to wipe out the Jewish state. On television, people saw Egyptian troops marching into Sinai; they heard Nasser's warmongering speeches. Ahmed Shukeiry, the secretary of the Arab League, declared that the Jews of Israel would be sent back to the countries they came from and native Israelis would be slaughtered. Among the celebrities who showed up at the embassy to express their solidarity, the one who most touched our hearts was pianist Arthur Rubinstein, who wept aloud and infected everyone with his morbid prediction that Holocaust II was on the way. What those now denouncing the 40th anniversary of the occupation do not understand is that the Six- Day War was the most justified war Israel ever fought - because it knocked out of the Arabs' heads the idea that Israel could be destroyed by force.”

But ominously, Mr. Marcus continued:

“... After its victory, Israel came down with altitude sickness. By the eighth day of the war, this country of 21,350 square kilometers had become a country of 89,000 square kilometers - the same size as Austria. While the citizens of Israel were cheering and the victory albums were leaping hot off the press, only David Ben-Gurion and Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz advised giving the territories back right away. And that was even before the word "occupation" had rolled off anyone's lips. Not only that, but the government, and that includes Menachem Begin, voted on June 19 to return the territories captured from Egypt and Syria in exchange for recognition of Israel.”

Altitude sickness, as Mr. Marcus calls it, was not only an issue in Israel. There was ecstasy throughout the Jewish world. Jerusalem was reunited; the Old City, the Kotel, the Western Wall, were once again in Jewish hands. There were tears of joy, instead of the anticipated tears of

sorrow. And naively, many thought that peace with the Arab world was at hand. Israel, the modern David, had slain Goliath and even the French approved.

Who was this Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz, or even David Ben-Gurion, to suggest that we return territory needed for political bargaining? Surely, **no one** would ever expect us to return any part of Jerusalem or the Golan Heights, given the historical value of the one and the strategic value of the other.

Yeshayahu Leibowitz, was a senior professor of organic chemistry at Hebrew Univeristy and a philospopher.

In an HAARETZ article about Professor Leibowitz, (1903-1994), Miron C. Izakson wrote:

“A few days after the Six-Day War, he was already calling for unilateral withdrawal from the territories. [...He objected staunchly to retaining any Arab territory, arguing that occupation morally destroys the conqueror.]”

You win, but you loose!

In 1970, ... [Professor Leibowitz] wrote: "The territories do not interest me at all. The only thing that matters to me is the quarter of a million Arabs living there, and not because I care about the Arabs but because I care about the Jewish people and its state. Incorporating these Arabs within our jurisdiction means the destruction of the State of Israel as a Jewish state. Israel will be turned into a country of the Shin Bet, with a devastating outcome for education and the democratic system of government."

“Up until 1967, Leibowitz criticized the way Israel's wars were run, ... but from then on, he disapproved of the violation of human rights that became a basic component of Israeli rule over the territories. ... Leibowitz's enthusiastic support of the establishment of the state ... [was mainly]

because he believed that it could provide fertile grounds for the renaissance of Judaism as a whole. This was the source of his tremendous fear that after the 1967 war, the whole character of the state was liable to change.”

I hope we all know that David ben-Gurion was the first prime minister of Israel. He wanted to return all the territories except for East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

Forty years after the jubilation of June 1967, and long before now, the winners have been declared losers and too often murdered, and the losers have been declared winners, as victims of a war that they precipitated. Seemingly lost for too many Americans, and I am afraid for too many younger Jews as well, is that the Arab world triggered the Six Day War to destroy Israel, not to win back any “occupied territories” that were not under Israel’s control until after the war. Similarly forgotten, as though it did not matter, and obviously it did not to the rest of the world, was the inability of Jews to go to the Western Wall from 1949 until June 1967. Can you imagine the outcry if Israel had denied access to the Dome of the Rock or the Al Aqsa Mosque to Muslims? We won the war game, but have lost the propaganda game and too many lives to terrorism and subsequent battles including last summer in Lebanon. Each week we pray for Gilad Shalit, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev. Outside of the Jewish world, who cares about their fate?

And on top of all the murdered Israelis, painful enough for us, - because we are Jews, we are inevitably haunted by the prophecy of Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who argued in 1967 “that occupation morally destroys the conqueror.” Israel is the Jewish state, not a state of angels. But because Israel is a Jewish state, and a democratic society, many, probably most, of its moral blemishes connected both to the Palestinians and to the

Israeli Arabs are reported in the Israeli press. Have we, and do we make mistakes, some of them foolish and some terrible in relation to the Palestinians and to the Israeli Arabs – yes. But I seriously doubt that any nation in a similar circumstance would have done any better and the vast majority would have done much worse. The Israelis and the entire Jewish world surely miscalculated in the aftermath of the Six Day War – did anyone think that an occupation could last more than forty years?! But the Arabs also miscalculated.

As David Meir-Levi reminded us in FrontPageMagazine.com on Tuesday, June 05, 2007:

“A few days after the UN cease fire of 6/11/67, Abba Eban, Israel’s representative at the UN, made his famous speech. He held out the olive branch to the Arab world, inviting Arab states to join Israel at the peace table, and informing them in unequivocal language that everything but Jerusalem was negotiable. Territories taken in the war could be returned in exchange for formal recognition, bi-lateral negotiations, and peace.

Israel wanted peace. Israel offered land in exchange for peace. As Lord Carendon, the UK representative at the UN, noted with considerable surprise after Abba Eban’s speech, never in the history of warfare did the victor sue for peace -- and the vanquished refuse....

Unable to brand Israel the aggressor, and in disarray following Israel’s public request for peace and reconciliation, the Arab world faced what for it was a difficult choice. Recognize Israel, negotiate for the return of conquered territories, and make peace...or not.

Rather than respond to Israel’s invitation, the Arab states met in Khartoum, Sudan, for a conference in August, 1967. They unanimously decided in favor of the now famous three Khartoum “NO’s”: No recognition, No

negotiation, No peace. ...With the Khartoum “NO’s”, the Arab world forced Israel to unwillingly assume control over the approximately million Arabs living in the West Bank, Golan Heights, Sinai and Gaza Strip.”

Forty years after the Six Day War, Israel is being punished because the Arab world decided not to make peace. Israel won and saved itself from destruction and yet, ironically, the world, with the notable exception of the United States government, has declared them the loser.

Nor was this the first time that we won the war, but lost much in the aftermath. Israel won the war of independence, but not peace in 1949. And as we struggle with the issue of the two state solution, and think about an independent Palestine, we should not forget about the Israeli Arabs. Rabbi Daniel Gordis is a good voice of balance on Israel today. He writes “Dispatches” and here are a few insights from his September 3rd piece: “Gentlemen, Bow Your Heads.” In this article, Rabbi Gordis focuses on Israeli Arabs and their articulated vision for the future which eliminates Israel as a Jewish state!

“Listen, no one here with half a brain thinks this is simple. Of course, the creation of Israel has been very hard on the people who were once the majority here. Who could deny that? And yes, this place is (so far) Jewish to its core, and I realize that that marginalizes you. And Israeli Arabs are now about 20 % of the population, but that number’s growing, so the challenge is going to become more acute. ...

But with all the problematics that a distinctly Jewish state raises, you need to understand that it’s simply not up for discussion. The reasons are terribly complex, but if you want to boil them down to a few succinct sentences, they would be about the fact that there’s simply nowhere else on the planet for Jewish civilization to flourish. There’s nowhere else where Hebrew

could have been revived, where three-year-olds can speak the language of the Bible. There's nowhere else ... where Jewish law, Jewish ethics and Jewish history and memory need to get factored in. There's nowhere else where the Jewish people can re-imagine what Jewishness ought to be about, and have the tools to make that happen.

Yes, it may be, in some ways, more dangerous to be a Jew here than it is anywhere else in the world, but there's also nowhere else where Jews get to chart the course of their own destiny. There's nowhere else, in short, where the Jews can have what every other "normal" nation has at least somewhere. How can a people that wants to survive in a meaningful way just give up on that? It can't.

Now, how do we make a life together?

That, I think, could be the beginning of a conversation. Not an easy one, but a productive one. But the biggest challenge, perhaps, is to get another generation of Israelis to want to have it."

Israel won a dramatic victory in June 1967 and yet forty years later it feels as though it lost. Much of the world has made David into Goliath and Goliath into a poor victim. From what I read, it seems many Israelis are weary of the battle – the battles – for peace. In my opinion, Israel is one of the seven wonders of the modern world for all it has accomplished in agriculture and technology and architecture and education and the arts and many other areas of human endeavor. Let us all pray for Israel and hope that peace will arrive as quickly and unexpectedly as victory did in June of 1967.

AMEN