


A Jew's Tools for Peace in the Middle East

A community is defined as a unified body of individuals with common interests. The Roadmap to Peace, a document delivered by the United States, European Union, United Nations, and Russia outlining specific measures of solving the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, illustrates no such attempt of unifying the Israelis and Palestinians into a community. The plan thoroughly outlines ways to control the issue of terrorism between the two sides, but no plan of acceptance. It places large amounts of responsibility on each side of the conflict to police their own people who are suspected of terrorism, but again nothing to promote coexistence. The plan also calls for meetings between high ranking officials to help ratify official documents and other political issues. However, those who sign the documents are not the people raging wars in the streets. All of these steps are indeed necessary in securing a safe place for Israelis and Palestinians to coexist, but somewhere there needs to be a method of acculturation for the plan to succeed. In Jonathon Boyarin's work, "Waiting for a Jew," he points out specific tools for mediating between communities. If these tools of acculturation, compromise, sacrifice, and patience were applied on a larger scale, they would undoubtedly help to ease tension in the Middle East.

The Roadmap to Peace is extremely detailed when it comes to how terrorism will be stopped. However the Roadmap fails to incorporate a plan on just exactly what will be done once it is stopped. The Quartet seems to be putting aside the need for an understanding between the two communities. The Roadmap even states that it's major goal is to have, "continued comprehensive security performance and effective security cooperation"(Roadmap 4). Somewhere a method of understanding needs to be implemented. One tool Boyarin explains is acculturation. One example is his excitement over the new Jewish studies program being started at the college. About the programs he states, "they represent the growing acculturation (not assimilation) of Jews into American academic life"(Boyarin 151). This education will help introduce the Jewish culture to new people in an

academically accredited manner. He focuses on the fact that it will help to acculturate and not assimilate. Rather than Jews being made just like everyone else in society, their culture is integrated into and exposed to American life. This can be applied to the Middle East in that Israelis and Palestinians need to develop an understanding of each other's culture. The culture barrier needs to be torn down to allow for a general acceptance. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to invest time in educating the youth. It's very difficult to change something you've believed in all of your life, but starting in early childhood would promote acceptance from the beginning. Classes could be added to the Israeli curriculum which preach acceptance and understanding of the Palestinian culture and vice versa. The more information provide in these classes, the better the understanding. Children will no longer grow up continuing to learn the hate that was passed down from their parents. Boyarin also expresses the common connection he felt with other Jews by being able to communicate in Yiddish. He writes, "Speaking Yiddish to people with whom I have no other common language confirms its legitimacy and reinforces the sense of a distinctive Jewish identity that is shared between generations" (158). If children in the Middle East were taught Hebrew and Arabic there would be no language barrier and would place them on an equal playing field.

This would ease misunderstanding and frustration during communication and again allow for better acceptance and understanding.

 In order for this acceptance and understanding to take place each side has to agree to disagree. This tool is called "unity and otherness." Boyarin makes an excellent example in his description of his stay at the Eighth Street Shul and just why it has survived. He writes, ". . . if the shul survives, it will be because of its very marginality, because of the many individuals who have recognized the creative possibilities of a situation that demands that they create a new unity, while allowing each of them to retain their otherness"(164).

Applying this to the Middle East, the demand of a new unity between Israelis and Palestinians is obvious. Countless lives have been lost during this struggle. Each side of this

conflict shares the common goal of wanting to end fighting and move onto a better life. They need to cling to this common goal and use it as the basis of their unity. While collaborating together on ways to achieve this goal, each side will be able to retain their own sovereignty and unique beliefs. The new knowledge from the previous tool of acculturation will provide them with another basis of unity. Over time they will begin to share cultural ideas while continuing to maintain their own way of life.

☰ To allow for this "unity and otherness" another tool must be incorporated, sacrifice.

The Roadmap to Peace is a very strict proposal in which there seems to be no room for mutual sacrifice or compromise. It is a set list of demands with no room for negotiation between the two sides. Boyarin's example of sacrifice comes in his description of going to synagogue on Saturday mornings. "It's hard for me to get up early on Saturday mornings, after being out late Friday nights. It still seems like a sacrifice, as though I were stealing part of my weekend from myself" (157). In every compromise there is some sort of sacrifice taking part on each side. In Boyarin's case it actually made him feel good about what he was doing. It made it seem as if what he was doing was worth while. In the case of the Middle East each side might begin to feel the same way. Individuals will begin to notice their own individual sacrifices and feel that they are making a significant contribution to the peace process. It's also important to examine where Boyarin draws the line in his sacrifice. When he wants to join their chevra at the shul and is told that he must remain kosher and strictly observe the Sabbath he immediately withdraws his request. This could also be applied to the Middle East. Each culture should open up to the people of the other. However if those people desire to participate in the other's culture they should be expected to abide by their rules and regulations. If they then decide not to participate, nothing will be held against them and they should still be welcomed otherwise. No one is demanding that these people do anything they don't feel they want to. Sacrifice on both sides will also lead to appreciation. If they each understand the other's culture, they will also be able to appreciate

what the other is giving up. One side could look and see what a significant sacrifice the other has made. From this observation they can be appreciative of what the other side has done for the common good and strive to do the same.

⇒ sacrifice is an imperative tool in mediating between the Israelis and Palestinians. What is more important to understand is that sacrifice takes time. The next tool, patience, will prove to be one of the most important among the list. For example, when the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown vs. The Board of Education* that all schools were to be desegregated, it did not demand it be done by a certain date. The Supreme Court understood that the desegregation of schools in the South would be a tremendous shock. Instead they allowed time for the people in the South to come to at least somewhat accept the desegregation of schools. Boyarin experiences this same problem with becoming accustomed to the synagogue in Paris. He states, "Gradually I settle in, though I have trouble following the prayers in the beginning. I feel like a new immigrant coming to his landsmanshaft's shul to hear the melodies from his town" (161). Boyarin accepts that adapting is going to take time and opens himself up to the new experience. Nothing is going to change overnight in the Middle East. It takes time to forget about years of pain and suffering, not to mention the hatred between Israelis and Palestinians.

The final tool that is needed to bring all of these other tools together is one on one interaction. The Roadmap does make reference to this idea. In one section it states the need for increase funding for, "people to people programs, private sector development" (Roadmap, 3) However a more detailed plan is needed. Meetings between high ranking officials are necessary but they do little for the communication between the civilians. Debates or discussions should also take place in a more accessible place to the public. Israelis and Palestinians should be able to participate in open discussions or debates so they do not feel that they are just being taken along for the ride. Boyarin's entire story is proof of what one on one interaction can provide. Specifically in the reactions he gets when he wears

the yarmulke. "But it works effectively, almost dangerously, as a two-way sensor, inducing Jews to present themselves to me and forcing me to try to understand how I am reflected in their eyes"(154). Each specific encounter Boyarin has in which another Jew opens up to him is an example of the difference one on one communication can make. Just imagine how much easier it is to learn something about what's going on first hand as opposed to reading a book about. Israelis and Palestinians would generally be more interested if they were learning from people of the opposite culture and not a textbook or article attempting to explain it to them. Just as with all of the other tools the success is strictly contingent upon the willingness of each party to cooperate fully and sincerely want to develop an understanding.

Amidst all the negative things that can be pointed out in the Roadmap to Peace there is still hope for a brighter future. Although the Roadmap to Peace has some gaps, previous success by the EU and the United States in settling the conflict in Northern Ireland leaves hope. The citizens of Northern Ireland suffered many of the same conditions of terrorism, hate, and religious wars raging in their streets. The main cause for reform was due to the increase willingness among important members of the community such as businesses, trade unions, and community groups to try and take an active role in the peace process. With the assistance from the United States and the EU Northern Ireland was able to open up and put the conflicts aside for the common good of peace. With every political move there will be criticisms. What will make the difference is how well the United States can learn from this criticism to continue to update and implement new plans into the Roadmap to Peace. Patience is the key. It may take four years it may take twenty years but when the Israeli's and Palestinians come to adopt Boyarin's tools of acculturation, unity and otherness, sacrifice, patience, and one on one interaction, peace will one day grace the Middle East.