

Korach June 12, 2010 / 30 Sivan 5770

A Good Story --Two elderly ladies were enjoying the sunshine on a park bench in Miami. They had been meeting at that park every sunny day for over 12 years chatting, and enjoying each other's company. One day, the younger of the two ladies, who was 92, turns to the other and says, "Please don't be angry with me, dear, but what is your name? I am trying to remember, but I just can't." The older friend stares at her saying nothing for two full minutes, and finally says, "How soon do you have to know?"

Today I want to speak briefly about memory, about what we remember and why. I truly believe that if you can figure out what people are most likely to remember you will know what they are most likely to do. Thousands of years ago, a Greek philosopher invented the science of history. Herodotus is called the "Father of History" because he was the first person to collect historical memories and write them down as narrative. In other words, he took random historical events and recorded them as stories. He knew that people don't remember facts -- they remember stories. The more compelling the story, the more likely it is that its message will be remembered. The best orators paint pictures with words, they move you to imagine that you are part of the story they are telling, and those are the stories that stick. Those are the stories that are told over and over again. Sarah, our bat mitzvah is who she is today, in part because of the stories her grandmother told her, stories she will someday tell her own kids. Her grandmom will be remembered not by the facts of her life, but by those mental images that come from the story. And Avital will always remember the back-story to her bat mitzvah and what her dad went through to get here today. Memories are shaped by stories. The more compelling the story, the more apt we are to remember it and to return to it again and again.

What motivates people are not random facts, but compelling stories. And I draw this to your attention because I believe it explains why Israel is losing the media war today. Simply put, the supporters of Gaza are telling a more powerful and compelling story than we are. Israel is armed with facts, but it's not enough. There seems no logical reason why the world would not understand that hostile enemies who seek to annihilate her should be stopped. Video evidence clearly shows that Israel soldiers were nearly beaten to death. Any one who values democracy and human rights should see that Hamas is a vassal of Iran. These are facts. And we Jews throughout the world, you and me, we get e-mail after e-mail setting the record straight. We have the facts, on paper, on video, and yet Israel is still seen as the aggressor, the colonial power afflicting the masses and denying human rights. And you know why that is? Because their STORY trumps our facts. Their story captures the imagination of the world, and our facts only speak to people who are already convinced that we are right.

We have to do a better job of getting our story across. Neither military might, nor cogent, well-reasoned arguments are as effective as a good story - and ours is a great one! Taken from slavery into our Promised Land, and despite exile and famine and war, we Jews have clung to the Land of Israel. We never left. Warring armies came and went, but the Jews stayed. And those who did leave, yearned daily to one day return. Whenever oppression struck in foreign lands, we

lifted up our hearts in song, to never forget Zion. And finally, after millennia of prayer -- a glimmer of hope. Millions of Jews died, and the U.N. finally recognized that the Jewish homeland, from which Jews never wholly departed, should be legally recognized for what it is. They gave Israel a tiny sliver of land, almost indefensible, and our People said, Yes. Yes, we will make it work. One homeland for the Palestinians, and one for the Jews. And what happened? We were attacked on all sides when still only hours old. And we fought back, and we won! And we have been holding back, like plugging the dikes with our fingers, the enemies who never accepted the fact that Jews who live in Israel can actually call it a country of their own. And still we made the desert bloom, and became world leaders in science and industry, and built a nation with an economic and democratic base that is unknown in that part of the world. And human bombs on busses and in malls, maiming indiscriminately don't stop us; and SCUD missiles don't stop us. Senior citizens learn to sleep with gas masks next to their beds. Relentless attacks, endless security checks, friends and family killed, but nothing stops us. We have waited too long, and suffered too long, and yearned too long for this country to lose it to hate. That's our message!

And it's all true, but again, facts have little to do with it. It is the story that counts most. And you and I, we have to get that story out there, and so does Israel. And it is going to take a change in mind set to win the battle this time. Israel needs to pull together a clear, coherent and concise message and run full page ads in all the major papers in America, and Europe, too - especially there. Even if they don't want to hear it, Israel must bring its story, its compelling, heart-rending story across, into people's homes and hearts and minds.

In this trying hour we Jews have a sacred responsibility, not just to fight the battle through politics, although that is important, too. But to fight and win the battle for the hearts and minds of the world by telling and retelling our incredible story to all who will listen. And I hope Israel's leaders understand this. But, more importantly, I hope that you do, and that your children do, and your grandchildren, too. We cannot take for granted that our own people, especially the young ones, know it. I grew up in the shadow of the Six Day War, but today's young people didn't. Don't ever take for granted that they know our story. You can rest assured they know the other side that they see in the papers, and read on the internet every day. But our own??? Don't take it for granted, even in your own home. We need to return to our story. We, who gather each year to retell the story of how we came to be, must do so every day, and at every opportunity. Bottom Line: You tell me what people are likely to remember, and I will tell you what they are most likely to do. So, with heads held high and shoulders back, let's help them to remember the true story of the Land of Israel, and of the Jewish People too. Shabbat Shalom.