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Sharon and the Second Intifada*

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*means “expression of will” in Arabic; in other words “demonstration” (the First Intifada occurred in 1987).

<Visit to the Hill Shrine>

On 28th September, 2000, the main opposition party Likud leader Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount; a sacred Islamic place of worship in Eastern Jerusalem. The religious significance of the shrine to Palestine and Israel is explained in Part 3 below, but the reason for Sharon’s visit was his dissatisfaction with the tripartite summit that took place at Camp David the previous summer between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Chairman Arafat, and U.S. President Bill Clinton. In particular, Sharon was dissatisfied with what he saw as a one-sided concession by Israel on the rights of refugees to return to their homelands, and Arafat’s refusal to continue talks on the division of Jerusalem despite Barak’s attempts to initiate discussion on the issue, and show his willingness to break up the 3000-year old capital of Judah. Sharon was convinced that Arafat was trying to take all. He felt that Israel was at a most critical historical moment in September, 2000. So in order to thwart Arafat’s strategy, he provoked Palestine and chose to a path that might cause a war (in this case the Second Intifada).

On 23rd September Barak invited Arafat for a dinner at his home in Israel. On hearing this news, an enraged Sharon on the 24th immediately made a public announcement from New York that on the 28th he would visit the Temple Mount, a place sacred for both Israel and Palestine. Can this act be seen as similar to the World War II incident when General de Gaulle broadcasted from London his strong encouragement for the French to resist German rule?

<Sharon’s Fate>

Sharon’s chosen day of September 28th had a connection of a tragedy. In September 1967, after gaining control of Samaria and Judah in the Six Day War, Sharon had returned home to prepare with his only son for the Jewish New Year celebrations held on September 29th. Although his son was still young, Sharon held great hopes that the boy may one day become a leader. But while this boy of great promise was playing with a small antique rifle Sharon’s friend had given him as a congratulatory gift for the war victory, the rifle exploded, blowing his head to pieces. Remembering the incident must be unimaginably tragic for Sharon, but he states in his book that whenever he thinks of the event, the Old Testament stories of the prophets Jephtha (or Jephte) come to mind. In order to defeat the Ammonite people, Jephtha prayed to Almighty Jehovah that if He allowed victory, he would offer the first living thing that came to welcome him home as a sacrifice. After successfully winning the battle and returning home, his beloved daughter came

skipping towards him. Jephtha had assumed that nothing more than a livestock animal would come out to meet him. Nevertheless, unable to break his oath to Jehovah, Jephtha sacrificed his daughter and, consequently, brought lasting peace to Israel but lived an unspeakably miserable life. The facts that the incident was a terrible disaster after a victory and that the daughter was an only child are common points in Sharon's case. It is interesting to note that in the Old Testament story of Abraham, Jehovah at the last minute stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son Isaac, but not in Jephtha's case. Many people have criticized the story as being overly cruel. In addition, his wife and her sister are both deceased. Although he has a grandchild, his tragic history will always remain with him. Considering his determined and somewhat stubborn nature, as seen in the fact that he even refuses to wear a bulletproof jacket, it is hard to imagine that Sharon went through this tragic incident.

<Sharon's Personality>

Sharon turned 76 in 2005, is known for his military exploits during the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War, and recognized around the world as a skillful tactician. On the other hand, he was known to have arbitrary tendencies; at the Egyptian front-line during the Six Day War he was given the name "the King of Israel" by his men, who vandalized vehicles with the words "Arik, King of Israel." This act was looked upon sternly by command. Here is an episode. At that time, some journalists seriously questioned whether Sharon was planning a coup d'état. Chuckling in response, Sharon answered that if he ordered his forces to occupy Cairo they would all charge as one towards it, but if he ordered them to advance on Jerusalem everyone would burst out laughing.

One blot on Sharon's record is considered to be in 1982 when, during the Israeli occupation of Lebanon, over a thousand Palestinians were massacred at Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut. Although it was the Lebanese army who were directly involved, Sharon was blamed as the National Defense Minister and is still considered responsible today, and harshly criticized by human rights groups world-wide. Depending on the way one looks at it, some believe that Sharon turned a blind eye to the massacre.

<Withdrawal from Gaza>

Following a Cabinet decision on 20th February, Sharon announced the withdrawal from Gaza. According to the announcement, the withdrawal was to take around two months from 20th July. But it is said that Sharon encouraged further resettlement of the area because he considered security to be so important. His policy of sending Israelis on buses and guiding them around various destinations was later called 'Sharon Tours', and in four years he is said to have created over sixty resettlement areas.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Amb. KAI Noritake, which was originally appeared in "JFIR Column" on March 10, 2005.)