

## Ben & Jerry-Gate

Rabbi Aaron Starr

That Rebecca and I will no longer purchase Ben & Jerry's ice cream hardly affects the company's bottom line. In full disclosure, no one in our family particularly loves ice cream. We are far happier with chocolate. And brownies. And chocolate chip cookies. And did I mention chocolate?

So, our boycott of Ben & Jerry's in response to its boycott of Israel is mostly symbolic, but it is a boycott all the same. For me, it comes down to this: don't threaten my family.

This past week, Ben & Jerry's ice cream company turned a "cold shoulder" toward the presence of Israeli Jews in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank). Long associated with left-leaning causes, the ice cream makers -- no longer run directly by its Jewish founders but certainly inspired by their commitments -- announced that it would cease sales in "Occupied Palestinian Territory," though it would continue to sell in Israel (apparently as defined by Ben & Jerry's as Israel's pre-1967 borders).

It seems that Ben & Jerry's is seeking to put a "deep freeze" on the presence of Israeli Jews across the Green Line.

On one hand, Ben & Jerry's decision is confusing. In 2018, the company said, "it cannot be silent in the face of policies that attack and attempt to roll back decades of progress on racial and gender equity, climate change, LGBTQ rights, and refugee and immigrant rights."<sup>1</sup> Yet now they choose to boycott aspects of Israeli policy when Israel is, especially as compared to her neighbors, the most progressive as it pertains to racial and gender equity, climate change, and LGBTQ rights.

On the other hand, we know that Israeli policy in Judea and Samaria upsets even most Israelis. No one -- especially Jews -- wants to see anyone suffering, and everyone agrees that the Palestinians are suffering. The problem with Ben & Jerry's and other efforts at BDS is that it places blame for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict solely at the feet of Israel. Such efforts assume that Israel is entirely in control of its situation.

Certainly, Israel is not powerless as it pertains to the conflict; it can and should continue to make efforts to lessen the suffering. At the same time, Palestinians are not innocent victims either. They suffer from a Palestinian leadership that is corrupt at best and terrorist at worst. They cannot agree amongst themselves whether their goal is a return to pre-1967 borders or pre-1948 borders (i.e., to destroy the State of Israel and, presumably, Jewish presence within the land). They reward perpetrators of terrorism and celebrate those who kill Jewish Israelis.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is complex and deserves a conversation far more significant than what a pint of ice cream can proclaim.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/settlement-boycott-latest-in-series-of-progressive-stances-by-ben-jerrys/>

For me, though, at the end of the day, it comes down to my family.

The movement for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) of which Ben & Jerry's decision is very much a part, ultimately hurts my sister-in-law and brother-in-law who made Aliyah; it hurts their kids and their grandkids; it hurts my cousins – descendants of my great-aunt who survived the Holocaust and made Aliyah not long after the War. BDS hurts my brothers and sisters – all Israelis – most of whom, at the end of the day, simply want to live in peace and security, raising their children, going to work, and probably even enjoying a scoop or two of ice cream at the end of the day.

Truth be told, I imagine that most Palestinians want the same: to live in peace and security, raising their children, going to work, and probably even enjoying a scoop or two of ice cream at the end of the day. I hope that they achieve this life, without hurting or killing my family to do so.

Reasonable people can disagree and we can discuss policy differences. Israel is not entirely innocent as it pertains to Palestinian suffering, nor is it entirely to blame either. But for me, with regard to BDS, it comes down to this: don't threaten my family.

A little less ice cream will probably be good for all of us. Unless, of course, we are far happier with chocolate. And brownies. And chocolate chip cookies. And did I mention chocolate?

From my family to yours, Shabbat Shalom.