

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I am heartbroken: I was not invited to attend a function at Convention Centre, commemorating Israel's Independence Day. I am not a Jewess, and I think you know this. But does that make a difference? It is true, I was never circumcised. Actually, I happen to believe that Israel is a wonderful country and the various governmental administrations over the years have done a crackerjack job in steering this tiny nation through some very difficult times in the 62 years since its independence on May 14, 1948. The Arab neighbours of the State of Israel know fully well that about 3.20 million people, all of whom are residents, living in Israel, today, are ready and willing to serve in the armed forces of their country, representing about 44 percent of the total population, if needs be such. Notwithstanding that fact, however, what I am bitching about is that, on May 14, 2010, I was not invited to attend the celebrations of Israel's Independence Day. I am told that the celebrations were reserved, only, for Hongkong-domiciled Jews, or bona fide Jews, visiting the territory. Talk about discrimination! When Japan held a function at a leading Hongkong Island hotel, it invited all kinds of people to drink the health of the Emperor of Japan on his birthday – even though, actually, it was not the Emperor's birthday. In fact, I was at this function and I can tell you that there were more Chinese, drinking down the free Champagne and sake, than there were Japanese nationals. And I do not even speak Japanese! I have never met the Emperor and, originally, I assumed that he would be at the function and that, actually, was the reason for my attendance. Sadly, the Emperor was not in attendance at his birthday party in Hongkong. Bad form, don't you think?

There is a big difference between the Japanese and the Israeli, I have come to learn, over the years. The main difference is that, with the Japanese, one is never really certain what a man or woman really means when he or she states something. With an Israeli, however, one knows, immediately, what that person means: It is there, on his or her sleeve. Let me give you an example of this. A Japanese man will state, on meeting a Caucasian at a cocktail party for the first time: 'Please call me whenever you need something.' And, then, he will walk away to talk to a Japanese. The Jewish man, on the other hand, will state, something along the lines: 'Interesting ... Velly interesting ...' and, then, slowly meander to another part of the room, out of earshot of the person that he hopes, never again to meet. The Japanese man, of course, assumes that the Caucasian that he has just met will not call him and, therefore, the Caucasian poses no direct or indirect threat to him. The Israeli, on the other hand, is always on his guard – he is not called a sabra (prickly pear) for nothing, you know. It is an unfortunate fact that the sabra of today has been born into the very militaristic society of Israel. As such, it is required that the citizens of Israel be on their guard, 24 hours per day. With their proverbial backs to the wall, the Jewish citizens of Israel know, only too well, that their enemies far outnumber their puny 7.20 million residents. The Jews of Israel are united by the common bond that states that this is their home and that they will defend it to the death.

Now, on the other hand, the Japanese have, already, lost their war in 1945 and so, to their way of thinking, they are subservient to the victors – which is only fitting and proper. The Japanese of today seem to have forgotten the edict: Death before Dishonour. When the American troops successfully invaded Okinawa just before the end of World War II, they witnessed how many Japanese soldiers and civilians preferred to obey

the code of ceremonial suicide by disembowelment, a method originally restricted by custom to nobles and later adopted by all classes. Hara-kiri originated in feudal Japan when it was used by samurai, or warrior noblemen, to avoid the dishonour of capture by their enemies.

The Jews, also, believe in suicide in certain cases and the deaths at Masada in 73 A.D. is an example of condoned suicide. The story goes that Masada was occupied by a Roman garrison until the Zealots captured it in 66 A.D. When Jerusalem was taken by the Romans in 70 A.D., the last remaining rebels—about 1,000 men, women, and children—withdrew to the remote mountaintop. Under the leadership of Eleazar ben Jair, they withstood a 2-year siege by the Roman Tenth Legion, killing themselves when all was lost rather than surrendering when the besiegers finally captured the fortress in 73 A.D.

Today, very few Jewish people believe in committing suicide, but not so for the Japanese and, from time to time, one reads of a Japanese man or woman who determines to end his or her life rather than suffer the ignominy of living a life of dishonour. An honourable death is deemed to be far better than a life of dishonour. Over the past 12 years, the suicide rate in Japan has been about 30,000 per year. I suppose one could say that that statistic is not particularly telling or worrying since it only represents about 0.024 percent of the entire human population of the country of about 127 million people.

So you see, My Dear Grandchild, there are only minor differences between the Semites – all Jews are Semites, at least, originally they were, being the descendents of Shem, son of Noah – and the slightly yellowish, Mongoloid race of Japan – except, of course, that I was invited to attend the Birthday of the Emperor of Japan, but not invited to celebrate Israel's Independence Day.

Such Chutzpah! Sabra! What can one expect?

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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