

Introduction

Hello everyone. Welcome to *Eyes on Gaza*. Our daily gathering, a combination of protest and learning, concludes this week's series of powerful and empowering activists with Attorney Dr. Netta Amar-Shiff. She is a Mizrahi feminist activist, formerly among the founders of the *Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow* and the *Ahoti* movement. Today she works as a human rights lawyer, and she is also a co-founder and the director of the Mizrahi-Civic Collective. For almost three weeks now, Netta and her colleagues have been on hunger strike—both in solidarity with the criminal starvation of Gaza's residents, as a protest against that starvation, but also against the raising Kahanism and the crimes being committed in our name in the West Bank. All this, as she defines it, amounts to the destruction of the Jewish People. Netta will speak about this and more for eight minutes, and afterward we will leave time for a short discussion. I remind you that anyone wishing to ask a question is invited to write it in the chat, and I will read it out to Netta afterward. Netta, thank you very much for joining us.

Talk

Thank you very much. This is an amazing and very important initiative that keeps humanity always before our eyes. I will begin by saying that this was in fact a personal initiative that arose from very deep distress. I am a human rights lawyer. I represent on a daily basis Palestinian communities that are being displaced, that undergo pogroms, that suffer repeated attacks and forced transfers. They are part of the ethnic cleansing in the West Bank. Therefore, this is what I am constantly exposed to, and for me we are living under a new regime. This is reflected, among other things, in the fact that we now have a new kind of prosecution, we have a new kind of judicial system. And I felt that I no longer set the rules of the game. The old rules of the game are in fact no longer relevant—neither in petitions nor in hearings. It is also reflected in the way the army simply lies before the court, inside the court itself. I felt I no longer controlled my life situation, and I needed to take control back for myself. That is why this hunger strike was meant to redefine the rules of the game and to say: I push evil away from me. I will not let it penetrate me, I will not let it infiltrate and distort my moral values. And in fact, the moment I decided this, it was what kept me sane.

The hunger strike takes different forms. Each one of us strikes within her abilities, and within the fact that we are here to stay. That is, we are not on hunger strike in order to disappear. Precisely we—people with a very clear moral position, which translates into a political program of how we and the Palestinian people must live together in this land—precisely we should not have to pay the price. I will say that we sat together and gathered and thought about what we could do. We sat together, good friends, Hedva Eyal, Meir Amor, Ilana Shamaï and Rela Mazali, and many others. We sat and thought about what we could do to constantly sustain this position and make it present everywhere. And we set out on a “Destruction Journey”. We decided that every week we would go out to make the destruction present. This is essentially the destruction of humanity—the destruction of humanity in the annihilation in Gaza, the destruction of humanity in the ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, the destruction of humanity also in the abandonment of peripheral populations within Israel. This includes the displaced Israelis from the Gaza Envelope, who were the first to absorb

October 7th. And it also includes the people of central Israel. It includes, of course, the silencing of Palestinian citizens within Israel and, at present, the harm to their right to vote and to be elected.

Our first stop was Bat Yam. We were there on Tisha B'Av. We sat facing the ruins in the city—entire areas destroyed because of a overbearing campaign that the State of Israel launched against Iran. And there our friend Zehorit Assouline sat. I want to briefly read you a midrash she told us. It is customary to say that the Destruction of the Temple occurred because of baseless hatred. Look in the Book of Lamentations, the scroll read on Tisha B'Av—it is explicitly stated, and here is the quote: “It happened because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed within her the blood of the righteous” (Lamentations 4:13). The loss of our Judaism, for us, is an inseparable part of the hunger strike. Zehorit told of an example of the corruption of the people's morals, against which we must go on hunger strike, and against which we must rise up. It is not only baseless hatred. This example is the case of Sodom: “It is said ‘in great sin.’ For what were they punished? As was expounded: the people of Sodom were wicked and sinful. Wicked with their property, as it is said, ‘Do not harden your heart against your poor brother’; and sinful with their bodies, and sinned before God. Their sentence was sealed because they spurned charity and did not look after their poor and their fellows who lay starving. And this is what Scripture explained in its plain meaning: ‘Now the people of Sodom were wicked and sinners against the Lord exceedingly.’ Their sin reached God. Behold, this was the sin of your sister Sodom: pride, fullness of bread, and careless ease was hers and her daughters’, and the hand of the poor and needy she did not strengthen. And since they persisted in this sin, their sentence was sealed. For there is no nation in the world that does not do charity one with another, but the people of Sodom despised it and were utterly cruel. And even though the Torah had not yet been given, charity is one of the rational commandments. And it is an abomination for a person to see his fellow human being, of the same kind, lying in hunger while he is wealthy and satiated with every good, and not to have pity on him to restore his soul. All the more so when it is someone of his own people, living in the same city.” That is, not only of his own people—someone living in the same city. All the more so with the Palestinian people living with us in this land.

Our next Destruction Journey, which we are setting out on right now at three o'clock, will be in the Gaza Envelope. I will not say exactly where, but it will also be at a point overlooking Gaza. There we will hear from Flora Shoshan, and from our friend Rela Mazali who is on hunger strike, and also from the journalist Amira Hass, who will convey important messages to us as we look out over destroyed Gaza, while at this moment feeling that we cannot do anything.

I will conclude by saying: Hedva Eyal and I will publish an article in *Haaretz* on Friday. And I want to read you its final paragraph: “A hunger strike is not a cry of despair and not rage. It is a deep refusal to normalize the routine of escalating violence. It is not only a personal step and it does not necessarily stem from a pacifist position. It is a step of a new politics, shaking off violence by turning its back on governmental power. Politics reminds the government that it was elected not as a row of army generals. And that there is no security threat in the world that justifies the categorical elimination, as this government is doing, of any political arrangement with the Palestinian people, which is intended precisely to prevent bloodshed. We are struggling to present a politics based on the human foundations indispensable for the management of a state that aspires to life and to rebuilding: human compassion, civic solidarity, and mutual rescue of the two peoples living together in this land, despite and in spite of everything.”

We know there are many reasons to hate, many reasons to seek revenge, many reasons to return to biblical discourse that speaks of blotting out Amalek. The true Amalek—and this is how the Jewish Sages interpreted Amalek—is not a specific people. It is certainly not the specific people living with us. It is the Amalek within us, it is the inability to set a red line even when we aspire to the personal security of each and every one of us, or of our people, or of our community, or of our town. It does not matter. There is always a red line we must not cross, and the discussion of the red line disappears and is erased just like the red line itself.