

# Obama Charm Reverses Attitude of Cynical Israeli

To all of the non-supporters of President Obama out there: I apologize in advance for this blog. I know you are not going to like it.

Since I became a believer in Yeshua nearly 18 years ago, one of my most frequent prayers has been that I would remain teachable. It is in that spirit that I write and share this blog.

First, let me begin by stating some of my credentials.

- I didn't vote for Obama in 2008 and I didn't vote for him again in 2012.
- As the writer and producer of videos for Maoz Israel Ministries, I have produced several short films criticizing President Obama's policies on Israel since he took office in 2009. I have also written several blogs similarly critical of the president.

So you can imagine my shock, and perhaps reluctance to write what I am about to write. But the goal of my life is not to be an ideologue. Instead, it is to pursue Yeshua.

Yeshua didn't see the worst in people; He saw the best. He didn't shy away from sinners; He spent almost all of His time loving on them. He didn't hold grudges and judge; He forgave and encouraged those who sought to turn their lives around, much like Saul the persecutor who later became Paul the apostle.

I could sit in the cynical seat of scoffers, immovable in my politics and my criticisms of President Obama. Or I could embrace what I see before my very eyes. Today, I choose the latter.

For the last three days, we here in Israel have been consumed with the visit of the president of the United States. His every move has been shown live on TV, the Internet, and even a specially designed smartphone app.

We have watched him arrive at the airport, and listened in (thanks to a live microphone) as he chatted with each member of our new Israeli government. We watched him stroll around Ben Gurion airport with Prime Minister Netanyahu, both with their jackets slung over their shoulders. We watched him inspect an Iron Dome missile defense battery and pose for photos with the soldiers who man it.

We heard him speak bits of Hebrew at nearly every public event he held. We watched him plant a tree at President Shimon Peres' residence. We watched him interact with Israeli children singing show tunes to him. We watched him hold press conference after press conference after press conference with the Israeli president, the Israeli prime minister and the Palestinian leader. We watched him joke with and pose for photos with our first lady, Sara Netanyahu.

We listened in (thanks to another live microphone) as he gave career advice to the Netanyahus' son. We watched him visit a treasured Israeli museum housing the Dead Sea Scrolls. We watched him tour an exhibit on Israeli technology. We heard his speech to Israeli university students. We saw him attend a state dinner with Israel's leaders. We saw him accept Israel's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Distinction.

We saw him lay a wreath at the grave of the great Zionist Theodor Herzl. We saw him lay another wreath at the grave of slain Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and even visit with Rabin's family. We saw him tour Israel's Holocaust Museum, Yad Vashem, and watched him kneel before a memorial housing the ashes of faceless victims.

Yes, we saw and heard all of this; for three days. And at the

end of it all, at the end of this blatant 'charm offensive' I must admit ... I have been charmed. It worked. I have now done a 180-degree turnaround and truly believe Barack Obama is a sincere friend of Israel.

A newspaper columnist did a variation on the classic line from the film, *Jerry Maguire*, saying of Obama; "you had us at Shalom." But for me, that wasn't the case.

Yes, I loved seeing him pull out the chair for our first lady. Yes, I loved the humility he showed asking where the appropriate location was, to place a memorial stone at Herzl's grave (a stone, we're told, that came from the Martin Luther King Jr. memorial in Washington).

But that wasn't what really convinced me. Words, as my conservative Republican friends like to remind me, are cheap. It's actions that matter.

I agree. So let's look at the 'actions' from these past three days.

President Obama announced that the U.S. would continue funding Israel's Iron Dome system to the tune of \$200 million this fiscal year alone.

President Obama announced that Israel and the U.S. have begun discussions to extend our military cooperation beyond the current agreement that doesn't even expire until 2017.

President Obama went to Ramallah to meet with Palestinian leaders and condemned Hamas for violating its ceasefire with Israel by firing rockets on Sderot, while Obama was in the country! He chastised Hamas for "focusing on tearing Israel down, rather than building Palestine up."

And let's not forget that when nearly the entire Western world voted in favor of a unilateral Palestinian state at the U.N., President Obama was one of the very few voices of dissent,

insisting that the Palestinians must negotiate any final agreement with the Israelis.

Other than converting to Judaism and making aliyah to Israel, I'm not sure what else the man can do to prove his commitment to Israel in both word and deed.

I cannot commend him enough for all of his gestures over this three-day visit. It was perfectly orchestrated and powerfully symbolic.

All of that said ... I in no way believe the situation for Israel and the U.S. is all sunshine and roses.

There is still damage to be undone. Namely, the settlements obsession.

In 2009, President Obama gave his famous 'Arab relations reset speech' in Cairo. And in that address, he elevated the issue of Israeli settlements to a place of prominence in the 'peace process' that it had never publicly enjoyed before. Of course, behind closed doors, it has always been an enormous stumbling block to a final agreement.

But, when Obama put it in his speech, he gave Mahmoud Abbas a bone to chew on, that to this day, Abbas refuses to drop. Even in his press conference with Obama this week, Abbas obsessed over the issue of Israeli settlement building. Obama had to do verbal gymnastics to communicate that he is urging Abbas to drop the issue as a pre-condition to peace talks, without saying those exact words during their public appearance.

Whether or not Obama will be able to convince Abbas to 'let it go' remains to be seen.

Within days you'll start hearing more about the Arab Initiative. That is the long-discussed peace plan that would include all Arab and Muslim countries, agreeing at once to peace with Israel, should the Palestinians get what they want.

Secretary of State John Kerry will be pushing this idea hard in the days to come.

This is part two of Obama's plan. Will it work? That remains to be seen.

But if he can turn cynical me around, the way he has these past three days ... anything is possible.

"Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God" (Psalm 146:3-5, NKJV).

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