

A SHORT GUIDE TO BAZAAR NEGOTIATIONS

Dedicated to Those Obsessed With Peace

Moshe Sharon

Everybody says that his donkey is a horse.

There is no tax on words.

(Two Arab proverbs)

On December 25th 1977, at the very beginning of the negotiations between Israel and Egypt in Ismailia, I had the opportunity to have a short discussion with Muhammad Anwar Sadat the president of Egypt. "Tell your Prime Minister, he said, that this is a bazaar; the merchandise is expensive." I told my Prime Minister but he failed to abide by the rules of the bazaar. The failure was not unique to him. It is the failure of all the Israeli governments and the media.

On March 4, 1994, I published an article in The Jerusalem Post called "Novices in Negotiations." The occasion was the conclusion of the Cairo Agreement. A short time later Yasser Arafat proved yet again that his signature was not worth the ink of his pen let alone the paper it was written on, and his word was worth even less. Then, as in every subsequent agreement, Israel was taken aback when her concessions became the basis for fresh Arab demands.

In Middle Eastern bazaar diplomacy, agreements are kept not because they are signed but because they are imposed. Besides, in the bazaar of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the two sides are not discussing the same merchandise. The Israelis wish to acquire peace based on the Arab-Muslim acceptance of Israel as a Jewish state. The objective of the Arabs is to annihilate the Jewish state, replace it with an Arab state, and get rid of the Jews.

To achieve their goal, the Arabs took to the battlefield and to bazaar diplomacy. The most important rule in the bazaar is that if the vendor knows that you desire to purchase a certain piece of merchandise, he will raise its price. The merchandise in question is "peace" and the Arabs give the impression that they actually have this merchandise and inflate its price, when in truth they do not have it at all.

This is the wisdom of the bazaar: if you are clever enough, you can sell nothing at a price. The Arabs sell words, they sign agreements, and they trade with vague promises, but are sure to receive generous down payments from eager buyers. In the bazaar only a foolish buyer pays for something he has never seen.

There is another rule in the market as well as across the negotiating table: the side that first presents his terms is bound to lose; the other side builds his next move using the open cards of his opponent as the starting point.

In all her negotiations with the Palestinian Arabs, Israel has rushed to offer plans, and was surprised to discover that after an agreement had been "concluded" it had become the basis for further demands.

Most amazing is the reaction in such cases. Israeli politicians, "experts" and the media eagerly provide "explanations" for the Arabs' behavior. One of the most popular explanations is that these or other Arab pronouncements are "for internal use," as if "internal use" does not count. Other explanations invoke "the Arab sensitivity to symbols," "honor," "matters of emotion" and other more patronizing sayings of this nature. Does Israel possess no "sensitivities" or does it have no honor? What does all this have to do with political encounters?

It is therefore essential, as the late President Sadat advised, to learn the rules of the oriental bazaar before venturing into the arena of bazaar diplomacy. The most important rule is the Roman saying: "If you want peace – prepare for war." Never come to the negotiating table from a position of weakness. Your adversary should always know that you

are strong and ready for war even more than you are ready for peace.

In the present situation in the Middle East and in the foreseeable future “peace” is an empty word. Israel should delete the word “peace” from its vocabulary together along with such phrases as “the price of peace” or “territory for peace.” For a hundred years the Jews have been begging the Arabs to sell them peace, ready to pay any price. They have received nothing, because the Arabs have no peace to sell, but they have still paid dearly. It must be said in all fairness that the Arabs have not made a secret of the fact that what they meant by the word “peace” was nothing more than a limited ceasefire for a limited period.

Since this is the situation, Israel should openly declare that it has decided to create a new state of affairs in the Middle East, compelling the Arab side to ask for peace and pay for it. Unlike the Arabs, Israel has this merchandise for sale.

From now on Israel should be the side demanding payment for peace. If the Arabs want peace, Israel should fix its price in real terms. The Arabs will pay if they reach the conclusion that Israel is so strong that they cannot destroy it. Because of this, Israel’s deterrent power is essential.

Therefore, if anyone asks Israel for plans, the answer should be: no “plans,” no “suggestions,” no “constructive ideas,” in fact no negotiations at all. If the Arab side wants to negotiate, let it present its plans and its “ideas.” If and when it does, the first Israeli reaction should always be “Unacceptable! Come up with better ones.”

If and when the time comes for serious negotiations, after the Arabs have lost all hope of annihilating the Jewish state, here are ten rules for bargaining in the Middle Eastern bazaar:

1. Never be the first to suggest anything to the other side. Never show any eagerness “to conclude a deal.” Let the opponent present his suggestions first.
2. Always reject, always disagree. Use the phrase: “Not meeting the minimum demands” and walk away, even a hundred times. A tough customer gets good prices.
3. Don’t rush to come up with counter-offers. There will always be time for that. Let the other side make amendments under the pressure of your total “disappointment.” Patience is the name of the game. “Haste is from Satan!”
4. Have your own plan ready in full, as detailed as possible, with the red lines completely defined. However, never show this or any other plan to a third party. It will reach your opponent quicker than you think. Weigh the other side’s suggestions against this plan.
5. Never change your detailed plan to meet the other side “half way.” Remember, there is no “half way.” The other side also has a master plan. Be ready to quit negotiations when you encounter stubbornness on the other side.
6. Never leave things unclear. Always avoid “creative phrasing” and “creative ideas” which are exactly what your Arab opponent wants. Remember the Arabs are masters of language. Playing with words is the Arab national sport. As in the market, so also at the negotiating table, always talk dollars and cents.
7. Always bear in mind that the other side will try to outsmart you by presenting major issues as unimportant details. Regard every detail as a vitally important issue. Never postpone any problem “for a later occasion.” If you do so, you will lose. Remember that your opponent is always looking for a reason to avoid honoring agreements.

8. Emotion belongs neither in the marketplace nor at the negotiating table. Friendly words as well as outbursts of anger, holding hands, kissing, touching cheeks and embracing should not be interpreted as representing policy.
9. Beware of popular beliefs about the Arabs and the Middle East – “Arab honor” for example. Remember, you have honor too, but this has nothing to do with the issues under negotiation. Never do or say anything because somebody has told you that it is “the custom.” If the Arab side finds out that you are playing the anthropologist he will take advantage of it.
10. Always remember that the goal of all negotiations is to make a profit. You should aim at making the highest profit in real terms. Remember that every gain is an asset for the future because there is always going to be “another round.”

The Arabs have been practicing negotiation tactics for more than 2000 years. They are the masters of words, and a mine of endless patience. In contrast, Israelis (and Westerners in general) want “quick results.” In this part of the world there are no quick results; the impatient one always loses.

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