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Citizen and Stranger: Ethnic Others in Our Communities

Background Reading

1. David Hartman, *Conflicting Visions: Spiritual Possibilities of Modern Israel*
2. Yossi Klein-Halevi, "The Asymmetry of Pity," *Best Jewish Writing* 2002, pp. 243-254

CONFLICTING VISIONS

SPIRITUAL POSSIBILITIES OF
MODERN ISRAEL

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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 covenantal 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 ground 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.

BEST JEWISH WRITING 2002

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THE ASYMMETRY OF PITY

Yossi Klein Halevi

MY MOST INSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATION on the Middle East conflict was not with a politician or a journalist but with a soft-spoken Palestinian Anglican minister named Naim Ateek, whose group, Sabeel, promotes a Palestinian version of liberation theology. During a long and friendly talk about two years ago, we agreed on the need for a “dialogue of the heart,” as opposed to a strictly functional approach to peace between our peoples. In that spirit, I acknowledged that we Israelis should formally concede the wrongs we had committed against the Palestinians. Then I asked him whether he was prepared to offer a reciprocal gesture, a confession of Palestinian moral flaws. Both sides, after all, had amply wronged each other during our hundred-year war. The Palestinian leadership had collaborated with the Nazis and rejected the 1947 UN partition plan and then led the international campaign to delegitimize Israel that threatened our post-Holocaust reconstruction. What was Reverend Ateek prepared to do to reassure my people that it was safe to withdraw back to the narrow borders of pre-1967 Israel and voluntarily make ourselves vulnerable in one of the least stable and tolerant regions of the world?

“We don’t have to do anything at all to reassure you,” he said. He offered this historical analogy: when David Ben-Gurion and Konrad Adenauer negotiated the German-Israeli reparations agreement in the early 1950s, the Israeli prime minister was hardly expected to offer the German chancellor concessions or psychological reassurances. The Germans had

been the murderers, the Jews the victims, and all that remained to be negotiated was the extent of indemnity.

"So we are your Nazis?" I asked.

"Now you've understood," he replied, and smiled.

I have thought often of that conversation since the collapse last fall of any pretense of a mutual process of reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis. With disarming sincerity, Reverend Ateek offered the most cogent explanation I had encountered for why the Oslo peace process never had a chance to succeed.

From the start, Palestinian-Israeli peacemaking was burdened by asymmetry. The gap between Israeli power and Palestinian powerlessness was translated into a political process that required tangible Israeli concessions—reversible only through war—in exchange for Palestinian promises of peace: in essence, land for words. But the deepest and most intractable asymmetry has been psychological: it has been an asymmetry of pity or, more precisely, of self-pity. The Palestinians, as losers of the conflict, continue to see themselves solely as victims, without guilt for helping maintain the conflict or responsibility for helping to end it; indeed, for many Palestinians, the war is not over borders but absolute justice, a battle between good and evil. Because history has been kinder to them, Israelis can afford to concede complexity and, indeed, the Israeli mainstream now perceives the conflict as a competition between two legitimate national movements over the same tortured strip of land. Aside from the hard-right minority, most Israelis acknowledge that both sides share rights and wrongs.

Zionism's Victory over Jewish Self-Pity

The first generation of Israelis after statehood resembled Palestinians today in their simplistic view of the struggle over the land as an absolutist moral conflict. In every generation, as the Passover Haggadah puts it, a new enemy rises to destroy the Jews and, for most Israelis, this was the Arabs' turn. A popular Yiddish pun emphasized the point: Hitler fell into the water, it went, and emerged *nasser*—Yiddish for "wet" and a reference to Egypt's president, Gamal Abdul Nasser, Israel's great antagonist during its formative years.

Only gradually did Israelis begin to see the conflict with the Palestinians and the Arab world generally as a fundamental break from the pattern of Jewish history—that Zionism's hard gift to the Jews was to restore to us our collective free will, transform us from passive victims of fate to active shapers of our own destiny, responsible for the consequences of our decisions. A key turning point was the November 1977 visit of Anwar

Sadat to Israel. Remarkably, a mere four years after Egypt's surprise attack against Israel on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year, Sadat was welcomed as a hero in the streets of Jerusalem. The Israeli notion of the Arab world as an impenetrable wall of hostility began to change. So, too, Israeli certainty about the justness of its cause was subtly challenged: many Israelis, including Ehud Barak, began to suspect that Israel could have prevented the 1973 Yom Kippur War had it agreed to withdraw from the Sinai in the early 1970s. The subsequent invasion of Lebanon in 1982, followed in late 1987 by the first intifada, reinforced for Israelis the moral ambiguity of the Middle East conflict.

At the same time, Israel's sense of siege began to ease. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the repeal of the UN "Zionism is racism" resolution, the post-Gulf War optimism in the Middle East, the mass Russian immigration and resulting Israeli prosperity—all reinforced the same message that Israel had entered a new era and was about to fulfill the long-deferred Zionist promise of Jewish normalization. Finally, a new generation of native-born Israelis that could take Jewish sovereignty for granted no longer saw itself as living in the pathology of Jewish history but in a new Israeli reality.

Indeed, young Israelis became so distanced from the traumas of exile that the Israeli Ministry of Education felt impelled in the 1990s to introduce pilgrimages to Nazi death camps in Poland for high school students, as an emotional crash course in Jewish history. In politics, too, the Holocaust lost its centrality: only the hard Right and the ultra-Orthodox continued to cite the genocide of European Jewry as a potentially recurring threat. Whereas former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin once routinely invoked the Nazi era—and even publicly compared himself, during the invasion of Lebanon, to an Allied commander closing in on Hitler's bunker—his equally right-wing politician son, Benny, confined his traumas to the Middle East. Thanks largely to the effects of Israeli sovereignty on the Jewish psyche, a wound that should have taken generations to heal began to recede into history. By the time of the Oslo agreement in September 1993, a majority of Israelis had been weaned from the self-defensiveness of the victim and educated in the moral dilemmas of the conqueror.

The Weight of Palestinian Self-Pity

It would be unrealistic to expect a similar evolution among Palestinians who, after all, lack fifty years of sovereignty to compensate for their historical trauma. The Palestinians are at a different stage of their national

development, resembling Israel in its early years, celebrating nationalism and self-sacrifice and mistrusting moral complexity as weakness. Yet that psychological gap between Israelis and Palestinians was precisely Oslo's great structural flaw. The problem with the Oslo process, as Ariel Sharon has noted, was not its goals but its timetable, its lack of ample "process." Oslo's implicit expectation was that Israel would return to approximately the June 1967 borders after a mere seven years of tenuous relations with the Palestinian entity, well before the Palestinians could be emotionally prepared to offer Israelis even the most minimal sense of safety and acceptance in the region.

On the Israeli side, a vigorous and successful effort was made by Labor Party leaders to wean the public from its emotional attachment to the biblical borders of "greater Israel." Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres repeatedly told the Israeli people that the dream of greater Israel was unrealistic and self-destructive. That message was reinforced by the Israeli media, often by what we journalists chose to omit as much as to publish. I recall, for example, reading an account in the *Jerusalem Post's* media column, written by right-wing commentator David Bar-Ilan, just after the White House handshake of September 1993. The column reported on a speech delivered by Yasser Arafat in Amman in which the Palestinian chairman noted that by signing the Oslo Accords he was merely implementing the "stages" policy—that is, the 1974 PLO decision to accept whatever territory Israel evacuated and continue struggling until the demise of the Jewish state. My instinctive reaction was that the account must be exaggerated: Bar-Ilan, after all, was a right-wing ideologue. Despite the devastating implications of that speech, I did not bother checking whether Bar-Ilan's report was accurate, precisely because I feared that it might be. Nor did I want to be tainted by association with the right-wing opposition. That combination of wishful thinking and cowardice characterized most Israeli journalists, at least in the early years of the Oslo process.

In contrast with Israel's contortionist efforts to adapt to Oslo's false promise, no attempt was made by Palestinian leaders to accommodate the Jewish state in their people's mental map of the Middle East. Indeed, the self-justifying myths of the Palestinians have only become more entrenched since Oslo. The Palestinian people are routinely told by their controlled media that the temple never existed on the Temple Mount, that the biblical stories did not occur in Israel/Palestine, and even that the Holocaust is a lie. The consistent message is that the Palestinians are victims of a false Jewish narrative.

Rather than challenging the Palestinians' wholesale expropriation of justice and truth, the international community has encouraged their self-

perception as innocent victims of the Middle East conflict. Every year on May 15, as Palestinians violently mark the *nakba*, or tragedy, of 1948, much of the world's media dutifully replays the Palestinian version of that event. Few journalists challenge Palestinian spokesmen with the fact that Arab rejectionism was at least partly responsible for their people's uprooting and occupation. Indulging that sense of blameless victimization has only reinforced the Palestinian inability to assume the role of equal partner in negotiations and take responsibility for helping to end the conflict. As Naim Ateek put it, the Palestinians' only obligation to peacemaking is to show up and receive concessions. The Palestinian leadership has felt no moral obligation to fulfill its stated commitments under Oslo—such as curbing terrorism and ending incitement or even the straightforward matter of revoking the Palestinian Covenant that calls for the destruction of Israel. (To this day it is uncertain whether the Palestinians have legally revoked the covenant, and their deliberately created ambiguity has negated any positive impact its revocation may have had on the Palestinian psyche.)

The apologetics offered by much of the international community—and by part of the Israeli Left—for Arafat's violent rejection of Barak's peace offer have reinforced the pathological tendencies of Palestinian self-pity. Especially absurd has been the claim that Barak's settlement-building was a sign of bad faith that undermined Arafat's trust in the process. Nearly all the housing starts begun under Barak were concentrated in areas intended to become settlement blocs—whose permanence the Palestinians accepted during negotiations at Camp David. According to Barak's chief negotiator with the Palestinians, Gilad Sher, settlements—whose total built areas cover a mere 1.5 percent of the West Bank—were not even among the five major issues of disagreement during the Camp David negotiations. Instead, the major issues were the Palestinian insistence that Israel assume full moral blame for the flight of the refugees in 1948 (ignoring the Arab world's invasion of Israel that preceded the refugee crisis) and the Palestinian refusal to acknowledge any Jewish connection to the Temple Mount, Judaism's holiest site.

When confronted with the continued ideological intransigence of the Palestinians, the Israeli left-wing retort was invariably a sarcastic dismissal: "We don't expect them to become Zionists." Even as it successfully compelled a reluctant Israeli public to confront at least some truths of the Palestinian narrative, the Left refused to demand any reciprocity from its Palestinian partner. In so doing, the Left ignored its own argument: that without accommodating the other's narrative, peace would be impossible.

The Israeli Left committed one more fatal tactical mistake: it divorced itself emotionally from Judea and Samaria, even as the Palestinians reinforced their emotional claim to pre-1967 Israel. The moral basis for partition of Israel/Palestine is that two peoples, profoundly rooted in the entirety of the land, must each sacrifice part of its legitimate claim to accommodate the legitimate claim of its rival. But by tacitly rejecting even a theoretical Israeli right to Judea and Samaria, the Left created a moral imbalance: the Palestinians were offering a traumatic concession by ceding parts of historic Palestine, whereas Israel was merely restoring occupied—that is, stolen—land. That imbalance reinforced the Palestinians' refusal to compromise on the 1967 borders, even though no independent Palestinian state had ever existed on any part of the land.

The success of Oslo was predicated on the Palestinians' ability to convince Israelis to trust them enough to empower them. But soon after the White House signing, increasing numbers of Israelis began to suspect they had been deliberately deceived. That process accelerated with Arafat's 1995 speech in a Johannesburg mosque, in which he compared Oslo to a cease-fire the Prophet Muhammad signed with an Arabian tribe he later destroyed. By dismissing that speech as mere rhetoric intended to appease domestic opposition, the Israeli Left made a fatal miscalculation of its devastating effect on the Israeli public. Then came the wave of suicide bombings in early 1996, which further eroded Oslo's credibility among even centrist Israelis and provided a link between Arafat's incitement and intensified terrorism.

The inevitable result was a revolt by the Israeli majority that had initially welcomed the Oslo accords and that had been willing to make far-reaching concessions for genuine peace. The first revolt occurred in 1996, with the election of Benjamin Netanyahu. Apologists for the Palestinians insist that Israel under Netanyahu helped destroy the Oslo process by resuming massive settlement-building, largely frozen under Rabin, thereby eroding Palestinian trust in Israeli intentions. That argument ignores the fact that the election of Netanyahu was a self-inflicted Palestinian wound—a direct result of Arafat's refusal to fulfill his most minimal obligations under the Oslo accords. The erratic voting pattern of the Israeli public throughout the Oslo process—repeatedly veering between Left and Right, from Yitzhak Rabin to Benjamin Netanyahu to Ehud Barak to Ariel Sharon—reflected both the growing skepticism of Israelis and their reluctance to repudiate the hopes raised by Oslo. Only with the landslide election of Sharon, who had warned for decades against empowering the PLO, did the Israeli people deliver its definitive judgment on the Oslo process as one of the gravest mistakes in the history of Israel.

Unchanged Palestinian Goals

By refusing to “partition” justice and insisting that historical right belongs exclusively to them, the Palestinians have preempted the need, in their minds, to revise their long-term goal of undoing the “injustice” of Israel’s existence. Indeed, when Palestinian leaders speak of a “just and lasting peace,” it is now clear that they mean, in the long term, peace without a Jewish state. Mainstream Palestinian leaders no longer invoke the old crude slogan of throwing the Jews into the sea. Instead, the scenario has become more complex, a gradual eroding of Israel that includes undermining its will to fight and to believe in itself; loss of territorial intactness; a compromising of its sovereignty via international commissions, observers, and “peacekeepers”; increased radicalization of Arab Israelis, leading to demands for “autonomy” and even the secession of those parts of the Galilee and the Negev where Arabs could soon form a majority.

Indeed, the key element in the “stages” plan is the massive return—both through Israeli consent and illegal infiltration—of embittered and unassimilable Palestinian refugees to pre-1967 Israel. By refusing to concede the “right of return,” the Palestinian leadership belies its claim that it has recognized Israel in its pre-1967 borders. For Palestinians, the great crime of Zionism was artificially transforming the Jews into a majority in any part of Israel/Palestine—through Jewish immigration (“colonization”) and Arab expulsion and flight. In a stunning speech to Arab diplomats in Stockholm in 1996, Arafat laid out his vision of undoing the Jewish majority even within pre-1967 Israel. By overwhelming the land with refugees and expropriating water and other resources, as well as turning a blind eye to ongoing Palestinian terrorism, Arafat would ensure that a large part of the Israeli middle class would emigrate in despair to the west. The remaining Jews would be so disoriented and demoralized by the departure of Israel’s most talented citizens that the state would eventually collapse from within.

That this was no mad fantasy on Arafat’s part but an accurate reflection of mainstream Palestinian strategy was confirmed by the late Faisal Husseini, long considered by the Israeli peace camp to be among the most pragmatic Palestinian leaders. In an interview with the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Arabi*, Husseini made the remarkable admission that the Oslo process was a “Trojan horse.” He explained: “When we are asking all the Palestinian forces and factions to look at the Oslo Agreement and at other agreements as ‘temporary’ procedures, or phased goals, this means that we are ambushing the Israelis and cheating them.” The goal, he concluded, was “the liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea”—that

is, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. Though it appears that *Al-Arabi's* claim that its interview with Husseini was the "last" before his death in June is false, the veracity of its substance should not be doubted; Husseini made similar statements in a meeting with Lebanese lawyers in Beirut last March.

In a private conversation I held about two years ago in Gaza with the head of one of the dozen or so Palestinian security services established by Arafat, I was offered a benign vision of that dream of Israel's demise: "This land is too small to sustain two states," explained the commander. "When the refugees return, there won't be enough resources and we will be forced to create one state—a beautiful country that will show the world how Muslims and Jews can coexist, just like in the days of Muslim Spain." That historical model, of course, is based on a Muslim sovereign majority and a dependent Jewish minority.

It is hardly coincidence, too, that the model most invoked by Arafat for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is South Africa. Israeli left-wingers misinterpreted that constant reference to South Africa as proof that the PLO leadership had embraced peaceful reconciliation. In fact, what most appeals to Palestinian leaders in the South African precedent is the transition from minority to majority rule. Though the Jews constitute a slim majority in the whole of Israel/Palestine and an overwhelming majority within the pre-1967 borders, Palestinian leaders believe that this is a temporary aberration. When the refugees begin returning (and Jews begin leaving), the "natural" majority will reemerge, and the Jewish minority, like the white South African minority, will then be compelled to negotiate the terms of its own surrender. This is why Nabil Sha'ath, the PA minister of planning and international cooperation, told a Washington audience on June 21 that the January 2001 Taba negotiations "witnessed significant progress." Of what did that progress consist? "A conceptual breakthrough on the issue of refugees and the right of return," said Sha'ath, who described Israeli negotiators as acknowledging that "Israel was responsible for the initiation of the refugee problem" and as agreeing that "the Palestinians had a right to return to both Israel and Palestine" (quoted from a rapporteur's summary of Sha'ath's remarks to a policy forum of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 21, 2001).

Israel after Oslo

There certainly exist Palestinians capable of accommodating the Israeli narrative into their understanding of the conflict. Some of them are my friends and colleagues—a Palestinian Israeli academic who welcomes Is-

rael's existence as essential for Middle Eastern evolution, a West Bank sheikh who believes it is God's will that the Jews returned to this land, a former leader of the first intifada who has come to realize that Zionism "wasn't just a form of colonialism but the return of a people home." Understandably, it is easiest for Palestinian citizens of Israel to reconcile with Israel, more difficult for Palestinians in the territories, and more difficult still for Palestinian refugees in the diaspora. The tragedy of the Oslo Accords was to impose on West Bank Palestinians—with whom Israel's conflict is potentially territorial rather than existential—the revolutionary leadership of the diaspora, which represents the Palestinian grievance of 1948; that is, the very existence of a Jewish state. The effect has been to suppress those Palestinian voices advocating genuine reconciliation. Even much of the Israeli Left today concedes that Israel gambled on the wrong man in mortgaging the peace process to Yasser Arafat. Many other Israelis would extend that critique to include the entire PLO-Tunis leadership. Israel has empowered a Palestinian leadership that is unwilling to revise its morally exclusionist view of the conflict. Genuine peace is impossible when one partner considers the other's very existence illegitimate.

The growing tendency among Palestinians and Arabs generally to view the Middle East conflict as a battle between good and evil has led to an outbreak of crude Jew-hatred, on both the official and mass levels, unprecedented since Europe in the early 1940s. By insisting that Israel's very founding is immoral, much of the Arab world inevitably finds itself aligned with classical anti-Semitism, which considered Jewish existence itself a crime. The state-controlled Egyptian media has revived the medieval blood libel and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Official newspapers in Syria, Lebanon, and in the Palestinian Authority deny that the Holocaust happened; indeed, Arab countries are the only places in the world where Holocaust denial enjoys mainstream credibility. Ahmad Ragab, a columnist for the Egyptian government-sponsored newspaper, *Al-Akhbar*, disagreed with the growing Holocaust revisionism: he noted that the Holocaust did indeed happen, and he expressed his gratitude to Hitler—"although we do have a complaint against him, for his revenge on [the Jews] was not enough." A recent hit on Egyptian radio was called "I Hate Israel"—and the state censor boasted that he inserted the title line into the song.

Though largely ignored by the international community, this growing chorus of hatred has reinforced the tendency of the Israeli mainstream to once again view the Arab world as genocidally minded. Holocaust terminology has seeped back into Israeli discourse, emerging from unlikely sources. In a recent letter of political contrition written by former left-wing

activist Edna Shabbtai to her friend, right-wing activist Geula Cohen, Shabbtai invoked the Holocaust in her call for a war against the Palestinian Authority: "We need to read again the poster that [partisan leader] Abba Kovner directed at the Jews of Lithuania in 1942: 'Jews! Don't go like sheep to the slaughter.'"

Despite the growing sense among Israelis that we have slipped back into the pathology of Jewish history, Israeli society has not reverted to a simplistic moral understanding of the roots of the Middle East conflict. Most Israelis still perceive the conflict as being fought between two legitimate national movements; if a majority were convinced that a credible partner had emerged on the other side, they would opt, even now, for partition. While sympathy for the settlers under attack has grown, there has been no increase in political support for their annexationist agenda. Israel has repudiated the illusions of the Left, but it has hardly returned to the equally fantastic alternative of the annexationist Right. Indeed, most Israelis would probably agree that, together, both ideological camps share responsibility for the disaster—the Right, by inserting armed Jewish fanatics into Palestinian population centers; the Left, by empowering a Palestinian terrorist army on the border of Jewish population centers. Together, Right and Left have created the conditions for apocalypse in the territories.

In this atmosphere, the option that increasingly appeals to Israelis is unilateral withdrawal—itsself an expression of despair in both greater Israel and a negotiated peace. The advantages of unilateral withdrawal would be to extricate us from a pathological process that ties us to a partner whose goal is our destruction, and to allow us to build a fence along borders we ourselves determine as essential for Israel's security. Unilateral withdrawal would grant the Palestinians sovereignty over most of the territories, but preserve Israeli rule over areas of dense settlement, the strategically vital Jordan Valley and, most crucially, over united Jerusalem. The notion of "sharing" Jerusalem with a violent and expansionist Palestinian Authority is now seen by most Israelis—even by many who in principle are prepared to share sovereignty—as an intolerable security risk that would almost certainly lead to the dismemberment of the city. The main disadvantage of unilateral withdrawal would be to magnify the impression created by Israel's hasty retreat from Lebanon—signaling the Arab world and especially the Palestinians that Israel is on the run, thereby inviting further violence and increasing the possibility of regional war.

In theory, only a national unity government—enjoying overwhelming public support and headed by Ariel Sharon, who built most of the settlements—could dare implement a unilateral withdrawal, necessitating

the traumatic uprooting of dozens of Jewish communities embedded deep in the West Bank and populated by the most ideologically committed settlers. In practice, though, Sharon has repeatedly vowed not to initiate any move requiring the massive uprooting of Jews from their homes, and he should be taken at his word. True, there is the Yamit precedent—when Sharon, as minister of agriculture in Menachem Begin's government in 1982, bulldozed the Sinai town of Yamit as part of Israel's withdrawal from Sinai. But Sinai's historical, religious, and especially strategic significance for Israelis cannot be compared to that of Judea and Samaria. Yamit existed for barely eight years; by contrast, the West Bank settlements have already produced a second generation of native Judeans and Samaritans.

Moreover, Sharon has repeatedly dismissed separation as an illusion: Jews and Arabs, he believes, are too economically and even geographically entwined. Finally, Sharon has since expressed regret for destroying Yamit: during a pre-election interview I conducted with him, he noted that Israel should have withdrawn to the international border in Sinai only in exchange for genuine peace, while in practice it received only an extended cease-fire. He will almost certainly continue to reject the notion of unilateral withdrawal from Judea and Samaria without a negotiated peace—inconceivable in the foreseeable future.

Still, if the current conflict with the Palestinians deepens and widens into regional war, pressure from within Israeli society and especially the army could induce Sharon to invoke the precedent of 1948, when some isolated and besieged settlements were evacuated. As hatred and self-righteousness increasingly determine the Arab agenda, the ground is being prepared for that scenario.