

May 27, 2024

Among the headlines is a story about missed opportunity that brought to mind a few lines from Garth Brooks's "The Dance." The bard declares, "Holding you, I held everything, for a moment wasn't I the king?" A few verses later the singer states, "And now I'm glad I didn't know, the way it all would end, the way it all would go." Brooks's "The Dance" is about two lovers. The "dance" in the news is about two enemies.

To understand the background of this dance, a good resource is NPR's December 3<sup>rd</sup> article, "The Shadowy Hamas Leader Behind the War Against Israel." The Hamas Leader is Yahya Sinwar, who, ". . . is widely believed to have helped mastermind the unprecedented [Oct 7<sup>th</sup>] Hamas attack." The relevant information from this piece is that Yahya Sinwar ". . . spent more than two decades behind bars in Israel, before being freed 12 years ago in a hostage ransom deal." Sinwar was serving four life sentences for murder.

Now cue the music. On May 26<sup>th</sup> the New York Times reported, "The Hamas Chief and the Israeli Who Saved His Life." The article introduces Dr. Yuval Bitton, an Israeli dentist. We are told, "The day he saved Yahya Sinwar's life, Yuval Bitton was 37, running the dental clinic at the Beersheba prison complex." Dr. Bitton provided the diagnosis for Sinwar's mystery ailment, an "aggressive brain tumor, fatal if left untreated." After emergency surgery, Yahya Sinwar told Dr. Bitton, ". . . that he owed me his life." This frank admission was one of many intense interactions in the two-decade relationship between the doctor and the terrorist. In 2011, Sinwar was released, and the dentist transitioned into intelligence work. When the massacre of October 7<sup>th</sup> was committed, ". . . Dr. Bitton says he knew with certainty who had masterminded the attack: Yahya Sinwar." Increasing the pain for Dr. Bitton was the knowledge that his sister's son was one of the victims. Reflecting back on her brother's earlier medical intervention, Dr. Bitton's sister observed, "On the one hand my brother saved a life, and on the other his sister lost her boy to the same person he saved." The siblings both agree Dr. Bitton could not have done anything different.

The Bible contains an interaction between two foes that mirrors this "dance" from Gaza. In the eighth chapter of II Kings, the prophet Elisha had an interaction with Hazael, a man who would later become the king of Aram, Israel's enemy. Hazael asked Elisha whether the current king of Aram would recover from his illness (2Ki 8:9). Elisha told Hazael that the king would be healed (2Ki 8:10). However, God showed Elisha that Hazael would someday commit atrocities against Elisha's countrymen. The knowledge made Elisha cry, so his enemy asked him, "Why is my lord weeping?" Elisha said to Hazael, "Because I see the evil which you will do to the children of Israel: burning down their strong towns, killing their young men with the sword, smashing their babies against the stones, and cutting open the pregnant women" (2Ki 8:12).

Elisha and Hazael went their separate ways. The king of Aram would have recovered from his illness if Hazael had not smothered him in his bed (2Ki 8:15). Many years later, when the children of Israel started to worship other gods, Elisha's vision for

Hazael was fulfilled: “The LORD was angry against Israel, and He gave them up into the power of Hazael, king of Aram” (2Ki 13:3).

While Elisha the prophet had to speak as God commanded him, regardless of Hazael’s future actions, Dr Bitton was under no such compulsion. I like to think if Dr. Bitton were to ever sing “The Dance” it would be a lament instead of a love song. I believe he would change the lyrics a little: “I wish I didn't know the way it all would end, the way it all would go . . . I wish that I had missed the dance.”