

Where's the Outrage?

Written by Dr. Michael Berenbaum
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Before Michael Oren was named Israel's Ambassador to the United States, he wrote an article in Commentary that listed corruption as an existential threat of Israel. He might not want to say it today, but let us give credit where credit is due. Oren was right, political corruption is an existential threat to Israel.

If you read the JTA on Tuesday May 25th, two of the news items listed were that former Prime Minister Ehud Omert was being questioned on Jerusalem's real estate scandal that has also ensnared the former Mayor, who was widely respected for the work of his charity Yad Sarah. Omert is already facing trial on corruption charges for the period that preceded his service as Prime Minister. The former President Moshe Katzav was forced to resign for sexual improprieties that make former President Clinton seem virtuous and now the Police have recommended to the Attorney General that Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman be indicted on charges of money laundering.

Some caution is required: a police recommendation is not an indictment and an indictment is not a conviction. All are innocent until proven guilty, but still what does it say about the third generation of Israeli leaders when a Prime Minister, President and Foreign Minister and the former Mayor of Israel's eternal and undivided capital – a city whose memory is so holy that it is above politics—are subject to indictment and there is barely a ripple in the Jewish world.

What does it say about them?

What does it say about us?

The founding generation of Israel and its leaders lived modestly. Say what you want about David Ben Gurion and Levi Eshkol, about Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, disagree with them all you want, but they were honorable men who wanted the rewards of their achievement. They wanted to accomplish something. They lived modestly. No one could have imagined that Golda Meir spent a fortune on her wardrobe or at the hairdresser, The founders may have been tempted by many things but not by money. Their successors' generation was tempted by materialism and power; the third generation seems consumed by it.

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This challenge to Israel's future is fully within Israel's control. Unlike the problem with Iran, which is now global in scope, this is local. Unlike the tensions with the United States, which depend on both sides to resolve themselves, this is fully resolvable without sacrifice but by the reassertion of values.

The prophets of ancient days would have railed against such corruption: "Zion shall be redeemed by law, its returnees by justice." Woe to us if corruption becomes the norm, not even worthy of outrage.