

Opinion -What It Takes to Be a Liar

Netanyahu's conduct with regard to Western Wall worship and the conversion bill set a new record for his deceptive policies concerning both the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and ties with Diaspora Jews

A year after being elected prime minister in 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu slandered, incited and sowed division by telling Rabbi Yitzhak Kedouri, "The left forgot what it is to be Jewish." Twenty years later, Netanyahu clearly still has not learned what the Jewish people is. His conduct with regard to the Western Wall worship compromise and the conversion bill set a new record for his deceptive policies concerning both the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and relations with Diaspora Jewry.

Netanyahu has never understood that to display credibility, there must be a relationship between words and deeds. It now seems he has also forgotten that the two most important qualities for a liar are consistency and a good memory.

The claim that the Palestinians led by Mahmoud Abbas are unwilling to recognize Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people serves Netanyahu as perpetual justification of his rejection of a two-state solution. He holds that the Palestinians have no intention of making peace, but only "to return [Israel] to the narrow borders that existed prior to the Six-Day War. Afterwards, they will renew their offensive from these borders to destroy the Jewish state".

But in complete contrast to the Palestinians, who have no power either to militarily threaten Israel's existence or to influence its identity and character within its recognized borders, Netanyahu is actually the one who, given his influential position, both has the power to and is succeeding in threatening the state's character and identity and building a wall between it and the Jewish people, in order to preserve his bridge to a group of settlers and their supporters who threaten the future of the Zionist dream.

Implementing the Zionist idea, which sees Israel as the state of the Jewish people, has been a guiding light to successive Israeli governments ever since the state was established. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion explained his position on the upcoming armistice talks in Rhodes during an internal discussion that took place in mid-December 1948: "The main goal now is peace. There is an excess of intoxication with victory. [Jewish immigration] requires an end to the war; our future requires peace and friendship with the Arabs".

And as the late Revisionist philosopher Israel Eldad later admitted, "The state would not have been built had it not been for what the left and the pioneers' movement did. ... We wouldn't have established a state. ... [Menachem] Begin wouldn't have brought a million Jews from Middle Eastern countries".

The challenge is greater today, because circumstances have changed since the state's early days. Around half of the world's Jews now live in Israel, and the rest are mainly in the United States and other developed countries.

Thus the challenge for a government that seeks immigration is to guarantee that Israel serves as a source of inspiration and identification for Jews from various movements, not only for Orthodox Jews. It must ensure that Israel remains a democratic state that safeguards its citizens by guaranteeing the conditions that make their personal, economic and cultural fulfillment possible.

But as we know, Netanyahu and cabinet members Naftali Bennett, Ayelet Shaked, Arye Dery, Yaakov Litzman and Miri Regev are working for the exact opposite. This space is too small to detail all the actions, laws, statements and budgets of the Netanyahu government against these goals in every area in recent years: in foreign relations, against the Palestinians, the Arab world and Israel's supporters in Europe and America; in the social sphere, in regard to the cost of living, the culture wars, the loyalty laws and the exclusion in and growing religiosity of the education system and the public square; and on the legal front, in the justice minister's war on the Supreme Court and the attorney general's protective behavior.

Netanyahu also sees both Diaspora Jews and Israelis living abroad as pawns in his game of personal political survival. In 2010, together with Avigdor Lieberman, he promoted a bill allowing Israelis living abroad to vote in Israeli elections, because he believed the prevailing assumption that they lean toward the right.

His cynical exploitation of the Holocaust for cheap political gain reached new heights recently, when he ignored the Hungarian prime minister's approbation for Hungary's Arrow Cross party, which collaborated with the Nazis, and even backtracked to come out in support of an anti-Semitic incitement campaign against George Soros, a Holocaust survivor and a well-known donor to the U.S. Democratic Party. This shortsightedness from the son of a historian has deep roots in the Israeli right. Until Netanyahu recognizes his error, we will all pay the price of his disrespect for the Holocaust and for ties with Diaspora Jewry.

The shortsightedness that is the Netanyahu government's main characteristic has not skipped over the area of immigration. This government even contravenes its own messianic political vision — which is unfeasible from the demographic, economic and security perspectives, as well as immoral — of annexing the West Bank, or at least a large portion of it.

Netanyahu, like his ministers, is well aware of the current demographic balance and the forecast for the next few years in British Mandatory Palestine. They know there's no credible scientific basis for claiming that the West Bank Palestinian population is smaller than the figures of all the states and official organizations. They recognize that the possibility of realizing their dream while putting off the demographic threat it entails depends on massive Jewish immigration, just as Israel gained time in the 1990s thanks to mass immigration from the former Soviet Union. Yet their blindness is absolute.

The only bridge the Netanyahu government wants to build and has built is a bridge to the messianic ultranationalist settlers and others of "our crowd," who are cushioned with mountains of shekels and carried on the shoulders of Israeli soldiers. This is a tiny group that doesn't represent the Jewish people and seeks to annex the West Bank, or parts of it, to Israel even at the price of annulling the Zionist dream of a democratic state with a Jewish majority.

But neither this government nor those settlers will be anything but a passing stain on the history of the Jewish people. Because Netanyahu is the one who has "forgotten what it means to be a Jew".