

# S A P I R

A JOURNAL OF JEWISH CONVERSATIONS

THE ISSUE ON

## ZIONISM



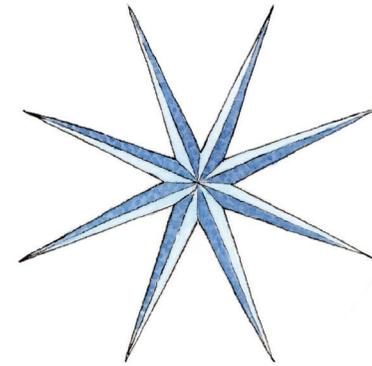
*Volume Five*



*Spring 2022*

*And they saw the God of Israel:  
Under His feet there was the  
likeness of a pavement of  
sapphire, like the very sky  
for purity.*

—Exodus 24:10



# S A P I R

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Cover portrait depicts Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), the father of modern political Zionism.

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# Editor's Note



WITH OUR FIFTH ISSUE, *Zionism*, we launch our second year of SAPIR. The response to our first issues has been dramatic. More than anything else, we have heard from readers an appreciation for our commitment to pushing the envelope, touching the third rail, giving voice to provocative views that change the nature of Jewish communal conversations. We have often heard a version of: “I don’t agree with everything in this piece, but I’m glad you’ve published it. It’s pushed me to think differently, to clarify my positions, to question my assumptions.”

There is a broader context here. From the editorial pages of the *New York Times* to those of the *Wall Street Journal*, Americans of different partisan colors agree that there is a free-speech crisis in the United States. For the most part, the crisis is not yet a legal and political one, though there are worrying instances of censorship at the state and local level.

But there’s little doubt that there is a free-speech crisis in our cultural and social life. Survey after survey shows that people are afraid to speak their mind, lest they invite social ostracism

or professional cancellation. A growing list of topics remains all but undiscussable in what counts as polite company. Social-media companies and private universities use their immunity from the First Amendment to shut down speech they dislike, often in the Orwellian name of combating “misinformation.”

The crisis is also personal. Many of us—including many who profess a belief in the value of free speech—can be quick to take personal offense at what is intended only as intellectual provocation. How an argument makes us *feel* is often taken as evidence of its validity or lack thereof. Instead of delighting in the contest of ideas, we retreat to the comfort of agreement.

When we founded SAPIR last year, we did so with a goal and a theory. The goal was to offer ideas for a thriving Jewish future—ideas that moved beyond diagnosis to prescription; ideas to inspire action. Sometimes the value of those ideas is not only in the agreement they elicit, but also in the dissent they provoke.

The theory was that the way to generate the best ideas was to be intellectually diverse and inclusive. SAPIR has published pieces spanning a wide political spectrum and will continue to do so. It reflects no particular stream of Judaism. And it is certainly not intended to reflect my personal views, except in the essays published under my own name.

Instead, it is heterodox on principle and eclectic by design. The Jewish tradition is rooted in argument for the sake of heaven. We believe this is a tradition that best suits the challenges of our time.

Every issue of SAPIR, including the current one, reflects this belief. You will probably encounter opinions, analyses, even word choices in this issue with which you strongly disagree—and those with which you fully agree. We think the greatest intellectual value comes from having a robust mix of both, and we are confident that our readers will approach these essays as whetting stones to sharpen their own thinking, whether they run with the grain or against it. \*

—Bret Stephens,  
April 18, 2022

PART ONE

ZIONISM IN  
THE WORLD



# Zionism Remains a Freedom Struggle



WHEN THE UNITED NATIONS was founded in 1945, it had just 51 member states. Today, there are 193. Most of the new states were born from the twin processes of decolonization and so-called national-liberation struggles.

Among the first was Israel.

The subsequent trajectory of most of the decolonized countries has not been a happy one. From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, their politics have been marked by despotism, anarchy, or civil war; their economies by kleptocracy, mismanagement, and destitution; their social dynamics by ethnic strife, religious fanaticism, and the oppression of women. They are countries from which people flee: more than a million refugees from Burma; 2.6 million from Afghanistan; 3.4 million from Zimbabwe. They are countries in which people die: an estimated 2 million civilians in the Biafran war of 1967–1970; as many as 3 million in the Bangladesh genocide of 1971; at least 1.5 million in Cambodia's killing fields between

1975 and 1979; some 800,000 in the Rwandan genocide of 1994; another 5.4 million in the Second Congo War of 1998–2003.

Israel, too, has been scarred by sectarian and ethnic strife, from the early days of the Yishuv to the intercommunal riots of 2021. This is a fact its critics often pretend is unique, and uniquely awful, when it has mainly been the tragic norm throughout the world.

Yet in other respects, the Jewish state has been the remarkable exception: nearly the only postcolonial state that has flourished in independence. Israel regularly ranks as one of the world's happiest countries, behind Australia but ahead of the United States. Nearly 500,000 Jews have made aliyah in the past 20 years alone. Gross domestic product per capita exceeds that of Britain and France. Its economic base is geared toward future-oriented technologies. It is an anchor of regional security on which its neighbors depend: Jordan for Israel's water; Egypt for Israel's reconnaissance capabilities; Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States for the tools it brings in the fight against Iran. And it has managed to do all this while maintaining, however imperfectly, democratic institutions, the rule of law, and an ability to live with its partisan and religious differences.

That Israel is a decolonized nation, liberated from imperialism just as surely as Kenya or Indonesia was, is a fact that lies buried in most conversations about the Jewish state. But it matters. It is a reminder of how normal Israel's problems are given the circumstances into which it was born, and of how remarkable its achievements have been, when viewed in the correct historical context. And it is a testament to what Zionism is: an attempt to unshackle Jews not just from foreign rule but also from foreign ideas.

Let's explore these points in turn.



Students of 20th-century decolonization agree on one thing: It was a mess.

The partition that would divide India from Pakistan, the border

drawn on five weeks' notice by an English civil servant named Cyril Radcliffe—a man who had never so much as visited the subcontinent—resulted in a death toll estimated at up to 2 million people, as well as the forced displacement of another 14 million. The European scramble out of Africa and Asia created a slew of nations whose new borders rarely corresponded to ethnic, sectarian, or tribal lines, leading to decades of oppression and violent conflict.

Israel emerged from the same shambolic process. Promises were made in the Balfour Declaration of 1917 only to be withdrawn in the White Paper of 1939. Policies such as the wartime restrictions on Jewish immigration were capricious and cruel. The partition plan proposed for Mandatory Palestine was unworkable. The borders foisted on the proposed Jewish state were indefensible. Inevitably, the result was violent and chaotic. Whatever view one takes of the birth of Israel, its rights and wrongs, it was of a piece with the tragic circumstances of its era.

Most postcolonial states have spent decades trying to work their way out of this kind of rubble. Just as Israel has never fully settled territorial claims with all of its neighbors, neither has Pakistan with India (over Jammu and Kashmir), or Cyprus with Turkey (over northern Cyprus), or Armenia with Azerbaijan (over Nagorno-Karabakh), or Morocco with the so-called Sahrawi Republic (over Western Sahara), or Georgia with Russia (over Abkhazia and South Ossetia), or, most recently, Russia with Ukraine (over Ukraine itself).

A complete list would be much longer, but this one already provides a sense of just how unexceptional the Israeli–Arab conflict really is. Equally unexceptional have been the reasons why it has persisted for so long. Wherever ethnic groups are locked into conflict, the competition for power tends to be zero-sum. Sectarian strife is especially difficult to resolve because it involves value systems that are self-justifying, nonrational, and prone to fanaticism. Borders are hard to agree on when they involve not just land and resources, but also memory and meaning.

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To yearn for Jerusalem is the idealization of a place. To yearn for Jerusalem *next year* is the placement of an ideal. Together, the two aspects of this yearning conjoin geographic destination with moral aspiration.

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There is also a profound tension between the claims of collective identity and those of personal liberty. Americans may think of the words “independence” and “liberty” as indissoluble, if not interchangeable. But there has never been any guarantee of the former leading to the latter.

Look closely at the history of decolonization and it is mostly a story of foreign imperialism giving way to local tyranny. Jomo Kenyatta helped free Kenya from British rule only to preside as a tyrant until his death. The same goes for the revolutionaries who defeated the French in Algeria. Each supposed liberator left his people with even fewer civil rights, legal protections, and economic freedoms in their independent states than they had enjoyed under colonial rule.

The Jewish state might easily have succumbed to the same dynamics. In David Ben-Gurion, it had a charismatic founding father who could have sought a dictatorial path. The prominent role of the military in Israeli life, along with the constant threat of invasion, has given generals a position in politics that elsewhere is the stuff of coups and juntas. And the country has always felt the tension between the claims of identity and freedom. It lies at the heart of controversies such as the 2018 nation-state law, the egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall, marriage laws, and the exemption of Israeli Arabs from military service.

Yet Israel's commitment to democratic and liberal values for its citizens has been resilient and profound. Why?



Part of the explanation is rooted in Jewish history and text. In Genesis, the usual hierarchical expectations of patriarchal authority passing from father to firstborn are repeatedly overturned—in the story of Ishmael and Isaac, and then of Jacob and Esau, and again with Joseph and his brothers. Merit (or divine favor), not primogeniture, determines one's fitness to lead. In Exodus, the Jewish story explicitly becomes a freedom struggle. And while Jewish antiquity had its kings and dynasties, there was also a pronounced current of mistrust for unjust authoritarian rule, foreign or domestic.

Then there is the history of the Diaspora. Shlomo Avineri has observed that a paradox of Jewish politics in exile is that the absence of Jewish sovereignty, combined with the exclusion of Jews from Gentile society, led to a remarkable degree of self-governance within Jewish communal life. Rabbis were frequently elected, not appointed by distant ecclesiastical authorities. Taxes were collected and spent by communal officials who met in representative councils. Rules were developed to curb nepotism and other self-dealing practices. The depredations of the Gentile sovereign served as a constant reminder of the evils of absolute power, while also cultivating an instinct for political dissent.

Hovering above this was a spiritual dimension. For many persecuted religious and ethnic minorities, the experience of oppression begets two distinct emotions: the desire to belong, or to avenge.

For many Diaspora Jews, by contrast, the desire is to get going. *Next year in Jerusalem*, a phrase that dates to the 15th century C.E., if not earlier, is the wish for a home that is elsewhere: a home that is remembered, imagined, envisioned; a home that nevertheless, astonishingly, exists. To yearn for Jerusalem is the idealization of a place. To yearn for Jerusalem *next year* is the placement of an ideal. Together, the two aspects of this yearning conjoin geographic destination with moral aspiration. Jerusalem, the city, may be sacked or

rebuilt, evacuated or recovered. Jerusalem, the metaphor, is always sought, and always there.

A culture of yearning can lead to different kinds of politics, including the utopian and the revolutionary. But the flip side of yearning is dissatisfaction, and the most natural politics of dissatisfaction is democracy. Everyone has a gripe, a dream, and a voice. These were the politics that so many of the early Zionists brought with them from their shtetls. Avineri notes:

When a few members of a pioneering group decided to establish what eventually became the first kibbutz, the only way known to them to do this was to have a meeting, vote on the structure proposed, elect a secretary and a committee.... And when they eventually disagreed, and some wanted slightly different institutions and arrangements, these dissidents went to the other side of the hill and established their second kibbutz. That is why we have Degania Aleph and Degania Beth.

A society typified by constant disagreement, breaking with consensus and going your own way, creating tribes within a tribe, is sometimes seen both as a Jewish peculiarity and one of Israel's crippling faults, the source of its social polarization and political paralysis. But it is Israel's defining strength. Consider a few contrasts:

- The notion that someone like Gamal Abdel Nasser or, more recently, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, would install himself as a president-for-life may have been sadly predictable given the pharaonic nature of Egyptian politics. The idea that anything similar could happen in Israel—despite the stature of a Ben-Gurion or the ambitions of a Netanyahu—is preposterous in a political culture that prizes arguments and upstarts.
- In many postcolonial states, rulers held on to power by dispensing favors to their tribal group while discriminating against

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The fulfillment of Zionism as a freedom struggle requires a recognized border that preserves the political viability of Jews as a people neither above nor below, but fundamentally *apart*.

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their tribal foes. In Israel, the nature of the state as an ingathering of exiles has meant constant evolution with each fresh wave of immigration, beginning with the early pioneers from Eastern Europe, to the next wave of escapees and survivors from western Europe, to Mizrahi and Ethiopian refugees, to the Anglos who came after the Six-Day War and the Russians who came after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and thence to Argentinians, French, and now Ukrainians. Each wave of immigrants has brought with it a new outlook, and new votes, requiring the rest of the country to adjust and evolve.

- Elsewhere, too, elites tend to come from particular social backgrounds and educational upbringings. In India, for instance, Jawaharlal Nehru attended Cambridge, his daughter Indira Gandhi attended Oxford, her son Rajiv Gandhi went to Cambridge, and each served as prime minister. In Israel, the early generation of elites tended to be left-wing secular Jews from the kibbutzim, who rose in the army and civil service: Think of Golda Meir and Ariel Sharon. Then came the right-of-center secular Jews from cities, who rose in business and politics: Think of Ehud Olmert and Benjamin Netanyahu. Now more observant Jews, epitomized by Naftali Bennett, are rising to the fore.

The broader point is that Zionism, and the state it created, was a bottom-up enterprise, more horizontal than vertical in its communal and religious life, often fractious but, for the same reason, mobile and dynamic. As a result, it was able to escape national-liberation movements' typical fate of falling into tyranny, or collapsing into chaos, or ossifying into a social order rigged by an entrenched elite. Zionism squared the national-liberation circle: It liberated a people *as a people* while honoring the promise of liberating them as individuals as well.

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The argument that Zionism is a freedom struggle runs up against an obvious objection: What about the Palestinians? This is a serious objection, though not in the intellectually unserious way that Israel's most acidic critics usually mean.

What is unserious? The allegation that Israel is a white, racist, illegitimate, colonialist, "apartheid" regime. Jews are not "white" to start with, and even by the invidious racial categorizations of Israel's critics, it's worth noting that a plurality of Israel's *Jewish* population is of Middle Eastern descent. A state whose right to exist was affirmed in one of the UN's first resolutions may be many things, but it is not illegitimate. A nation whose ties to a land are millennia-old and continuous is not colonialist, particularly when the territories it is supposedly colonizing were acquired in wars it did not seek and include land it has repeatedly tried to give back.

Regarding apartheid, even hardened critics of Israel generally acknowledge there is no such thing for Israel's Arab citizens. As with other minorities around the world, they have experienced serious discrimination. Yet they are nonetheless members of the Israeli Knesset, the Cabinet, the Supreme Court, the medical and academic establishment, the legal profession, and so on.

The more insistent charge is that, because of policies like

checkpoints and security walls and the refusal to allow Palestinians to vote in Israeli elections, Israel practices apartheid against Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. But most of these security restrictions came about because, in wave after bloody wave, terrorists continually capitalized on the inadequacy of security measures *to kill Jews*.

As for the argument that Palestinians experience apartheid because they don't get a say in Israeli politics, the entire point of the 1993 Oslo Accords was to provide Palestinians with a *separate* polity in the form of the Palestinian Authority. The principal reason that Palestinians don't get a vote is that, fearing democracy, Palestinian leaders in both the West Bank and Gaza have effectively banned elections. And the principal reason that Palestinians don't live in a state of their own, democratic or otherwise, is that Palestinian leaders have repeatedly rejected one. As Esawi Frej, Israel's first Arab-Muslim Cabinet member, recently wrote, "Israel has many problems that must be solved, both within the Green Line and especially the Occupied Territories, but Israel is not an apartheid state."

If these are the unserious objections, what is the serious one? It's that Zionism cannot be true to its calling as a freedom struggle for Jews if that entails exercising a substantial degree of control over another people without their consent.

The reasons why this control is currently being exercised may be defensible and necessary. Israel cannot be expected to agree to the immediate creation of a Palestinian state if Israelis have good reasons to fear that ending the occupation is a prelude to ending Israel itself. To adapt Justice Robert Jackson's famous line about the Constitution, a peace deal cannot be a suicide pact.

Still, it should be said: There needs to be a horizon.

A horizon is neither a deadline nor a *démarche*. It's a goal that is years if not decades away. It is based on an idea: in this case, the idea that the fulfillment of Zionism as a freedom struggle requires a recognized border that preserves the political viability of Jews as

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A Jewish state is not just a political and a security concept. It is also a civilizational opportunity; a chance to rediscover, rearticulate, and redevelop a uniquely Jewish way of thinking, being, and doing in the world.

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a people neither above nor below, but fundamentally *apart*. And it's an idea that requires patience: both the patience to hold fast to the idea when circumstances make it seem unnecessary or irrelevant, and the patience not to hurry it when circumstances make it premature and dangerous.

The most effective way to advance that idea isn't through international diplomacy or political decision-making. It's through Zionist dialogue—there being no point in discussing the Zionist future with people who don't want a future for Zionism. It's by asking, first, in an aspirational sense, what Israelis want for the next 50 or 100 years, and whether that includes a perpetual "Palestinian problem"; second, in a prudential sense, how to get there without doing Israel grave injury along the way. There is no reaching the long term without surviving the short.



We come to the final point: Zionism as liberation from foreign ideas.

Seen at a distance, Zionism is just the Jewish branch of the global phenomenon known as nationalism. In many senses it is. But Zionism isn't mere Jewish nationalism, given that Jewishness isn't merely a national or ethnic identity; it is also a religious and moral one. And the goal of Zionism isn't merely to give Jews "a

place *among* the nations” (per the title of Benjamin Netanyahu’s 1993 book). It’s to make Israel a light unto the nations.

The point may seem flattering, but it isn’t always an easy one to accept. It imposes a set of moral burdens and expectations, many of them unfair. “Other nations when victorious on the battlefield dictate peace terms,” Eric Hoffer wrote in 1968. “But when Israel is victorious it must sue for peace. Everyone expects the Jews to be the only real Christians in the world.”

Hoffer was right: Israel continues to labor under what might be called a moral colonialism — typically coming from those who are loudest in denouncing the legacy of colonialism. The Jewish state is expected to conduct its battles with greater regard for the safety of its enemies than for that of its own people. It is expected to make diplomatic concessions that put the lives of its own citizens at serious risk. It is expected to strengthen its “democratic” character, but only if its democratic choices conform to progressive sensibilities. It is expected, when struck, to turn the other cheek.

These expectations aren’t wrong for holding Israel to high standards: Nobody should hold Israel to a higher standard than Zionists themselves. But they are wrong when they are based on ethical concepts inimical to Jewish traditions, ideals, and practical realities. Israel did not liberate itself politically from colonial masters merely to remain a captive of their ideas.

A Jewish state is not just a political and security concept. It is also a civilizational opportunity; a chance to rediscover, rearticulate, and redevelop a uniquely Jewish way of thinking, being, and doing in the world; a means of finding out how a culture that was both stunted and enriched in its long exile can, with the benefit of sovereignty, create a healthier model of human community. Are there ways of doing politics, Jewishly, that aren’t simply a facsimile of the way politics are done in other advanced democracies? Is there a way of managing differences in society, and of enriching the human experience in the modern state, that is not only distinctive but can also offer a model for other nations wrestling with similar dilemmas?

Three areas come to mind:

- Can the tension between identity and freedom, which elsewhere has led to so much conflict and repression, achieve a more sustainable and dynamic balance? The freedoms of modern liberal societies are almost limitless; these freedoms are especially precious to those with the inner resources to make the most of them. But they come at a cost: the disconnection of the individual from his community, the lack of a sense of personal purpose, the moral entropy that often goes with what Rudyard Kipling called the “Gods of the Market Place.” On the flip side, a powerful sense of identity, tradition, and place offers its own emotional and spiritual comforts. But it’s frequently stifling, most of all to the free spirits and free thinkers who usually move the world forward, and which Jewish civilization produces in such abundance.
- Can there be a model of religious-secular coexistence that is less frictional, less distanced, and more mutually enriching? Contrary to the hopes or expectations of some of the early Zionists, a Jewish state was never going to leave Judaism in the atavistic dust. And contrary to the beliefs or predictions of some of today’s religious Zionists or Haredim, the state of Israel cannot succeed without the cultural and economic dynamism of its secular side. Similar fantasies typify secular and religious expectations in other countries, not least the United States. Much of the challenge rests in finding ways to de-escalate secular-religious divisions at the legal level and engage the two sides in different layers of life — pedagogical, spiritual, and social.
- Can democratic states with large, and largely separate, cultural minorities find a middle path between bitter communal rivalry and complete assimilation? The intercommunal violence of

2021 was a loud alarm for many Israelis that not only have they neglected this challenge, but also—in legislation such as the 2018 nation-state law and the neglect of basic policing in Israeli-Arab communities—that they have moved in the wrong direction. On the other hand, the creation of last year’s extraordinarily broad coalition government, along with the signing of the Abraham Accords, gives reason to hope that there are hidden reserves of good will between Jews and Arabs, as well as opportunities to create a far more inclusive Israel than the one we have today.



An argument is sometimes made that the term “Zionism” no longer means much. In this reading, Zionism was a 19th- and 20th-century project to regain a secure and recognized Jewish homeland. It succeeded in 1948. Those who approve of the project have gotten on with it; those who don’t approve need to get over it. End of story.

But leaving aside the fact that this homeland is neither universally recognized nor truly secure, this view of Zionism sells its true meaning short.

*A struggle for freedom begins with a quest for a homeland—but it doesn’t end there.*

*A homeland isn’t truly free until it is self-governing—but self-governance doesn’t lead to freedom unless rulers are bound by law and the consent of the governed.*

*Democracy is the essential precondition for living a free life, but not the only condition—there is also the need for freedom from want and freedom from fear.*

*The blessings of a prosperous and secure state are not sufficient for freedom—there is also the need for moral, spiritual, and intellectual freedom, both at the individual and national level.*

*The pursuit of ever fuller forms of freedom is often a blessing—but*

*it becomes a curse when it diminishes or blocks the same pursuit by others.*

To say that Zionism *remains* a freedom struggle does not merely vindicate the distance it has traveled so far. It reminds us that the journey is far from over. \*

# Amnesty International's Israel Problem— and Mine



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S recent report on Israel is very long—278 pages—and detailed (more than 1,500 footnotes). Its description of Israel, in its title and throughout, as an “apartheid” state has, predictably, elicited immediate outrage and immediate praise. The report defines apartheid as “serious human rights violations . . . committed in the context, and with the specific intent, of maintaining a regime or system of prolonged and cruel discriminatory control of one or more racial groups by another.” This is, alas, pretty accurate in terms of the occupation—though not, as the report insists, as a description of the situation of Israel's Arab citizens, which is fundamentally different. (Amnesty denies this crucial distinction throughout.) The “A-word” is not verboten in Israel. Mainstream Israeli politicians—including Yitzhak Rabin, Ehud Barak, and Tzipi Livni—have used the term, at least as a warning. But it is a (deliberately) provocative one—especially in the U.S., where language is synonymous with

virtue and vice—for it immediately conjures the old South Africa, where a small minority of whites dominated a large black majority.

Rather than fighting over nomenclature, which is often a waste of time, let's just say from the start: The occupation is very bad. It is obviously bad for the Palestinians, because it denies them citizenship, statehood, land, and rights. But—of equal concern to me—it is bad for Israelis. It prevents Israel from establishing borders, the *sine qua non* of a normal state. It threatens Israel as a Jewish-majority state, that is, as the one place in the world where the Jewish people can exercise sovereignty and self-determination. It re-creates the conditions of the ghetto by settling a minority of Jews within the land of another people who hate and sometimes harm them. It is leading, in the words of former Mossad official Yossi Alpher, to “an ugly, conflicted binational one-state reality.”

In short, the occupation is anti-Zionist; this cannot be what Ben-Gurion had in mind, or what thousands of young Israelis have fought and died for. But Israel is a very different place from South Africa—with whom it shares no history—and the use of the word “apartheid” creates a kind of Pavlovian equation between the two. So let me suggest a radical idea: Israel is not a photocopy of, a metaphor for, or the symbolic representation of any other country. Israel is Israel.

The Amnesty report is worth parsing because it represents the more general state of leftist thinking on Israel. I agree with some of its prescriptions, such as revocation of the Nation-State Law and a ban on all future settlements. So do many Israelis and liberal Jewish organizations. (The entirely unnecessary Nation-State Law, in particular, was protested by tens of thousands of Israelis and by members of the military-security establishment.) But embedded within Amnesty's report is an assumption that, though never overtly stated, is its bedrock: In this case, subtext is urtext. To wit: Israel not only commits egregious acts; it is an egregious project. Israel not only commits crimes; on the most basic, irredeemable level, it *is* a crime. And this, in the Amnesty view, has been true

since May 1948, when the country was born in sin. Israel's history is simply the inevitable working out of its wicked origin story; the stain can never be erased, except perhaps by national suicide.

The report is also deeply mysterious, because the history it describes offers no explanations of how the present situation came to be. This is not a document about the Israeli–Palestinian, or the Israeli–Arab, conflict. And that might be the most confounding thing about it: Amnesty essentially denies that there is any conflict, which would imply at least two sets of actors, at all.



The genesis of a war is always important, not in order to insist, “You started it!” but as a way to understand its political aims and subsequent ramifications. The Second World War began on September 1, 1939, when Nazi Germany invaded Poland; the Iraq War began on March 19, 2003, when the U.S. invaded that country. But the wars between Israel and its neighbors resulted, if Amnesty is to be believed, from a kind of inscrutable spontaneous combustion. “In the course of establishing Israel as a Jewish state in 1948,” Amnesty writes, “its leaders were responsible for the mass expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.” This is true, but did not simply happen “in the course” of Israel’s independence. The war began, one day after independence was proclaimed, when five Arab armies launched what Azzam Bey, head of the Arab League, frankly called a “war of extermination” against the new state. (Amnesty never mentions the building of the Yishuv, or the reasons for partition.) Extermination remained the aim of virtually all Arab countries, and of the various Palestinian organizations, for decades; it remains the stated aim for some today. From the beginning, Amnesty writes, “Palestinians were perceived as a threat” by Israel. But without understanding the nakedly eliminationist aims of its neighbors, this sounds like irrational ethnocentrism on Israel’s part.

The strangely anodyne non-history continues in the discussion of

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The deadly dialectic between Israel and its neighbors, which is central to any understanding of the current impasse, is utterly absent in the Amnesty report. There is, instead, simply an inexplicable evil at work: Bad things happen to good people.

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the 1967 war, which is, of course, the origin of the occupation. Again, things just sort of happened: “Palestinians became fragmented even further after the June 1967 War, which resulted in Israel’s military occupation of the West Bank...and the Gaza Strip.” Yes again, but also: No again. The implication is that, on a nice spring day, Israel suddenly decided to invade its neighbors in a kind of unprovoked, ultra-imperialist delirium and then, for no particular reason, decided to stay. The causes of the war—Nasser’s expulsion of the UN peacekeepers and closure of the Gulf of Aqaba, Egypt’s military pact with Jordan and Syria, the mobilization of troops, the cries for blood in the Arab “street”—all absent. The whole tangled, sad history since 1967—the rise of messianic Zionism, the refusal of the Arab states to negotiate, the revanchism of the PLO and then of Hamas, the many reasons for Oslo’s failure—is scarcely to be seen. Hamas is described, in an almost laughably understated way, as “the de facto government of Gaza” that has established a “security and law enforcement apparatus.”

In short: A conflict, often violent, has existed between Israel and its neighbors since 1948 (or, actually, before). Israel has made some terrible decisions. I believe that the current situation is—or at least should be—unsustainable. (An equally terrible thought: Maybe it’s

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I wonder why it is Israel, of all places, that is asked to give up the concept, and the protections, of sovereignty. Shouldn't someone else — perhaps Syria or Iran — go first?

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not.) But the deadly dialectic between Israel and its neighbors, which is central to any understanding of the current impasse, is utterly absent in the Amnesty report. There is, instead, simply an inexplicable evil at work: Bad things happen to good people.

The second key to the Amnesty analysis is the demand, repeated almost obsessively, that Israel “recognize the right of Palestinian refugees *and their descendants* to return to homes *where they or their families once lived*” (emphasis added). This has been a — if not *the* — major sticking point in Palestinian–Israeli peace negotiations, and it’s the pet project of many left-wing groups in the West. It is also a demand that virtually no Israelis, and certainly no Israeli government, would ever consider, much less one to which it would accede. Though couched in the language of justice, such a return would mean — and is *meant* to mean — the end of Israel as a state of, and refuge for, the Jewish people. At least theoretically, millions of Palestinians — who, unlike any other people, are defined as refugees *ad infinitum* — would enter Israel and somehow “reclaim” the homes and lands of their long-deceased ancestors. (What would happen to the millions of Israelis already in those homes and lands? Best not to ask.) Many of these new residents (according to Amnesty, potentially 5.6 million) would bring with them a deep hatred of Israel, sometimes for good reason, and an opposition to the state’s laws and customs — and indeed to the state itself. There is no country in the world, from the most liberal to the most

despotic, that would agree to such a plan; nor is there any country that outsources its immigration policies to the international community (or to Amnesty). Rather than a recipe for a “democratic” Israel, the “right” of return would undoubtedly instigate a brutal civil war — one that would make previous Israeli–Arab wars look like child’s play. To pretend otherwise is to play with the lives of Israelis and Palestinians alike and is, therefore, unforgivable.

And yet in today’s Israel, an odd and potentially fatal paradox is at play. The most fervently right-wing Israelis, who would never countenance the “right” of return, continue to support the building of the settlements and the expansion of the occupation — though this is surely leading to the one-state reality that they claim to oppose.

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An interesting accompaniment to the Amnesty report is a new book by Sylvain Cypel, *The State of Israel vs. the Jews*. Cypel is a well-respected French journalist who reported on Israel for years; his father was a leading socialist-Zionist in France. Cypel *fits* has good Zionist credentials: He lived in Israel for over a decade, served in a brigade of Israeli paratroopers, and studied at the Hebrew University. But Israel has changed, and these days he defines himself as a dedicated anti-Zionist. More than that: Israel, he argues, now “constitutes less a protection for the Jews of the world than a threat to them.”

I can’t argue with Cypel’s description of Israel’s “bleak new normal,” which echoes that of my Israeli friends who *do* identify as (left-wing) Zionists: the ultra-nationalism, the decline of democratic institutions, the disregard for Palestinian suffering. But Cypel’s critique, like Amnesty’s, goes further. He begins the book with a quote from Tony Judt’s 2003 essay “Israel: The Alternative” and almost gushingly revisits it. Judt had argued that “the very idea of a ‘Jewish state’” is an embarrassingly antediluvian construct that is “incompatible” (in Cypel’s words) “with the evolution of a ‘globalized’ world.”

Judt put it bluntly: Israel is “a dysfunctional anachronism.” Cypel puts it bluntly, too: “Tony Judt’s vision was correct.”

One can, of course, argue that the nation-state stands in the way of open borders, international solidarity, and universalist values. Yet, as I write this in March 2022, I can’t stop thinking of the Ukrainians as they fight for their freedom, their language, their culture, and, yes, their nation; I doubt they would think much of Judt’s vision. As the citizen of a powerful country that has never been existentially threatened or invaded, it is all too easy for Judt to scoff at the “dysfunctional anachronism” of the nation-state. But there is something about this that strikes me as repellent, akin to a plump, well-sated man asking a starving woman why she fixates on cake. And I wonder why it is Israel, of all places, that is asked to give up the concept, and the protections, of sovereignty. Shouldn’t someone else — perhaps Syria or Iran — go first?

Amos Oz — who, shortly after he fought in the Six-Day War, warned that the occupation would corrupt Israel — addressed this question. He wrote:

The idea of the nation-state is, in my eyes, “*goyim naches*” — a gentiles’ delight. I would be more than happy to live in a world composed of dozens of civilizations . . . all cross-pollinating one another, without any one emerging as a nation-state: no flag, no emblem, no passport, no anthem. . . . But the Jewish people has already staged a long-running one-man show of that sort. The international audience sometimes applauded, sometimes threw stones, and occasionally slaughtered the actor. No one joined us; no one copied the model the Jews were forced to sustain for 2,000 years, the model of a civilization without the “tools of statehood.” For me this drama ended with the murder of Europe’s Jews by Hitler. And I am forced to take it upon myself to play the “game of nations” . . . I accept those rules of the game because existence without the tools of statehood is a matter of mortal danger, but I accept them only up to this point.

The Amnesty report will undoubtedly strengthen attempts to delegitimize Israel, which saddens me. The charge lodged by some Jewish organizations that Amnesty selectively criticizes Israel is true, but it is also, in my view, not germane. The cry of “What about Syria? What about Myanmar? What about China?” is not an attractive one; is that really the company we want to keep? As always, the task — a delicate and difficult one — is to concentrate on the valid criticisms as a way of *strengthening* Israel, not undermining it. It is to refuse to let anti-Zionists make Zionism synonymous with the occupation. It is to remember, as so many Israelis — and not only those on the Left — have warned, that the occupation threatens Israel’s existence as a Jewish and democratic state as much as Hezbollah and Iran (and to a lesser extent Hamas) threaten it physically. Jewish history teaches that we can destroy ourselves. \*

# What Britain Can Learn from Israel



REAT BRITAIN loves nothing more than to lecture Israel on her supposed failings, adopting an unfailingly patronizing *de haut en bas* attitude. Whether the Foreign Office is constantly calling into question Israel's commitment to a two-state solution because of West Bank settlements; or Sir Alan Duncan, the former Foreign Office minister, is accusing pro-Israel lobbyists of "the most disgusting interference" in British politics, negatively influencing foreign policy in the Middle East; or Britain is providing official Covid travel guidance that depicts Jerusalem as politically separate from Israel—few opportunities are missed to criticize and belittle Israel. Of course, the attitude of the BBC is worse even than that of the Foreign Office.

Behind this stance lie many things. Among them is the conviction that the "Great" in Britain's name is more than just a device introduced when, in 1603, James VI of Scotland succeeded Elizabeth I of England to become sovereign of the new combination. Many influential people, especially in the United States, continue to see

Britain as a serious and substantial player on the world scene, if no longer a great power. In an "International Influence" ranking drawn from a *U.S. News & World Report* survey of "more than 10,000 informed elites," Britain came in second only to the United States.

Fair enough. But Israel came in at number 11 in the same survey—a truly remarkable number, given that Israel only just makes the top hundred by population, and sits at only 31 by GDP. And there are several areas in which Israel can teach Britain important lessons. Britain, instead of lecturing Israel, ought to be taking notes from her about how to become a better country.

The first and most obvious concerns independence. From the foundation of the nation-state in May 1948, Israel has been a proudly independent country, looking to her own wherewithal and her Diaspora to defend her rights as much as any country can. She had strong alliances, primarily with the United States, but it is remarkable historically how little she has ceded to the Americans in terms of her foreign policy and national destiny over the decades. If ever a country has punched above her demographic and territorial weight, it has been Israel, and she has recognized that in the last analysis, self-reliance is the only way to approach international relations during crises. Partly as a result of the lessons learned during the Holocaust, Israel has a clear-eyed answer to the question of Hillel the Elder: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?"

By stark contrast, only a quarter of a century after Israel grasped her independence, Britain gave away hers when, in January 1973, she joined the European Economic Community, then called the Common Market. Her prime minister, Edward Heath, deliberately misled the public about the sovereignty issues involved in joining what originally looked like only a customs union; as papers released decades later revealed, he knew perfectly well that there were profound sovereignty challenges involved. It took 43 years for the British people to finally demand their independence back, in the Brexit referendum of 2016, and then nearly four years to force the British establishment to allow the U.K. to leave what by then was well on the way to realizing its

founders' dream of becoming a European superstate. For nearly that entire half-century, Britain ought to have cleaved to Israel's example, which proved that self-government is best.

The first duty of an independent state is to defend its borders. Here, too, Israel has proved superb, while Britain has been woefully lacking and ought to learn lessons, despite Britain starting with the huge advantage over Israel of being an island. While Israel has been brilliantly detecting and destroying Palestinian tunnels from Gaza, patrolling "smart" walls around its territory, and intercepting incursions by small boats along its coasts, Britain has become the prime magnet for illegal immigration from Europe. No fewer than 28,400 illegal aliens entered over the past year, and a total of 40,000 since 2018.

Many of these people are allowed into Britain after having knowingly destroyed their identity documents, so the British state has no way of knowing who they are. Large gaps in border security combined with massive asylum fraud have led to a situation that Israel would not have countenanced for long. Furthermore, 45 foreign nationals who served prison sentences for terror offenses have been allowed to remain in the U.K. after completing their jail terms. Britain would do well to learn from Israel about policing its borders effectively.

As well as individual terrorists such as the 45 just mentioned, terrorist states face far too weak a stance from Britain, unlike the robust attitude adopted by Israel. Even though the bomb for which the Iranians are presently enriching uranium will encompass Britain in its radius, the U.K. government has been bent on appeasing Iran rather than standing up to it. After Donald Trump rightly denounced the JCPOA as too weak, the U.K. in January 2019 joined Germany and France in creating a payment system to facilitate European trade with Iran in products such as pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and agri-food goods. Jeremy Hunt, then the foreign secretary, boasted that it was "a significant step forward in delivering our commitment under the Iran nuclear deal to preserve sanctions relief for the people of Iran."

After Trump lost the presidential election, the U.K. government

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stated, "We welcome and support President Biden's commitment to not just return to the deal, but to strengthen and extend it," and with added pathos boasted, at the UN Security Council, that it regularly raised Iran's destabilizing role in the region, as though that mattered a fig. The U.K. much prefers criticizing Israel in the United Nations, although she has recently moved from opposing Israel outright on pro-Palestinian motions to abstaining on them. The British attitude toward Iran—which is essentially one of appeasement—underlines yet again how Israel should heed the wisdom of Hillel the Elder.

Similarly, the 2.0 percent of GDP that Britain spends on her defense is a pathetic figure at a time of massively increasing geopolitical tensions, with Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, China saber-rattling against Taiwan and establishing naval ports on the west coast of Africa, and the Royal Navy reduced to six destroyers and 12 frigates on active service. Even that figure of 2.0 percent is arrived at only by the accounting legerdemain of adding widows' pensions and the Intelligence budget into the defense-spending figures, which most nations do not do. By contrast, Israel spends a healthy 5.6 percent of GDP on defense and, as a result, is a regional superpower worthy of her neighbors' respect.

Although Britain has done extremely well in the global race to vaccinate as much of its population as possible against Covid, Israel has done better, and there are lessons the U.K. could learn from Israel there, too. Israel did not simply have a higher proportion of her population receive the first two inoculations earlier than almost any other

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As more countries now seem to be embracing various forms of socialism, Israel is increasingly becoming a beacon for entrepreneurship in the world.

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country in the world: Israeli epidemiology has been at the forefront of the global struggle against Covid throughout the pandemic.

At the end of July 2021, Israel began offering boosters to everyone over the age of 60, and from late August of that year, boosters were available to anyone over the age of 16, five months after their second dose of the vaccine.

Britain was fortunate that because of Brexit she was not in the European Medical Agency. She therefore could act nimbly and early in ordering millions of jabs from whichever companies she wanted, getting vaccines into people's arms long before France, Germany, Italy, and the other countries that were encumbered by membership of the lumbering EMA, which wished to act for all 27 EU member states. Israel did better than the EU and U.K. on any possible metric. Covid data from different sources are difficult to compare. But the most reliable metric is deaths per capita—in which Israel has done better and usually far better than the U.K. and any European country of its size or larger.

As more countries—including, tragically, the United States—now seem to be embracing various forms of socialism, Israel is increasingly becoming a beacon for entrepreneurship in the world, and she certainly has a great deal to teach the United Kingdom, which is increasingly turning her back on the eternal truths about the free market and individual enterprise that Margaret Thatcher taught in the 1980s. The bonfire of red tape and regulation that many of us Thatcherites

hoped might take place post-Brexit has yet to occur, and we have so far failed to take advantage of the opportunities for what was over-optimistically and too early nicknamed a “Singapore-on-Thames.”

By contrast, entrepreneurs are admired in Israel—Singapore-on-the-Mediterranean?—where the Netanyahu governments did much in their power to encourage economic activity, especially in the high-tech industries. Israel has the highest number of start-ups per capita in the world and occupies third place globally in venture-capital investments. In 2019, Israeli high-tech companies raised a record amount in capital, an estimated \$9 billion, which was an impressive 15 percent increase over 2018. In the past decade—during which Netanyahu was in power the entire time—“exit value” grew eightfold, from £2.6 billion in 2010 to £21.7 billion in 2019. This is a staggering achievement, and one that Her Majesty's Treasury would do well to study but probably won't. (Whether this entrepreneurial golden age continues in Israel's post-Netanyahu world is another matter.)

In Chapter 7 of the Gospel of Matthew, that wise and holy rabbi Jesus of Nazareth asked, in his Sermon on the Mount, “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” Britain would do well to take heed of his question. When the United Kingdom has a beam in her eye in the form of so many problems that she could better address by being more like Israel, why do her Foreign Office, the BBC, and other entities nonetheless love to concentrate on criticizing the mote in Israel's eye instead? Is it a form of displacement therapy? Is it the superiority complex of a thousand-year-old larger country toward a three-quarters-of-a-century-old smaller one (which would betray a serious historical ignorance in itself)? Or is it just the ancient bacillus of antisemitism, appearing in a new mutation?

Whatever it is, it is a profoundly unattractive feature of my country, and it is diametrically opposed to both rationality and Britain's best interests. Instead of criticizing Israel, Britain should be trying to do more to emulate her. Instead of being a constant punching bag, Israel should be a role model. \*

# Israel 2072



WHAT CAN WE EXPECT of Israel in 50 years, when the modern Jewish state marks its 124th birthday? The United States reached the same milestone in 1900. To note the comparison is a good way of being struck by how young Israel remains—as old today as America was during the administration of Millard Fillmore. It’s also a reminder of how much Israel has yet to face, for better or worse, as it moves into its adulthood as a modern nation-state.

Navigating the next half-century will not be easy. Antisemitism is resurgent across the globe. Iran may get a nuclear weapon and become a regional hegemon. More of the Arab world could collapse into anarchy. The United States seems increasingly disengaged from the region. Divisions between Diaspora Jews and Israelis—along with ethnic, sectarian, and socioeconomic divisions within Israel itself—could erode the sense of common purpose that has helped Israelis meet past challenges. The two-state solution could become unattainable; a binational state could become unavoidable.

One way to understand the challenges—what they might be,

how they might be overcome, and, more pessimistically, how they might overwhelm Israel—is through an exercise of the imagination. Imagination is not the same thing as prediction, which is usually inaccurate. But a colorful imagination can be an aid to *planning*: to thinking creatively about what sort of outcomes one might expect. With that as prologue, what follows are three visions of Israel 50 years hence: the good, the bad, and (perhaps most likely) the mediocre.



The year is 2072. Israel is thriving and at peace with its neighbors. Palestinians enjoy democratic citizenship in a self-governing, demilitarized, prosperous Palestinian Authority encompassing Gaza and most of the West Bank, with Israel retaining control of East Jerusalem and the large settlement blocks. Israel’s gross domestic product is six times as large as it had been in 2022, thanks to decades of macroeconomic stability, abundant foreign investment, a tech hub that leads the world in nanotechnology, and universities that rank with Caltech and Johns Hopkins as the most scientifically innovative in the world. Its biggest problem in 2072 is that there isn’t enough housing for the Jewish families choosing to leave the United States and Europe to build lives in Israel.

Decades earlier, in the 2020s and early 2030s, Israel’s chief concern had been to stop Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Yet, despite a long campaign of sabotage and assassination, it could not do more than postpone the inevitable.

And then a geopolitical miracle occurred: In 2032, amid yet another economic crisis precipitated by years of low oil prices and severe droughts, the Iranian parliament voted to eliminate the office of the supreme leader, enlisting dissident Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commanders to enforce the decision. Within hours, Supreme Leader Ebrahim Raisi and his family had fled to Beijing.

The discontent had been building for years. Encrypted communication technology, persistent work among Iranian professionals living abroad, social and ethnic unrest within Iran, and the passing of the 1979 generation had nurtured an anti-theocratic movement that grew despite repeated crackdowns, which only sent it underground. A member of the Pahlavi dynasty, who combined monarchical legitimacy with democratic convictions, was swiftly elected president. She immediately reached out to the West, quietly including Israel. Negotiations led to Iran's permanently forswearing nuclear ambitions in exchange for desperately needed economic aid — aid that, for once, went to helping ordinary Iranians instead of funding Hezbollah and producing ballistic missiles.

Over time, Israel and Iran forged closer ties, even as Israel's relationship with the Arab states again began to fray. Without a common enemy, fair-weather friends such as Egypt's General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi and Saudi Arabia's Mohammed bin Salman tried to distract their people from their autocratic misrule by returning to tried-and-true state-sponsored antisemitism. But Israelis had spent two decades traveling to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab states as a result of the Abraham Accords, and Arab populations were no longer so easily duped by propaganda. In 2042, the House of Saud was replaced by an elected government that sought to keep peace with Israel. Al-Sisi was overthrown by his intelligence minister, a secularist who promised to maintain good relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia and a democratic Iran.

Perhaps the most stunning change occurred with the Palestinians. It started with the funeral of Mahmoud Abbas in 2025. The corrupt and ineffective Palestinian leader was unable to negotiate an independent state, and the bitter leadership fight after his demise weakened the Palestinian Authority. At first, this provided an opening for Hamas. But after Hamas used sarin gas shells in its final war with Israel, the IDF had no choice but to reoccupy Gaza and take out the Hamas leadership.

That 2033 war was a tipping point. Images of Jews being gassed

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in Tel Aviv shocked the conscience even of the transatlantic Left. The vast reservoir of support for Palestinians in Western universities dried to a trickle overnight. The use of chemical weapons also outraged Palestinians, in part because some of the shells fell inside Gaza. For the first time in its history, Israel fought a war against Arabs with Israeli Arab volunteers. Having terrified both its enemy and its people, Hamas managed to unify Jews and Arabs in Israel and the West Bank.

All of this opened a path for Mansour Abbas, the first Arab politician to participate in an Israeli coalition government. Crossing from Jerusalem to Ramallah to enter Palestinian politics, he won the Palestinian presidency in a landslide over both Hamas and Fatah. His party unified Gaza and the West Bank for the first time in a generation and began serious negotiations with Israel.

Those talks did not produce the two-state solution envisioned by the Oslo Accords. Instead, they resulted in an economic union between the Palestinian Authority, Israel, and Jordan, with military security provided by the Israel Defense Forces. This Benelux in the Levant soon proved to be an unstoppable economic power, prompting Lebanon — itself freed from the shackles of Hezbollah — to join the union in 2044.

By 2072, Israel's economic prosperity and domestic peace made

it possible to take on a larger regional role. Its navy patrolled the eastern Mediterranean at the request of Cyprus, Lebanon, and Greece, which feared a truculent and unpredictable Turkey. Its army helped train the next generation of senior Iranian military officers. By the 2060s, Israel had replaced the United States as the region's dominant military power.

This combination of peace and prosperity was a powerful magnet for Diaspora Jews. The influx into Israel forced the Knesset to prioritize immigrants by need. Those not actually fleeing oppression were still entitled to citizenship—but the waiting list was now five years long, as Israel managed immigration in line with its ability to build housing, desalination plants, and absorption infrastructure in an environmentally sustainable fashion.



The year is 2072 and Israel hangs by a thread. Its economy has stagnated for decades. The Abraham Accords are a thing of the past: Peace between Israel and the Gulf states has eroded into open hostility. Israelis still lead the world in some innovations, such as desalination and cyber defense. But Israel's Jewish population has declined, and Israel's relationship with the United States has deteriorated. Israel is a weak state perceived by most of the world as a strong bully.

The decline began in 2033, when Iran conducted its first successful test of a nuclear weapon. The cyber command of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard sent a mass text to Israelis with a video of the mushroom cloud and a warning in Hebrew: "Your next day could be your last."

At first, Israelis rallied to the flag. But once Meta decided in 2035 to close its Herzliya campus and Alphabet canceled plans to invest in the Technion, the message was clear: Israel was too risky for the kind of outside investment that had fueled the three-decade boom most citizens had come to take for granted.

As desirable jobs dried up, many of Israel's most talented citizens left for the United States, Cyprus, Australia, or the world's new high-tech capital: India. By 2062, nearly a third of Israeli citizens made their home outside Israel.

Iran's nuclear test also had deep repercussions for Israel's regional standing. The Arab states that had counted on Israel continuously to delay Iran's bomb concluded that they had bet wrong. The 2034 Arab League summit voted unanimously to kick out any state that maintained diplomatic relations with Israel. Nearly 70 years after the infamous Khartoum Resolution of 1967, the Arab world was back to no peace, no recognition, and no negotiations with Israel.

The Jewish state responded by acknowledging the worst-kept secret in nuclear proliferation: It stated publicly that it had hundreds of nuclear weapons, which it reserved the right to use preemptively. Israel's declaration caused a crisis in the U.S.-Israel relationship. Invoking Dwight Eisenhower, President Tucker Carlson suspended military sales to Israel and declared that the United States would not choose sides between what he called "two theocracies, one Shiite, the other Jewish." The U.S. then sponsored a UN Security Council resolution condemning both Iran and Israel. It passed unanimously. Within two years, Saudi Arabia and Turkey had tested nuclear weapons too, turning the Middle East into a nuclear minefield.

Sensing an opportunity, China's government offered Israel a deal. In exchange for Israeli nano-drones and renewed access to Israeli ports, China would distance itself from Iran and sign a 25-year strategic cooperation with Israel. Jerusalem agreed. This was a massive miscalculation. Support from American Evangelicals and mainstream Republicans, initially outraged by the Carlson administration's stance, evaporated overnight. When China used Israel's nano-drones to conquer Taiwan in 2038, the U.S. military ended all defense-technology sharing and training with Israel.

The realignment emboldened the Palestinians. Hamas from

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The year is 2072 and Israel is muddling through. Its economy remains impressive compared with those of other countries of its size. But the ‘start-up nation’ dynamism that characterized the first two decades of the 21st century has long since petered out.

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Gaza, Hezbollah from Lebanon, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards from Syria, and the Houthis from Yemen launched a devastating missile war against Israel in 2042 with Iranian support. The barrages overwhelmed Iron Dome 5, David’s Sling 7, and Arrow 9, Israel’s multitiered missile-defense systems, and Israel suffered the worst military and civilian casualties in any of its wars since 1948. The IDF eventually fought its way to a ceasefire, but Hezbollah and Hamas merely used the pause to rearm with more deadly and accurate missiles. Air raids and funerals became daily features of Israeli life. All the while, Iran cemented its regional hegemony.

By the 2060s, Israelis faced an excruciating choice: all-out war with Iran, potentially involving a full-scale nuclear exchange, or an endless cycle of wars with Iran’s proxies. It chose the latter. Israel’s Jewish population dwindled to a point at which Israeli Arabs equaled the Jewish population, not including the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. With funding from European and American NGOs, Arab parties in coalition with a one-state Jewish party were able to win the 2071 election and form a coalition government. It granted full citizenship to all Palestinians in its territory, paving the way for the negation of the world’s only Jewish state.

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The year is 2072 and Israel is muddling through. Its economy remains impressive compared with those of other countries of its size. But the “start-up nation” dynamism that characterized the first two decades of the 21st century has long since petered out. In the early part of the 21st century, Israel’s biggest growth sector was high tech. As the century approaches its fourth quarter, Israel’s largest export is natural gas pumped to Europe via undersea pipelines to Greece.

While Israel maintains a powerful military and remains an innovator in missile-defense and drone technology, it lags in technologies that don’t have direct military applications, such as medical devices and renewable energy. And while a small Israeli elite enjoys oligarch-like levels of wealth (much of it spent or invested abroad), the average Israeli has no chance of owning a home, leading to massive trailer parks running along both sides of Highway 1 from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv.

The gap between ultra-Orthodox and secular Israelis has also widened—but there are now more voters among the former than among the latter. As Orthodox communities swelled with ever-larger families, the increasing progressivism of Israel’s secular elites alienated many Israelis, leading to a spiritual awakening. Shas and United Torah Judaism, which had won 16 of the Knesset’s 120 seats in 2021, eventually controlled 65 seats, transforming the Jewish confessional parties from kingmakers to kings.

The religious parties in the Knesset used their vast political power to mandate the observance of the Jewish Sabbath for businesses and local governments. A board of rabbis was created to review whether existing or new laws in the Knesset violated the Torah. The only reform the religious parties have not yet tried to achieve is a ban on women serving in the military, although they are once again restricted to noncombat roles.

Regionally, Israel maintained good relations with the Gulf states and Egypt. The Mossad identified the Iranian spy ring inside the

Saudi interior ministry that was poised to assassinate Mohammed bin Salman at a party for the king's 58th birthday in 2043, although it continues to deny the rumors. Israel also sent special forces into Egypt in 2039 to hunt down Islamist fanatics who had managed the largest jail break in modern Egyptian history.

Israeli sabotage continued to set back Iran's nuclear program. This prompted Iran to find two new ways to exact revenge. First, it persuaded Vladimir Putin's successor in 2035 to void the long-standing arrangement that had allowed Israeli jets to enter Syrian airspace to strike Hezbollah positions. From then, the Russian no-fly zone for Syria applied to Israel, too. Soon thereafter, Iran supplied Hezbollah with enough precision-guided munitions that, in 2043, the group was able to launch successive barrages that defeated Iron Dome. Large sections of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa needed rebuilding. But it also prompted Israel to invade Lebanon and wipe out most of Hezbollah, something it had not been able to accomplish in its 2006 war.

Iran caught up to Israel in many areas of cyberwar, too. In 2055, the Iranians implanted a devastating virus, known worldwide as "Stuxnet's Revenge," inside the computers that controlled Israel's power grids. The resulting blackout lasted for a week. The failure of Unit 8200 to detect and prevent the intrusion became a national scandal.

The resilience of Iranian tyranny wore down America's resolve. After lifting most sanctions on Iran's energy sector in 2022, the U.S. pursued a policy of de facto neutrality in the Middle East. The silver lining was that Israel's Arab partners actively worked to cultivate a less radical Palestinian leadership. In 2048, 100 years after the founding of the Jewish state, Palestinians agreed to a demilitarized state that allowed Israel to retain the large settlement blocs it had built up in the late-20th century and protect Jewish religious sites on the West Bank.

Unfortunately, two states for two peoples did not bring peace for long. The Palestinian economy remained mired in corruption,

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If some of the scenarios discussed above are frightening, then they should be a call for preventive action, not a cause for despair. 'If you will it, it is no dream' remains basic to the Zionist's ethos.

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leading the Islamic State of Palestine to gain the trust of the population. In 2064, they unseated the Palestinian government and declared a war to recapture Jerusalem. Israel had to reimpose checkpoints, night raids, and the counterterrorism policies it had honed during the second intifada.

By 2072, Israel and Iran are locked into a cold cyberwar, even though Israel remains the only Middle East power with nuclear weapons. And nearly 80 years after Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat signed the Oslo Accords on the White House lawn, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains largely unchanged.

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It's important for readers to draw their own conclusions from these scenarios. But a few points should be clear.

- First, any of these outcomes is possible 50 years hence, given the array of domestic and regional trends currently facing Israel. What that means is that there is no cause for some of the stark fatalism, particularly demographic fatalism, that typifies many conversations about Israel's future. But there is also no reason to feel confident that Israel's current strengths won't evaporate very quickly if they are not zealously guarded.

- Second, no issue more profoundly affects Israel's prospects and even its survival than the fate of Iran's nuclear program. In no scenario does an Iranian bomb detonate over Israeli heads, because the real threat of a nuclear Iran lies in second-order consequences: an emboldened Iran that can dominate its region and wear Israel down through proxy warfare; nuclear proliferation in the world's most combustible region; America's increasing reluctance to continue to stand by Israel's side.
- Third, Israel's current Arab partners in peace did not make peace with Israel for humanitarian reasons. *They are making a bet on Israel as the strong horse.* An Israel that accepts a nuclear Iran on the theory that it can survive through mutually assured destruction will almost surely squander the impressive diplomatic gains of the past decade.
- Fourth, the Palestinian issue will not be resolved with renewed diplomatic negotiations leading to a formal agreement based on old formulas—just as the Abraham Accords came about only through a new approach. Only an internal change in Palestinian attitudes toward Israel will change the century-old dynamic—something unlikely to come about without a complete collapse of the current Palestinian political model of dysfunction and fanaticism. The broader Arab world will be instrumental in making that happen, but only if they continue to see the existence of a strong Jewish state as advancing their own regional interests.
- Fifth, while readers of SAPIR may have little control over Iran's nuclear program, they can still have agency in the here and now to affect long-term outcomes as philanthropists, investors, policy experts, and so on. If some of the scenarios discussed above are frightening, then they should be a call for

preventive action, not a cause for despair. “If you will it, it is no dream” remains basic to the Zionist's ethos.

- Finally, it's not enough for Israel to rest on its laurels—the already-achieved vindication of a people's ancient hope of return to its ancestral homeland. Israel must be a magnet—a continuous pole of attraction to Jews everywhere because of its strength, its prosperity, its resourcefulness, and the sense of purpose that infuses so much of Israeli life. The great task of Israeli statesmanship and Jewish leadership for the next 50 years is to keep that magnetic pull strong. \*

# Dear Paul, I'm a Zionist



EAR Paul O'Brien,

Let me introduce myself: I'm a Zionist. Clearly, you aren't.

As executive director of Amnesty International USA, you recently clarified your position on Israel. American Jews, you told an audience at the Women's Democratic National Club, don't want Israel to be a Jewish state. They just want a "safe Jewish space." Israel, you added, "shouldn't exist as a Jewish state."

The data say something else—fully eight in 10 American Jews identify as "pro-Israel," according to a 2020 survey from the Ruderman Family Foundation—but you insist your "gut" tells you otherwise. In another context, one might describe your position as "alternative facts."

My interest in a SAPIR issue on Zionism predates your declaration by about a year. It was then that I and other foundation executives were presented with the results of a survey of attitudes of American progressives regarding Israel. Among other recommendations, we were told to stop using the term "Zionism": It was

irredeemably damaged and would turn off too many Americans, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. When I pushed back that this was essentially capitulation, that we ought to be proud of who we are and what we stand for, I was told by the researcher that I was part of the problem: I refused to accept the reality as it was.

Sorry, but I don't buy it. I was, am, and intend to remain a proud Zionist. What does that mean? Let me tell you.

- I believe that the Jewish state, whose heart lies in Jerusalem, is central to my identity and the identity of my people.
- I believe that the journey to Canaan that Abraham began millennia ago is a national journey that his progeny continues today.
- I believe that, whether we live in New Jersey, on Canvey Island in England, or in Tel Aviv, our hearts are, as Yehuda Halevi reminds us, in the East.
- I believe that the great national experiment of the Jewish people in modernity is the rebuilding of the State of Israel as a Jewish state and homeland, and I think we are doing splendidly.
- I believe that our national mission of being a light unto the nations is best fulfilled by contributing to that rebuilding, whether in Israel or from afar.
- I am aware that Israel is struggling to create a society that is an expression of Jewish values, and just as we fall short in our own lives, Israel falls short as well. But to strive to live up to Jewish ideals is the most noble of struggles.

Zionism is a political expression, but it is also a deeply religious one. My relationship with God, with Torah, and with the Jewish

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Zionism is not about a ‘safe space’ for Jews. Zionism is about creating a real home for Jews—the kind of home Robert Frost had in mind when he wrote, ‘When you have to go there, they have to take you in.’

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people, cannot be separated from my relationship with the State of Israel and its people. I can’t imagine a Judaism without the magic of Shabbat; so, too, am I unable to imagine a Judaism without Israel at its core. Zionism inspires the songs that I sing with our children and the novels I read on too many plane rides. When I scan the paper each morning, if the word “Israel” appears, it’s that story that will first draw my attention.

Eighty years ago, as Jews tried to flee the war raging in Europe, they had nobody to turn to and nowhere to go. Even if they could escape, almost no place in the world would accept them. The existence of the State of Israel guarantees there will be no repetition of that tragedy.

At this writing, as war rages in Ukraine, Jews are once again on the run, trying to flee another evil tyrant. But today they are greeted by volunteers holding signs under a giant Israeli flag, directing them to food and shelter. And for those who wish, there is also a flight to Israel, where a new life and new hope await them. Zionism is not about a “safe space” for Jews. Zionism is about creating a real home for Jews—the kind of home Robert Frost had in mind when he wrote, “When you have to go there, they have to take you in.”

So, Mr. O’Brien, while I’m grateful for your candor, I plan to remain a committed Zionist, as do the overwhelming majority of my fellow Jews.

I’m going to celebrate Israel’s achievements and ache in its suffering. I’m going to take pride in Israeli Olympians competing in sports I otherwise don’t care about. I’m going to sing secular Israeli songs that quote the Psalms and watch excellent (and not-so-excellent) television shows produced in Israel. I’m going to dedicate my energy to the success of this grand national project of the Jewish people and do everything I can to ensure that our children do the same.

In 1961, while Amnesty’s founder, Peter Benenson—himself a committed early Zionist—was penning articles about jailed students, Israel was welcoming in the first 11,000 immigrants from Morocco (it would become 85,000 within two years) and holding Adolf Eichmann accountable for crimes against humanity. In 1975, Amnesty was defending the rights of Jewish prisoners of conscience in the Soviet Union even as the United Nations declared that Zionism was racism.

At least Amnesty was on the right side of history then. How did the group let itself fall so far?

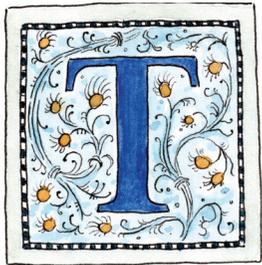
The next time I visit Jerusalem’s Old City or the promenade in Tel Aviv, I’ll try to remind myself to thank you for explaining, in your unwitting but still useful way, why Zionism remains as necessary as ever for a thriving Jewish future. \*

PART TWO

ZIONISM IN  
CULTURE



# Judaism and Zionism Are Inseparable



THE JEWISH STORY begins in Genesis chapter 12:

*And God said to Abram: "Go forth from your native land...to a land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation...and you shall be a blessing...and*

*all the families of the earth shall bless themselves through you." And Abram passed through the land...and God said, "I will assign this land to your offspring."*

From this point forward, and forevermore, the Torah establishes two foundational principles of what became Judaism:

Nationhood and national territory.

Abraham was selected to found a nation, and like all other nations of antiquity, the Israelites required national territory—the Land of Israel—in which to fulfill their collective purpose. The entire remainder of *Tanakh*, at its most basic level, is about the unfolding destiny of the descendants of Abraham, defined first and

foremost in a manner that's physical rather than merely spiritual.

The nation, not the individual leader, covenanted with God: *I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. ... You shall be ... a holy nation* (Exodus 19:4–6). We never considered ourselves simply a religious community. A Jew is a member of the Jewish people.

Jewish particularism—the distinctive attachment and commitment to the Jewish people—is not an incidental component of Judaism, or a less-evolved, now irrelevant vestige of ancient days. It is its beating heart. Every biblical verse, every prophetic utterance, every Talmudic discussion, every halakhic ruling, every prayer, emerges from, and assumes fealty to, the centrality of *Am Yisrael*—the people of Israel.

That said, from the beginning, Jewish peoplehood was a blend of both particular and universal impulses: *I have grasped you by the hand... and appointed you a covenant people, a light of nations, opening eyes deprived of light* (Isaiah 42:6–7). Thus, God compelled a reluctant Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach the message of repentance and social repair. Our particular purpose was to represent universal moral values: *I have selected Abraham to do what is just and right* (Genesis 18:19). The urgency to do right compels Abraham to challenge God's intention to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Judaism absent Jewish peoplehood is not Judaism; it is something else. Whenever Jews abandoned their ideological—or practical—commitment to *Am Yisrael*, they eventually drifted away. This was precisely the accusation leveled by Reform Zionist Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver toward his anti-Zionist colleagues in the pre-war years. By continuing to insist that the Jews are “no longer a nation, but a religious community” (Pittsburgh Platform, 1885), Reform rabbis were, Silver contended, reconstituting “Paul's insistence upon a religious creed entirely divorced from nation and land.” In a scathing critique, he noted that this declaration of Reform rabbis “was the first of its kind ever made by an assembly of Jewish religious leaders,” implying that had the Reform movement continued down this path, we, too, like the early Christians, would have eventually drifted away from Jewish civilization.

These two foundational principles of Judaism—nationhood in the Land of Israel—accompanied us throughout the centuries of dispersion. Unlike every nation of antiquity that lived by our side, we did not disappear when our national sovereignty was dissolved. Miraculously and unprecedentedly, we learned to adapt and survive. But at no time was separation from the Land of Israel considered permanent. At no time did we abandon the dream of return. At no time did we consider dispersion to be a blessing. At no time did the rabbis sever Torah from Israel, or God from the people. At no time was *tikkun olam*—the universal demand to do what is just and right—ripped from the moorings of *klal yisrael*—the centrality of Jewish peoplehood. It was never one or the other. One without the other diminished both. It was all part of a unified whole. Loyalty to the Jewish people absent concern for all the families of the earth is a distortion of Judaism. And *tikkun olam* divorced from Jewish peoplehood is not Jewish universalism; it is just universalism. To contend that the Hebrew prophets cared only about repairing the world, and not about the well-being of the Jewish people as a people, is to misunderstand and disfigure the entire prophetic tradition.

A fundamental reason for the remarkable accomplishments of the Zionist movement that emerged at the end of the 19th century is that it did not invent a new philosophy of Judaism. Zionism sought to *restore* politically the essence of the Jewish spirit. Theodor Herzl wrote: “We are a people, one people. We shall live at last as free men on our own soil, and in our own homes, peacefully die. The world will be liberated by our freedom. Whatever we attempt for our own benefit will redound mightily and beneficially to the good of all mankind.”

Herzl, a prophet in every sense of the word (albeit a secular one, who probably knew more about Hegel than Hosea, John Stuart Mill than Jeremiah), was propelled into the pantheon of our people’s greatest and most influential figures because he understood or intuited our basic values and aspirations, incorporating them into a stunningly successful political plan.

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Loyalty to the Jewish people absent concern for all the families of the earth is a distortion of Judaism. And *tikkun olam* divorced from Jewish peoplehood is not Jewish universalism; it is just universalism.

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First, the centrality of the Jewish people: “We are a people, one people.”

Second, the yearning for territorial sovereignty like all other modern nations: “We shall live in freedom on our own soil.”

Third, the universal purpose of Jewish particularism: “Whatever we do will redound mightily and beneficially to the good of all mankind.”

Initially, most Jews were opposed to the Zionist platform. They thought Herzl delusional or mad. Such is the burden of all prophets. Orthodox Jews opposed Zionism because of their preexisting conviction that the dispersion was punishment for the sins of our people—exile—a condition that only God could lift, not human beings, especially not secular Jews such as Herzl and his colleagues. Anti-Zionist Orthodox Jews still reject Zionism for this reason. Reform Jews opposed Zionism because of their preexisting conviction that the Jews did not constitute a nation. Anti-Zionist progressive Jews still oppose Zionism for this reason—that Jewish nationalism suppresses, distorts, or perverts Jewish universal values.

But within a historical blink of an eye, most of the initial opposition from the Right and the Left dissolved, for the same reason—the increasingly intolerable antisemitism sweeping across Europe. Herzl had previously embraced the promise of European Enlightenment to solve the Jewish problem. He thought that the Age of Reason would finally eliminate Jew-hatred because, after all, antisemitism is irrational,

and its persistence contrary to Enlightenment values. But Herzl came to realize that even the Enlightenment would not cure Jew-hatred: “We have sincerely tried everywhere to merge with the national communities in which we live, seeking only to preserve the faith of our fathers. It is not permitted us. We shall not be left in peace.”

There is a kind of primal despair in these words. One can only imagine the internal conflict in the heart of this product of high European culture. In effect, Herzl concluded that Europe would never live up to its promises to the Jews, and therefore Jews had to abandon Europe. Integration is doomed to failure. There is something so unreasonable, so impenetrable, so deep about European antisemitism that it could not be reasoned with. A person cannot be reasoned out of something they have not reasoned themselves into in the first place. The only way to preserve Jewish life, Herzl thought, was for Jews to get out of the way. While no one could have anticipated the dimensions of the genocide of European Jewry in the decades to come, the early Zionists did intuit that Europe would become increasingly dangerous for Jews—not only physically but also spiritually. That is, the return of the Jews to Zion would not only save Jewish lives; it would liberate the Jewish spirit, unleashing our national creativity and reinvigorating our national energies. Herzl wrote: “Our enemies have made us one whether we will it or not. Affliction binds us together and thus, united, we suddenly discover our strengths.”

We have rediscovered our strengths since the convening of the First Zionist Congress in 1897. Many dreams were realized. Many remain unfulfilled. There is still much work to be done.

We should always distinguish between those who are critical of this or that Israeli policy and those who oppose the very existence of the Jewish state. To oppose a government policy, even vociferously, is consistent with the best of Jewish values. Our entire tradition is built on the premise of dispute, argumentation, debate, and controversy. Often, the most authentic, honest, and loyal act is to oppose prevailing opinion. Many critics of Israel are right to be critical. The unresolved Israeli–Palestinian

disputes create moral dilemmas that should trouble all of us deeply.

Even as Jewish anti-Zionism seems to be intensifying, in particular among the younger generations in America, anti-Zionist Jews constitute a small minority of our people. On the Right, this minority is composed largely of Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jews, whose lifestyles and values are outside the mainstream of world Jewry. On the Left, they are largely so-called progressive Jews, who, whether by word or deed, are regurgitating the old, discarded Classical Reform rejection of Jewish peoplehood. In truth, Jewish anti-Zionism is an anachronism. The majority of the world’s Jews already—or will soon—live in Israel. With every passing year, Israel becomes stronger, and its influence on world Jewry increases. Israel is here to stay. Anti-Zionism is a luxury of secure Jews, those who do not feel threatened by widespread Jew-hatred. It is hard to find any anti-Zionist Ukrainian Jews. To the contrary, Israel is preparing to absorb tens of thousands of immigrants from Russia and Ukraine in years to come.

“Zionism is the return to Judaism even before the return to the Land of Israel,” Herzl said to the delegates of the First Zionist Congress. It was an astonishing insight, a prophecy we now know to be true: By reviving the Jewish nation, Zionism revived Judaism itself. It is impossible to envision Judaism today without the State of Israel. Zionism restored the Jewish people to history, propelling us back to the future.

On my first glance at the Tel Aviv skyline in final descent above Ben Gurion Airport, the white city slowly emerging from the azure sea, I often recite to myself these words from Amos 9:14:

*I will restore My people, Israel. They shall rebuild ruined cities and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine. They shall till gardens and eat their fruits. And I will plant them on their own soil, nevermore to be uprooted from the soil I have given them.*

Ruined cities are rebuilt, the people restored, nevermore to be uprooted from the soil of the Promised Land. \*

# Flipping the Script on Intersectionality



IN MAY 2021, nearly a dozen Princeton students—Jewish Americans living in Israel while attending Princeton classes remotely—hid in bomb shelters amid a flurry of rockets from Gaza. Shaken by the unfamiliar violence, some thought of turning to the University Health Services (UHS) for support. Such support, however, was apparently not for them: UHS had posted a public statement on social media offering resources for those hurting from the “suffering and pain occurring around the world, including the violence occurring in Palestine.”

When queried about the apparent exclusion of Jews and Israelis from their statement, the UHS director affirmed the students’ fears: Jews were being excluded because of their alleged privilege, even as rockets targeting civilians literally rained down on their heads. “Our role as...counselors is to support all students while at the same time actively supporting students who are marginalized

by systems of power and oppression,” the UHS outreach counselor wrote, grotesquely prioritizing certain groups of sufferers. Having your life threatened doesn’t rate if you’re a Jew on the wrong side of the American college-campus hierarchy.

For these Jewish Princetonians and for Zionist college students across America, this kind of treatment has become commonplace. We exist under a new, potent ideology that distorts reality and holds immense sway on college campuses: intersectionality.



Originally posited as a theory for understanding the ways multiple categories of identity-based oppression can intersect within a person or a group, intersectionality has mutated on campuses and activist movements into an ideology that splits politics into a two-tribe sport of the privileged and oppressed. The categories are defined simplistically. On one side are heterosexuals, males, and those born with the same pigmentation as historical oppressors (i.e., whites)—also, it turns out, anyone whose opinions do not align with the theory. On the other side is everyone else. All “oppression” is assumed to be rooted in the same political, sociological, and psychological power dynamics.

Privilege conferred through traits such as wealth or religion, though, are only subplots to the primary drivers: politics and race. For while Karl Marx’s Communism permitted a member of the proletariat to become a member of the bourgeoisie, intersectionality treats an individual as immutably bound to his origins. Hispanic conservatives and Asians protesting discrimination in education are accused of being coopted by their oppressors instead of capable of intellectual (or political) agency. Class, too, takes a back seat: Impoverished whites caught in cycles of poverty and in the throes of the opioid crisis are still “privileged” on account of their race; none of their other struggles matter.

Intersectionality demands that an individual “ally” with all of

the other ostensibly oppressed groups. “Communities of color” must stand up against privileged white people, in concert with one another, to prevent white oppressors from maintaining supremacy over fractured minority groups.

If this all sounds fantastical or like a strawman, I suggest spending a day on an American college campus speaking to university administrators or sociology majors. Intersectionality was concocted in the ivory towers of elite universities, and it has successfully spread to every aspect of the college experience.

Where do Jews fit in? If, once, Jews were capitalists to the Communists, now Jews are white and privileged to the intersectionalists. A rudimentary knowledge of history would reveal the absurdity of this notion. But it is precisely the misalignment of the Jews’ historical and current conditions that disrupts the intersectional binary.

Ever since Jews were exiled from the Land of Israel, they have lived as oppressed minorities. The identification of Jews as “privileged” in the current schematic rests on an ignorant extrapolation of a few anomalous elements of the contemporary Jewish condition. Israel, the young nation-state of the Jewish people, has managed to succeed despite all efforts to destroy it and now boasts a flourishing economy and mighty military. And although American Jews are still disproportionately victims of hate crimes, and while antisemitism has left an indelible impact on American Jewry, Jews disproportionately constitute the highest rungs of American business, academia, politics, and media. Most significantly, because so many American Jews are descendants of a persecuted *European* minority, American Jews are now deemed to be “white-passing,” which trumps any other factor.

Intersectionality leaves no room for the complexity of the Jewish condition; Jews are, simply, privileged. As intersectionality functions on American college campuses, such a designation yields anything but a genuinely privileged place in the campus hierarchy. Like white Americans, political conservatives, religious

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people, and heterosexual males, proud Jews are regarded as fundamentally sinful. Their perspective is unwelcome on controversial issues where reasonable minds might disagree, unless they are actively apologizing for their immutable characteristics or supporting progressive policies. They are expected to publicly declare their “anti-racism” according to its contemporary political definition, or else be complicit in oppression. In the Jewish case, “privilege” licenses polite society to excuse blatant antisemitism and excludes Jews from student groups, especially under the guise of anti-Zionism.

Yesterday, Jews were mocked for being oppressed; today, Jews are denigrated for being successful. We have lost the political lottery once again.

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Jews on campus tend to fall into three camps relative to intersectionality: those who accept the framework and try to win favor through self-degradation; those who accept it but try to place themselves into the “oppressed” category; and those who reject the ideology absolutely. Each of these strategies is morally problematic and doomed to fail.

Jews who seek to work within the intersectional framework cede crucial moral ground and, frankly, fight for something not

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## Intersectionality is dominant on American college campuses, but that does not mean that it needs to dominate us.

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worth fighting for. The *apologetic position* insists that if Jews confess their sins, then they can win forgiveness. This group harps on Jewish (really, Israeli) faults as a way of demonstrating their enlightened sensibilities. Dara Horn calls them the “cool Jews.” They host “Breaking the Silence” events and hold innumerable lectures exclusively focused on false notions of Israeli “settler colonialism,” “genocide,” and “apartheid.” Sometimes, their points veer into outright anti-Zionism, and their selective presentation of Israel too often crafts a narrative for anti-Israel activism. They dump Jewish pride for Jewish self-criticism.

The other group that works within the system takes a *victim position*. They accept the intersectional binary but revolt against their placement in it. Per the historian Salo Baron, they support a lachrymose conception of Jewish life, and just as Baron argued, their focus on the low points of Jewish history weakens the Jewish people and its understanding of itself. They spotlight the existential threats posed to Israel and to Jews worldwide, paying no more attention to the country’s strengths and miracles than does the first group. Jewish pride is here replaced with Jewish victimization.

The Jews who hold themselves up as proof of intersectionality’s incoherence take a different approach—the *critical position*. This group, too, labors under a misunderstanding. Intersectionality is an outgrowth of 20th-century critical theory, and it functions on campus as an ideology that philosopher Karl Popper would label “unfalsifiable.” No matter how strong a case is made that

the complexity of the Jewish condition refutes the validity of the black-and-white framework, proponents of intersectional ideology will not be convinced. Moreover, too often, this critical position concedes the basic tenets of intersectionality but asks for a Jewish “exception” to it, jilting other “privileged” groups. “We might look like those white people, but we’re not like them” is an ugly argument that will fail to convince fellow Jews, let alone anti-Zionist activists.

In addition to their inherent problems, each of these strategies is also futile on the college campus. They all try to exist outside the formalized intersectional framework, either attempting to reorder the social hierarchies or to reject the system outright. But intersectionality has already triumphed on campus. The system cannot be dismantled. If Zionists hope to stay relevant and build allies in this brave new world, we must accept that the battle is not being fought on our own turf.

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I propose a new strategy for confronting intersectionality: tactically embracing it. Whether justly assigned or not, we Jews must accept our place in their model, or our arguments will be completely written off. We must make arguments on the prevailing ideology’s terms, stop chasing after the groups that vilify us, find new friends and allies among those we are lumped in with, and double down on our uniqueness. “We are what we are, we are good for ourselves, we will not change, nor do we want to,” wrote Ze’ev Jabotinsky.

While not ignoring the real oppression that Jews have experienced and, in some cases, continue to face, we should not shy from celebrating our accomplishments. Israel is a magnanimous, successful state (in spite of its internal and external challenges), offering its services and resources to struggling peoples around the globe. Jewish Americans are blessed to have thrived (in spite

of antisemitism, past and present), including through high levels of engagement with American civic and philanthropic life. Where we can use our “privilege”—our strengths, our assets, our blessings—to do good for ourselves and for others, we have done so and ought to continue to do so.

We can also join with our intersectional “bedfellows”: political conservatives, religious people, and other groups, such as Asian Americans, that find themselves, often bizarrely, locked into privileged status. Good luck trying to convince any “marginalized” individuals to break with their intersectional communities. Our “privileged” tribal brothers will be our best bet at making allies. In turn, we should stand up for them when they are unfairly attacked or discriminated against. If we are going to be designated as privileged, we might as well take stock of the new possible allies this affords.

Consider how this new approach might manifest in a response to a campus BDS vote. Jewish groups have tended to argue that BDS marginalizes an already marginalized group and seeks the collapse of the vulnerable Jewish state. These arguments are non-starters with the intersectional mob, as we have seen on campuses time and time again. The idea that Israel should draw sympathy as an “oppressed” entity is scoffed at. Jewish groups, then, ought to argue from a different angle: They should own Israel’s successes and strengths. BDS is wrong because Israel is a fundamentally *good* project and is being unfairly targeted. Stop apologizing for and victimizing the Jews, and stand on the side of justice—real justice—based on fact, history, context, and fairness. This is an argument that will sidestep intellectually lazy intersectionalists and appeal to those who are similarly subject to unfair characterizations. This latter group is our natural ally; it is the audience we need to reach in moments when we need friends. This is our winning path forward.

It may well be that this new strategy won’t open University Health Services to Jewish or Israeli students in need, but neither

will the other three strategies. It will, however, empower Jewish students to stand with their heads held high and make new friends. Intersectionality is dominant on American college campuses, but that does not mean that it needs to dominate us. Jewish students can accept our position in the privileged/oppressed divide, look around, and hold our friends close—embracing who we are and what we have to offer. For our own good, we cannot continue submitting to regressive conceptions of morality. \*

# Can the Academy Be Saved from Anti-Zionism?



LITE UNIVERSITIES are sites of seduction. Grassy quads, the vaulted architecture of stone and brick, the library with its oak tables and little desk lamps, all suggest that modern-day America has been left behind. So do the universities' mottos: "Veritas," "Lux et Veritas," "Disciplina in Civitatem," "Truth even unto its innermost parts."

For many who spend time on elite American campuses, however, the cognitive dissonance between image and reality is profound. Far from being a haven for free inquiry and intellectual growth—the pursuit of truth and light, as well as an education for citizenship—the 21st-century American university is dominated by political agendas, litmus tests, and demands that students commit to a narrow set of worldviews and opinions. The institutions that promise parents they will equip their children with the intellectual

tools to grapple with society's most challenging questions have instead become toxic, politicized environments, indoctrinating more than they educate. And truth be told, non-elite universities are often no better.

Lamentably but predictably, Israel is central to this crisis, chiefly in the shape of attitudes to Zionism. The State of Israel is an obsession of today's university, a linchpin around which an extraordinary volume of discourse, pedagogy, and politics revolves.

This essay sets out the intellectual developments that underpin the current discourse on Israel and goes on to suggest solutions. Most of these solutions are designed for Jews on campus. But we need to work to change non-Jewish minds, too. After all, some of these students will in 20 years be shaping foreign and domestic policy, some will be rising to the top of our now-woke corporations—and the rest will probably be voting. Allowing wave after wave of unreflectingly anti-Zionist students out into American society only aggravates a situation that gets worse for Israel with each commencement.

As it happens, changing non-Jewish minds is important for these students themselves, too. The incessant anti-Israel rhetoric is in many ways just the front line of the larger assault on critical thinking that has taken hold in our universities. Every student exposed to the idea that there is *another way of looking at Israel* is being given a gift—an opportunity to exercise and strengthen his or her mental faculties.



Tendentious discourse about Israel has been a part of the American university since the late 1960s and early 1970s—sometimes overtly, sometimes beneath the surface—but never absent. Several intellectual factors govern this discourse—most prominently, post-colonialism, postmodernism, and post-nationalism. There's nothing a priori wrong with examining the world through

any of these lenses. But when one is used not as an experimental way of looking but imposed as the primary or only lens through which a topic is refracted — and when, further, one is instructed in advance as to what one will see when one looks through the lens — then critical thinking is short-circuited, and the neural wiring is weakened.

To understand post-colonialism and how it concerns Israel, we must consult Edward Said's 1978 book, *Orientalism*, which maintains that Westerners cannot understand, explain, or even usefully study the East. As Said's ideas have come down to us today, only members of an indigenous ethnicity can understand their own condition — only they, that is, possess the authentic “lived experience” to speak with authority. As a practical matter, this means that the post-colonialist thinker lauds all things indigenous while dehumanizing the West.

In this post-colonial narrative, Israel is a wealthy, powerful, and foreign — colonialist — enterprise implanted in the middle of a poor, oppressed, weak native society. Nineteen hundred years of Jewish history are ignored, as are any complicating factors in the Arab past or present.

Post-colonialist discourse also bleeds into post-nationalism, which blames the nation-state for all the ills in the world and celebrates an ill-defined internationalism and indigenous self-governance (ironically, in the form of nationalism). In this context, Israel is doubly anachronistic as a Jewish (i.e., non-indigenous) nation-state and ought to terminate its identity or suffer its own termination as a moral imperative, in order to become a “state of all its citizens” (another unacknowledged irony). This includes not merely Israeli Arabs — who are already citizens — but all the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, too. No other nation-state is subject to this kind of demand, but that doesn't trouble the critics: To point out any inconsistencies in their critique is, they say, to engage in “whataboutism,” another tool of the oppressor.

Finally, the crucial postmodern contribution to the attack on

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As the university became ever more focused on identity issues as part of postmodern, post-colonial developments, Jewish faculty steered clear of conversations about Jewish identity or engagement.

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Israel is its insistence that what is at stake in the search for truth is not actually truth, but merely *competing narratives* that — in theory, at least — are all equally valid. It follows that those who insist on the value of seeking objective truth based on provable facts are to be regarded as merely pushing their favored narrative — a narrative that inevitably favors the strong over the weak, the wealthy over the poor, and the West over the rest. And so, claim the post-modernists, this narrative must be resisted, and replaced with narratives that have historically been ignored — or worse, “silenced.” This process exchanges the search for a shared truth for a Marxist framework in which wealth and power are inherently evil, the poor and weak are inherently moral, and it therefore becomes the moral obligation of the intellectual to wield the new narrative as a weapon to strengthen the weak by weakening the strong. Suddenly, it turns out, as Orwell would have put it, that all narratives are equal, but some are more equal than others.

There are real differences between postmodernism and post-colonialism. But they certainly agree on one thing: Israel's right to exist is merely the narrative that a wealthy, powerful entity imposes upon a poor and oppressed one; it must accordingly be resisted. The Jewish past — not exactly an unbroken history of wealth and power — is either ignored or explained away.

To any committed critical thinker, it should be clear that the

21st-century university is a house built of intellectual matchsticks glued together by master narratives of good and evil, oppression and power, that have nothing to do with reality. In such an environment, in which the modern State of Israel, born in sin, is irredeemable, it is impossible to conduct an honest exploration of the facts of the matter.



About 20 years ago, a group of individuals of which I was one began to say and write that ignoring the ways in which higher education was framing Israel would have long-term implications for the view of Israel beyond the ivory tower. It's easy to see that we were right; but we were also unpopular, and so we were ignored.

Unfortunately, as the university became ever more focused on identity issues as part of postmodern, post-colonial developments, Jewish faculty steered clear of conversations about Jewish identity or engagement. They were happy to leave it to the student-life professionals at Hillel, or the rabbi running the university's Chabad House.

But young Jews on our campuses are seeking intellectual role models to whom they can turn as they think about their own identity and how their identity intersects with their intellectual passions and curiosities, and most will not find their way to Hillel or Chabad. Jewish and avowedly Zionist intellectuals and faculty cannot cede this role to those who fail to comprehend—never mind embrace—the complicated relationship between universalism and particularism embodied in the Jewish experience.

Is it possible to change anti-Zionist ways of thinking in at least those institutions of higher education that claim to welcome critical thinking and value a true liberal arts approach? I believe so. But it will require faculty who have the moral courage to question the received wisdom, and senior administrators who believe that the university ought to be a marketplace of ideas rather than a place where students imbibe the “truths” of an anti-Western, anti-Zionist

monoculture. The greatest challenge of all will be to cultivate within students not only the critical thinking skills that will allow them to arrive at their own conclusions, but also the courage to risk the implication of those conclusions—the willingness *not* to fit in with the conventional wisdom, which is unobtrusively backed up by a small but powerful cadre of students and faculty whose beliefs dominate university discourse today.

This vision is utterly countercultural, so execution will demand patience. But an intervention must be staged. Jewish faculty obviously owe this to Jewish students—but all those interested must see that they also owe it to all those being educated to become responsible, valuable citizens. This will be a very long intellectual and sometimes bureaucratic struggle, but we must persevere. And because the additional solutions below are directed only to Jews, we cannot give up on this effort, for the sake of the non-Jewish majority on campus.



At the same time, however, we must recognize that success is not remotely guaranteed: Existing institutions may not have the capacity to reform. Even those newly committed to free speech face serious obstacles. Board governance, activist professors and student groups, the entrenched political culture of most institutions, their prevailing intellectual orthodoxies and their sacred cows—all leave little room for optimism.

Certainly, we should try, and every green shoot should be watered. But it may also be time to set aside our outdated sentimentality about elite, legacy academic institutions, and build anew. That way, we will not be back at square one should an effort to change things on our existing campuses fail.

What would an effort outside our current campuses look like? Here I address our Jewish students.

We need educational organizations outside the university that have two foci: 1) engagement with ideas without any predetermined

end goal, to strengthen critical thinking in general among Jewish students; and 2) the empowerment of educators and faculty who care about Israel to engage in conversations about Jewish identity outside the lecture halls. Both efforts carry risk for those who would undertake them, because identity is the shibboleth of modern society. But the long-term risk of not trying is greater.

One option is to establish one or ideally several new, small colleges that combine a classical liberal arts education with an education in Jewish civilization: a 21st-century curriculum that hones critical thinking skills, avoids hyper-politicization of ideas, and pursues *emet*—the Jewish idea of truth. Insofar as these succeed, the model can be extended.

A second option is for more Israeli universities to adopt the model of the English-language undergraduate degrees offered by Reichman University (formerly the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya). These degrees offer a solution for American Jewish students who seek a Zionist as well as a liberal arts education. It is transformational for students to spend a substantial amount of time in Israel, living, studying, immersed in Israeli life, engaging at a formative period of their development with the larger questions that animate our societies.

The third option, to which I believe we should devote our greatest effort, is K–12 Jewish education, where we must build a cadre of subsidized institutions that will invest in educators who shun trendy ideologies, who are committed to the ideals of a classical liberal education, who will encourage courageous conversations in the classroom, and who will emphasize critical thinking skills, Israel education, Hebrew language immersion, and Jewish literacy.

These new K–12 institutions must engage the whole family: Many parents need—and crave—similar educational content, and schools can be hubs for community-building in an era of disaffiliation. Obviously, this kind of prioritization of Jewish and Zionist education within the Jewish community will also require Jewish communal leaders from the agencies to the pulpits and

everything in between to articulate the case for cultivating “Jewish operating systems” in the next generation of Jewish youth—so that young Jews arrive on our college campuses Jewishly educated and moderately fluent in Hebrew—forearmed rather than merely forewarned. And when they find the university culture overwhelming, as many will, a visit home will recharge them to return ready to resist the postmodern tide.



One way or another, Jewish faculty and intellectuals must sit with students Jewish and non-Jewish who are open to examining their thoughts and feelings about Israel and about Zionism as a movement that changed the trajectory of Jewish history—and the world—for the better. We must reimagine and transform our institutions inside and outside the university to support students and faculty in the pursuit of *emet*—for all. \*

# An Iron Dome for Social Media



IONISM IS PROGRESSIVE.”

When I was approached to pen this piece, I contemplated turning in just that one line as the whole article. *Res ipsa loquitur*. It speaks for itself. As someone who has worked in the entertainment industry all my professional life, this is what Virgil Abloh, the late great designer, DJ, and cultural influencer would have turned in. “Zionism is progressive.” Simple statements can be very powerful. As Virgil once said, people need to “stop using their mind, and start using their imagination.”

During the May 2021 conflict between Israel and Hamas, many were surprised by the slew of celebrities who made simple statements of condemnation of Israel, often with a meme or by way of a tweet.

One of the most egregious was made by pop star Halsey. She tweeted to her 14.5 million followers and the world that the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict was “not too complicated to understand”; it was about “brown children being murdered.” Her post was retweeted 40,000 times and received 123,000 “likes.” The fact that she has never visited Israel and undoubtedly couldn’t distinguish between a Jew and a Palestinian to save her life didn’t matter. The damage was done, and as the saying goes, a lie can travel halfway around the world before the truth puts on its boots.

During the conflict, my organization, Creative Community for Peace (CCFP), identified about 45 entertainers or influencers who made positive or neutral posts about Israel—mostly neutral ones. In contrast, 130 posted negative comments, often declaring that Israel was taking part in one of the usual buzzwords—apartheid, genocide, racism, or ethnic cleansing—while adding in a “free Palestine” for good measure. These are the most heinous crimes any country can commit, and lo and behold, the world’s only Jewish state is apparently guilty of committing all four. As historian Jacob Talmon put it, the Jewish state has become the Jew of the States.

Despite the public anti-Israel statements by these “activist” entertainers, supporters of Israel remain a strong yet silent majority.

For instance, during the May conflict, CCFP released an open letter that called on our colleagues to stop spreading misinformation and to hold Hamas accountable for its actions. This letter was signed by more than 130 entertainment-industry leaders from Michael Bubl  and Gene Simmons to Diane Warren and Selma Blair.

Unfortunately, our statement didn’t align with the mainstream media narrative, so it received little coverage. From May 11, 2021, through May 24, 2021, the *New York Times* featured nine negative Guest Essays about Israel, with just three taking a neutral stance on the conflict. The *Guardian* had 16 anti-Israel opinion pieces and just three neutral ones. Neither outlet had any positive articles from guest writers during the conflict.

With that sort of coverage, it was not surprising that some celebrities thought ill of Israel. Especially since Israel ceded social media to the anti-Israel movement long ago, where many of these articles were also circulated incessantly. For instance, during the conflict more than 2 billion videos used the hashtag #FreePalestine on TikTok. In contrast, the most prominent pro-Israel hashtag, #IStandWithIsrael, was used on just 20 million videos.

Make no mistake about it: This social-media onslaught was no accident; this was a coordinated attack. It wasn't on the ground in Tel Aviv, but it was an attack nonetheless. A calculated social-media disinformation campaign built up, fine-tuned, and unleashed. We've tracked this for years.

Anyone who spoke out against Israel saw their social-media posts supported and amplified by thousands of likes. In contrast, those who spoke up for Israel saw their social-media feeds overrun by waves of bots, trolls, fake accounts, and anti-Israel activists, with the help of Iran, Malaysia, and others. Artists who posted messages of peace were bullied into silence and accused of being sociopaths who supported apartheid, genocide, and the killing of innocent children. This was a targeted and successful campaign to silence anyone who dared speak up for Israel.

In addition, while the pro-Israel side put together long-winded social-media explainer posts, videos, and threads, the anti-Israel side hammered home simple messages. It's not a conflict; it's genocide. Don't dare talk about peace; it's apartheid. They established the narrative. They controlled the discourse. They shut down speech and silenced people, right out of the woke playbook.

This wasn't surprising: We have seen this weapon in action before, such as when singer Demi Lovato merely posted photos of her being baptized in the Jordan River, visiting Yad Vashem, and meeting with kids at a disabled children's hospital in Israel. The mere fact that she stepped foot in Israel was beyond the

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pale. Her photos were overrun with hate, causing her to panic and apologize for daring to visit and post from Israel. She was labeled a “normalizer” by the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

The boycott movement, which existed even before there was a State of Israel, has reinvented itself to use the language of critical social justice theory, which is so salient in America's culture today. To people in the West, BDS presents itself as a social justice movement, an LGBTQ+ rights movement, an environmental movement, and a women's rights movement. They claim that to stand in “solidarity” with progressive causes is to support the Palestinian cause. Never mind that BDS cleverly obscures their true motives—that their real aim is Israel's demonization and eventual destruction—because that doesn't sound as woke.

Under this critical social justice theory, Jews, and thus Israel, are painted as white and therefore part of the privileged and oppressive class: the “colonizers.” Halsey and others took the bait.

Palestinian scholar Edward Said's *Orientalism* is the foundational work on which postcolonialism—one aspect of critical social justice theory—was developed. Under this theory, forget history, forget truth; the only narrative that matters is the narrative

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Anti-racism activists — who understand racism as prejudice wielded by the powerful — cannot grasp the aspirational movement Zionism should represent to all indigenous communities because, through their lens, antisemitism constructs Jews as the privileged and powerful.

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of the oppressed, the “colonized,” the Palestinians. History and this conflict are to be seen only through their eyes.

Never mind that to deny Jewish ties to the Land of Israel is antisemitic and that to paint all Jews as white is racist: The Israel–Palestine debate takes center stage in postcolonial studies, and, unfortunately, most leftist activist groups have adopted the postcolonial demonization of Israel. You want to be woke? You want to stand for minorities? Support the Palestinian cause as presented by anti-Zionists or be pushed out of your social spaces.

The anti-Israel movement effectively weaponizes this language by co-opting the ills of any country and forcing people to see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through that lens. In South Africa, Israel is an apartheid state; in America, Israel is a racist state; in Australia, Jews are the colonizers of the indigenous population. It’s fungible. Whatever the worst thing a country has done in its history, Israel is doing it now.

The anti-Israel movement also co-opted the Black Lives Matter movement at its inception; its leaders were whisked away to “occupied Palestine” within six months of the Ferguson protests.

It’s no coincidence that this domestic American movement for black rights chose to single out Israel for condemnation in its manifesto. To stand for black rights meant you had to stand against Israel. Be anti-Zionist.

Anti-racism activists — who understand racism as prejudice wielded by the powerful — cannot grasp the aspirational movement Zionism should represent to all indigenous communities because, through their lens, antisemitism constructs Jews as the privileged and powerful. If you were posting in solidarity with the American black community, you also needed to be posting in support of the Palestinians. That’s the rule. Go against this, and you face being ostracized by your peers.

The culmination of these efforts is what led to all these entertainers adopting the anti-Israel narrative.

It doesn’t matter that the Zionist story is a story of progressive success. The unprecedented story of a conquered and colonized people miraculously reestablishing a country in their historic homeland. Triumphant over real colonizers, not imagined ones. A country that has brought democracy to a region that has known only kings, dictators, and theocracies. Where the environment is protected — Israel is one of the only nations in the world that entered the 21st century with more trees than it had 100 years ago. Where there is socialized health care. Where LGBTQ+ rights are protected not just in practice but in law, while members of this community are violently persecuted in every other nation in the Middle East. Where a woman was elected prime minister within 20 years of the founding of the state. Where minorities sit on the country’s supreme court and within its governing coalition.

This is unheard of in the Middle East, and it’s all brought to the region by Zionism. Unfortunately, no woke theory sees the world through a Zionist’s eye. Or sees Israel for what Israel really is and what it has accomplished. But this has been the case for the past 2,000 years for the Jewish people.

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So, what can be done?

As Thomas Friedman once remarked, people don't listen with their ears; they listen with their guts; therefore, you must connect to people on a gut level. If you do, they don't care about the details. If you don't, you can't show someone enough details to convince them of anything.

As Friedman and Virgil Abloh understood, the message needs to be simplified and emotive. Pro-Israel organizations and the Jewish social-media warriors need to stop talking just to the echo chamber of the converted and instead think about reaching the masses and influencing the influencers in order to transform the zeitgeist. Unfortunately, your favorite social-media warriors are being tuned out despite your nodding along. They've already been unfollowed.

Who wants to hear strident soliloquies about 3,000 years of history and the Balfour Declaration when the other side utters just a few words? People don't have that kind of attention span in today's world—particularly the younger demographic that lives so much on social media.

For instance, how much more memorable, viral, and impactful was Ukrainian president Zelensky's 30-second clip filmed on an iPhone at night on the streets of Kyiv, with his lieutenants by his side, than the more formal video of him talking stridently in front of a proper camera, played at the recent Grammy Awards? Then someone even set the iPhone clip to the music of hip-hop group Mobb Deep's "Shook Ones." Genius.

We need to create a social-media and communications Iron Dome. We can no longer cede the field:

- **Tech Center:** We need to establish a coordinated tech center that can counter the flood of bots, trolls, and fake accounts unleashed against anyone who speaks positively of Israel and

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We need to establish a coordinated tech center that can counter the flood of bots, trolls, and fake accounts unleashed against anyone who speaks positively of Israel and that are nefariously used to amplify the voices of anti-Israel posts.

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that are nefariously used to amplify the voices of anti-Israel posts. We also need to continue to expose this network, as CCFP did when artist Billie Eilish had her Instagram account overrun for two weeks in 2021 simply for saying "Hi, Israel."

- **Human Network:** We need to create an extensive, coordinated, human rapid-response network of young people who can engage on social-media posts that are attacked or that need amplification.
- **Empower Pro-Israel Activists:** We need to cultivate, support, and nurture the grassroots network of young pro-Israel activists to educate the pro-Israel community and who counter the anti-Israel online activists spreading misinformation online.
- **Engage the Zeitgeist:** We need to engage with marketing specialists outside the *hasbara* bubble. Firms and companies that specialize in storytelling, who ladder in cool, and who can tell the human side of Israel's story to younger, often more progressive audiences. We must speak their language and reflect modern-day sensibilities.

- **Public Relations and Communications:** We need to engage with communication firms and publicists who have clout and contacts. Through them, we must broaden the public's awareness, place articles, and get spokespeople and allies on center and left-leaning media outlets. We need to tell the real Israeli story across the partisan spectrum and on media outlets where young people get their news and information.
- **Influencer Education:** We need to continue to engage with influencers outside the pro-Israel echo chamber and educate them about what is really happening in Israel, about Israel's past, present, and future.

Most important, we need to amplify the voices of those on the ground, like Nof Atamna-Ismaeel, the first Muslim Arab to win Israel's *MasterChef*, who is on a quest to bring Jews and Arabs together in Israel through food. There are thousands like her, from the Jerusalem Youth Chorus to the Polyphony Foundation, including the Israeli National Football Team, where half of the starters last year were Arab players, and the captain is a Circassian Muslim. As chef Atamna-Ismaeel states in her new documentary *Breaking Bread*, 90 percent of Arabs and Jews want to live and work together peacefully, but the international media covers only the 10 percent who foment hatred.

This is why CCFP encourages entertainers to go to Israel and see for themselves and why the BDS movement doesn't want them going to Israel. If Israel really were practicing apartheid, genocide, and ethnic cleansing, wouldn't the anti-Zionists have wanted Demi Lovato to see that? No, they wanted to scare off any other celebrity like her from coming and seeing the truth, which doesn't align with the absurd narrative they are pushing.

*Homo homini lupus*, Ze'ev Jabotinsky declared in his 1910 essay. Man to his fellow man is a wolf. One of the greatest Zionist leaders understood intersectionality back then, as he spoke out

against anti-black racism in America and linked it to the struggles of the Jews and other persecuted minorities worldwide, such as the Kurds. Zionism has always been progressive.

So how do we take back the narrative? "Zionism is progressive." \*

# Zionism and the Necessity of Choice



GROUP OF BRITISH ARTISTOS was sitting around in the mid-Thirties, and one asked, “Where was Hitler born?” Nancy Mitford answered, “Versailles.” A pretty good bon mot. Woodrow Wilson bulldozed the Peace Conference at the end of World War I, created new countries, and imposed reparations on Germany, which allowed the rise of Hitler. Hitler, thus, was born at Versailles and Reform Judaism at the foot of Mount Sinai.

Modern Reform, the child of Enlightenment, was the confection of German Jews, trying to (pick one or all) modernize/assimilate/pass. Their desire to remove the irrational (religious) from religion is cautioned against continually in the Torah. It’s known as whoring after one’s heart—the heart understood, in the Torah, as the root of evil.

We see the cost of disregarding the warning around us in the wreck that “good works” and “compassion” have made of the West.

A woke reformer might opine that when we throw out the baby

with the bathwater, at least we’ve gotten rid of the baby. The baby, in the above instances, is Judaism defined as obedience to God’s Law as expressed in the Torah. Hillel’s “Torah on one foot” is “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.”

Its refashioning into the Golden Rule, “do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” reveals a foundational difference between Judaism and Christianity. The latter an invitation to a necessarily intrusive benevolence; the former, a stricture about self-restraint.

To reduce Judaism to “good works” (the current *reductio ad nihilo* of Reform) is to denature it not only to an identity with Christianity; but, beyond, into po-faced agnosticism. It is no doubt challenging to retain one’s self-esteem in the face of horrors wrought by one’s good-willed actions, but it need not be intellectually taxing, given an ever-handly villain.



After 2,000 years of persecution and exile, the Shoah, and mounting contemporary antisemitism (see critical race theory), why are we Jews still here?

I was studying with a Chabad rabbi, we broke for tea, and discussed antisemitism. I said the most vicious comment I’d ever heard came from a supposed friend (non-Jewish) some years back. He said, “If you Jews are being persecuted down through the ages, isn’t it possible you’re doing something to bring it about?” I was looking for an endorsement of my umbrage, but the rabbi said, “He’s right.”

And I spent an afternoon with Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. I brought up the absurdity of the canard that Jews rule the world; he said that the Christians loathed us, because *believing* that we did, they did not understand why we’d let them down, the world being in such a state.

It’s never been the case that Jews ruled the world—if so, why suffer under Egypt, Babylon, Rome and Greece, the Turks, Italy and

Spain, the Nazis, the Soviets, Hamas and Hezbollah, and so on.

We've never ruled the world (that position, having been previously filled), but, under untold tyrannies and oppressions, we ruled ourselves.

Those who assimilated sought acceptance in a wider world, while maintaining something of their Jewishness, if not their Judaism.

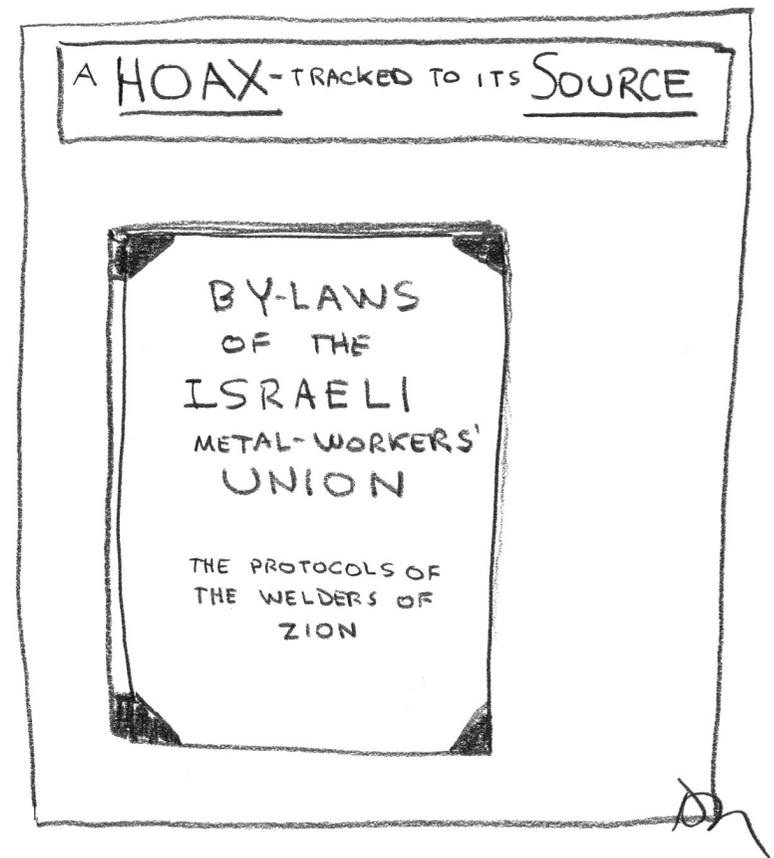
I grew up with something called "Jewish Guilt." This, it was supposed, by us Episcopalian-Reform, was some indwelling sense of shame over something or other. As, indeed, it was. But the something was never named, nor did the afflicted dare to name it, for it was not actually shame, but anxiety at having fallen away.

We did not know where we belonged. We were living the lie that, rationally, we were "just like anyone else," and needed only to redefine our Jewishness as the Desire to Do Good, and all our enemies would accept us. This "good" was never defined, but understood, by said Jews, as, finally, devotion to the teachings of Christ — see Ethical Culture, Rational Judaism, and so on. We were living a lie, which always extracts a price. (In Proverbs, we find a prostitute takes only your money but an adulteress will take your life.)

For, as in the affair with the adulteress, we not only sought sin (in apostasy), but sin-with-the-promise-of-love (as near-Christians, and, so, entitled to His love) — a bargain we dared not perceive, let alone name.

The Ostjuden have always been despised by their more acculturated Western brethren. The Polish Maskelim hated the Chassids, the German Jews loathed the "Contagion" of Polish Jewry, American Reform sided largely with the *New York Times* in ignoring the Holocaust; and the (largely) Jewish Left loves toying with the perfidies of the Jewish state — a proof of their even-handedness. It was always those farther East who were "giving us some trouble."

The trouble, for the Jews, is the necessity of choice: In or out. Are you, that is, siding with your people, or betting that, uniquely in human history, the host culture in which you live will not, eventually, revert to destroying you, should you attract its notice, awakening envy



by your success and savagery by your differences? How do the frightened propitiate their opponents? What could be a greater proof of sincerity than indictment of one's own kind?

One might stand with his people from a sense of joy, or responsibility, or gratitude, or even obligation. Or one might do so from the most practical consideration: Who is likely to defend me when the general population loses its mind?

“Who is a Jew?” I always held that if it's good enough for Hitler, it's good enough for me. A contemporary application: All of my

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One might stand with his people from a sense of joy, or responsibility, or gratitude, or even obligation. Or one might do so from the most practical consideration: Who is likely to defend me when the general population loses its mind?

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neighborhood Jews shovel their offspring into schools teaching the racial inferiority of their kind. When the fit hits the shan, they're likely to search for a home displaying not the various woke sanctimonies, but the American flag.

That would be my house.

Similarly, they (and I), in the shirt-that-we-stood-up-in, might one day have to fight our way to LAX to queue up and plead to be taken on a flight to Israel, which, alone in the world, we knew, would protect us. Which of us, on that bad day, would stay and be killed, giving our lives in martyr testimony to the antisemitic proclamations of the UN?

Our society, now sick, which enshrined free speech as the first of the freedoms, was founded on the principles of Torah.

As those principles are forgotten or derided, the biblically illiterate Jew is left with nothing save the chimera of his good works — these never mentioned in the Constitution, and, time and again, warned against in the Jewish Law.

Dissent, including the invitation to discussion — in the dark night of social justice and CRT — is treated like the offense of the architect in *Schindler's List*.

She was a young Jewish woman, an architect, part of an intake at Auschwitz ordered to build a shelter for themselves. They were

given lumber and plans. The young woman goes to the SS Guard and explains that the building desired can't be built from those plans. He shoots her.

Security comes only from strength.

The thug or burglar will not pass over the house displaying the LOVE IS LOVE, or NO HUMAN IS ILLEGAL, sign. He, being rational, with only so much time in the day, will be attracted to that house as a low-risk endeavor.

What might dissuade the burglar? An American flag, a sign announcing membership in the NRA, an Armed Services license plate.

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We all know of Emma Lazarus's poem "The New Colossus" on the Statue of Liberty. The invitation to the world's tired and poor is on its base.

The poem was written as a *cri de coeur* for the Russian Jews massacred in the pogroms of 1881, six years before the statue's placement.

Miss Lazarus wrote largely about the plight of the Jews. See another of her poems, "The World's Justice":

*Yet when Egypt's self was young,  
And Assyria's bloom unworn,  
Ere the mythic Homer sung,  
Ere the gods of Greece were born,  
Lived the Nation of One God,  
Priests of Freedom, sons of Shem,  
Never quelled by yoke or rod,  
Founders of Jerusalem —  
Is there one abides to-day,  
Seekers of dead cities, say!*

The poem concludes:

*Still on Israel's head forlorn,  
Every nation heaps its scorn.*



The State of Israel remains free because it has an army.

For the first time in 2,000 years, the Jewish People have proclaimed their God-given right to *live*, independent of the sufferance of others.

Who would deny it? The United Nations, and all the woke Left screaming “How dare you?” We might rehearse Israel’s right to exist, citing the British Mandate, unbroken millennial Jewish presence, the sanctity of our holy places, UN resolution 181, continued martial victories, 75 years of statehood, and so on. But one does not ask a victim, “Would you tell me again, please, what *precisely* are your arguments against rape...?” What the good-willed antisemites seek is the destruction of the Jews. Those who question Israel’s “right to exist” are on the continuum of the Black Hundreds, the Cossacks and the SS: They want to murder a people.

Is this unclear to the do-gooders? I don’t think so, but, rather, hold that they consider it (consciously or not) a grand idea. What is the non-Jewish world’s insane preoccupation with Jews? They, as Rabbi Steinsaltz said, are infuriated by the idea (right or wrong) that some group might actually be committed to moral behavior.

Zionism is the defended assertion that a people has the right to live in peace in its own home—a right endorsed by the UN and all human-rights councils; their endorsement withheld from but one group. We know from the Torah that Hashem says of Israel, *Those who bless you will be blessed, and those who curse you will be cursed.*

Normalizing the indictment of Israel is antisemitism. Historically, it is an entry-level step to chaos. See the election to Congress of antisemites, riots regularized as protest, and various thefts and assaults decriminalized.

The miner’s canary may be fed for singing or die as a disposable safety tool in the mine.

Those creatures who will not perceive the second possibility are unlikely to fly free, should they discover the cage door open—as it was at the first Passover. And in 1948. \*

PART THREE

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ZIONISM IN  
AMERICA



# Zionism Will Survive the Legacy Media



HERE WERE NAMES on the letter that I knew, even a few I admired. On June 9, 2021, not long after the escalation between Israel and Gaza-based militant groups ended, scores of journalists signed a public statement decrying the “decades-long journalistic malpractice” of the news industry’s alleged bias in favor of Israel. The media had premised its coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict on Israeli narratives of proportionality and legitimate self-defense, the signers suggested, in part through failing to adopt the viewpoints of the letter-signers’ preferred segments of Palestinian society. “These terms—apartheid, persecution, ethnic supremacy—are increasingly gaining institutional recognition after years of Palestinian advocacy, and we, as journalists, need to examine whether our coverage reflects that reality,” the letter instructs. Coverage could be rebalanced only by endorsing a Palestinian-nationalist interpretation of the conflict and ending the scandalous evenhandedness that treated Israel as

if it were a normal country with just as much of a moral, legal, and practical foundation as any other.

The letter currently has more than 500 signatories, with representatives from nearly every major American news outlet, including the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, ABC News, NBC News, *ProPublica*, and, of course, NPR. The letter hinted at the way in which the industry’s growing internal divisions are likely to express themselves in coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and reflected a view of the journalistic vocation that has become uncontroversial among younger practitioners. A new generation of writers and reporters working in institutional media now believes that it is their job to take unambiguous moral stances in situations in which the journalists themselves detect some deeper injustice guiding the course of events. The rising generation of journalists has a power-based analysis of the media’s purpose and role—which is to say, of their own role. The signatories of the letter have effectively accused their editors, bosses, and colleagues of worsening a real-world conflict.

The journalistic revolt against the supposed immorality of their profession’s standards and traditions is a familiar story by now. In a June 2020 *New York Times* op-ed, published as the George Floyd protests still raged nationwide, the journalist Wesley Lowery neatly sketched out the battle lines of an industry-wide reckoning. On one side were the dead-enders who supported “neutral objectivity,” toadies to power and racism whose worldview “trips over itself to find ways to avoid telling the truth.” The opposite value was “moral clarity,” in which journalists treat their profession as a kind of permanent crusade for social improvement.

So far, the moral-clarity camp is winning. In the post-Floyd era, publications from *Bon Appétit* to *Slate* to the *Hollywood Reporter* to the *New York Times* saw leading editors and personalities forced out for alleged sins against the social justice agenda. But the real sign of a shift in attitudes about the media’s role can be seen in more mundane coverage choices. According to an August 2020 analysis by

political scientist Zach Goldberg in *Tablet Magazine*, the appearance of the words “race” and “racism” increased by over 700 percent in the *New York Times* and just under 1,000 percent in the *Washington Post* between 2011 and 2020. A recent NPR report examining the potential racism of white people who use yellow thumbs-up emojis typifies this exciting new frontier of news coverage. The moral-clarity generation has already succeeded in transforming what American news consumers see and hear, succeeding to such a degree that readers barely even notice the transformation anymore, having been conditioned by years’ worth of earnestly reported stories about what kinds of prom dresses might be racist.

The Holy Land has long been treated as the ultimate in metaphors, a blank slate for the dreams and delusions of ideological projects that have little to do with the place itself. The ascendant moral-clarity faction in American journalism seeks to draft Israel into its broader mission, with the Jewish state serving as the perfect stand-in for racism, Western militarism, and the outdated moral and political structures that the newsroom insurgents are in the process of replacing.

But just as significantly, this approach is running up against the limits of anything centered around the crumbling legacy outlets that constitute what was once thought of as “the media.” The insurgents matter. But they matter only within the context of a profession that is fading in stature and authority. The anti-Zionists are in a comfortable position atop a fracturing and distrusted industry. If they “win,” that victory might prove to be meaningless.

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During the 2021 Gaza flare-up and its aftermath, it was clear that the moral-clarity agenda had filtered into coverage of Israel. An article in *Slate* in May 2021, published toward the end of the fighting, explored how journalists covering the Hamas–Israel war for major American media now saw themselves as upholding a morally indefensible Israeli interpretation of events. “The collective political

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consciousness has shifted largely because of Black Lives Matter,” an anonymous former *New York Times* journalist told the online magazine. “Last summer, our newsrooms as a reflection of a larger society had to take a hard look at state violence, how we perceive it, how we cover it, in a way we haven’t done before.”

Framing of the Gaza escalation as a racial conflict pitting white settlers against a darker-skinned native population started cropping up even in mainstream media. As the violence crested last May, a *New York Times* news story quoted a 26-year-old Jewish-American left-wing activist on the total interchangeability of the United States and the Middle East: “In the protest movements last summer, ‘a whole new wave of people were really primed to see the connection and understand racism more explicitly,’ she said, ‘understanding the ways racism plays out here, and then looking at Israel/Palestine and realizing it is the exact same system.’” In the months after the fighting, more left-leaning mainstream outlets didn’t hesitate to use racism as an interpretive key to any alleged Israeli wrongdoing: In early 2021, a columnist for MSNBC wrote that “Netanyahu’s Covid plan is even more racist than Trump’s.” The column was based on

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The winners of the great media unbundling don't have an agenda, or at least they don't present themselves that way. For their readers and listeners, these writers and podcasters are providing the unvarnished version of the world that traditional media is withholding from them.

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the false premise that Israel had withheld Covid-vaccine doses from the Palestinian Authority. But it illustrated a “morally clear” perspective that was just too convenient to be corrected.

Such breezy equivalencies between Israeli and American racism, and their elevation to something newsworthy, is to be expected by now, and not only because of the rapid reorganization of coverage priorities in the wake of the George Floyd protests. American media is essentially solipsistic; it long ago lost the ability to discuss complex events in other parts of the world as if they existed outside a narrow and often partisan American domestic framework. The American media treats Israel as if it's no more than an hour's drive from New York or Washington, D.C.

Believers in the moral-clarity vocation are inevitably driven by a specifically American set of concerns and by a sense of their own society's innate injustice. The rising generation of scribes believes that their country is wracked with unpurgeable sins of structural racism, white supremacy, slavery, and, to a lesser extent, capitalism and social inequity. To export the analysis to a close ally of the United States that is riven with its own active ethnic and sectarian conflict, and that governs the geographic locus of seemingly the entire world's feverish imagination, was probably inevitable.

Thousands of years of experience tell us Israel is an easier and more natural target for frustration toward one's own society than, say, Jamaica or Norway. As discontent in America continues, and as the media are increasingly squeezed by shrinking budgets and demoralized by their declining prestige, it should surprise no one if the focus on Israel, and on the alleged kinship of Israeli and American sins, deepens in years to come.

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The moral-clarity agenda assumes that the values of major American newsrooms will reverberate through society as a whole—that the media can essentially serve as a vanguard for the transformation of American morals and sentiments. So far, they've been wrong. Polls indicated that the Black Lives Matter movement was about as popular in late 2021 as it had been before Floyd's killing—and this was after more than a year of the media's championing the priorities of the movement and accepting its basic outlook on American life. The U.S. media are now less trusted than they have ever been, with a mere 7 percent of adults telling Gallup that they had a “great deal” of “trust and confidence in newspapers, television, and radio news reporting.” Audiences are shrinking: A Knight-Gallup poll tracking news consumption found that 2021 was perhaps a record year for Americans ignoring the news media, with just 33 percent of respondents saying they paid attention to national news.

Moral clarity's defining product has been the 1619 Project, the *New York Times'* attempt to reorient the American national story around slavery and racism, so named because of the project's stated goal of showing that the true founding was in 1619, when the first slaves from Africa were brought to the United States. Nikole Hannah-Jones, the project's organizer and public face, is listed as a signatory to the May 2021 journalist's letter decrying the news industry's coverage of Israel. But use of the 1619 Project's materials in just 3.5 percent of public schools and its appearance as a book must be weighed against

the project's ultimate impact, which was to expose and sharpen deep polarities in how experts and the general public understand American history. The 1619 Project blew open a new front in an elite-level culture war. It is still unclear, however, how many readers it really convinced, or even how many it actually reached.

The 1619 Project, along with the controversy it stirred, is a microcosm of legacy media's current status. News consumers largely treat the *New York Times*, CNN, and other former gold standards as if they're simply one option among many. Substack, Patreon, and other self-publication platforms are filled with journalists who understood that they didn't need institutional support to reach large audiences, or who realized that their old employers were probably underpaying them. As a result, consumers are attaching less importance to the relative prestige of their news sources. Perhaps the most-listened-to figure in American media, the podcaster Joe Rogan, is also among the media industry's most openly reviled figures, the target of a notably ineffective takedown attempt across the legacy media in early 2022.

On Israel, the media's moral-clarity revolution has created an opportunity in the form of an audience repelled by the partisanship and ideological stridency of the outlets it no longer trusts. In an environment in which news consumers treat the *Washington Post* as if it's just an especially large Substack, it is possible that a handful of Substacks, as subscription numbers rise, will soon be able to counteract the narratives and distortions of outlets with the size, reach, and resources of the *Washington Post*. The psychic monopolies of the major broadcasters and newspapers have been broken, and it's possible that the moral-clarity insurgents have won out so easily because their bosses now have only a vague and ever-shifting sense of what their job is supposed to be.

Medium and small-scale media projects can now gain vast followings and credibility within a very short time. But believers in the importance of a Jewish state can't assume that old approaches will work within this new world. The most successful breakaways from legacy media haven't thrived because their ideas are compelling, or

their reporting is especially thorough or fact-based. Whether it's a brainy liberal such as Heather Cox Richardson or a more libertarian-minded everyman like Rogan, the winners in the new ecosystem get across by being personally immediate—by speaking in their own voices and with a refreshing lack of mediation. They're community builders with no house style. They believe that their own individual sense of purpose doesn't need the validation of someone else's corporate machinery. Most important, and somewhat counterintuitively, the winners of the great media unbundling don't have an agenda, or at least they don't present themselves that way. For their readers and listeners, these writers and podcasters are providing the unvarnished version of the world that traditional media is withholding from them. Richardson already has 500,000 readers of her newsletter—while Rogan proved impossible to cancel, despite many people's best efforts.



If believers in Israel treat the new media ecosystem as nothing but the newest front in the same ongoing ideological battle, they will risk re-creating the dynamics that have taken hold in legacy media in the past few decades. The fight over how Israel is covered is worth having, but the next round shouldn't necessarily be focused on persuading people of the justness of the country's existence or on correcting every flaw in a maliciously distorted public record. Better to invest in what's coming rather than what's declining. The way to succeed might be through appealing to the need for human connection and the open-mindedness of the growing number of readers who no longer trust the old system. Journalists and editors dedicated to a truthful depiction of events in Israel should seek to understand how to appeal to a new type of readership in an ecosystem that is only a couple of years old. It will probably be a better use of their time than investing in whichever side of the media industry's culture war happens to inherit an empty and unimpressive ruin. \*

# Israel, America, and the Herzl Paradox



IRCUMSTANCES are forcing Israel to rethink its position in world affairs.

Russia reasserted itself militarily in Syria and has now invaded Ukraine. China continues its rise to dominance, in its region and beyond. America, meanwhile, as successive presidents have made clear in word and deed, is disengaging from the Middle East and shrinking the U.S. role in the world.

In many respects, Israel is stronger and more secure than ever. But it still faces challenges—primarily, an Iranian nuclear bomb—that can best be handled through cooperation with America. Can it count on that cooperation? Should it respond to American disengagement and apparent decline by seeking partnerships elsewhere?

In recent decades, Israel has cultivated relations with China and Russia. It sees China as a major economic opportunity and generally turns a blind eye to China's crimes against human

rights in Xinjiang and elsewhere. Meanwhile, efforts to improve relations with Russia intensified after Putin joined Iran in the Syrian civil war to defend Assad. Iran wants to be able to attack Israel from Syria. To prevent this, Israel has to strike Iranian forces there without killing Russians. Good relations with the Putin regime have made possible the necessary “deconfliction.” Anxious to preserve coordination with Russia in Syria, some Israeli leaders have been less than full-throated in denouncing Putin's enormities in Ukraine.

U.S. officials from the Trump and Biden administrations have counseled caution in both cases, warning that China exploits trade and investment arrangements for strategic purposes and complaining that Israel is too cozy with Putin—a complaint with starker resonance since the rape of Ukraine.

In rebuffing this criticism, Israelis often say simply that China has never been their enemy. That's a flip answer to the serious question of how Israel (and the West in general) should regulate economic relations with an increasingly aggressive China. Xi's threatening policies have belied decades of hopes that integration into the world economy would liberalize and moderate China. In Israel and throughout the West, major policy changes are required, but the world economy does not transform itself overnight. Neither the United States, Israel, nor any other economic partner of China has yet come fully to grips with the challenges that Xi is posing. The first required step is to acknowledge the problem.

The Ukraine war obviously makes it harder for Israel to deflect criticism of its cooperation with Russia. Israelis, nevertheless, make a valid point in highlighting America's responsibility for Israel's predicament. The United States gutted its own Mediterranean fleet, allowed Russia to become dominant in Syria, and did nothing to keep Iran out. That is why Israel needs Russia's help, or at least acquiescence.

These matters are a problem in the U.S.-Israeli relationship,

particularly for the junior partner. Israel knows the relationship has been helpful, sometimes supremely so. But America's substantial support over many years elicits unease as well as gratitude. It creates dependency. It limits Israel's freedom of action. And it may not last forever.

As national-security officials in Jerusalem assess their choices, they should consider what I call the Herzl Paradox.



When Herzl organized Zionism into a political movement, his goal was Jewish self-reliance. At the same time, he sought foreign support. This is the paradox.

In Herzl's day, Jewish life, liberty, and property depended everywhere on the goodwill or toleration of non-Jews. Nowhere were Jews a majority, and hostility to them was pandemic. From Britain to Yemen, Jewish communities were vilified, expropriated, murdered, and expelled century after century.

The Zionist message was that Jews should cease living as history's objects. They could take their future into their own hands by creating a Jewish-majority state in their ancient homeland. For some, a Jewish state would be home. For those in the Diaspora, it could be a refuge. Jews could build a national center there. There would be dignity in independence and related responsibilities, and the resulting self-respect would not be confined to Jews who lived there.

While some Zionists stressed Jewish culture (most notably Ahad Ha'am) and others stressed the practical value of creating farming settlements (Menachem Ussishkin, for example), Herzl focused on national sovereignty and diplomacy. The first World Zionist Congress, with Herzl presiding, declared in 1897 that the Jewish people aimed for a "publicly recognized and legally secured homeland in Palestine." He had in mind some kind of charter to legitimate the Zionist enterprise. A decade after his

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death, Zionists who sided with Britain in World War I advanced his ideas and were instrumental in bringing about the Balfour Declaration, which may be seen as the great-power charter that Herzl had envisioned.

But Herzl was a pragmatist as well as a visionary. As much as he stressed the importance of Jewish national independence, he recognized the need for outside help. How has the Israeli government applied that lesson to relations with the United States?



The complexity of the U.S.-Israeli alliance is sometimes obscured by both sides' insistence that the relationship has always been strong and unshakable. In fact, its strength varies from one U.S. administration to another, and individual administrations are often inconsistent in their support. That does not mean the alliance has been poor, only that it is a creature with two heads, each with its own mind — and each capable of holding inconsistent thoughts.

President Truman was the first world leader to give formal recognition to Israel's independence. The new state was then fighting for its life against the Palestinian Arabs and a coalition of neighboring Arab states. And yet, just as British and American intelligence agencies were predicting Arab victory, Truman imposed an arms embargo that particularly disadvantaged the Jews.

President Eisenhower shared the conventional Washington

view that Israel was a Cold War liability. After Israel defeated Egypt in the 1956 Suez War, Eisenhower threatened Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to compel Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula. Ben-Gurion submitted—in return for assurances that America would uphold Israel's Red Sea navigation rights.

Ten years later, however, when Egypt blockaded the Red Sea, President Johnson reneged on Eisenhower's promise. Though he considered himself a friend of Israel, Johnson warned that, if it broke the blockade by itself, Israel would find itself alone. Israel defied the warning and won the Six-Day War. Had it complied, it might have lost.

A high point in U.S.-Israeli relations occurred in 1970, when Syria, a Soviet client, threatened to overthrow Jordan's King Hussein. President Nixon asked Israel to protect the king, which it did by aborting a Syrian invasion. King Hussein survived, and President Nixon was grateful. But a low point also occurred that year. Egypt violated its cease-fire agreement in the "War of Attrition" at the Suez Canal by moving anti-aircraft missiles forward. The United States, which had promoted the cease-fire, did nothing. Then, when Egypt used those missiles in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Nixon, in perhaps the brightest moment in the history of U.S.-Israeli relations, ordered the resupply of Israeli forces, saving the country from possible destruction. But he promptly pressured Israel into a cease-fire, blocking it from a clear victory.

President Carter spoke sympathetically of the Palestinians and reproachfully toward Israel. He wanted Israel to feel as much pressure as possible to withdraw from Gaza and the West Bank, so he warned Egypt's President Sadat against a bilateral peace. But once Egypt and Israel signed their treaty in 1979, Carter initiated huge aid programs for both countries. Steady funding from Congress has helped preserve the treaty for more than 40 years, despite Middle Eastern tumult. Israel has been especially successful in using that aid to create a superb military.

Reagan-era U.S. officials increasingly valued Israel as a Cold War asset—pro-American, stable, and committed to free-world political and economic principles. Its military and intelligence capabilities were unmatched in the region and showed the superiority of American over Soviet arms. In the Arab-Israeli conflict, President Reagan viewed Israel as wearing the white hat. Yet his administration condemned Israel at the United Nations in 1981 for destroying Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor and, in 1982, sent Marines into Lebanon to rescue the Palestine Liberation Organization. In 1988, Reagan gave the PLO formal U.S. diplomatic recognition—a first.

Inconsistency remains a feature of the relationship. In post-9/11 America, Israel won widespread popular appreciation as a valuable ally in the War on Terrorism. President Bush, however, was the first U.S. president to announce support for a Palestinian state. Bush was furious when Palestinian officials lied to him about contraband weapons they had tried to smuggle from Iran—but he allowed his State Department to pressure Israel to meet Palestinian demands on settlements and other peace-process issues.

President Obama often voiced resentment of Israel and pursued policies on Iran and the Palestinians that Israeli leaders said were harmful to Israel's security. At the same time, perhaps to mollify pro-Israel congressional Democrats, he permitted his Defense Department to expand U.S.-Israeli cooperation.

President Trump's bull-in-a-china-shop disregard for conventional wisdom worked in Israel's favor. Trump defied standard warnings that the United States would antagonize important Arab partners and detonate the "Arab street" if he aligned with Israel on Jerusalem, West Bank settlements, the Golan, and other reputedly explosive issues. Trump went further. He pulled the United States out of Obama's nuclear deal with Iran. His peace plan endorsed Israeli security concerns regarding the Jordan Valley and other parts of the West Bank—and made no gestures toward evenhandedness between Israel and its enemies. The plan promoted

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In expanding economic, academic, and other ties to China, Israeli officials are whistling past the graveyard — making light of moral and strategic hazards that may be more damaging and imminent than they assume.

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the Abraham Accords — the peace and normalization deals Israel soon signed with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Trump did not detonate the Arab street, but he exploded the reputation of many “experts.”

Trump meanwhile shared his predecessor’s isolationist impulses. He embraced Obama policies that had helped create in Syria the strategic vacuum that Russia and Iran filled. Trump squeezed Iran economically, cutting its oil sales and weakening its currency, but showed no interest in countering its seizure of commercial ships and destruction of Saudi oil facilities. Denouncing “endless wars,” as if one’s enemies have no say in when a war ends, Trump set in train the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan that President Biden endorsed and then managed so badly.

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Israeli officials have a duty to keep the Jewish state safe no matter how world affairs evolve. Because Israel depends heavily on U.S. arms, aid, trade, investment, and diplomatic support, it has worked to demonstrate its loyalty and usefulness to America. Now, however, with world affairs in high flux, Israeli officials wonder whether they should hedge. They voice impatience with U.S.

warnings about excessive coziness with China and Russia. Meanwhile, Israelis fret about American steadiness, reminding me of a remark I heard from a NATO diplomat almost 50 years ago: The problem with being a U.S. ally is that you never know when America is going to stab itself in the back.

As hedging can be hazardous, some cautions are in order.

First, the strategic tie between Israel and America is as strong as exists between any sovereign states. Each has its own interests and priorities, and they will sometimes differ and even clash. But that’s the whole point of sovereignty — and of Zionism. One must have wildly unrealistic expectations to be disappointed in what the U.S.-Israeli alliance, in general, provides to both parties.

Second, shared political principles have strategic importance. A common commitment to liberal democracy creates a bond that is more than sentimental. China and Russia are strategically aligned with Iran, Israel’s mortal enemy, not simply for reasons of wealth and security. Their axis is a joint rejection of Western principles of individual liberty and self-government. Elites in Israel, as in America, tend to downplay the importance in world affairs of ideology, honor, tradition, fellow feeling, and a shared understanding of right and wrong. But these “soft” considerations can make and break armies and alliances. It harms Israel for its officials to appear so hardheaded as to be hard-hearted and so realpolitik-minded as to be amoral or worse. That also undermines solidarity with Israel’s American friends, a good part of whose support for Israel is rooted not in considerations of strategy and economics, but in religious faith, memory of the Holocaust, and sympathy for a fellow democracy defending its existence.

In expanding economic, academic, and other ties to China, Israeli officials are whistling past the graveyard — making light of moral and strategic hazards that may be more damaging and imminent than they assume. China is committing brutal human-rights abuses on a large scale in Xinjiang. It is pressing claims of

sovereignty over the South China Sea, threatening war against Taiwan, and acting violently toward its other neighbors. Its officials speak with vehement hostility against the United States. And the hallmarks of China's trade and investment policy are corruption of foreign officials, anti-democratic political influence operations, and the massive theft of foreign intellectual property. These problems, assigned due weight, should be in the balance when Israelis consider cooperation with Chinese entities. Until recently, Jerusalem had no mechanism for evaluating the national-security implications of Chinese or other foreign investments in Israel. It now has one, but the mechanism is not strong enough for its task. Meanwhile Russia is savaging Ukraine and causing much of the world to divide into either a pro-Russia or an anti-Russia camp. It is easy for Israelis to see that the Iranian Islamic Republic's ideology—the foundation of its strategic commitment to Israel's destruction—precludes friendly relations with the Jewish state. But it should be obvious, too, that the ideological principles Russia and China share with Iran severely limit the quality of Israel's relations with the Putin and Xi regimes.

Third, it is a bad bet to assume that America is weak or in irreversible decline. If that is why Israel is thickening links to China and Russia, it should reconsider. Those who have lost that bet include the German leadership in World War I, Hitler after Pearl Harbor, and later Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milošević, and Osama bin Laden. The 1970s offer a telling case. First came Watergate, then the fall of Saigon. The Soviet Union was approaching nuclear-weapons superiority. Its proxies were gaining ground in Vietnam, Ethiopia, and southern Africa. Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan. Projecting naïveté and weakness, President Carter suggested that America was suffering from malaise. Iranian Islamists toppled the shah of Iran, an important U.S. ally, sacked the U.S. Embassy, and held its personnel hostage for over a year. America seemed hopelessly impotent. But Reagan rebuilt its power and confidence and systematically aggravated the Soviet

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Zionists have always understood that Israel may one day have to stand alone. But prudent Israeli officials will do what they can to put off that day—and not hasten it by courting anti-Western powers in ways that antagonize America.

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regime's internal contradictions. The United States won the Cold War, destroying the Soviet Union without a hot war.

Lastly, Zionists have always understood that Israel may one day have to stand alone. But prudent Israeli officials will do what they can to put off that day—and not hasten it by courting anti-Western powers in ways that antagonize America. Israel's interest is in encouraging America to strengthen its military and revive its leadership of the democratic world.



Israel's relations with the Putin regime, a minor irritant among some U.S. officials over the past decade, are now a high-profile element of the Jewish state's image in the world. From inside and outside the country, Israeli leaders have been criticized for not siding squarely with Ukraine.

Some of those leaders immediately joined the anti-Russian consensus. Others equivocated, fearing to antagonize Putin and thereby endanger Israel's ability to counter Iran in Syria. Some, then, are focused on morality, and others on realpolitik. The latter approach, as this essay has argued, is short-sighted and often dishonorable. National-security policy, however, requires more than moralism.

Let us assume that Prime Minister Naftali Bennett believes Ukraine is in the right and the Russian invasion is an unmitigated evil. Even so, he cannot act based only on what is good for Ukraine. His duty is to ask, what is necessary for Israel? It makes sense for Ukraine's President Zelensky to tell other leaders what they "must" do to help—but those leaders all also have unique calculations to make.

Weighing interests against morality is hard to defend when the interests are economic. But when survival rather than trade is at issue, morality may sit on both sides of the scale.

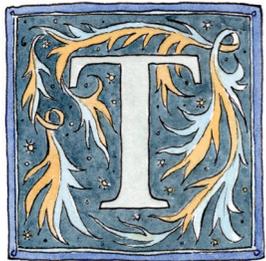
The highest duty of leaders is to preserve their countries' freedom. That is why President Biden must balance the danger of nuclear war against his inclination to aid Ukraine. Polish leaders acted similarly when considering whether and how to donate MiG aircraft. It is likewise proper for Israel to safeguard its freedom of maneuver in Syria when setting its policy toward Russia. Anyone who grants that Britain and America were right to ally with the monstrous Stalin to defeat the Nazis can see why Israel now works with Putin to be able to fight Israel's genocidal Iranian enemy.

This is not an argument against helping Ukraine. A case can be made that considerations of both strategy and morality favor action by the West far bolder than what has been done to date. But no one should expect any foreign leader, obviously including Israel's prime minister, to decide how to act solely based on what is good for Ukraine.

In fact, Ukraine's hideous plight warns Israel to keep to an absolute minimum any serious threat to Israel's existence. As tens of thousands of Ukrainian Jews flee for their lives, Zionism is vindicated once again. These refugees are being welcomed into a country happy to receive them, grant them citizenship, and generously assist their absorption into their ancient national homeland. The war confirms both elements of the Herzl paradox. It shows how important it is for any country—including

Ukraine and Israel—to have friends willing to extend help. But it also demonstrates the importance of being able to defend oneself. Either can be a matter of life and death. \*

# Saving Israel for Democrats



HOUGH THE MEMORY is a fading one, the Democratic Party was once Israel's central pillar of political support in the United States, if not in the entire world.

Harry Truman considered his recognition of Israel in 1948—taken against the advice of the State Department and the CIA—to be one of the finest moments of his presidency. He later compared himself to Persia's Cyrus the Great for restoring the Jews to their homeland. John F. Kennedy described the U.S.-Israel alliance as “a special relationship” and lifted an arms embargo by providing the Jewish state with Hawk anti-aircraft missiles in 1962. Lyndon Johnson sold Israel state-of-the-art F-4 fighter jets in the waning days of his presidency. Bobby Kennedy was a stalwart supporter of Israel from its founding and paid with his life for that stance at the hands of Palestinian fanatic Sirhan Sirhan. Another legendary Democrat, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, won the admiration of the Jewish world when, as Gerald Ford's ambassador to the United Nations, he

denounced, in unforgettable language, the General Assembly's 1975 “Zionism is racism” resolution. The United States, he said, “does not acknowledge, it will not abide by, it will never acquiesce in this infamous act.”

But Democratic support for Israel began to wobble and slide in subsequent years. The Left, which had once seen Israel as the victim of Arab aggression, became increasingly hostile when it decided that it was Israel that was the oppressive power, denying Palestinians precisely what Zionism had given Jews: a state of their own.

The diplomatic rupture began with Jimmy Carter, who pressed Israel to pave the way for a Palestinian homeland long before Palestinian leaders had shown any interest in renouncing terrorism, much less recognizing Israel. As an ex-president, Carter became the first major American political figure to accuse Israel of being an apartheid state.

Under Bill Clinton, the U.S.-Israel relationship became increasingly partisan: Democrats were pro-Israel as long as the Labor Party was in power. But hostility turned intense once Benjamin Netanyahu came to power, even when he tried to mollify Clinton (and defy his own Likud) with further territorial concessions, as he did over Hebron in 1997 and at the Wye River talks the following year. It would later come as a shock to many Democrats that it was Yasser Arafat who scuppered a peace deal by rejecting an Israeli offer of a Palestinian state on 100 percent of the Gaza Strip, 95 percent of the West Bank, and much of East Jerusalem.

Barack Obama's presidency saw a further steep deterioration in the relationship. Obama remained committed to providing American security assistance to Israel and even enhanced intelligence cooperation. But he also made a point of publicly stressing, as part of his outreach to the Muslim world, that the “situation for the Palestinian people is intolerable.” His administration also pursued secret talks with Iran without first notifying Israel, a profound breach of trust between the two countries. Netanyahu, who at first had sought to placate Obama by imposing a temporary settlement freeze and accepting in principle the idea of a Palestinian state,

retaliated by taking his objections to the Iran nuclear deal to Congress, further alienating congressional Democrats (many of whom boycotted the speech) and infuriating Obama. The following year, the administration refused to veto an anti-Israel resolution at the UN Security Council. It was undoubtedly the lowest point in American-Israeli relations.

Which brings us to Joe Biden. The president has worked with every Israeli prime minister since Golda Meir. His administration has affirmed the Abraham Accords, kept the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem, and done nothing to reverse Donald Trump's recognition of the Golan Heights as sovereign Israeli territory. Biden himself has gone out of his way to strike a friendly tone with Israel's right-wing prime minister, Naftali Bennett, in contrast to the sourness that typified Obama's attitude toward Netanyahu. And so far he has not made an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement a central goal of his foreign policy. But the president has also pushed hard for a new nuclear deal with Iran, which Jerusalem views as exceptionally dangerous to Israel's security. The verdict is still out on whether the Biden presidency will leave relations with the Jewish state stronger or weaker.



Today, the Democratic Party stands at a crossroads: Will it make a final break with the Jewish state, following the increasingly prominent lead of anti-Israel progressives such as Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib? Or will it find its way back to a more traditional liberalism—one that recognizes that Israel, for all its faults, is an embattled democracy that champions values of tolerance, pluralism, and progress otherwise in short supply in today's Middle East?

Much of the evidence isn't encouraging. An AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll conducted in June 2021 concluded, "Among Democrats, 51 percent say the U.S. is not supportive enough of the Palestinians. The sentiment jumps to 62 percent among

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## Fighting lazy and invidious stereotypes used to be a liberal priority; pro-Israel Democrats should make it one again.

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Democrats who describe themselves as liberal." Another 2021 poll, conducted by Vox-Data for Progress, found that 26 percent of Democrats thought Biden was not sufficiently supportive of Palestinians, as opposed to only 7 percent who thought he wasn't supportive enough of Israel. (A plurality of Democrats thought he had "the right approach.") Additionally, 45 percent of Democrats wanted the United States to decrease the amount of annual military aid sent to Israel. All of this corresponds with the drift of many younger Democrats toward the ranks of groups such as the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), whose members have adopted the "Boycott, Divest, Sanctions" stance as a linchpin of their foreign policy.

The poll numbers are increasingly reflected in political action. In May 2021, some 25 Democrats signed a letter calling Israel's then-planned evictions of Palestinian families from homes in east Jerusalem "abhorrent" and a violation of international law and human rights. (The evictions were later suspended by Israel's judiciary.) When Hamas sent rockets toward Jerusalem on May 10, these same Democrats called Israel's military response a violation of international and American law, and condemned Israel's use of force. After the war, Representative Jamie Raskin, a Jewish Democrat from Maryland, spearheaded a letter, signed by more than 140 congressional Democrats, calling on Republicans not to block an aid package for Gaza—even though the aid would unavoidably benefit Hamas. Ron Kampeas, of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, called it a "tectonic shift in how Democrats relate to Israel." Months later, House progressives briefly blocked an effort to fund the Iron Dome missile-defense

system, the chief purpose of which is to intercept Hamas's rockets before they can kill Israeli civilians.

The influence of the far Left in the Democratic Party is exemplified by the change in position taken by New York representative Jamaal Bowman, who was a co-sponsor of a bill backing the Abraham Accords, called the Israel Normalization Act, or INA. A leading progressive, Bowman got in trouble with both the DSA and "the Squad" after a trip to Israel sponsored by the liberal group J Street, which favors a two-state solution to the Palestinian issue, and because he voted for (after initially opposing) \$1 billion in funding for Israel for the Iron Dome system. As a result, DSA's foreign-policy committee called for his expulsion. He was not expelled, but the far-left group said they would not endorse his reelection in 2022 unless "he is able to demonstrate solidarity with Palestine in alignment with expectations we have set."

Bowman soon gave the DSA what it wanted. Though 55 members (out of 97) of his own progressive caucus support the act, he announced his opposition to INA. The congressman may have once feared alienating pro-Israel constituents, since a sizable portion of his district is Jewish. But recent redistricting (now headed to New York's highest court on a challenge) has reduced the number of Jews, and whatever fears he had were clearly outweighed by the risk of losing votes from progressives for whom anti-Israel politics are central to their cause.

For all this, it remains important to stress that the militant anti-Israel wing of the party still represents only a minority of Democratic views. There is also an important wing of the progressive movement that has maintained a principled commitment to supporting Israel.

Nobody better exemplifies this than Ritchie Torres, the young congressman from the Bronx, who seems to check every box in the progressive identity tool kit: gay, black, Hispanic, born to a single mother, raised in a housing project. Yet Torres has distinguished himself as an outspoken defender of Israel. (He likes to joke that the reason he's pro-Israel is that he dropped out of college.) In a series of recent tweets,

Torres wrote that the Abraham Accords "created a path to peace that fundamentally altered the Middle East, while the BDS movement offers no positive change for Israelis or Palestinians." In a follow-up tweet, he noted that it is possible to support "Palestinian dignity and sovereignty without delegitimizing Israel as a Jewish state."



What then, can be done to turn this around—to encourage more of the politics of Ritchie Torres, and less of AOC's?

The most important political step in this direction was the creation, in 2019, of The Democratic Majority for Israel, or DMFI, led by Democratic pollster Mark Mellman. Its focus so far has been the work of its corresponding political action committee to help elect supporters of Israel to Congress, and to challenge those Democrats who are hostile to Israel in primaries. In 2020, it helped elect 83 pro-Israel members of Congress, and it was the first group to endorse Joe Biden during the 2020 primary.

Not every DMFI campaign has been a success, but notable ones have. This March, California's Democratic Party endorsed a strong pro-Israel platform at the party's convention. In Ohio in 2021, DMFI was instrumental in electing pro-Israel candidate Shontel Brown in a Democratic primary against Nina Turner. Turner, who had entered the race with a large lead in the polls, had the support of AOC, Bernie Sanders, and the far-left "Justice Democrats" PAC. But Turner also left no doubt about her pro-Palestinian sympathies, tweeting her "solidarity" with calls to "#EndApartheid." She wound up losing the race by six percentage points in the deep-blue 11th congressional district.

Along with DMFI, there is Pro-Israel America (PIA), a bipartisan PAC that endorses pro-Israel candidates of both political parties. That includes Janice Winfrey, the Detroit city clerk who is running in the state's Democratic primary against Rashida Tlaib in Michigan's redrawn new 12th congressional district. With its new super PAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee has also gotten into the

political-endorsement business. As of this writing, the AIPAC PAC has endorsed 61 Democrats and 62 Republicans in the midterm elections. But even as it's vital for groups such as DMFI, PIA, and AIPAC to do this sort of political work, it's equally important to go to work on the ideological and moral front. The fight over Israel among Democrats is ultimately a battle of ideas, and that's the one that pro-Israel Democrats cannot afford to lose.

Four tasks are especially important.

First, it's essential to break the mental and rhetorical grip of "intersectionality" as it now applies to Israel—the idea that if one is against the oppression of black people in America, one must also be anti-Israel, on the view that Israelis are white Jews oppressing colored Palestinians. Not only is that mistaken on factual grounds (Jews aren't "white," and a plurality of Jewish Israelis are of Middle Eastern descent), but it is also neocolonialist in its assumption that America's racial categories can be grafted on to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Fighting lazy and invidious stereotypes used to be a liberal priority; pro-Israel Democrats should make it one again.

Second, pro-Israel Democrats must fight the accusation that they are using "dark money" from reactionary (or Republican) sources. In her concession speech, Nina Turner said, "We didn't lose this race, evil money manipulated and maligned the election." The charge is itself reminiscent of the infamous statement made by Representative Ilhan Omar that American support for Israel is "all about the Ben-jamins"—that is, Jewish money. It also echoes some Republicans' habit of blaming every liberal activist they dislike for taking money from George Soros, who everyone knows is Jewish.

Third, the distance between expressions of anti-Zionism and antisemitism is often short or nonexistent, and liberal Democrats need to be encouraged (or shamed) into understanding that fact and denouncing the behavior. Whenever Omar has made blatantly antisemitic statements (for which she usually apologizes and backtracks, before doing it again), Democratic condemnation has been far from full-throated. When she remarked that she saw nothing wrong when

she criticized people who pushed for "allegiance to a foreign country"—meaning Jews who lobbied on behalf of Israel—Democrats responded with a statement that did not mention her by name, left out what she had said that was objectionable, and balanced opposition to antisemitism by stressing opposition to "Islamophobia." At a time when Jews have become the leading target of religiously motivated hate crimes, the diffidence in criticizing Omar is unworthy of a Democratic Party that otherwise shows no tolerance for bigotry.

Finally, centrist Democrats and pro-Israel groups must develop educational programs showing that support for Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, along with its status as the only true democracy in the region, corresponds with the other policies most Democrats hold in common—a commitment to democracy at home and abroad, a foreign policy based on morality and the defense of humane values, and economic growth that benefits regular people throughout America and the world.



The Democratic Party remains, however equivocally, a supporter of the Jewish state, particularly when it comes to current leaders such as House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer. Some may be tempted to write off that support, either because they think it can't last, or that it shouldn't. They're mistaken. A party that supports Israel—even as it recognizes its faults—is a party that is true to its best traditions. And a party that supports Israel helps itself by demonstrating to voters that it won't be held hostage to the radicals and antisemitic bigots in its midst. It's a case of the right thing to do in politics also being the smart thing.

As for Israel, maintaining American support from both major political parties must remain a strategic priority for any Israeli government. The old ties that once held between Israel and the Democrats might be frayed, but they aren't yet broken, and they remain very much worth mending. \*

# Israel and the Empathy Deficit



AS THE FOUNDER and long-time CEO of Hazon, the American Jewish community's largest environmental organization, I want to reflect on our inability to talk with those we disagree with—particularly about Israel—and to offer three suggestions for what we might do about it.

As ever, personal history influences my relationship with Israel. I first went there in the late '70s, when I was 15. It was a world gone by. New cars were few and far between. I hitchhiked happily and safely around the country. In those days, Jewish life came in three flavors—Orthodox, Conservative, Reform—but in practice there was just one religion: “support for Israel.” Memories of '73 and '67 were still fresh.

I grew up in England. As a young Jewish leader there in the mid-'80s and early '90s, I already didn't feel quite right about

this approach. I am eternally grateful that Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom showed me a better model. I was finishing my Georgetown M.A. at The Hebrew University, where I took his class “Politics and Religion in Jerusalem.” One class, we'd be in the classroom. Next class, we'd visit settlers. Then we'd meet with a Palestinian expert on West Bank land seizures, who told us that everything the settlers had said was untrue. Rav Froman, z”l, the Orthodox Israeli peace-maker, visited us. Faisal al-Husseini, the long-time PLO official who championed a two-state solution, couldn't, because the Israelis had him under house arrest—so we visited him.

It was from Jeremy's class that I understood, viscerally, that on Israel, people had different views about . . . well, everything. But understanding that there were different views didn't mean I had to agree with everyone. Looking back, I see that the time between my teenage years at a highly academic English boys' school and my mid-'30s at Pardes, a liberal co-ed yeshiva in Jerusalem, was a high-water mark for arguing about important topics with mutual respect and affection. Today, we seem to have lost the capacity to argue in a way that isn't sometimes scary—especially about Israel.

How and when did we lose this ability? I don't know exactly, but a profound shift happened during the years I led Hazon, starting in 2000.

In those 21 years, Hazon produced more than 40 Israel trips of different sorts. To me and others in Hazon, it was clear that our goal of “*a healthier, more equitable and more sustainable Jewish community, and a more sustainable world for all*” necessarily involved working in North America *and* in Israel *and* on the Israel-Diaspora relationship.

But over time, the (unrealistic) “Israel can do no wrong” of the '70s became the (equally bizarre and unfair) “Israel can do no right” of the 2010s and 2020s. So the default position on Israel for many became “let's not go there”—literally, in some cases. Anything one said ran the risk of offense.

One measure of the change is that when Hazon started its Israel

Ride in 2003 with the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies (a program that involves Palestinian students), we were concerned we might be seen as too “pro-Palestinian” by some participants or stakeholders.

Skip forward to 2017, when we signed a grant with Israel’s Ministry of Diaspora Affairs for Hazon’s Hakhel program, which supports emerging Jewish intentional communities worldwide. A staffer asked me what to do with photos of me with the then-Minister Naftali Bennett (who was seen as a strong right-winger). I said, “Just make sure no one sees them.” I was smiling—but I wasn’t kidding. It was too easy to imagine a response and counter-response spinning out of control. I wasn’t the only Jewish nonprofit CEO starting to worry about this kind of thing.



This is strange. I’m proud of Hakhel, which today includes five communities in Ukraine. As I write, in the fourth week of this terrible war, nine delegations have now gone from Hakhel to bring humanitarian relief, including medication, food, and clothes, to Ukrainian refugees.

Was my self-censorship oversensitive? I don’t know. But I was certainly influenced by a growing number of conversations with young progressives who assumed that there were “correct” positions on Israel—and woe betide anyone who didn’t agree.

During last year’s war with Gaza, there seemed to be an extraordinary absence of empathy for Israelis. I’m baffled that people could feel that a misspoken *word* could make someone unsafe, and yet be untroubled by how actually unsafe people might feel as missiles were being lobbed at them from Gaza, or, for that matter, in the face of random stabbings or shootings.

I’m equally struck by the presumption that being “against the occupation” is axiomatic. I, too, am “against the occupation” in some senses. I was a founder of the New Israel Fund in the UK

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## I have empathy for young Jewish progressives who feel that their voices aren’t fully heard in organized Jewish life.

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in the ’90s. I’ve worked steadily to build relationships with Palestinians in my time at Hazon. I co-chaired a multiday Encounter trip to the West Bank. Not all that long ago, I went with Rabbis for Human Rights and spent a day picking olives with a Palestinian family who had been attacked by Israeli settlers.

But I love Israel and Israelis more than I can say, and I hold with Beit Hillel in my determination to begin by explicating the positions of Beit Shammai: the settler, the Bibi-supporter, the anti-Zionists of the *Ha’aretz* op-ed page, the people who vote Hadash, the different worlds of Bat Ayin, Machane Yehuda, Pardes Hannah, and Umm al Fahm. And I’m also profoundly aware that Israeli Jews remember the second intifada. Many of them are not exactly in favor of the occupation. But they will live with it *if they feel that their lives will likely be endangered by withdrawal*.

This is why empathy seems crucial to me. I have empathy for people living within missile range of Gaza. I have empathy for Palestinians held up at Israeli checkpoints, and for Israeli Palestinians who feel like second-class citizens. For that matter, I have empathy for young Jewish progressives who feel that their voices aren’t fully heard in organized Jewish life.

So “end the occupation” seems facile to me. Yet the neutral Israeli position—“ignore the occupation”—may create the seeds of greater strife in the future. If we had more empathy, we might all be better placed to make a difference in Israel—and to talk more easily with one another. Without empathy, there’s not much space between condemnation and silence.

What is to be done? One observation, and three suggestions.

My observation: With regard to Israel, there are four distinct groups of young American Jews—and the organized Jewish community has horribly dropped the ball on one of them.

- Group 1 is a traditional “pro-Israel” group. They skew Orthodox. From a pro-Israel perspective, they are fine—although they *should* go on an Encounter trip, or start to listen to some different voices, lest they succumb to bigotry and intolerance *by* Jews, even as they stand up for Israel and the Jewish community.
- Group 2 isn’t especially connected to Israel, or especially interested, and they’re not very political. They are well served by Birthright Israel, and the more that Birthright deepens and broadens its programming, the more positively it will affect this large cohort.
- Group 3 is liberal, progressive, and well-educated. Many went to day school or Jewish camp. Their grandparents rallied for Israel in ’67, and their parents have integrated a commitment to both universalism and particularism into their lives: Their parents’ connection to Israel is not uncritical, but it is genuine.
- Group 4 consists of the young Jewish anti-Zionists. They’re the ones who passionately support JVP, or start conversations with “*I’m Jewish, but ...*” They’re deeply antipathetic toward Israel, sure that they are right and that everyone else is wrong. I doubt any systematic intervention is likely to have much impact on most of them.

It is Group 3 we must pay far more attention to. They are confused, troubled, and unsettled. They feel that their parents are

too supportive of Israel, too blind to the occupation, too willing to ignore Israel’s mistakes or crimes. They live in a multicultural world of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. They take it for granted that one must strive to ally with disadvantaged minorities—including the Palestinians.

I agree with much of this, which in many ways feels deeply Jewish. The Torah’s repeated refrain is to *love the stranger because you were strangers*. Isn’t this group applying that mitzvah, full force?

Well, yes—and no. *Love the stranger* is indeed a strong injunction in the Torah. But so, too, is each generation’s fight against Amalek. The Torah recognizes that there’s evil in the world, which must be confronted. This is a view many young progressives aren’t comfortable with. But you cannot relate to *all* “strangers” oblivious of the fact that Israel has real enemies.

This third group is deeply conflicted about Israel. *And the organized Jewish community has neglected to develop the targeted and specific programming that is vitally needed for engaging progressive twentysomethings*. This is especially problematic, given that a large proportion of the leadership of the non-Orthodox community—including rabbis—will come from this group.

My suggestions:

First, we must create programs that will bring people in this third group together with young, Israeli changemakers. My greatest regret in the time I ran Hazon was that we couldn’t raise permanent funding for *Siach* (“conversation”), which did precisely this. Five times, over five years, we brought together Israeli, European, and American environmental and social justice leaders. It was profound, intense, sometimes hard—and it was deeply impactful.

It is too easy to find reasons not to fund this work. Yes, it’s complicated, and yes, many participants will express themselves in ways that make some uncomfortable. But if young idealistic Jews

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We don't just need more empathy and more relationships among young changemakers; we also need to relearn the habit of arguing.

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are *not* in relation with Israelis who share much of their critique but who live in Israel and deal, every day, with the complexities of living there—if we don't put young liberal Jews in relation with Israelis, then some will surely be pulled, inexorably, into the fourth group: people who find it almost impossible ever to defend Israel.

One clear example: Teenagers in Israel who are part of *ha'noar l'ma'an ha'aklim* (“Youth Protest for The Climate”) share a deep passion with the American teenagers in Hazon's Jewish Youth Climate Movement. But these young Israelis and Americans certainly see Israel differently. Bringing them together won't just strengthen Jewish environmentalism; it will also strengthen Israeli-Diaspora relationships in powerful ways.

Second, we must integrate into Jewish education a new way of addressing the particular and the general. We live our lives in concentric circles, out from family and friends to the 8 billion people on the planet. Between these two groups lies the Jewish people. I put family and friends in particular before Jews in general—but I put Jews in particular before the planet in general. This was once obvious. But today, “preference for” (good) is hard for many to distinguish from “prejudice against” (bad).

Because of this, many see preference *for* Israelis as prejudice *against* Palestinians—and thus tantamount to racism. This is the presumption that underpinned the rabbinical students' letter criticizing Israel during last year's war in Gaza. *We cannot address progressive anti-Israel sentiment without first addressing this underlying tension between preference and prejudice.*

Third, we don't just need more empathy and more relationships among young changemakers; we also need to *relearn the habit of arguing.*

My friends Abi Dauber Sterne and Robbie Gringras have developed a new project, For the Sake of Argument, to re-teach people how to disagree. They have spent 20 years working in Israel education; but at a certain point, they realized they couldn't help people engage with Israel if those people couldn't argue peaceably.



I end by noting that the Ukraine war erupted as I was writing this essay. Our young people have lived through four years of immense political polarization—two years of Covid, now this war, plus the climate crisis, burning down upon the future of their lives. We should not be surprised that they are unsettled, or have mental-health issues, or are critical of the generations who came before them.

It's against this backdrop that I think of the distinction drawn by the late Rabbi Sacks, z”l, between optimism and hope. Optimism is the expectation that things will get better. Hope is a positive vision for the world we want to create—and a determination to create it.

So: I am not optimistic.

But I am genuinely hopeful.

Our task is to listen and learn; to build relationships across difference; to have empathy for all; and to learn to argue with respect. That's how we might yet build a healthier and more sustainable world for all. *Kein yehi ratzon*—may it be so . . . \*

# Reclaiming the Z-word



LONG BEFORE a New York Hebrew School teacher was fired for accusing Israel of egregious crimes and calling herself an anti-Zionist, I was obsessing about Jewish anti-Zionists. I find their attitude to Israel maddening—at best, ignorant and insensitive; at worst, pouring fuel on the antisemitic fire. I wrestle constantly with how to respond, not least because I run one of the country’s largest JCCs, in very liberal Palo Alto, California.

I’ve wanted to brand anti-Zionists as traitors, even “Un-Jews,” to borrow Natan Sharansky’s and Gil Troy’s term. I’ve flirted with ideological litmus tests to determine whether they are “us” or “them,” as Liel Leibovitz does. I’ve wondered whether we ought to exclude “them” from our institutions.

I’ve wanted to tout my moral clarity and challenge them: “Do you really believe every other state in the world is legitimate except

Israel? How is that not antisemitic?” I’ve wanted to denounce them as I imagine Matityahu the Maccabee denounced the Hellenist Jews of his day.

Part of me believes that if (when) the world comes after the Jews (again), the anti-Zionist Jews will have helped paved the way. We must not invite them into our Jewish spaces. We must turn off their microphone.

And then I remember: They’re Jews, and they are part of our family. They are our children and grandchildren, new generations, some on the path to Jewish leadership, some even becoming rabbis. Whether or not I consider them misguided, they ought always to have a place at our tables, a seat in our synagogues, a membership at our JCCs, and a passport waiting for them in the Jewish state.

We should be big enough to make space for them and confident enough to tell them why we think they’re wrong. If we don’t, this debate will proceed without us and without our views. They will not come into our spaces but create their own instead—and not invite us in.

In fact, that’s partly why this problem exists in the first place—why, that is, there are Jewish parents anguished to discover that their children don’t share their views about Israel, and children who believe they were “lied to” in their Israel education.

We have not engaged vigorously enough with Jewish anti-Zionists. But we should not be afraid to do so. We have always debated and disagreed with one another. The Jewish people have always been divided. Sadducees and Pharisees. Hasidim and Mitnagdim. The Irgun and the Haganah. Zionists and anti-Zionists. All members of our complicated tribe.

So how should we proceed? The Jewish way: from disagreement through debate to dialogue. Only by inviting them into conversation can we explore our views with them. I want to listen to their point of view—really listen—so they will listen to mine. Only if I’m in conversation with them can I say things like:

*These 9 million people living in Israel—including 7 million Jews—they aren't going to disappear in your anti-Zionist future, right? So what happens to them? Did you know that 800,000 Jews who used to live in Arab countries were expelled by their governments after the 1948 war? Does that make you optimistic about a binational state? If not, it seems we are going to have to keep working at how to have a Zionist state. Doesn't it?*

This may persuade some that they're not actually anti-Zionist—either because they're really just fierce critics of Israeli policy (as many Israelis are), or because they haven't thought through the ramifications of what it would mean for Israel to stop existing, or to stop existing as a Jewish state. Certainly, however, it won't persuade all. Nevertheless, it can open up the dialogue about Zionism so that what I regard as the critical discovery can be arrived at: Zionism today doesn't mean what it used to mean.

Some would abandon “Zionism” as too polarizing, but the word is too important to lose. Changing our own language to suit our critics is not the right answer—what other group is asked to do such a thing? Instead, we need to help people, including Jewish anti-Zionists, understand what Zionism has meant in the past, during the early days of Israel, and what it means today.

Before modern Israel existed, Zionism 1.0 stood for a set of questions. Should there be a Jewish state at all? What should it look like? Where, even, should it be? That debate has been settled. Resolved: We have a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, with equal rights for its non-Jewish citizens. *It's not going away.* A debate about whether Israel *should* exist is a waste of time. The anti-Zionists want to relitigate that—that's what the fight over the term really is. But Ben-Gurion declared Israeli independence on May 14, 1948, on territory voted by the UN to be the Jewish State of Israel—the legitimate legal successor to the British Mandate. Zionism 1.0 became history when Israel became a country.

And then Zionism 2.0 was born: shorthand for a debate over

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whether Diaspora Jews should be expected to support struggling Israel unequivocally—to have a stake without a say. The answer was *yes, but*: Diaspora criticism of Israel was limited to the extremes. Should it have been? That, too, is a moot question: As it was being debated, Israel became a self-sufficient, thriving country. Now we are living in a third era of Zionism, to go with the Third Jewish Commonwealth.

Welcome to Zionism 3.0. No more hand-wringing over whether Israel should exist and no more letting our enemies define the terms of the argument. Discussion of Israel must now be about what Zionism 3.0 should look like and how Diaspora Jews should be a part of it. Here is where I would start the conversation:

- Diaspora Jews should continue to make economic and philanthropic contributions to a robust, thriving Israel. But that doesn't mean being silent about Israeli politics. Instead, it means debating them within a framework that takes Israel's existence as axiomatic. No other religious or cultural diaspora ever questions the right of its homeland to exist.
- Diaspora critics of Israel should remember what Israel has done for its Diaspora. The number of Jews who remember the extraordinary upsurge of pride and self-confidence in being Jewish after the 1967 war is dwindling. They should be enlisted

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## Welcome to Zionism 3.0. No more hand-wringing over whether Israel should exist and no more letting our enemies define the terms of the argument.

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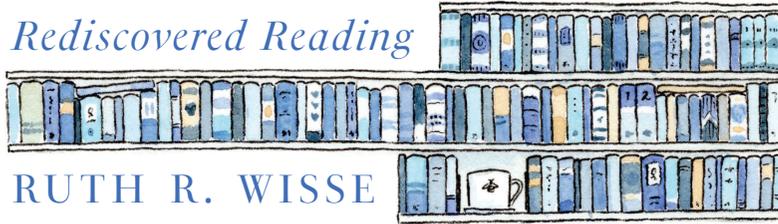
to remind their younger co-religionists of what being Jewish in America was like beforehand, and what, therefore, it might be like again in a world without Israel.

- It's a mature, two-way relationship now. Israel plays an enormously important role in Diaspora Jewish life beyond just being our security blanket. Israeli culture — science, literature, language, music, art, and food — enriches and strengthens Diaspora Jewish life and should be incorporated into tomorrow's Zionism.
- Some Diaspora Jews are uncomfortable with the influence of traditional and even ultra-traditional Judaism in Israel. But Tel Aviv is perhaps the only city in the entire Middle East where a progressive Jew can be comfortable, even an anti-Zionist one.
- And — bringing us back to where we started — Israel can help us engage the anti-Zionist Jews. Israel is ideally placed to provide Diaspora Jews with the perspectives — and, if they can be persuaded to visit, the experiences — that change the way people think. We should enlist Israel's help in engaging anti-Zionist Jews, not in one-off visits, but in the creation of mutually supportive relationships that last years beyond the moment the wheels leave Ben Gurion's tarmac.

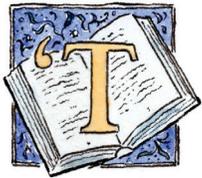
Think of these points as the beginnings of a conversation you will continue. Teach these things to your children. Speak of them when you sit at home and when you walk abroad, when you lie down and when you rise up. If we can shed the out-of-date definitions of Zionism 1.0 and 2.0, we can take back the Z-word from those who have made it a dirty word — and perhaps bring them back, too. \*

# DEPARTURES





# Haim Hazaz: 'The Sermon' (*HaDrasha*)



THE SERMON' is a classic of Zionist and modern Hebrew literature—one that most Israelis and Jews have never heard of. The story was published in the Land of Israel in 1942 at what may have been the most desperate moment in the history of the Jewish people. Palestine was under the British Mandate, which forbade Jewish immigration to the country even as the Nazis were exterminating the Jews of Europe. Jews of the Yishuv, the Jewish community of Palestine, had formed their own secret defense force—the Haganah—knowing that they would have to fight the Arabs and possibly also the British to win sovereignty over their land.

Yet Zionism was a movement of ideas conceived, nurtured, and propelled by some of the finest minds of a highly contentious people. Among many contemporary national movements, the one

returning the Jews to their national homeland required more than usual persuasion and met with more than the usual resistance. Hazaz voices all the pent-up frustration of centuries of delayed independence without ultimately requiring the break from the Jewish Diaspora that others felt the new country required.

The story's Hebrew title, *HaDrasha*, evokes a rabbi before a congregation, and at that moment in Jewish life, one might have awaited an address worthy of Churchill.

Instead (here in the translation of Hillel Halkin), we read:

Yudka didn't talk much. He never spoke in public, never argued at meetings or at conferences, rarely opened his mouth when anyone else was around. He was reputed to be a man of few words. And though he was not what he was reputed to be, his reputation grew on him, so that in the end he quite lost the knack of saying anything coherent out loud, no matter how trivial or important it was. Which was why his comrades in the Haganah were surprised when they heard that he proposed to address a certain committee whose existence was a secret to all but a chosen few—especially since the committee had been convened that day solely to hear him speak.

Through a string of negatives apparently designed to confound any hope of inspiration, we learn that our preacher is the unlikeliest of orators. For synagogue, substitute an Israeli kibbutz, for the Sabbath, an impromptu meeting to hear the disjointed thoughts of an unhappy member. We would have been better prepared for what follows had Haim Hazaz called his story "The Protest," since it consists, after a brief introduction, entirely of Yudka's dissenting views to the committee that evening, punctuated by some occasional interruptions.

Haim Hazaz, born in Russia in 1898, wrote this story when he was already a well-known Hebrew novelist. As a young man, he had been deeply shaken by the Bolshevik Revolution, and—unlike many of his

contemporaries who welcomed the Soviet promise—he feared for the Jewish world that he saw the revolution was bent on destroying. In 1921, he left Russia, never to return. He lived for 10 years in Istanbul, Berlin, and Paris, making Aliyah in 1931. Most of his writing before and after his arrival in Palestine was about life in Russia, about the effects of the revolution on the community he had left behind. This story was among the first situated in his actual time and place.

Yudka, the only named character in Hazaz’s story, works as a stonemason “who could smash a rock with one blow” and “who was not afraid to encounter the enemy singlehandedly on dangerous night patrols.” But when it comes to the meeting he requested, he is nervous about getting started. The chairman of the meeting and his comrades around the table are all men of action, impatient to know why they are there. When Yudka finally blurts out his purpose, we can understand the laughter that greets his words: “I wish to announce,” he said in a low voice, “that I object to Jewish history.”

The man who laughs loudest turns out to be the one who took Yudka’s wife away from him, which adds humiliation to this portrait of a misfit. All in all, one can hardly imagine a less impressive speaker. Nevertheless, he is a Haganah member, and as the men have gathered to hear him out, so do we.

*Eyni mekhabed hahistoriya hayehudit.* I don’t respect Jewish history. *Ani mitnaged.* ...I am opposed to it. ...You see, we never made our own history, the Gentiles always made it for us. Just as they turned out the lights for us and lit the stove for us and milked the cow for us on the Sabbath, so they made history for us the way they wanted and we took it whether we liked it or not. But it wasn’t ours, it wasn’t ours at all!

Yudka’s first objection to what he calls Jewish history is its passivity. To make his point, he cites the custom of hiring Gentiles to perform tasks that were forbidden to Jews on Sabbath and holidays and uses this as a metaphor for Jewish national dependency,

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Jewish bravery had meant maintaining the Jewish way of life among hostile nations. If salvation were to come from some divine intervention, why bother with kibbutz pioneering?

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insisting, “Here’s the *Zagvosdka*—I don’t know how to say it in Hebrew. Here’s where the dog lies buried.” I have deviated here from Halkin’s translation in order to keep Yudka’s Russian word: his use of Gentile language reinforces his insistence that Jews have been dependent on others. He speaks as a product of the Diaspora whose history he now wants to erase. The case against the Diaspora is being made by the person who best represents it.

The Hebrew of these men is new; their native languages are Russian and Yiddish. Everything about this scene is new and improvised—the country they are reclaiming, the agricultural collective called the kibbutz, Jews forming their own army—all this is radically different from the way they were raised. Yudka wants to ensure that there is no going back.

Jewish history is simply boring. ... It has no adventures, no conquering heroes, no great rulers or potentates. All it has is a mob of beaten, groaning, weeping, begging Jews. And you’ll agree with me that there’s nothing interesting about that... nothing! If it were up to me, I wouldn’t allow our children to be taught Jewish history at all. Why on earth should we teach them about the shameful life led by their ancestors? I would simply say to them: “Look, boys and girls, we don’t have any history. We haven’t had one since the day we were driven into exile. Class dismissed. You can go outside now and play...”

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Jews say they persisted for 2,000 years because of their faith in the Messiah — an ingenious legend, but *false*. The longing for Jerusalem did not lead to the eventual recovery of Jerusalem; it was intended to *prevent* return to the Land of Israel.

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Hazaz was hardly the first to air these ideas. In 1882 another Russian Jew, Leon Pinsker, had argued in very similar terms that although Jews once stood on equal footing with other nations, they lost the essential defining attributes of a nation when they lost their land and went to live in the Diaspora. To end this ghostlike nature of the Jews, Pinsker issued a call for auto-emancipation that 15 years later became the Zionist movement. Yudka echoes Pinsker, but in the *past tense*, from the perspective of those who have corrected the problem by moving to Israel and resettling their homeland.

Why then is he not triumphant? Why doesn't he just declare "mission accomplished"?

In 1942, when Hazaz wrote this story, the establishment of the Jewish state was by no means assured. Theodor Herzl and fellow Zionists may have dreamed of peaceful coexistence with their fellow Semites, but Arab aggression had only hardened, the Mufti of Jerusalem was actively encouraging Hitler to complete the Final Solution, and the British were "staying neutral" by preventing Jews from reaching Palestine. It would take an incalculable effort to reclaim Jewish sovereignty when millions of defenseless Jews were being hounded to death.

Meanwhile, some Jews themselves needed convincing. Two thou-

sand years of Talmudic civilization had persuaded many of them that they could continue to survive in exile waiting for the divine promise of *being returned* to Zion. Jewish bravery had meant maintaining the Jewish way of life among hostile nations. If salvation were to come from some divine intervention, why bother with kibbutz pioneering?

Yudka anticipates and shoots down these objections. Jews may say they manifested great courage through centuries of suffering, but this "heroism of despair" deserves no respect. Reacting to conditions that you are forced to endure is a function not of choice but of necessity, and there is nothing heroic about it. Suffering is even worse if you make a virtue of martyrdom, and "sorrow replaces happiness as an ideal, pain becomes the norm rather than pleasure, tearing down rather than building up, slavery rather than redemption, dream rather than reality, vague hope rather than real plans, faith rather than common sense..."

From this "psychology of the night," Yudka turns his contempt on theology: Jewish national character has been fatally misshapen. Rabbis say that the passage in Ecclesiastes — *Vehakhut hameshulash lo bimeheyro yenatek*, the threefold cord is not readily broken — refers to "exile, martyrdom, the Messiah." Well, that's it then! As long as Jews valued exile and martyrdom, they could never bring the Messiah they claimed to wish for! Belief in the Messiah, eternal expectation, meant that Jews never actually had to return to the Land of Israel to do whatever was necessary to reclaim it. It was the perfect excuse for inertia.

Jews say they persisted for 2,000 years because of their faith in the Messiah — an ingenious legend, but *false*. The longing for Jerusalem did not lead to the eventual recovery of Jerusalem; it was intended to *prevent* return to the Land of Israel. If you are waiting for the Messiah, you do not have to move to dirty, malaria-ridden Palestine. Yudka is sick and tired of turning to the east in prayer instead of sailing to the east in ships. Had it not been for the myth, he thinks, "we would either have had to return to Palestine right away or to disappear from the world." The myth is what sustained the lie. Jews

were not being hypocritical in affirming their faith and trust in the Messiah, but the longer they did it, the less they were inclined to get up and actually redeem the land.

But wait! Yudka's attack is so effective that he suddenly seems to realize where his line of thinking has brought him. If his Zionism denies so much of Jewish history, might it not be rejecting Judaism as well?

If I'm right, *if* I'm right, Zionism and Judaism are not the same thing at all but two entirely different things, perhaps even two contradictory things. Most certainly two contradictory things! ...*A man becomes a Zionist when he can't be a Jew any more.* [my emphasis]

If those generations of patient dreamers represent what it has meant to be Jewish, then the kibbutzniks of the Haganah may embody not the fulfillment of Judaism but its repudiation. In his fumbling way, Yudka sees that the none of the Zionist leaders really addressed the questions he is raising. Herzl took up the problem of acquiring a Jewish state, while Ahad Ha'am believed that the regeneration of a national Jewish culture—"set up a Jewish study circle, or build a school"—would have to precede the physical return to Zion.

At the mention of Jewish culture, the kibbutzniks break the tension to poke fun at the German-Jewish professors they (and author Haim Hazaz) disdained—members of Brit Shalom such as Ernst Simon and Martin Buber, who were dedicated to the cause of Arab-Jewish reconciliation and promoted a binational rather than a national state. The contempt of these practical kibbutz and Haganah members for the European intelligentsia was another kind of protest against the unwelcome carryover from the Diaspora. While Yudka denounces the messianism of the ultra-Orthodox, the kibbutzniks mock the political messianism of those who think they can have a country without fighting for it.

When Yudka is given the floor again, he admits that in forcing

the distinction between Judaism and Zionism, he had not really known where his logic would take him. Let's face it, he says, we've already proven what I've been saying. Isn't that why we switched from speaking Yiddish to speaking Hebrew, and why we speak Hebrew according to the Sephardi pronunciation instead of how we used to pronounce it? Here in our country, we have no one to hide from, and yet we're ashamed of our past—hiding our identity from ourselves. You think that what I'm saying is radical, but what have we been doing other than rejecting Jewish history itself?

There was a term for the ideas that Yudka was propounding: *Shlilat hagolah*—Negation of the Diaspora. A local group calling itself the Canaanites aspired to return Hebrew language and culture to their pre-Talmudic past. David Ben-Gurion as head of the Jewish government-in-information was implementing some of Yudka's ideas by insisting that the new country's generals adopt Hebraic names and that the population phase out Yiddish. The literary scholar Robert Alter writing about this story reminds us that since fiction allows an author to attribute ideas to a character without taking full responsibility for them, Yudka's point of view does not necessarily represent that of the author. But first we should see how this "sermon" ends.

Yudka is not ambivalent. He and his colleagues have done something more revolutionary and momentous than the Bolsheviks in Russia, and done it in a wholesome spirit of self-liberation. Without waiting for the diplomatic resolution that Herzl had sought or the cultural transformation Ahad Ha'am deemed necessary, they simply went and did it. Commentators have always paused on the seemingly inverted sequence of the Jews' response when receiving the Torah at Sinai—*Na'aseh v'nishma*, we will do and we will listen, and though Yudka does not cite this biblical passage, the pioneering movement of which he forms part likewise acted first, leaving him to spell out the implications: Now that we have left the Diaspora, here is the philosophical logic behind our actions.

But because Hazaz has not given us a Churchillian orator or a

sermonic pronouncement, the story can hold together what is in danger of being torn apart. Yudka is indeed the “new Jew” of the Yishuv, the builder-defender of the old-new Land of Israel, yet he is still enough of the Diaspora “Yid-ke” to worry about rejecting the Judaism that brought them there. The actuality belies the theoretical dichotomy, and the altered names and pronunciation do not change the fact that they are all functioning in the language of the Bible.

Accordingly, the story does not really conclude. The listeners are relieved that, having brought them to the edge of a cliff, Yudka pulls back a little. Maybe they will not have to accept the “either-or” choice between past and future. The denier of Jewish history points out that they themselves are undeniably its product. As Yudka gathers his thoughts, the chairman urges him to say what he wants, “Just go easy on the philosophy...” And indeed, we thank God that the actual Haganah men did not wait for a resolution to Yudka’s reflections before continuing to build and defend their recovered homeland! The rabbis of the Talmud would have designated the ellipsis that ends the story with the Hebrew acronym *Teiku*—to be resolved with the coming of the Messiah. The Talmud has many problems that remain philosophically unresolved.

Had Yudka asked to speak at a kibbutz meeting, there would also have been women around the table. The Haganah leaders of whom Yudka is one, representing the toughest part of the Yishuv, prove that his negative version of “Jewish history” is done with: A paramilitary command post has replaced the rabbinic conclave. Yudka charts the straight road from the Tanach to the Palmach, from the Bible to the strike units of the Haganah, but then, like a husband suing for divorce, regrets what he stands to lose in dissolving the marriage. Zionism could never be a triumphalist movement precisely because centuries of loss had preceded this reconquest, and because of how much had to be left behind. *Yudka*, the prototypical “little Jew” of earlier Hebrew and Yiddish literature, could not declare victory over the civilization that brought him home.

Hazaz had witnessed a revolution that was ruthlessly determined to eliminate the past: But that was not the Jewish way.

There is much else to consider in this story—the human hierarchy that breaks through the egalitarian ideology of the kibbutz; the improbable orator as the only trustworthy Jewish speaker since Moses; the brittle humorlessness of then-emergent Hebrew culture—and in the distance, the simultaneous meeting in 1942 in Wannsee, Germany, of the German high command, to seal the Final Solution to the “Jewish problem.” It should not surprise us that so modest a Zionist work should be one of the very best.

“The Sermon” used to figure prominently in discussions of Zionism and in Israeli education. None of the Israelis I’ve recently asked had ever read it, and none had been taught it in school. Where in Diaspora Jewish culture will it now appear? Maybe SAPIR can help get important works like this one back into circulation. When I once taught this story, at the point that Yudka says, “A man becomes a Zionist when he can’t be a Jew anymore,” a student responded, “And maybe a man becomes a Jew when he can’t be a Zionist anymore.” She was thinking of fellow Americans who tire of defending the Jewish polity and who retreat into increased religiosity and spirituality as a way of avoiding political engagement.

Yudka embodies the age-old Jewish civilization that part of him wants to reject. Hazaz exposes the paradox. May the story hold together what is still at risk of being torn apart. \*

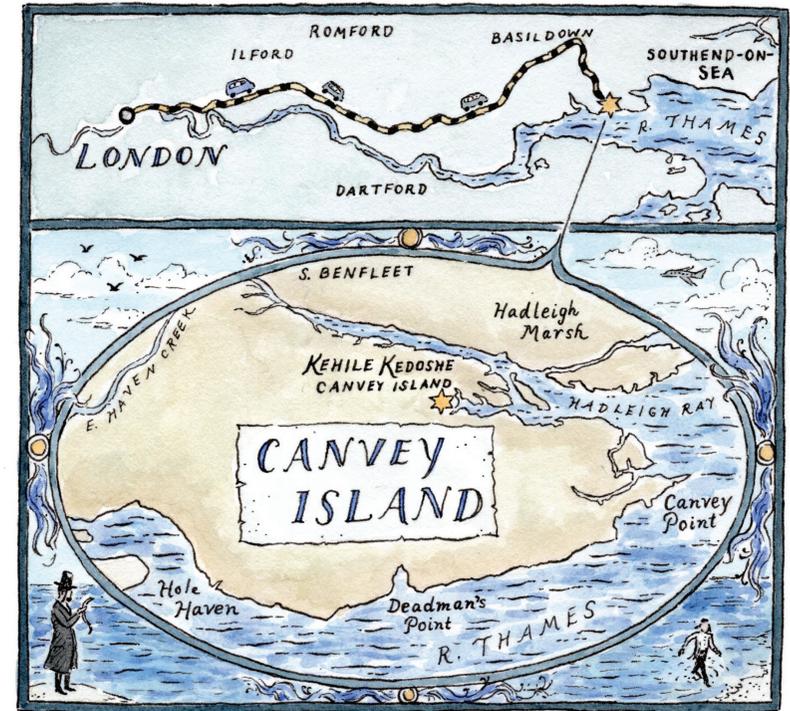
# Postcard from Canvey Island



IT'S THE ONLY KOSHER SHOP in town and you can find there every type of Ashkenazi food imaginable, if you can just make sense of the chaos. Men in black are stacking sacks of flour and receiving the delivery of freshly slaughtered meat. The till goes unattended for lengthy periods, but no one is worried about shoplifting. On a little shelf near the entrance lies a pile of shoddily printed Yiddish newspapers with blaring headlines of a distant war on the outskirts of the Russian Empire.

Other men in black are coming in from prayers at the shul next door, exchanging gossip, taking shelter in the entranceway while stopping for a quick morning smoke. A cold wind is blowing in across the mudflats. In the distance, out at sea, cargo ships are moving slowly in the mist. This could be a shtetl on the Baltic shores, in the northern reaches of the czarist Pale of Settlement.

But then the men with their *tallis* bags and shopping bags filled with milk and cereal pile into their minivans, parked haphazardly between piles of building materials, and drive home past immac-



ulate red brick houses bordering a bleak and beautiful golf course on the Essex coast.

This is the new frontier of the Haredi world. *Kehile Kedoshe* (holy community) Canvey Island—an autonomous group of a hundred ultra-Orthodox families who, less than six years ago, began escaping the housing crisis of inner-city London, just over an hour's drive away.

As in other countries with sizable Jewish populations, the Haredi community is the fastest-growing Jewish group, estimated currently at around 60,000, or 20 percent of British Jews. But over the past decades, while they increased in number, they shrank in geography, concentrating in a handful of neighborhoods in north London

and Manchester, with one northern outpost around the yeshiva in Gateshead founded in 1929.

This is the first major migration of Haredi Jews to a brand-new location within Britain in nearly a century, when the children of migrants from Eastern Europe began moving from the overcrowded East End of London to the more comfortable suburbs to the north, making way for new waves of immigration to Britain.

And unlike in the United States, where ultra-Orthodox communities have been moving out of New York City to places such as Lakewood, Monsey, Kiryas Joel, and New Square since the 1940s, the Canvey Island community wasn't created at the behest of a charismatic rabbi. It was the initiative of a few men in their late twenties and thirties.

"We were a group of about seven or eight people, in early 2015, who stayed behind at shul one evening after Ma'ariv and talked about house prices and what we can do," says Joel Friedman, one of the founding members of the community and the first to purchase his family's new home in Canvey Island, in February 2016.

Friedman, 37, is a father of seven, a Satmar Hasid, and for want of a better definition, can be best described as a *macher*—a grassroots activist. He commutes daily back to Stamford Hill in London, where he works as director of public affairs at Interlink and the Pinter Trust, organizations that work to provide public services within the British Haredi community and connect it with local authorities, the media, and the British government. His group spent nearly a year trying to find a location for their new community.

They scoured the area around London, looking for a place that fit their requirements. It would need to be about an hour away, so as to be "not too far, but also not too close, so it could become self-sustainable and not rely on Stamford Hill for everything," says Friedman. It would need to have a low crime rate, space for building communal institutions, and above all, a ready supply of homes at reasonable prices.

This wasn't the first attempt at establishing a new Haredi

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Ultimately, what dominates the new community's growth is real estate. There is only one cardinal rule of membership—that no one negotiates his own home purchase.

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community outside Greater London. Larger and better-financed organizations and groups had tried in the past to build an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood in the new city of Milton Keynes and projects in other places, but there was a reluctance of local authorities to go along with a secluded community, and the Haredim lacked the organizational and financial heft necessary.

Friedman's group of individuals, without backing, accepted that they would not be capable of creating a separate Haredi neighborhood, but believed they could establish a viable community in an existing place.

On the short list of locations they compiled, Canvey Island stood out for a number of reasons. A bustling seaside resort in the early 20th century, Canvey was nearly destroyed by a major flood in 1953, and the entertainment business never recovered. The absence of nightlife is a plus for an ultra-Orthodox community, and it also means a low crime rate.

The rebuilt Canvey Island appealed in the 1980s to upwardly mobile young families seeking comfortable homes and large gardens outside London. Now, much of the local population consists of retirees looking to sell their four- or five-bedroom houses. But unlike other areas within commuting distance of London, Canvey's traffic problems, caused by having only one main road out of the island that is usable during high tide, have kept the house prices down.

And yet, despite ticking all the boxes, there was a reluctance, even

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Though no one there will admit it, the success of Canvey is proof of the resourcefulness of young Haredi Jews who have gotten used to the massive age gap and remoteness of their rabbis.

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on the side of the founders, to strike out alone. Friedman became the first to put down a deposit in February 2016. He was followed by six others, encouraged by their surprise success in purchasing the large, derelict building of a closed-down local school and the surrounding grounds, which have served since as the community center, shul, kosher grocery, mikveh, and campus for an entire range of separate boys' and girls' schools. All of them are in various states of rebuilding, while in use.

The first seven families agreed to move there together so they would have the nucleus of a community from the start, and on a Thursday evening in July 2016, the first Ma'ariv prayers were held in the shul. "Friends and relatives came to make sure we had minyanim, and the first Shabbos was a bit like a summer camp," recalls Friedman. More families soon joined, and each one knows their number in the order of arrival. They're up to 101, though the actual number is 98, as three have left.

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So far, every home that has come on the market and that's within walking distance of the shul has found ready buyers, but the demand, while steady, is still rather low. One or two families are added each month

on average, with most newcomers arriving in the summer in between school years. "Despite how crowded it is, many families are psychologically incapable of leaving Stamford Hill," says Yaakov Yuzevich, a Canvey resident in the past three years, who works in real estate. "It's as if the river [Hackney Brook, which borders Stamford Hill] is a border they can't cross. Particularly women, even after they're married with children, want to be around the corner from their mothers."

A visit to Stamford Hill back in London demonstrates this very clearly. In the Haredi area, you see rows of crowded terraced buildings with mezuzot, home after home, and a couple of commercial streets with kosher grocers, butchers, restaurants, and Judaica shops. Then you turn a corner and there's barely a kippah to be seen.

"It's hard to explain, but some people don't want to live even five minutes away from their families, even if they can find cheaper homes," says Friedman.

Ultimately, what dominates the new community's growth is real estate. There is only one cardinal rule of membership—that no one negotiates his own home purchase. For the community to remain viable, they need the house prices to remain stable, at around their current level, which is less than one-third of what similar-sized houses cost in Stamford Hill.

"It's an open market, anyone can buy a house, but for us, it's not an open market, we won't shoot ourselves in the foot," insists Friedman. The community has a *va'ad*—a committee that negotiates the price for potential members. "Someone can come along who has a wealthy father-in-law and offer a higher sum, but we operate on a first-come, first-served policy, with a loophole for people the community needs—for example, a new teacher for one of the schools will go to the front of the queue. Anyone who breaks that rule and buys a house separately won't be able to use the *kehile's* facilities, they won't be able to daven at our shul, and their children won't learn at our schools. We're building this *kehile* with our blood and sweat, and we want it to remain viable so one day our children can buy homes here as well."

Inside the shul, there's a board with all the usual notices on services and events and also a few unique to Canvey—such as the reminder that the ritual times for prayer based on sunrise and sunset are a minute later than in London, due to the eastern location, and instructions how to walk on Shabbat to the closest hospital in Southend-on-Sea, without breaking the halachic injunction of *tchum shabbat* (which forbids walking outside town).

There's also a stern notice in Yiddish warning everyone of the grave implications of buying a house independently of the *va'ad*.

If this sounds coercive, it's worth bearing in mind that Canvey Island is a Haredi community that exists without a rabbinical leader, though some of its members have *semicha* (rabbinical ordination) and they employ a *dayan* who rules on more technical issues of halacha. The Satmar Hasidim are the predominant Haredi sect in Canvey, affiliated with Rabbi Aaron Teitelbaum, who rules his international flock from Kiryas Joel in Orange County, New York (Satmar has been split for 16 years between two brothers, Aaron and Zalman). But Canvey is a general Hasidic community, not an exclusively Satmar one, and the rebbe is a distant figure. In March, Reb Aaron visited Britain but didn't come to see his followers in Canvey. "We're much too small and poor for him to visit," wryly observes one Satmar Hasid, who insists they weren't disappointed at being left off the rebbe's itinerary.

Though no one there will admit it, the success of Canvey is proof of the resourcefulness of young Haredi Jews who have gotten used to the massive age gap and remoteness of their rabbis. It's also proof of the adaptability of Haredi life—that the trend over the past 80 years among Haredi communities everywhere toward living in isolation isn't irreversible.

At first sight, the houses in the streets around the shul all look identical, but you can discern very quickly which ones are owned by members of the Jewish community, even before you see the mezuzah on the right-hand-side doorpost. The first sign is the car parked outside. The Hasidic families all have battered minivans.

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How do the Haredi communities continue to sustain themselves, when there is such a gap between 'infallible' leaders in their eighties and nineties and a massive young generation that is much more exposed to the outside world than were their parents, who grew up in homes where television and radio were forbidden?

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Then there are the bicycles piled around the door and the state of the front gardens.

"Our goyishe neighbors are mainly pensioners who all have lovely tended English gardens, both in front and around the back," says one of the ultra-Orthodox homeowners. "I'd love to garden as well, but we've got less time, as we're taking care of large families."

"For me, one of the things I'm most happy about here in Canvey is that my children have got to know and respect their non-Jewish neighbors," says Avrohom Kaff, owner of the kosher store. "That doesn't happen in Stamford Hill."

"My children have learned here not to be afraid of dogs," says Joel Grossberger, a used-car salesman.

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When I ask Haredi parents in Canvey Island whether they're not concerned about the outside influence on their children of growing up in a less insular environment, they shrug and say that the city has more than enough of its own temptations.

An hour away from multicultural London, Canvey Island remains a bastion of the traditional Tory-voting white English working class, which joined the aspiring home-owning middle class under Margaret Thatcher. In the 2019 general election, it reelected its local member of parliament with the third-highest Conservative majority in Britain. In the 2016 referendum on leaving the European Union, it also had the third-highest vote in favor of leaving. By all accounts, the relationship between the *kehile* and the local community has been friendly and there is a feeling of kinship between the two groups, who both arrived here to escape crowded London. “One of the local councilors told me that we’ve finally brought diversity to Canvey,” smiles Friedman.

The tension between urbanization and the secluded life of the shtetl existed already back in Eastern Europe and continued in the new Haredi worlds, as many rabbis sought to take their communities out to the suburbs, with varying degrees of success.

Historian David Myers, who has just published *American Shtetl: The Making of Kiryas Joel, a Hasidic Village in Upstate New York* with his wife Nomi Stolzenberg, says that Canvey is another example of “how the Haredi community settles the need for spiritual purity with the need for affordable housing. It wasn’t just about having splendid isolation. It’s always been present. Very often the primary motivating factor. There’s no such thing as isolation, it’s the illusion of isolation. To create the conditions to succeed and flourish, they need to have these connections with the outside world. They’re not the Amish and they’re not living off the grid.”



One of the most fascinating stories of the Jewish renaissance that followed the desolation of the Holocaust is the rebirth and resurgence of Haredi life: A community that had lost most of its members, its leaders, and its physical center in Eastern Europe, managed to rebuild itself, even surpass its former glory, in nearly

every spot on the globe that a determined group of families settled, from Monsey to Manchester to Melbourne.

But the phenomenal birth rates and success in isolation have created a new set of challenges. How do the Haredi communities continue to sustain themselves, when thanks to modern medicine, there is such a gap between “infallible” leaders in their eighties and nineties and a massive young generation that, thanks to the internet and smartphones, is much more exposed to the outside world than were their parents, who grew up in homes where television and radio were forbidden?

Keeping hundreds of thousands of young Haredi men and women with different aspirations and expectations than their parents within the fold will be a mammoth task, even if they can find places for all of them to live and raise families of their own.

In the two largest Jewish communities — Israel and the United States — the response to these challenges by the Haredi leadership has been to try and double down on isolation, a policy that failed miserably in the last two years of the pandemic, when the world couldn’t be kept outside.

The founders of the Canvey Island *kehile* are from the third post-Holocaust Haredi generation, now coming to the fore in leadership roles. As members of a much smaller but rapidly growing ultra-Orthodox community, they have had to adapt faster on their own initiative and figure out new ways to live and prosper in closer contact with wider society. A hundred families on the Thames estuary may have found the way forward for their global community. \*

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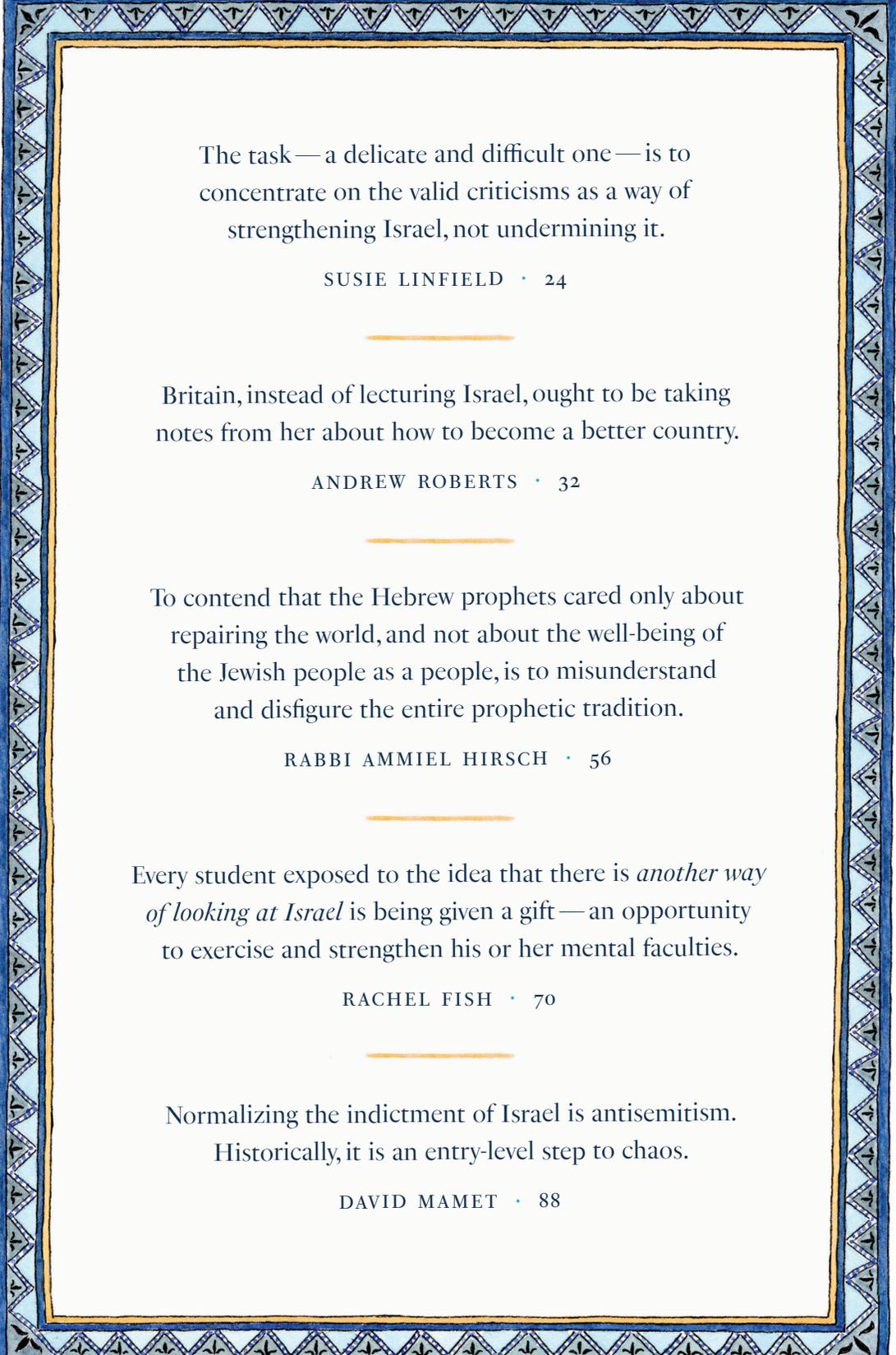
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וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַתַּחַת  
רַגְלָיו כָּמַעֲשֵׂה לְבִנְת הַסְּפִיר  
וּכְעֶצֶם הַשָּׁמַיִם לְטָהָר:

— שמות כד:י



The task—a delicate and difficult one—is to concentrate on the valid criticisms as a way of strengthening Israel, not undermining it.

SUSIE LINFIELD · 24

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Britain, instead of lecturing Israel, ought to be taking notes from her about how to become a better country.

ANDREW ROBERTS · 32

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To contend that the Hebrew prophets cared only about repairing the world, and not about the well-being of the Jewish people as a people, is to misunderstand and disfigure the entire prophetic tradition.

RABBI AMMIEL HIRSCH · 56

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Every student exposed to the idea that there is *another way of looking at Israel* is being given a gift—an opportunity to exercise and strengthen his or her mental faculties.

RACHEL FISH · 70

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Normalizing the indictment of Israel is antisemitism. Historically, it is an entry-level step to chaos.

DAVID MAMET · 88