

- **Rabbi Danny Rich, Chief Executive of Liberal Judaism**



Rabbi Rich first addressed the question, “Why I am here at all?” referring to sections of the Jewish community who would prefer that he wasn’t, this being part of the problem for viewing these issues from the Jewish community.

His view is that it is a pointless exercise to discuss these issues only with those who agree with us, so was thrilled to be invited to reflect with colleagues. Asked to respond to the play and film with heart and mind, he felt that:

- The play is a good attempt to struggle in a real way with this issue, although he has issues about the interpretation
- On the film, he commented on the assertion that that Palestine had been Arab for centuries, yet the Israeli position is that it was Jewish long before it was Arab. While this may not be a constructive debate, it leads to his major point that *unless we can begin*

to understand that there are two narratives about this place, we have no chance of making progress. We need to acknowledge the truth that we are two peoples who, for reasons which are partly a result of British Government policy, but might also be about Christianity. He was not arguing for Zionism as a Christian idea, but that it is a very interesting point to make. Many of the non Jews who supported Zionism did so out of their Christian understanding of what was happening.

- *- and unless the two parties begin to understand each other's narratives - they don't have to agree with them – there will be no breakthrough.*

So whether the Palestinian national identity didn't begin until the 1950s, or the 1960s, is really irrelevant, because that is not what the Palestinians believe. There are facts which can be tested - *but it is not about facts, it's about emotion and feeling.*

His major point was repeated: *Until we can begin to understand the narrative of the other I think we have very little chance of arriving at a future for either the Israeli people or the Palestinian people. Because the truth of the matter is they are both locked in the tragedy which they find very difficult to get out of.*

In conclusion he stressed 2 things:

First, Britain needs to be more involved, not less. Without real help in all sorts of ways, the Palestinians and Israelis are not able to sort this out for themselves, be that not a popular view in the Jewish community. He prefers that America should take much more interest in actually saying to the Israelis "There are things you may not do", even if that may be seen as colonial and a misuse of power.

Secondly, Liberal Jews are one of the few organisations I might call establishment - our organisation actually supported the British Parliamentary vote in favour of Palestinian statehood. I just think it is unviable, even immoral for the Jews, the Israelis, anybody, to say to another people: "You will get your state when I say so". Israelis need to wake up to that. Britain and the United States and a number of other people might help or facilitate the Israelis waking up to that view.

In the discussion this point was emphasized also by Sir Vincent Fean: *the way in which we talk to Israel is important.*