

**Feb. 21. 2007**

Hey friends, as some of you know, I'm a panelist on the Washington Post/Newsweek religion blog On Faith. Each week they pose a question which we are invited to answer.

This week's question is on whether you can criticize Israel without being anti-Semitic.

You can probably imagine my reply. Actually, you don't have to imagine it as it's below, but I encourage you to check out the site and add your comments, not necessarily to my post but to the ongoing discussion on others, as well. The URL is: <http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/>

### **To Be a True Friend of the Jewish People**

I can think of nothing more unfaithful to the strong Jewish traditions of social justice than the current climate of vicious denunciation towards anyone who raises criticisms of Israel's policies. Judaism is the religion of the prophets, who never held back from calling to account the people or the kings. Jewish culture thrives on intellectual freedom, argument and debate. "Where there are two Jews, there are three opinions," we used to say, proudly. How have we allowed this vibrant diversity to be stifled?

Anti-Semitism is a form of prejudice, and the essence of any prejudice is seeing all members of a group as the same and erasing the differences among them. To label any criticism of Israel as 'anti-Semitic' is to obscure the real differences between Israel as a state, Judaism as a religion, and Jews as a varied and diverse group of people. It is to ignore the thousands of Jews and Israelis who are strong critics of many of Israel's policies, and to erase the many courageous Jews who have crossed the line to stand with Palestinians in demonstrations against the wall, who have rebuilt demolished Palestinian homes, taken public stands in favor of justice for both peoples, and worked to build bridges of peace. It is to give a pack of strident lobbyists credence over the measured critiques of rabbis like Michael Lerner, Arthur Waskow, Aarik Asherman of Rabbis for Human Rights and so many more, the organizations like Jewish Voices for Peace, Gush Shalom, Bat Shalom, Btszelem, Israeli Committee Against Home Demolition, Jewish Peace Fellowship, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, Tikkun, and many more.

Although, as readers of this blog will have noted, I'm a practicing Pagan, I was raised as an American Jew in the postwar period, when Israel was our great dream realized, our one compensation for the horrors of the Holocaust. I grew up saving my pennies to buy trees to plant in the Holy Land, and spent my vacation, at fifteen, on a Hebrew High School summer-in-Israel program. I know the tug Israel has on our hearts, the deep pain we feel when that dream is threatened in any way, the excruciating process we must go through to challenge the myths and stories we were brought up on.

But I have also seen the other side. I have volunteered four times with the International Solidarity Movement, a group which supports nonviolent resistance to the occupation in Palestine. And yes, there is a strong nonviolent movement among the Palestinian people, and though the media rarely report on it. For the last two years or more, almost every day has seen protests at the wall, and hundreds of courageous Israelis have crossed the line to join marches, peace camps, and demonstrations together with their Palestinian neighbors.

I have been a witness in refugee camps under siege and negotiated with soldiers as they searched—and trashed—Palestinian homes. I have stood in line at checkpoints and experienced a taste of the daily frustration and humiliation of life in Gaza and the Occupied Territories. I have huddled with children trying to do their homework as soldiers fired bullets into their homes and tanks prowled outside, and I've sat in meetings with village elders searching desperately for some nonviolent means to resist the wall which would shortly confiscate their farmlands and their ancient olive groves. I know that every day in the occupied territories, people live with terror, with the death and loss of loved ones, with arbitrary restrictions imposed on their movements and their livelihoods, with hunger, want, and humiliation. I can never condone terrorism as a response to oppression, but I do know that under the conditions of the occupation, frustration and rage will breed violence as sure as stagnant water will breed algae.

Only justice for the Palestinian people can bring security to Israel and bring peace to both peoples. Every day that justice is delayed increases the danger to Israel and to the Jewish people worldwide. True friends of Israel will not support her in policies that sow hatred and reap retribution. Real allies of the Jewish people will listen to and amplify the voices of all those who cry out for justice.

For more information:

My accounts of my time in the Occupied Territories can be found in the archives of my website, [www.starhawk.org](http://www.starhawk.org)

I highly recommend Jimmy Carter's *Palestine, Peace Not Apartheid*. All the attacks he has suffered cannot obscure the calmness, fairness, and clarity of his account—and the fact that no other politician has yet delivered a long lasting peace agreement like the one he brokered between Israel and Egypt.

Some other good websites to check out:

International Solidarity Movement:

[www.palsolidarity.org](http://www.palsolidarity.org)

Gush Shalom

<http://gush-shalom.org/>

Jewish Voice For Peace:

[www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org](http://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org)

-- *Starhawk*

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