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Fighting, Talking and Praying

Jerusalem 8 Jan, 09. At a symposium on media coverage, held in Jerusalem last Tuesday, professor Bruce Williams of the University of Virginia described the treatment of news in terms of the "good" Second World War. Contemporary events in general and wars in particular, are often framed in terms of this war. Europeans are particularly prone to using the imagery.

The war in Gaza is a case in point. Thus Gaza is a "concentration camp." Israelis are "Nazis" and their efforts to stop terrorist attacks are causing a "Holocaust." Compromises are "Munich." And so it goes on.

In his recent book, *Behind the Humanitarian Mask*, Dr Manfred Gerstenfeld of Jerusalem quotes Josef Joffe, the editor of the German weekly *Die Zeit*. I believe that it's worth drawing the passage to your attention:

The new European dispensation is antipower, antiwar, antiracist — the *prise de conscience*, as the French call it, of "Never Again!" It reflects Europe's horrible past, with a lot more complicity in the Nazi project than some nations — say, Norway and Sweden, who are among the most anti-Israeli in Europe — are willing to own up to. It reflects ancient guilt feelings and the unconscious need to project them onto somebody else. Israel makes such a good candidate because it is (a) the source of these guilt feelings and (b) refuses to behave like Sweden or Switzerland, mainly because it does not live in their neighborhood that looks like permanently pacified Europe.

Perhaps there's something of this mindset also in non-European countries, including Canada. It may help to explain the furor against Israel that the Gaza war has unleashed. Israeli media describe much of it, not in self-pity but for the record, as it were. And, of course, many of us also watch foreign TV stations. As I probably mentioned before, in Israel you can even watch Al Jazeera both in English and in Arabic.

What I see, hear and read tends to alienate me, almost against my will, from the "peace camp" to which I feel I belong — and to which I want to belong. For I get the uncomfortable feeling that some of the legitimate pronouncements by Israeli peace activists are being abused by those whom Joffe refers to above.

I spent yesterday at a conference celebrating the 20th anniversary of *Rabbis for Human Rights* to which I'm proud to belong. While many of its leaders complained of not getting enough exposure in Israel, it struck me that the organization is probably more quoted abroad than here. Yet it's only here that its message is relevant and much needed.

For even those who know that Israel has to do what it's now doing, whatever the reasons for the many deaths of Palestinian civilians, the outcome is painful perhaps more for Jews than for others. We pride ourselves of caring for human life, and yet . . .

All this means that even when we're told about Israeli military and diplomatic successes, we don't cheer but wonder when will it all end and at what cost. While the generals are fighting and the

politicians talking, some of us are praying.

Editorial remarks

Rabbi Dow Marmur, Toronto, Canada, spends half the year in Jerusalem and the other half in Toronto. He sends his observations and comments from Jerusalem. See also [Beware of well-meaning Hypocrisy](#)