

 [Click Here to Print](#)

The Jewish Week

SERVING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF GREATER NEW YORK

(08/04/2006)

Leaving Gaza, One Year Later

Daniel Gordis

‘Admit you were wrong,’ people say to me, knowing that I’d ambivalently supported Sharon’s disengagement from Gaza. “We told you so” is already being heard on Israeli streets, as those who sported orange ribbons last year remind the rest of the country that a portion of Israeli society lost their homes, their communities and their way of life ... for nothing.

We’d prayed, of course, that it wouldn’t be for nothing. We’d hoped that with a withdrawal from Gaza, this region might inch a bit closer to peace.

But a year later, almost to the day, hope has died. In return for our withdrawal from Gaza, we got the election of Hamas, a barrage of more than 800 Kassams, and now, a war being fought precisely on the two borders from which we withdrew.

Eventually, though, the war will end. Our sons will return home, and Israelis in the north will once again sleep in their own houses. The dust will settle. And it will seem that the battle has ended, for now.

But another challenge lies ahead. And this challenge will determine Israel’s future no less than the battles we pray will soon draw to a close. When the shooting stops, we are finally going to learn whether Israel will truly survive the disengagement.

Were we wrong? What I pray for, as I gaze toward the weeks after this war, is that we will recall that there is no simple answer to that question. Clearly, our hopes that withdrawal from Gaza might be a first step towards peace were naive. I suspect that it will be a very long time before Israelis do anything similar again. But if we hadn’t gotten out of Gaza, and the warfare had continued, we would have wondered forever if giving Gaza back might have made a difference. There is a strange, agonizing comfort in our certainty today, and we would never have had that certainty had we not tried.

And note that even as Israel levels sections of Beirut, the world has not yet intervened. This long leash – who could have imagined Bush and Putin agreeing? – is due largely to the fact that the international community saw what we did with the disengagement. Without August 2005, it is very doubtful that the IDF would have had the leeway for July 2006.

But all that is understandably of no comfort to the people from Gush Katif who lost their homes, their communities, their schools, their synagogues. It does nothing to ease the pain, and now the rage, of the people who had to move their children’s graves. These communities were sacrificed, we must now admit, and these people’s pain must become ours.

“Admit you were wrong,” and “we told you so” will not help heal Israeli society. But neither will ignoring the justifiable outrage of those who were forced out of Gaza. What we need is shared grief, limitless love. What we will need is forgiveness. Perhaps we should all don orange ribbons, even if a year too late, to let the Israelis who lost their homes know that we haven’t forgotten them, that we feel their anguish and that their rage has become ours. Perhaps the entire country should rend its clothing, in classic Jewish mourning ritual, for all that has been

destroyed. It should certainly not be lost on us, this week of Tisha B'Av, that the Talmud claims that the Temple we mourn was destroyed because of hatred between Jews.

When the fighting stops, the pain will just be beginning. We will have lost Gush Katif and the wondrous way of life that had been built there. We will have buried soldiers. And civilians. We will not have achieved the decisive military victory that we once thought lay just days away. The IDF's performance is going to be second-guessed for a very long time. We may or may not have our three captured soldiers back. And we will have lost a good deal of hope.

It is going to be an excruciating period in Israel. And we are going to need each other more than ever. Only time will tell whether in periods of agony, like in the crucible of war, Israelis will know how to come together, and to face the future bravely, hand in hand. n

Daniel Gordis (www.danielgordis.org) is vice president of the Mandel Foundation – Israel. His most recent book is “Coming Together, Coming Apart: A Memoir of Heartbreak and Promise in Israel” (Wiley).

© 2000 - 2002 The Jewish Week, Inc. All rights reserved. Please refer to the [legal notice](#) for other important information.