



## ***APOLOGY TO GAZA FROM AN ISRAELI PARATROOPER***

*Psychologist Ofer Zur, PhD offers a dark interpretation of Israel's past and future*

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*Ofer Zur, PhD appeared at Science Buzz Cafe at HopMonk Tavern in Sebastopol, CA, last night, Tuesday, Nov. 11. This article is taken from comments he made during that presentation and a separate interview with him over the weekend.*

Dr. Ofer Zur makes people angry. He knows that. He's not popular in his home country of Israel, and he's been protested at events in his adopted home of the United States.

None of those protesters were in evidence last night when he appeared at Science Buzz Cafe, a lecture series at HopMonk. It was his fourth appearance at Science Buzz, and the audience seemed universally in his corner or too shy to say otherwise.

Zur's goal in his frequent public presentations is "to explain the complexities of the Middle East and Israel and Gaza and Lebanon and the West Bank from the perspective of somebody who served there, who killed in Gaza and lost my calf in the war in '73 in Egypt."

"In Israel, I haven't been left with too many friends," he said, "because I emphasize that it didn't start on October 7. It started with me killing the parents in Gaza and when the children grew up, they did October 7, and I feel guilty. This story is about context. That's my keyword. It started in '67 primarily—this is when Israel conquered Gaza and occupied it. Egypt was so

happy to get rid of that, and Jordan was equally happy to get rid of the West Bank. So, I go back to '67, but you can go back 2,000 years if you want.”

Unlike many veterans, who value their service to their country, Zur is not proud of his service in the Israeli military. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say he is ashamed.

“When I fell in Egypt, the other side of the Suez Canal, I told myself, you deserve it,” he said, “for being in fucking Ismailia.”

In August of this year, Zur flew to Israel, traveled into the war zone with a Palestinian guide and translator, and launched a paper airplane carrying his apology for the things he did as an Israeli paratrooper in Gaza in 1970. There is a video of him doing this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7Ykj9y1jEY>. After the plane makes it over the wall, his guide can be heard saying “God bless you!” and when Zur says, “Forgive me, forgive me,” his guide says, “It is more important that God forgives you.”

His paper airplane action alienated him from many friends and his family in Israel—including his left-wing sister, a 30-year member of Women in Black, a silent vigil group that protests the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. (Yes, he knows the occupation of Gaza ended in 2007, but as Wikipedia puts it, many continue “to consider Israel to be the occupying power of the Gaza Strip as Israel controls the Gaza Strip’s airspace and territorial waters as well as the movement of people or goods in or out of Gaza by air or sea.”)

Zur, who is 74, left Israel in 1979, after which he bounced around Africa, then visited Russia, before coming to the United States. As a psychologist, he specializes in what he calls the “Psychology of Enmity.”

“The psychology of enmity is when you dehumanize the enemy,” he said. “Then you can kill without guilt. So, if I’m a rat, you can kill a rat without feeling guilty, right?”

Zur said Palestinians have been dehumanized not as rats but as “terrorists.”

“What is relevant to Gaza is that the enemy is disguised as a “terrorist.” So, when the terrorists blow up buses or September 11 here, we say it’s not fair because they kill unarmed civilians. But if we go to Vietnam and drop a bomb on Japan and kill 2 million civilians, it’s okay because it’s done by somebody in uniform from an airplane...So it’s okay for Israel to kill 42,000 people with your tax money and my tax money. But when the Palestinians blow up a bus in Tel Aviv, it’s not fair.”

He does not blame the Palestinians for fighting back against what he considers to be an illegal occupation of their land.

Zur said, “There is an interesting movie, The Gatekeepers. I think it’s seven top Israeli generals my age—that is, old. And they all say, if ‘I grew up in Gaza, I’d be the head of, the father of Hamas.’ And I feel the same.”

In his talk at HopMonk, Zur distinguished between anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism and anti-occupation.

“So, when we talk about anti-Semitism, that means hatred of Jews, regardless of where they are in the world, whether they are in Israel, outside of Israel, whoever is born Jewish,” he said.

“Zionism is anybody who believes that Jews belong in Israel and in the state of Zion,” he said, noting that not all Jews are Zionists—some oppose it for political reasons and some simply because they feel Jews as a people have actually thrived in the diaspora.

The third category is “anti-occupation.” For years he considered himself a member of this third group—he was opposed to the occupation/persecution of the Palestinians—inside of Israel and in the occupied territories.

But now, he said, he feels himself being drawn slowly into the second group as well. He is edging toward being an anti-Zionist.

Zur has long been an advocate of the two-state solution, but he sees prospects for this solution dimming, in part because of the rise of the influence of conservative religious Jews in Israel, who believe all of Israel (and particularly the West Bank) are their God-given birthright.

“Now there are 700,000 settlers in the West Bank, and they can kill Palestinians, and they won’t even be investigated,” he said. “For me, they are the enemy.”

The last time he was in Israel, he donned a kippah (that little Jewish cap) and went undercover among the settlers—he called this an exercise in anthropology. He said what he heard there just confirmed his dislike of religious Jews—a longstanding enmity. He said he used to harry them as a teenager riding his motorcycle outside their synagogues on Yom Kippur.

Zur said that now there are groups of settlers waiting on the edge of Gaza for that area to be cleansed of Palestinians and that some Israelis have taken up the Palestinian cry of “From the River to the Sea” as their own.

“From the River to the Sea, Israel shall be free—of Palestinians,” he said.

Zur thinks that perhaps this current crisis will be the end of Israel, and he has counseled his friends and family in Israel to apply for citizenship elsewhere—the United States or Germany.

“This is the third time that the Jews live in Israel, and maybe we are at the end of this round,” he said. “And many people looking at the history of the Jews, they say that, you know, the Jews living all over the world are doing pretty well.”

*Find out more about Ofer Zur at his website [drzur.com](http://drzur.com).*