

Moderator's Guide for *The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom To Overcome Tyranny & Terror* by Natan Sharansky with Ron Dermer

Intro: Brief background of Mr. Sharansky

Mr. Sharansky currently serves as Minister for Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs in Israel and has been awarded the Congressional Gold Medal of Freedom for his courageous fight for liberty. The author has lived an unusual life, spending nine years as a Soviet political prisoner and nine years as an Israeli Politician. He has studied the system of tyranny from the inside out. He brings the unique perspective of his experiences to bear as he makes the case for democracy and explains why democracy is within the grasp of all nations, including dictatorships in the Middle East. Mr. Sharansky explains why democracy is essential for the security of the United States and the world - and why the free world plays a critical role in advancing democracy around the globe. [1]

In interviews with Front Page Magazine, Mr. Sharansky stated that his motivation for writing the book was to answer skeptics who did not believe that the power of freedom could change the world. His skeptics theorized that not all people desire freedom; that democracy in certain parts of the world would be dangerous, and that there is little the world's democracies could do to advance freedom outside their countries. [2]

The book has appeared on the Bestseller's Lists of the New York Times, Washington Post and Foreign Affairs. The book was a recurring theme in President Bush's Inaugural address, and President Bush has been quoted as saying "If you want a glimpse of how I think about foreign policy read Natan Sharansky's book . . ."

The following is a list of possible questions (with answers) that can be raised at book discussions. They were compiled and adapted from information in *The Case for Democracy* as well as interviews that Mr. Sharansky gave to Front Page Magazine, and Middle East Quarterly.

1. Q. Why does the form of government, democratic vs. non-democratic, impact peace and security in the world according to Mr. Sharansky? Why do the authors believe that we should care how a leader rules his country?

A. Democratic nations are dependent on the will of the people, since the people elect their leaders, they will be held accountable for their failures. Therefore, democratic leaders have a powerful incentive to improve the lives of their citizens, and keep their societies peaceful and prosperous.

On the other hand, the power of dictators is independent of the people's will. For dictators, staying in power is a function not of keeping people happy but rather of keeping them under control. To justify the degree of repression under a dictatorship, dictators need to constantly point the finger at an external enemy- in other words, blame another people or nation for their failures. The price for stability inside non-democratic nations is to promote terror outside of them. Under a dictatorship, there is no incentive for peace. [1]

2. Q. The author distinguishes between “fear” and “free” societies. Can anyone explain why the right to dissent is a key difference between the two societies?

A. “Free societies are societies in which the right of dissent is protected. In contrast, fear societies are societies in which dissent is banned.” [2]

3. Q. According to the author, what test can be applied to determine whether a society is a “free” or “fear” society?

A. “One can determine whether a society is free by applying what we call the “town-square test.” Can someone within that society walk into the town square and say what they want without fear of being punished for his or her views? If so, then that society is a free society. If not, it is a fear society.” [2]

4. Q. Do injustices occur in “free societies?”

A. “Of course, there can be serious injustices within free societies. They can have all sorts of problems and abuses of rights. But by having a right to dissent and having institutions that protect that right, free societies also have mechanisms to correct those abuses. In contrast, fear societies are always unjust and have no corrective mechanisms.” [2]

5. Q. According to Sharansky, fear societies are inevitably composed of three separate groups or citizens- True believers, dissidents and double thinkers. Can you explain or describe the differences of thought of each of these three groups.

A. “True believers are those who believe in the ideology of the regime. Dissidents are those who disagree with that ideology and are prepared to say so openly. Double thinkers are those who disagree with the ideology but who are scared to openly confront the regime.” [2]

6. Q. To topple a non-democratic regime, why are the double thinkers in a fear society so important to reach?

A. “With time, the number of double thinkers in a fear society inevitably grows so that they represent the overwhelming majority of the population. To an outside observer, the fear society will look like a sea of true believers who demonstrate loyalty to the regime, but the reality is very different. Behind the veneer of support is an army of double thinkers.” [2]

7. Q. How did Sharansky and the other dissidents view the Soviet Union from the inside?

A. Sharansky and other dissidents viewed it as a “rotten, weak society, liable to fall apart quickly, if only the West stopped supporting it.”

8. Q. Why did the Jackson-Vanik amendment, Helsinki Agreement and the Regan administration contribute to the collapse of the Soviet Union, while the Oslo Accords failed to bring peace to the Middle East?

A. The collapse of the Soviet Union occurred due to a combination of both internal and external

pressures. Inside the Soviet Union, dissidents like Andrei Sakharov challenged the authorities and publicized the lack of human rights to the Western press. Externally, the United States used political and economic pressures to encourage the Soviet Union to loosen control and grant more human rights to its citizens.

The Soviets signed the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which allowed the emigration of Soviet Jews in order to gain certain American trade benefits. With the Helsinki Agreement, the West found the Achilles heel of the Soviet Union by pursuing an activist policy that linked the rights of the Soviet people to the USSR's international standing as a superpower. The Regan administration decided to discard detente- a policy where a nation cooperates with its enemy to ease tension- in favor of competition with the Soviet Union. Regan stepped up the buildup of the Star Wars missile defense system. Gorbachev realized that his nation could not compete, and was forced to grant his people more human rights. Eventually, the regime crumbled, as the Soviet people demanded more freedom. [1]

On the other hand, the Oslo Accords failed because the democratic world, including Israel, thought that peace could be made with a dictatorship. The central premise behind Oslo was that if Arafat were given enough legitimacy, territory, weapons and money, he would use his power to fight terror and make peace with Israel. [2]

Further, Oslo provided no connection between human rights and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The tragedy, according to Sharansky, is that the Palestinians were so dependent on the outside world that it is hard to imagine a case when the West had greater leverage to insist on the creation of a free society. Instead, the process started at Oslo unleashed an unprecedented campaign of terror and left millions of Palestinians living under a tyrant. [1]

9. Q. What do you think Sharansky means when he says, “Without moral clarity, sympathy can also be placed in the service of evil.”

A. Without moral clarity, we may be supporting a strong dictator as a partner in peace, who has killed millions of his people while wrongly perceiving the only democracy in the Middle East as the greatest violator of human rights. [1]

10. Q. What 4 questions does Sharansky ask to determine whether a country is upholding human rights?

- A. “1. Could people in their country speak their minds?
2. Could they publish their opinions?
3. Could they practice their faith?
4. Could they learn the history and culture of their people?”

Suggested follow up question: What structural elements enable democratic societies to respect human rights? Answer: Independent courts, the rule of law, a free press, a freely elected government, meaningful opposition parties, human rights organizations, etc. [1]

11. Q. Sharansky believes it is wrong to appease a dictator. Why does he believe that a period of appeasement precedes war?

A. “The more resolute the free world is in not appeasing dictators; the less often it will have to use military power. If you look at the history of struggle between democracies and dictatorships, you will see that outright war is almost always preceded by a period of appeasement. This was the case with both Hitler and Stalin. In the Middle East, Palestinian violence and terror followed a period of appeasement. In Iraq, too, a decade of appeasement emboldened Saddam Hussein and contributed to war. We would not have had this problem in Iraq if the free world had not once thought that Saddam Hussein was good for stability. Had the United States and the West linked their foreign policies to basic human rights, not one shot would need to have been fired in Iraq.” [3]

12. Q. What are the two most important things that can be done to promote democracy around the world?

A. First, to bring moral clarity back to world affairs and second, to link international policies to the advance of democracy around the globe. The world must draw clear moral lines between free societies and fear societies, We must be willing to call the former good and the latter evil in order to advance the cause of peace because peace can not be disconnected from freedom. [2]

Suggested follow up question: Do you agree or disagree that Regan needed to identify the Soviet Union as the “Evil Empire” in order to establish moral clarity? Do you feel that President Bush was similarly justified in identifying certain nations as the “Axis of Evil” in the war on terrorism?

13. Q. Why does Sharansky believe that those fighting for human rights must distinguish between a free and fear society?

A. Right and Wrong become blurred and moral confusion results. For instance, statesman, politicians, diplomats and journalists, in respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, introduced a dangerous moral equivalence and “even-handed” approach. The words “extremists on both sides” are often used in reporting. The same word can point to a moral difference in a fear and free society. In the Palestinian case, extremists refer to terrorists who blow up houses, pizza parlors and murder innocent people. In the Israeli case, extremists refer to people who are part of a democratic process, respect democratic laws, but who hold views that are not considered mainstream- they are unwilling to transfer any territory. [1]

14. Q. Why do the skeptics believe that Islam is incompatible with democracy, while Sharansky disagrees?

A. “ People can always argue that the “Arabs” are different. And the skeptics present some weighty evidence- there are 22 Arab countries and not a single democracy. The scenes on television screens, from the celebrations that followed the 9/11 attacks to mass marches praising suicide bombers, would give even the biggest optimists pause. The picture we see from the outside is very troubling. Just as the 99% of Soviet citizens who supported the Soviet regime in 1985 was no indication of what the people inside the USSR really thought, the army of true

believers that we think we see in the Arab world is an illusion. One only has to read the memoirs of dissidents who have left places like Iran and Saudi Arabia to understand that these societies are steeped in doublethink.”

Sharansky gains his optimism from history. “Most of the serious thinkers once thought that democracy was not compatible with the cultures of Germany, Italy, Japan, Latin America and Russia.” [2]

15. Q. Does the post-Arafat era offer a renewed hope for peace?

A. “ There can be a real chance for peace if the world focuses on what goes on inside Palestinian controlled areas, and if the world cares how the Palestinian leader rules his people. The free world must tell Palestinian leaders that their support will be made conditional on enacting real reform- from dismantling refugee camps to developing private enterprise to changing the curriculum of hate in Palestinian schools. Mr. Sharansky believes the message should be: Embrace democratic reform and we will embrace you. Reject democratic reform and we will reject you.”[2]

16. Q. Why do you think dictatorship flourished for so long in the Middle East?

A. “ For too long the free world has been willing to appease dictatorships. The United States is no longer willing to accept a policy of appeasement toward Middle Eastern dictators. Washington's willingness to coddle dictators has been the main obstacle to dissent in the Arab world.” [3]

17. Q. Where might Washington better link its policies to human rights?

A. “Many places. Take Egypt, for example. The United States sometimes expresses sympathy for Egyptian dissidents, but Washington's word would mean more if it drew linkages between dissident rights and the \$2 billion in foreign aid it gives Egypt each year. Likewise, in the case of the Palestinian Authority, American support for Palestinian dissidents hasn't gone much past rhetoric.” [3]

18. Q. Why does Sharansky believe that the Palestinians can progress toward democracy?

A. “Whenever people are given an opportunity not to live in constant fear, not to live a life of doublethinking, they choose freedom. If given the opportunity, the Palestinians can progress toward democracy. The Palestinians have a strong middle class. They have special business opportunities in the free world. Palestinians are adroit observers of Israel and understand the functioning of democracy. The Palestinian Diaspora is well educated. All of these factors provide hope for a speedier transition. There is no doubt that the change of leadership resulting from Arafat's passing creates opportunities. Whether Palestinians seize these opportunities is another question.” [3]

19. Q. What role does Sharansky believe that Israel has in helping to create the conditions for a free Palestinian society?

A. “Israel has a special interest in Palestinian democracy because only with democratic

development among Palestinians and in the Arab world will Israel enjoy peace and stability. We can complain as much as we want about the lack of freedom and the lack of democracy among the Palestinians and other neighbors, but we should never forget our role. Israel and other nations in the free world tried to turn a Palestinian dictatorship into a partner. Many Israeli and American policymakers thought that a Palestinian dictatorship would bring stability. We were not ready to support any form of dissent in the Arab world and among the Palestinians because we believed it would weaken the Palestinian Authority and any chance for peace. Israel, the United States, and other free nations need to realize that they can play a very positive role, but that their choices can also be harmful for democracy.” [3]

20. Q. Why does Sharansky believe that the elections that took place in the Palestinian Authority have nothing to do with democracy?

A. Free elections can only take place in an atmosphere devoid of fear and only after the basic institutions that protect a free society—such as a free press, the rule of law, independent courts, and political parties—are firmly in place. Elections that are not free, that are not held in a free society have nothing to do with democracy. [3]

21. Q. Why does Sharansky oppose the Gaza disengagement plan?

A. If the disengagement plan consists of one-sided concessions, then Gaza could be transformed into a beachhead for a terrorist state. If a Palestinian democracy developed, then a Palestinian state would not be dangerous. Mr. Sharansky said many years ago, it is very important that the depth of Israel’s concessions match the depth of democracy on the other side. If disengagement were linked to democratic reforms, then Mr. Sharansky would be for this plan. However, he would object to any plan that leaves territory for terror. [3]

22. Q. Why does Sharansky believe that it is not whether we have the power to change the world but whether we have the will?

A. Sharansky believes that the free world must stay true to its ideals. Bringing democracy and freedom to other areas of the world requires that we link human rights to internal reforms within dictatorships. This is a matter of Right and Wrong- and we must move beyond Right and Left if we are to achieve this goal.

Notes

[1] The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny & Terror by Natan Sharansky with Ron Dermer

[2] Front Page Magazine-December 17, 2004 “The Case for Democracy” by Jamie Glazov, <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/Printable.asp?ID=16319>.

[3] Middle East Quarterly, Winter 2005- “Peace Will Come Only After Freedom and Democracy” <http://www.meforum.org/article/666>.