



Parshat Ekev

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**BDS: Boycott, Divestment and Sanction of Only One State, the Jewish State
Hateful Ideas Have Hateful Consequences**

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I want to speak to you today from the heart about something that is very important to me, I care a lot about it, yet I have never before in 23 years spoken about it from the bimah: BDS, the movement to boycott, divest and sanction Israel, the movement to single out Israel, from among all the nations in the world, not China, which imprisons its Muslim minorities, not Turkey, which stifles its dissenters, not any of the number of countries where being gay is a capital offense, but BDS focuses only on the Jewish state for special boycott, divestment, and sanctions. BDS does not say boo, does not raise a peep, about all these countries that violate basic human rights, but it saves 100% of its anger, 100% of its energy, only for the Jewish state. Why is that? Is there some agenda here?

To get at the heart of BDS, it is helpful to summon the hot new book about Israel that just came out this year to rave reviews. Written by Colum McCann, it tells the story of two grieving fathers, Rami Elhanan, an Israeli Jew whose 13 year old daughter Smadar Elhanan was blown to pieces on Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem by three Palestinian terrorists; and Bassam Aramin, a Palestinian Muslim, whose 10-year old daughter Abir Aramin was shot and killed by an 18-year old Israeli soldier. These two fathers grieve together—and come together to form an activist group called Combatants for Peace. Having experienced the unimaginable, Rami Elhanan and Bassam Aramin become like brothers.

Now the premise of BDS is that white people, white Jews, are oppressing people of color, Palestinians. Palestinians are indigenous. Jews are colonizers. This maps onto BDS's basic

white black template. White people oppressing black people in South Africa. White people oppressing black people in America. White people oppressing people of color in Israel and Palestine.

But if you read Colum McCann's book, you see Israel is *not* a story of one people oppressing another people. It *is* a story of two peoples, both of whom have legitimate, long-standing and conflicting claims to the same land.

What BDS does not see is that Israel made numerous serious attempts to make peace but those attempts were met with the Second Intifadah, in which Palestinian terrorists murdered 1,000 Israeli civilians. That is indeed the backdrop to the whole book. One of those so murdered was Smadar Elhanan. She was murdered after Israel had offered to give the Palestinians 96% of the land they sought, including dividing sovereignty over Jerusalem, the eastern portion of which would have become the capital of Palestine. That was the official offer of the Israeli government, headed at the time by Prime Minister Ehud Barak. The response was to blow up Smadar Elhanan among 1,000 other innocents.

BDS does not see that. BDS does not see what Israel tried to do. BDS does not see and does not hold accountable the Palestinian terrorists who murdered the innocent.

What is so striking about this book is its title—a word I had never heard before. *Apeirogon*. Apeirogon is a geometric form with an infinite number of sides—for the infinite complexities of modern Israel. McCann's book literally has *1001 chapters*. Have you ever read a book that has 1001 chapters? But it takes 1001 chapters to even begin to try to capture this infinite complexity.

BDS does not have 1001 chapters. BDS has one core idea. Israel is Apartheid. Israel is an Apartheid state where a white majority is oppressing a minority that is a people of color. Israel is South Africa.

By equating Israel with South Africa, BDS seeks to deny Israel's very existence any legitimacy. The Palestinians who rejected Ehud Barak's peace plan and blew up a thousand Israelis don't believe there should be any Israel at all. Their objection is not to the West Bank. Their objection is to the existence of Israel itself. All Israeli Jews are colonizers. Israel, all Israel, is illegitimate. Israel, all Israel, should not exist. The sin is not 1967. The sin is 1948.

Hateful ideas have hateful consequences, often in unintended ways. Consider the story of SodaStream. SodaStream is an Israeli company that allows consumers to make soda water at home using reusable containers. SodaStream had a factory located on an Israeli settlement in the West Bank. It employed hundreds of Palestinians who were earning good wages. But BDS raised a campaign against SodaStream. SodaStream moved that factory to the Negev. What did that accomplish? Answer: Hundreds of Palestinians who used to have good-paying jobs found themselves unemployed. They were not able to find work that could pay them anything near what they had earned working for SodaStream.

Consider Ala Al-Qabbani who used to earn \$1,500 a month as a line worker at SodaStream. He had spending money. He would buy new clothes. He would go out on dates. With money in his pocket, and a good paying job, he was dating, hoping to find a woman to marry. Now his job is being done by a Bedouin who lives in the Negev. The best job he could get was to hawk produce from a street cart. He earns a quarter of what he used to earn. No more spending money. No new clothes. No more dates. He told NPR that he cannot find a woman to marry without the secure source of income he no longer enjoys—thanks to BDS. When Israelis

and Palestinians work together, they can both win. When BDS singles out Israel, they both lose.

But BDS does not only hurt Israelis and Palestinians. BDS is very local. BDS hurts us, when we speak out in favor of Israel and against BDS. BDS does not only boycott Israel. It boycotts those who defend Israel. Consider what happened to Bari Weiss, the op ed writer for the New York Times who was bullied by BDS supporters into resigning. In her recent letter to the Times explaining her resignation, she shared that she was:

the subject of constant bullying by colleagues who disagree with my views. They have called me a Nazi and a racist; I have learned to brush off comments about how I'm "writing about the Jews again." Several colleagues perceived to be friendly with me were badgered by coworkers. My work and my character are openly demeaned on company-wide Slack channels where masthead editors regularly weigh in. There, some coworkers insist I need to be rooted out if this company is to be a truly "inclusive" one, while others post ax emojis next to my name. Still other New York Times employees publicly smear me as a liar and a bigot on Twitter with no fear that harassing me will be met with appropriate action. They never are.

This kind of intimidation is our own issue. It chills free speech. It will be a big disincentive for our children and grandchildren, when they go to a college campus, to speak out in favor of Israel. When they post on their social media platform a comment about their love of Israel, and the BDS blogosphere responds by calling them a Nazi and a racist, and cancelling them, that will serve to discourage our children and grandchildren from expressing their love and support of Israel, and that in time threatens to change how they feel.

Do we want a world where we are bullied and intimidated, like Bari Weiss was bullied and intimidated, because we support Israel? That is what will happen if BDS becomes mainstream. If BDS becomes mainstream, it will become mainstream to say Israel is Apartheid. It will become mainstream to say Israel is immoral. It will become mainstream to say Israel should not exist. Israel will be boycotted. Those who support Israel will be boycotted. And both Israelis and Palestinians will suffer as a result.

Unfortunately, BDS has already made it to Congress. There is a small number of representatives who are BDS supporters. This week, a new BDS supporter won the Democratic primary election in St. Louis. Hate spreads. Hate can become normalized. This issue is our issue. This work is our work. Now. Shabbat shalom.