

Opinion  
Israel

## We need an exodus from Zionism

*Naomi Klein*

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This Passover, we don't need or want the false idol of Zionism. We want freedom from the project that commits genocide in our name



📷 'Too many of our people are worshipping a false idol once again.' Photograph: Thalia Juarez/The Guardian

I've been thinking about Moses, and his rage when he came down from the mount to find the Israelites worshipping a golden calf.

The ecofeminist in me was always uneasy about this story: what kind of God is jealous of animals? What kind of God wants to hoard all the sacredness of the Earth for himself?

But there is a less literal way of understanding this story. It is about false idols. About the human tendency to worship the profane and shiny, to look to the small and material rather than the large and transcendent.

What I want to say to you tonight at this revolutionary and historic Seder in the Streets is that too many of our people are worshipping a false idol once again. They are enraptured by it. Drunk on it. Profaned by it.

That false idol is called Zionism.

***Zionism is a false idol that has taken the idea of the promised land and turned it into a deed of sale for a militaristic ethnostate***

It is a false idol that takes our most profound biblical stories of justice and emancipation from slavery – the story of Passover itself – and turns them into brutalist weapons of colonial land theft, roadmaps for ethnic cleansing and genocide.

It is a false idol that has taken the transcendent idea of the promised land – a metaphor for human liberation that has traveled across multiple faiths to every corner of this globe – and dared to turn it into a deed of sale for a militaristic ethnostate.

Political Zionism's version of liberation is itself profane. From the start, it required the mass expulsion of Palestinians from their homes and ancestral lands in the Nakba.

From the start it has been at war with dreams of liberation. At a Seder it is worth remembering that this includes the dreams of liberation and self-determination of the Egyptian people. This false idol of Zionism equates Israeli safety with Egyptian dictatorship and client states.

From the start it has produced an ugly kind of freedom that saw Palestinian children not as human beings but as demographic threats – much as the pharaoh in the Book of Exodus feared the growing population of Israelites, and thus ordered the death of their sons.

Zionism has brought us to our present moment of cataclysm and it is time that we said clearly: it has always been leading us here.

It is a false idol that has led far too many of our own people down a deeply immoral path that now has them justifying the shredding of core commandments: thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not covet.

***We, in these streets for months and months, are the exodus. The exodus from Zionism***

It is a false idol that equates Jewish freedom with cluster bombs that kill and maim Palestinian children.

Zionism is a false idol that has betrayed every Jewish value, including the value we place on questioning – a practice embedded in the Seder with its four questions asked by the youngest child.

Including the love we have as a people for text and for education.

Today, this false idol justifies the bombing of every university in Gaza; the destruction of countless schools, of archives, of printing presses; the killing of hundreds of academics, of journalists, of poets – this is what Palestinians call scholasticide, the killing of the means of education.

Meanwhile, in this city, the universities call in the NYPD and barricade themselves against the grave threat posed by their own students daring to ask them basic questions, such as: how can you claim to believe in anything at all, least of all us, while you enable, invest in and collaborate with this genocide?

The false idol of Zionism has been allowed to grow unchecked for far too long.

So tonight we say: it ends here.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/apr/24/zionism-seder-protest-new-york-gaza-israel>

Naomi, bless her heart, has given us some insightful, original, and eloquent analysis and commentary over the years. However, she tends to over-reach, I think, with a “selective” focus sometimes simplistic, and make sweeping pronouncements in secular spheres like an Old Testament prophet.

I’m not sure the Moses, Aaron, and golden calf story is meant to be read in “ecofeminist” terms, worthy as it is to “ecologically” minded and “feminism” sympathetic. Maybe little Naomi never “got it” before becoming an ecofeminist.

The Gaza razing pales in comparison with the slaughter portrayed in the book of Joshua. Perhaps Moses was not included in the Promised Land conquest because even a figure as fiercely protective in war of Israelites assailed in the wilderness was not compatible with the aggressive pitiless indiscriminate bloodshed spilled displacing the settled Canaanites.

The perversion and corruption of Zionism is indeed central to this debacle. Yet Islam is prone and prey to its own vicious exterminist exclusivism.

The more I try to judge Middle Eastern matters, it seems to me that we need to examine key responses, Israeli and Muslim, at pivotal junctures that have led to this impossible impasse, and see the failures of outside actors to rein in the various extremisms determined to exploit vacuums or lapses of oversight.

Because, without ally “oversight,” Israel would not have come into existence in the first place, or have survived a decade. So with the likes of Hamas too. TJB