

The Quest for Peace

The Past

Any discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be sober and balanced and not divide all concerned into saints and devils. Overly moralistic criticism provokes self-righteous responses and fruitless arguments about who is the real victim. The concern must be, not to ease the critic's conscience, but to encourage Israelis and Palestinians to believe in the fruitful possibilities of negotiation.

For many Israelis, criticism will be listened to and have a healing effect only if it is appreciative of the pain and rage that result from having been delegitimized by modern Arab propaganda and by Christian and Islamic theological teachings over many centuries. We live in a geographic area which refuses to know anything of the creative spirit of our culture. The radios of even moderate Arab countries, like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, habitually refer to Tel Aviv and Haifa as "occupied Palestine" and to Israel as "the enemy." Jordan Television switches off the live Eurovision Song Festival when the Israeli pop group appears; the joy of our songs must not be heard. Even a mere sports event in which Israel participates must not be seen on Arab television. Sermons heard in mosques, schoolbooks used in Arab countries, and a constant flow of anti-Jewish hate literature obstruct the search for a dignified solution to the Israeli-Palestinian struggle.

The distinctions which PLO spokesmen make between Jews who came to Israel from all corners of the globe and those born in Israel cut deeply into the soul of Israelis. These distinctions negate our history, our traditions, and the prayers which nurtured an unbreakable bond between the Jewish people and its land. Our unease is reinforced when even supposed "moderates," like King Hussein, join the Arab campaign to stop Soviet Jews from coming home to Israel.

As far as our neighbors are concerned, Israel is often perceived as a

post-Holocaust phenomenon created out of Western guilt for the destruction of European Jewry. We are described as an alien growth in the Middle East, not indigenous to its soil, history, and culture. The refusal of Arab regimes to cope with the tragic homelessness of Palestinian refugees epitomizes the perception of our return as only a temporary mistake, an aberration, which will in due time disappear.

For Jews, Israel's rebirth represents the fulfillment of our long historical commitment and connectedness to this land. When Jews walk in this land, they enter into a dialogue with thousands of years of Jewish history. Deeply engraved in our national consciousness is the knowledge that it is still only our military power and determined loyalty to our history that make Israel a viable political reality.

Our hope was that our presence would gradually seep into the consciousness of our Arab neighbors and evoke a significant degree of acceptance. Regarding most of them, this, tragically, has not been the case. Our isolation from our neighbors creates a paradoxical feeling: although we have come home and built a strong nation, we still share the painful alienation and loneliness experienced by Jews throughout their exilic history.

The Present

The recent Palestinian revolt in Gaza and the West Bank, together with the need for young Israeli soldiers to use brute force to quell the riots, has made Israelis more aware than ever before that Palestinians possess a national consciousness. Our future security and moral well-being as a nation will be jeopardized if we are indifferent to their desire for self-determination.

There are two options. We can recognize their fundamental human desire and seek to accommodate it, while at the same time building safeguards so as not to weaken our own national security, or we can create a society that rules by force and intimidation over a million and a half vehemently resentful people. Even if arguments could be found that this form of rule is militarily and politically feasible, it would inevitably undermine the moral and religious significance of our national renaissance. During two thousand years of wandering and waiting, we never imagined a Jewish nation that would find itself obliged to suppress and humiliate an entire people. Palestinians as homeless victims will make us constantly feel like strangers in our own home.

To reduce the Palestinians to a subject population who live in dread

of Israeli power is to destroy any significant connection between the best of our traditional, spiritual teachings and contemporary Israel. Permanent control over the Palestinians will eventually destroy the centrality of Israel for world Jewry.

A Palestinian political reality, in which they will find it necessary to become responsible for the social, economic, and political well-being of their citizens, may begin the process of healing the present negative and destructive identity of many Palestinians. However, if we continue to control them, their identity will be fed by hatred and rejection of Israel.

There is a vicious dialectic that must be broken. In controlling them, we lose ourselves. When our youth act with brutal anger against women, children, and elderly people, we become alienated from everything normally identified as Jewish behavior. We will not heal our own rage and frustration through military control over the Palestinians but only through dealing constructively with their will for self-determination.

At the same time, we must emphasize to them and to the world that their national existence must not in any way jeopardize our security. One way to do this is to insist on total demilitarization of any Palestinian national entity. No military offensive equipment must exist on this side of the Jordan River.

In stating this, it is evident that we do not seek to subjugate a people, but equally we show a healthy awareness that the Messiah has not come. We must not confuse security needs with questions of political control or with grandiose visions of Jewish historical destiny. We must insist on very clear safeguards for our national security. We thereby manifest our clear will to live in peace with our neighbors, but also our sure knowledge that only a secure and strong Israel will enable the development of good will and understanding between the different nations in the Middle East.

Into the Future

The confrontation with Palestinian nationalism has become the most urgent issue facing the Jewish state and world Jewry today. The future identity of both national communities hangs on their finding the wisdom and good will to resolve this tragic condition.

The conflict has deep roots within our respective religious traditions. In contrast to America, whose founders consciously rejected much of

their European past, in this land the power of tradition and historical memory is embedded in all that we do. The problem is how to live by the memories and aspirations of our past without creating a nightmare which destroys all innovative thinking in the present.

For centuries, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism each believed in its eventual triumph in history. Each sought to prove that it had the exclusive keys to God's kingdom, either through its political subjugation of other religious communities or through proving the falsity of the others' scriptures and religious traditions. Victory, whether military or intellectual, confirmed who was God's elect in history.

What we must now learn from history is that in the battle to demonstrate exclusive favor in the eyes of God, no single community was victorious. The crusades to liberate Jerusalem from the "infidels" failed, leaving bitter memories of suffering in all communities.

Jews were the most frequent victims of the belief that one community, and only one, is God's elect in history. Israel's suffering and exile were interpreted to confirm that God had rejected them and their way of life. The roots of the twentieth-century slaughter of European Jewry can be traced to that deep delegitimization of the Jews implied by an exclusivist, triumphalist view of God in history.

In the State of Israel, we find ourselves today locked in a great struggle with religious communities who share the biblical perception of history. We must all find a way to free ourselves from habits of thought which have brought so much suffering to all. The catastrophes of the past must teach us that no sacred text, historical memory, or tradition should be given greater weight than the sacredness of human life. What Jews, Christians, and Muslims need to learn afresh is that God's creation of all human beings in His image must have central importance in the interpretation of our religious traditions.

Within Judaism, giving primacy to the prevention of human suffering is implicit in the halakhic ruling that saving human life takes precedence over Sabbath observance. The Sabbath law is central to Judaism. Desecrating the Sabbath is considered equivalent to embracing idolatry. Our covenantal identity and entire belief system are irrevocably tied to observance of the Sabbath.

Nonetheless, rabbinic teaching ruled that when danger to human life comes into conflict with the observance of the Sabbath, the Sabbath must be put aside. Orthodox halakhic jurists have ruled that this principle applies to all human life, irrespective of race or creed. Maimonides treats the sacredness of human life as a guiding principle for understanding the whole Torah.

The commandment of the Sabbath, like all other commandments, may be set aside if human life is in danger. . . . Furthermore, it is forbidden to delay such violation of the Sabbath for the sake of a person who is dangerously ill, for Scripture says, "Which if a man do, he shall live by them" (Lev. 18:5), that is to say, he shall not die by them. Hence you learn that the ordinances of the Torah were meant to bring upon the world not vengeance, but mercy, loving-kindness, and peace. [*Hilkhot Shabbat* 2:1,3]

If, as Maimonides insists, the whole aim of the Torah is to bring about "mercy, loving-kindness, and peace," then holiness, be it of the Sabbath, land, or temple, must submit in situations of conflict to the sacredness of human life. The holiness of the Land of Israel does not hinge on whether we speak of "the occupied territories," "Judea and Samaria," or "the West Bank." If we are seriously concerned with the holiness of Israel and with God's indwelling in the land, then it is imperative that we ask what will happen to the moral character of the nation, what will become of our Judaic heritage if we dispossess or subjugate a vast population? How can we observe the Sabbath, whereby Jews bear witness to God as Creator of the universe, yet at the same time forget that Palestinians are human beings created in the image of God? How can we educate our children to imitate God's love for all His creatures and yet deny political freedom and national dignity to an entire people?

The Bible does not begin with the history of Abraham or with Israel's liberation struggle from Egypt, but with the story of God as the creator of all life. What Creation signifies for the understanding of our particular identity can be seen in the three benedictions recited at the Grace after Meals.

The first benediction addresses God as the creator and sustainer of all life. In the second, the Jew thanks God for the covenant, the Torah, and the land. The third expresses the yearning of the Jewish people for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the reestablishment of the kingdom of David. In arranging the benedictions in this order, the Halakhah teaches us that only after we acknowledge our solidarity with all of humanity is it appropriate to give thanks for our particular spiritual identity. The renewal of Jerusalem, the strengthening of our commitment to Torah, must flow from our deep awareness that all human beings are sustained by God's gracious love.

If we build our national life while ignoring the moral demands that come from belief in Creation, we significantly undermine our belief in the unity of the God of Creation and the convenantal Lord of history. This belief will best be manifested if both national communities can so

flourish in this land that the celebration by each of its particularity does not require the delegitimization of the presence of the other.

If we allow the God of Creation to channel our particular religious traditions, the future need not be buried by the past. We must never be discouraged by the obstacles encountered in our search for peace. The anger and bitterness of the past must not inhibit new thinking and bold initiatives. Our total commitment to resolve the tragic conflict with the Palestinians will be the finest expression of our loyalty to a tradition which seeks to unify solidarity with all of humanity and gratitude for the gift of Judaic particularity.

Living with Conflicting Values

In the past fifteen years, my thinking and teaching have focused almost exclusively on internal Jewish issues. It is easy to pray for the Ingathering of the Exiles, but can we live with that ingathering? Can we live with the fact that Jews today have no shared normative consensus about how we understand Jewish history and our own character as a nation? The very meaning of Zionism, of the establishment of the State of Israel, was the bold attempt to bring home a people whose members were in disagreement with each other. This was Zionism's fundamental courage—its belief that a national community could be forged although a national consensus was lacking.

The question central to my thinking, as a halakhic Jew in the Orthodox tradition, was how to appreciate Judaism in a way that allows for the flourishing of a variety of ideologies. Can I live as a Torah-observant Jew while knowing that there are many other Jews who have totally different views of what Jewish history could and should be?

There are, however, times when a new problem—or an old problem that has been lurking in the background—invades our consciousness in ways which do not allow us to return to everyday normalcy. For me as for many others in Israel, just that has now happened regarding our problem with the Palestinians.

This problem relates not only to the future physical existence of our society in Israel. Everything we value Jewishly, historically and spiritually, is at stake.

It is of such urgency, of such proportions, that it touches the very soul of the nation. Who we are as a people, what connection we have with our stories and our history—all will be decided by how we deal with the Palestinian question. What is at stake is the significance of our national renewal and our identity as Jews.

This is not only an Israeli issue; it is also world Jewry's concern. Therefore, it is not only people who vote in Israel who must be engaged

by it, but all who care about Jewish history, Jewish spirituality, and Israel's vision of the future.

There is a fundamental characteristic of a certain type of apologetic thinking that took place during our exile, in which Jewish theology or Jewish philosophy sought to find room for Jewish existence in non-Jewish environments. Traditionally, the way to find that room was to establish legitimization for Jews in the eyes of others. If Jews decided to be part of the surrounding world, they felt obliged to explain themselves in the other's categories. A German philosopher like Rosenzweig had to explain how Judaism fitted into Christianity. Hermann Cohen had to show that Judaism possesses a universalist ethic. If Jews preferred to live in the ghetto, on the other hand, then they did not have to speak a strange language and self-legitimization grew out of their own internal experience.

When Jews came home to their own land, one of the most refreshing things about Zionism and its quest for normalcy was that the need for self-justification ceased to be urgent. A Jew could say, "I do not have to justify my right to live and to be a people."

Coming home meant the end of apologetic thinking. It became enough to speak our own language, to have our own history, to read our own Bible. We could build our culture on our own story and allow our elemental passions to exist without justification.

We did not have to win the "Moral Man of the Year Award" by being a light unto the nations. Like any other nation, some of us were noble, some weak. It was so good just to be able to breathe free that in coming home we did not see that someone else was also there.

It is crucial to understand that in the Bible there is only one people's story. Where in the Book of Joshua do we find how the Canaanites or the Jebusites felt when the Children of Israel came into the land? Who ever spoke about what it meant to be a Canaanite? The only time we meet Ishmael or Esau is when they enter or leave the Jewish story. The Bible gives us a story of the world in which the history of the Jews is what excites God. He is like an enormously involved Jewish supreme being, even though in the beginning God was not Jewish. He began to be Jewish only when he met Abraham.

There are some brief passages in the Prophets on other people's history, but it is fundamentally a private story. Coming home to the biblical land, we inherited that biblical sensibility in which there is only one story. Unpreparedness to deal with the other is therefore deeply related to our elemental sense of coming home. It is easy for us to feel that the other is just invading our territory.

In Germany, Samson Raphael Hirsch interpreted "And you shall love

your neighbor as yourself" to include the non-Jew as well. In the Exile, neutral space, we could find room for the other without feeling that our own identity and integrity were being violated. The question is whether we can find room for the other within the context of our own intimate, passionate home. Does "my place" mean that he has no place? Does "his place" mean that I have no place? This is the true question, and the passions it unleashes are enormous.

The fact that the other, the Palestinian, also speaks as if there is only one story, and acts as if I am not here, makes it all the more complex and intense. We have a history of two peoples, each one living in its own story, unable to understand what it means for the other to be in this land. In the Bible, only one receives the paternal blessing. One is the blessed son; the other is the rejected son. There is no room for both Ishmael and Isaac. There is no room for both Esau and Jacob. There is only one blessing and only one son gets it.

Can there be any way to resolve this issue? Before we begin to deal with it, we have to appreciate the magnitude of the passions that this land unleashes, and reflect on how it feels for a people so long homeless to come home.

Nahmanides, Judah Halevi, and in our times Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik in *Kol Dodi Dofek*, speak of the desolate land waiting for its lover to return. The land cannot be inhabited by anyone who is not part of Israel, part of the Sinai covenant.

Nahmanides, for instance, bases one of his central concepts on his reading of Leviticus 18:25: "the land vomits out its inhabitants." This land cannot tolerate sin because it is the land where the God of the covenant lives. It can only be inhabited by Israel, and only when Israel does not stray in the manner of other nations. It has been desolate for a thousand years, waiting for its lover to return.

These are the passions that this land awakens. Unless they are understood, we cannot deal with the basic problem that Jews in Israel face today. We cannot talk about justice or utter moralisms like "Love your neighbor as yourself" unless we first empathize with the passion of a people who believe they and only they have redeemed this land from its desolation and therefore it is theirs in the deepest elemental sense.

I would like to distinguish between two forms of moral conflict. One is a conflict between good and evil. The question here is, Do we give in to passion, or can we overcome it? In response to the question "Who is the mighty?" the Mishnah says, he who can control his impulse—his *yetzer*. There is *yetzer ha-ra*, the instinct that leads to evil, and *yetzer tov*, the one that leads you to good. Judaism believes that you can win this

struggle through an act of will. *Yetzer tov* can conquer the *yetzer ha-ra* through a victory of will.

From a certain perspective, this is a simple conflict. It is a problem that requires determination and personal resources in order to be solved, but it is not confusing in terms of values. It does not touch the core of your value system. The question is merely, Are you weak or not? Can you overcome temptation or not?

However, there is another form of conflict in the Talmud, which is not one between evil and good, but between good and good. Examples of such conflicts are represented by various dilemmas. Does saving a life take precedence over keeping the Sabbath? If you, your father, and your teacher are captives, who has the right to be ransomed first? If you find objects lost by your father and your teacher, to whom do you return his lost object first? A more poignant variation asks, If you see that your father and your rabbi are poor, whom do you help first?

The issue here is not a firm will against eager passion but a conflict between two positive values, obliging us to evaluate the foundations of these values. Establishing priorities in this second kind of conflict requires analysis, reflection, and a sense of clarity, since this type of question touches upon the core of a whole value system.

Our conflict with the Palestinians is not an issue of good versus evil, where there is no uncertainty about the moral choice. The conflict involves two goods, two legitimate claims, which are mistaken in their narcissism but legitimate in their sense of justice and fairness. The first is justice, the dignity one accords to human beings and their collective history and culture. The second is survival, security, and self-preservation. The dilemma can be summarized as follows: How much can I risk survival for the sake of justice and how much am I allowed to give up for the sake of love?

I would like to offer the perspective of two teachers who might guide us in this conflict: Judah Halevi and Maimonides. For Halevi as for Nahmanides, the very meaning of the Jewish people is to bear witness to the concept of miracle in history. In Halevi's book *The Kuzari*, the rabbi is asked by the king, "Whom do you believe in?" The rabbi replies, "I believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." The king continues, "Why not say, 'I believe in the God who created heaven and earth?'" Basically, the king is asking, "Why not say you believe in the God of nature?" Halevi's answer is that the God of nature is the God of the philosophers. The God of the Jews is the God of history.

In the God of history, Halevi sees a God who is not enchained by the principle of necessity. He is the God who announces revolutions, who can take a slave people and offer them a new future. He is the God who

announces that through Israel He bears witness to the notion of radical surprise, radical innovation. Given that this is our God, the past does not restrict what we can expect from the future. Wisdom is not accustoming ourselves to necessity, as in the Greek stoic notion. Wisdom is living with the expectation of radical innovation.

Israel's future is open, an uncharted possibility. Who would have dreamed that a slave people would become the People of the Book? Israel is the bearer of that experience and therefore the major story for Jewish identity is Passover.

What do we love to do when we tell this story? As we dip our finger into the wine on Passover night, we count ten miracles. Then we begin to expand: "No, not ten. There were fifty. Not fifty, two hundred. Even two hundred and fifty." We are a people who love to tell stories like that of the rescue at Entebbe. Our need for miracle is in our very nature. Miracle embodies the notion of surprise, of hope.

In this context, what is God's name, for Halevi? God's name is *Ehyeh asher ehyeh*—"I will be what I will be." Israel's story is the source for revolutionary aspirations in history. Messianism is a Jewish innovation. It did not come from Plato and Aristotle. The Greeks gave us rigor and truth; they gave us the scientific understanding of nature. It was the prophets who gave us a dream which enabled us to believe that tomorrow could be radically different from yesterday.

For Halevi, this is the fundamental meaning of being a Jew, of Jewish nationhood, of "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the Land of Egypt." The Jews are the people that convey to the world the experience of miracle. That is their story and no other; not the story of truth, not the story of necessity. Their story is the parting of the sea—the miracle par excellence.

Therefore, the Jewish story requires a beginning. The Jews do not speak, as Aristotle does, of the world as a necessary reflection of the power of God. For Aristotle, the world is the necessary effect of God as the divine cause. The effect lives as long as the cause. Therefore, the world is eternal as the cause is eternal.

For Jews, the starting point is not eternal necessity but Creation. In the beginning was God's will, which produced the world out of chaos. If God's will is what drives the world, then history is an open drama. Herzl's Zionist vision had this attitude in common with the traditional Judaism that classical Zionism sought to supersede. His famous saying was "If you will it, it is no dream." Jews as a people believe in will. To want it all is a deep part of being Jewish.

The Creation story in the Bible is not told solely for its own sake. What is its point? According to Nahmanides, the point is that the

cosmos is in order when Israel is in its land. The Creation story is a prolegomenon, a preamble, to the Jewish claim of will. It is the underpinning of the belief in miracle. The Creation story enables us to say that when we live in this land, we live under divine protection. Israel is a people defined by divine and not by human causality.

So also when we consider our coming home today, the category that we use to explain it is miracle. I would say that the interpretative category of Zionism is miracle, but the success of Zionism is reality. We interpret what we do in the category of surprise and wonderment. When we think of Auschwitz, and then think of that decimated people coming home, we think of Ezekiel and the resurrection of the dry bones.

Given that sense of history and national identity, it is understandable that many Israelis should reject realism as a value. They are impervious to the arguments of Abba Eban or Shimon Peres, who are worrying about the demographic time bomb on the West Bank and Gaza. They are likely to agree with Israel Eldad or Hanan Porat, that if we had been realistic we would not have come here in the first place. If we had been realistic, we would not even have built Degania Alef. Who could have thought that the *yeshivah* boy could turn into a pilot? That is what Zionism brought about.

So, in Israel they use the word "Zionism" to mean "to do the impossible, not the realistic." To be a Jew is to believe in miracles. Forget demography and other difficulties. With will power, all is in our hands. It means that there is no causal principle outside our own will, that Aristotle's principle of causality has no relationship to Jewish political self-understanding. This land breathes with the power of will. If we give up believing in will, we give up everything, because that is the Jewish story.

That is the legacy of Halevi and Nahmanides. Even Marxist visions of utopia come from this deep perception of will, of a God who says "I will be." That is the passion deep in the soul of the Zionist revolution, both religious and nonreligious.

If this were the only tradition that could unlock our memory, the only interpretative key for Jewish self-understanding, I would be deeply pessimistic. A theology of will creates political narcissism, a private story in which reality becomes the outgrowth of an internal decision. What is, is what I claim must be. Therefore, nature, the other, the external world, do not channel or bridle the inner passion of my own will.

However, there is another voice in our tradition, that of a great teacher who passionately hated dependency on miracles. Every time

he read about a miracle in the Bible, he sought a natural explanation. This is the voice of Maimonides. In contrast to Halevi, Maimonides believed that the story of Creation was not meant to teach the principle of will; rather, Creation was only a founding catalytic moment to be absorbed by the principle of necessity.

Maimonides said that Judaism requires only the belief that the world started, whereas we could believe in the eternity of the world after Creation. It may seem strange to discuss medieval metaphysics in the context of our problems in Israel today, but I hope Maimonides' relevance will soon be clear. In his eyes, the causal structure of the ordered patterns of reality does not vitiate, violate, or minimize the passion of his love for God. On the contrary, Maimonides saw the presence of God not in surprises but in principles of order and necessity. For Maimonides, if you lose nature, you lose God.

Maimonides does not teach about miracle, but about the importance of causal necessity, of the natural order, of respecting the given world. In other words, reality is not the product of our will. Reality imposes itself on our consciousness. Who, then, is God?

For Halevi, when God introduced Abraham into the covenant, it is as if He told him, "Forget all you learned about philosophy. Now you are meeting the God of the covenant." For Maimonides, Abraham found God through philosophical reflection on nature. At the age of forty, Abraham found God by understanding the mystery of the cosmos. Abraham is not the announcer of miracle; rather, he announces that God is the principle of order and wisdom and not the principle of will. It is not miracle that tells you that there is a God, but predictability, causal necessity, order. Therefore, the God of Maimonides is also *Ehyeh asher ehyeh*, but understood as "I am that I am: I am the principle of necessity."

The big question for Maimonides was, What are the limits of necessity? How much room is there for freedom in this world? What do the Jewish people bear witness to? What is their task? It is not to announce miracle in the world. Their central task, as Maimonides sees it, is to do battle against every form of idolatry. What infuses the passion of the *Guide of the Perplexed* is Moses announcing to a people, "Your task is to fight the false gods of the world. Your task is to fight against fantasy." The priests of idol worship, what were they? They played on human weakness. They exploited people who were frightened of their children dying. The priests told them, "Do this, and your children will live." All paganism thrives on human vulnerability and fear, on the manipulation of human weakness.

Therefore, Israel's task, for Maimonides, is not to allow human

beings to fall prey to their fears, to their longing for cheap solutions. God is not a product to satisfy fantasy, to open up a world in which all is possible, but rather, God ensures that within the principle of necessity, there is room for freedom and creativity. Within the principle of limit, there is ample room for dignity and achievement.

Maimonides' messianism is not utopian but, rather, fundamentally rooted in an appreciation of reality. When asked why the Second Temple was destroyed, he answered in a letter: it was because Jews were reading astrology books and forgetting to learn the art of war. Fantasy is the source of idolatry because fantasy removes the principle of limit. Losing the principle of limit, we lose the principle of reality, and when we lose the principle of reality, God becomes a figment of our own imagination and our own needs.

Who is Israel? For Maimonides, Israel is the people that tells the world that dreams must be anchored in what is humanly feasible. For we can dream even though remaining tied to reality.

What does it mean to be a Jewish nation? It does not mean we announce utopia or we say that nothing in the past limits the future. The meaning of being a Jewish nation is to declare war against the distortion of the imagination, against fantasy, against idolatry. We must be the people that bears witness to the futility of the idolatrous quest.

For Maimonides, Creation is not the story of how God gave the Jews the land; Creation is what takes the Jews out of their own story and places them in a cosmic drama. The Bible begins with Creation in order to teach us that God is not Jewish, that there is a world which has a drama and a dignity not defined by the Jewish story. Halevi makes the creation narrative a Jewish historical story. Maimonides views it instead as a corrective, as a larger cosmic filter placing limits upon our private story.

What does this mean for today? I shall try to clarify how I believe we must approach the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis. The events of the last months have forced us to acknowledge a nation in revolt rather than individuals in revolt. Rabbi Druckman argues that the "disturbances" are the work of a few rabble-rousers. This view assumes that on the other side there is not an organized national will because in the Jewish story the land has one nation. People who share Druckman's views can allow individual Palestinians to be here but not a Palestinian nation. The first question for us to face is, Whom do we see facing us—individual Palestinians or a people with a national will seeking political freedom and political sovereignty?

Our first step toward recovering our sense of reality is to recognize that what we see is a nation. The second question is then, Can this

home to which we have returned contain another nation? In terms of our own history, the land has one nation, the God of history elects one people. If there is no corrective to this vision of history, then the ultimate resolution is total war. If there is only one way or people that mediates the God of history, then Jerusalem will be a city in flames.

What is the thrust of the idea of Creation, how does it filter our historical memories? Does the God of Creation enable us to understand ours as one possible story, but not the only one? Does the God of revelation announce an exclusive truth or one particular way? Is Israel the bearer of Halevi's principle of miracle, or is it the bearer of the rejection of idolatry and of the claim to the *only* story?

For Maimonides, the details of history are not important. What counts is the integrity of a people who are committed to the principle of reality, committed to wage war on fantasy and on the rejection of the principle of limit. Can this understanding of Creation enter into our story, so that room can be made for the Palestinians to be here as a nation? Can we feel the joy of our story, the joy of being home, knowing that another nation also feels that this is its home?

We have to deal with this problem in the manner of Hillel. Why, according to the rabbis, is the Halakhah according to Hillel? Because whenever he taught, he brought the words of Shammai, his rival, first. Accordingly, those of us who seek to find a way with the Palestinians have first to understand the passion of Gush Emunim and not call them Fascists or Nazis. We must not be seduced by integrity as a validation of a principle. The great mistake of existentialism was to think that if something is sincere, it is right. Sincerity is not a criterion for content.

We shall not attain reconciliation unless we can explain the position of those who disagree with us. We have to understand the elemental passions that feed their love for this land, and only then argue with their position and offer an alternative. We cannot ignore that they are speaking out of a definite strand in the Jewish tradition. We have to understand the passion of those who think that there is only one people in this land. By admitting their passions, we can argue constructively with them. By denying them, we risk being haunted by them. We stop listening to each other and substitute name-calling for dialogue. If we continue to do this, total chaos will ensue.

When there is a conflict of values between a positive and a negative commandment, the Talmud teaches that the positive commandment takes precedence over the negative. Nahmanides explains that a positive commandment is grounded in love, while a negative commandment is grounded in fear. Abstention from wrongdoing derives from fear of punishment, fear of God. Doing something good grows out of love.

A positive commandment takes precedence over a negative one because love is mightier than fear.

In the conflict with the Palestinians, there is a conflict of two values. Although it may sound romantic, I believe that love can make room for the other in a way that allows us to retain our own identity without feeling threatened by the other.

The meaning of Israel, of Zionism, is the affirmation of Jewish identity. When Jews sought justice in exile, they felt they had to deny their Jewishness. When admitting the other's moral claim, they felt they had to give up their identity.

Given this situation, it is understandable that people in Israel often say, "Liberalism, caring constantly about others, is a *galut* (exile) mentality. If I allow concern for the other too much weight, I commit suicide as a Jew. When Jews become overly moral, they lose their healthy instinct for survival. This was true for German Jews, Russian Jews, and it is true for North American Jews."

The beauty of being in Jerusalem is that we do not have to make this choice. Being at home, we allow elemental passions to surface. That is why we sometimes see violent behavior by people who feel threatened and think they are losing their home. When they think they are losing their home, they act in ways which are often alien to our most cherished values. But must they behave thus, or is there an alternative?

I believe and hope deeply that the instinct of our people in this land can be guided by the spirit of Maimonides. I believe that we neither seek nor require the degradation of a whole nation. We can live as lovers of God and Torah, which means making room for the other without negating our own dignity. In embracing the Palestinians, we show the power of love to allow another story into our reality. It is to show that our story has room for them because it is defined not by fear but by love. It shows that we have not come home because we are frightened by the world, that it is not fear that keeps us here, but the love of our own story, the love of our own history, the joy of recreating our own culture.

It is then not the fear of Hitler that nurtures us. During the war in Lebanon, Prime Minister Begin said, "Nine hundred thousand troops in twenty-four hours. A ghetto people! Look what we have become." We do not need to mass nine hundred thousand troops in order to compensate for the Warsaw ghetto. We do not need to work through the horrors of the Holocaust to find meaning here. If fear and terror control our reality, then ultimately there is no room for the other.

Of course, I do not call for a love that leads to national suicide, as was the case in Russia and Germany, where we did not see the reality

of evil. Therefore, we have to make room for the Palestinians on the clear condition that they understand that we will not allow them to jeopardize our security. We will not interpret Arafat sophistically or mystically. We need straight answers when we ask, Do you see me or do you hope I disappear? Not only do you see me, but do you recognize that I never left here?

The nightmare can only be healed by Palestinian voices that will say, with pristine clarity, that they are willing to give up military power for political dignity. If they are prepared to do that, then we can say that there can be room in this land for both our story and theirs. We can make room for the Palestinians when they give up all thoughts of our disappearance. That is the condition, the *sine qua non*, of our ability to be open to a Palestinian national entity. Security, however, must not be confused with political control.

What if the Palestinians do not say that they are willing to give up military power for political dignity? Then, I am afraid, the viewpoint of our hawks will win. The Palestinians have to understand that if they themselves cannot change, Israel cannot heal its own trauma. We will only be able to find room for love in our story if they, too, make a major change. Monologues among ourselves only create fears.

Therefore, the time has come for another voice, the Palestinian voice, to speak with great clarity and strength. If it does not, then I fear greatly what will be in this society. It will tax all the strength of what is, I believe, the most passionate and vigorous democracy in the world. It is amazing that in our country, which has always been under constant threat of war, there is such public debate and discussion and arguments and disagreements.

There will be no future in the Middle East if we do not have new interpretative keys to help make sense of our past. The past will come back to haunt us and may possibly fall into the hands of a Kahane or a Levinger. There will be no future in our homecoming unless we unlock our memories in a new way.

Gush Emunim echoes a voice in the tradition, but it is not the only voice. I have presented a perspective showing that there is room within Jewish theological thinking for multiple voices to be drawn from the tradition. Halevi and Maimonides give us different approaches to Jewish memory. Our past has to be rethought, reevaluated, and not given over to one group.

The keys we use to open up our past and the way in which we make sense of our stories are today life and death matters. Unless we reinterpret the Torah, we will choke with each other's dogmatism. Torah is open to creative possibilities and the last chapter has not yet been writ-

ten. That is the meaning of oral tradition in Judaism. We never live by the literal word alone. We live by a word that is open and reinterpreted and recreated.

As we face the Palestinians, everything that we were in Jewish history calls for reinterpretation. We cannot yield up our past to those who see no way to find room for another people. We must go back into our memory, open up our source books. Only then can we find our way.