

Three Women

Uri Avnery

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THIS IS A DECLARATION OF LOVE. Three loves, actually.

I love Achinoam Nini. I love her from afar. I have never met her.

I love her for what she did a few weeks ago.

The Israeli organization of composers and writers had awarded her a prize for Life Achievement. Though only 44 years old, she certainly deserved it. She is a wonderful singer.

Noa (as she is called abroad) did something very unusual: she refused the prize.

Her reason: another singer, Ariel Zilber, was to receive the same distinction with her.

Noa is an outspoken leftist. Zilber is an outspoken rightist. Is that a reason to refuse a prize?

Throughout the country there was an outcry. How dare she? What about freedom of expression? What about artistic liberty?

Rightists denounced her vociferously. They were joined by many righteous leftists. True, they say, Zilber is a rightist, but democracy demands that freedom of expression be safeguarded for all, even—and especially—for those who express objectionable views.

Even old Voltaire was brought into the fray. *“I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”*

SO WHAT has Zilber said that moved Noa to refuse to stand with him on the same platform?

For one thing, he has expressed his abysmal hatred for homosexuals. *“To be a homo is a perversion,”* he declared, and demanded that they be banned from society.

Not only they. All secular people. *“The seculars have nothing to offer, only to get sick with AIDS and look at naked women. Phooey!”*

Gays and seculars are not the only damned people. Leftists may be even worse. *“All leftists should be expelled and sent to the devil. They are Amalek!”* As every Jew knows, God commanded the Children of Israel to kill all Amalekites so that their very name be eradicated forever. King Saul, a national hero, was dethroned by the prophet Samuel because he did not kill all his Amalekite prisoners, men, women and children.

But this is only part of Zilber’s public persona. He

also believes that Yigal Amir, the assassin of Yitzhak Rabin, should be immediately released. He praised Baruch Goldstein, the settler who murdered 29 Muslims at prayer in the Hebron Ibrahimia mosque (called by Jews the “Cave of Machpela”).

He also sympathizes with the “Price Tag” thugs, the Ku Klux Klan settlers who go out at night to terrorize defenseless Arab villagers. They do the right thing, because *“the Arabs are not worth anything. They don’t know how to do anything but kill!”*

To cap it all, Zilber proclaimed: *“Kahane was right!”* Rabbi Meir Kahane was condemned by the Supreme Court of Israel as a fascist, and his “Kach” movement was outlawed—an almost unique judgment where Jews are concerned. To round things off, Zilber also wrote and composed a song on this theme.

Does this person deserve the protection of Freedom of Speech? Jews all over the world condemn the French government for tolerating the detestable anti-Semite Dieudonné M’bala M’bala, the inventor of the neo-Nazi “quenelle” salute. But this demagogue is a moderate compared to Zilber.

Should Noa appear on the same stage with this “Gift of God”? Or, if she had been living in the German Weimar republic three generations ago, with a clownish demagogue called Adolf Hitler? And would our bleeding-heart democrats have denounced her for refusing?

WELL, I for one admire her. Hers was an act of selflessness. In doing what she did, she was making a huge sacrifice. She will be boycotted by all right-wing audiences. She will not be invited to festivals by organizers who shake in their boots when thinking about the loss of government subsidies.

I remember that 45 years ago, after the outbreak of the first intifada, there was a large demonstration for peace in what later became Rabin Square in Tel Aviv. Practically all artistic celebrities of the day were there. Artists fought amongs each other for the right to appear.

These days are long past. Even well-known leftist artists are now afraid to express an opinion. God forbid. It could mean financial ruin.

So where did Noa find the courage to stand up and refuse? Both her parents are Yemenites—as was, curiously

enough, Silver's mother, a famous singer in my youth. As a rule, Yemenites—like other Oriental Jews—tend to be rightists.

The solution to the riddle may be that she grew up in the US, where her father was working. Being educated there in Jewish schools in the 70s and 80s may have implanted certain values.

I love her.

I LOVE Anat Kam.

Anat was a soldier. Her military duties gave her access to secret documents. She copied 2000 documents of them, which contained evidence of war crimes committed by Israeli soldiers, and gave them to a reporter from Haaretz. The paper published the secret report on one such incident. The army investigators discovered the source.

After almost two years of house arrest, Anat was condemned to a long prison term. On appeal, it was reduced to four years. Last week, after two years and two months in prison, she was freed on parole. A few days later, she revealed her present state of mind in a newspaper interview.

It is a good read. Anat is very intelligent and observant. Her description of her prison experience is vivid and fascinating. It appears that the prison authorities treated her comparatively well. Before entering prison she was very afraid of being beaten up or raped. However, the inmates of the women's prison, though mostly primitive patriots, did not hold her traitorous past against her and with few exceptions befriended her. Women who had murdered their children or lovers asked for her assistance in writing petitions. Anat seems to be a person with a lot of empathy.

She is bitter about Haaretz and the reporter, who, she believes, betrayed her trust out of fear. One can also be bitter about the peace camp in general, which was so afraid that almost nobody raised his/her voice in defense of her courageous act.

What made me sad was her contrition. She declares in the interview that she is sorry for what she did.

I believe that she isn't sorry because of the heavy price she paid. At the age of 28, she has to begin her life anew, branded as a traitor to her people. Four precious years have been stolen from her. She refuses to emigrate. "*Why should I? This is my home!*" she declares.

What makes her regret her action is the belief that it was all for nothing. She thinks that unlike the revelations of her American comrades in/without arms, Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning, who changed the world, her own deed has borne no fruit. It has changed nothing.

I want to take issue with that belief. It is not true. Courageous actions like these, committed by dedicated individuals, are never useless. They stand as an example. They encourage others. They testify for the human conscience. They plant a seed. Just as the sea consists of many drops, historic changes are built up from many, many individual acts like this.

I LOVE Daphni Leef.

She is the young woman—like Anat, she is 28 years old—who, furious at the rent demanded from her, put up a tent in a boulevard in central Tel Aviv to live in. The protest grew spontaneously and climaxed in an unprecedented mass demonstration of 400 thousand people.

The movement had an impact on last year's elections. Yair Lapid, a TV personality who had done nothing to help the demonstrators, adopted their slogans and won a huge vote in the election. Two of Daphni's collaborators were elected to the Knesset. But Daphni herself dropped out of public view.

I never spoke with her except for a few words at one of the demonstrations. I criticized her for ignoring the big national problems, like the occupation, and concentrating on the price of apartments and cheese.

This week she reappeared—on the prisoners' bench in court. Though all her demonstrations had been strictly non-violent, in one of them some pushing took place. The police mishandled Daphni, her arm was injured. But, as usual, the police blamed Daphni for attacking the policemen and disturbing public order.

The Judge threw the case out.

I LOVE these three women, because they show us that in Israel there are young people who obey their conscience.

They make us proud to be Israeli.

As long as we have youngsters like these, ready to stand up for democracy, peace and justice, take risks and make personal sacrifices, Israel has a future.

For me, they are the real Israel.