

OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM THE ISRAELI/PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

By

Howard Adelman

Introduction

Can you remember the time, long, long ago – I believe it was at the dinner celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of Hebrew University, that your guest speaker at the Inn on the Park, **Harvey Kreuger**, Vice-President of Lehman Brothers, said at the opening lecture of the conference on Israel's Evolving Role in the Global Economy: "I believe there will be peace." That was September 23, 2000, only four months ago. How many of you would have joined in that sentiment then? How many of you share it today?

In a recent issue of the *Jerusalem Report*, a cartoon of a theatre marquee indicated that two movies were being shown in the theatre. The top one read, **“END OF DAYS”**. Just below it, the second feature movie was: **“A NEW HOPE”**. Do we see the world as an **apocalyptic catastrophe**, or do we look and find new **possibilities for brotherly love and harmony**? The problem with the cartoon, if one is being picky, is that movies are shown in sequence, whereas most observers have been thrust back and forth and side to side from moment to moment. It has been like sitting on one of those frightening midway rides. Unfortunately, since September 29th, after the long slow climb of the roller coaster, we seem to have been going mostly downwards at enormous speeds.

Except even this metaphor misrepresents what most of us have been experiencing. For what we experience in response to the news is usually as much a reflection of our own subjective dispositions as the objective information with which we are confronted. If we tend to adopt a stance of **defiant self-preservation** as our first order of business, and are prone to see the world through very skeptical, even cynical, lenses, then the world generally looks bleak. However, if **sympathy for the downtrodden** is a primary governing motif of our lives, in spite of all the disasters that surround us, we are inclined to find silver linings in all the dark clouds.

Pessimism

The problem is that the current Israeli/Palestinian state of affairs confounds our general propensities. Those with a pessimistic view of others, or even just of the Palestinians, have to repress a desire to gloat and shout, 'I told you so,' lest they appear uncaring when they learn that thirty year old **Roni Tzalach** was found murdered beside his greenhouse in **Kfar Yam** in the Gaza Strip and when they hear that Palestinians in the Arab village of **Dahyat el Barid** opened fire on homes in Jerusalem's **Neveh Ya'akov** neighborhood.

What about those who tend to wear rose coloured glasses? Although violence is continuing in the West Bank and Gaza, negotiations are continuing to ratchet down the violence. Only one soldier was wounded by a stone thrower yesterday, and only two settlements, **Gadid** and **Neveh Dekalim**, were attacked. Optimists, however, have a hard time rallying out of a sense of general despair as they read of the summary injustices of Palestinians executing other Palestinians. **Majdi Makawi**, **Alam Bani Odeh**, and another unnamed victim in El Bireh, were executed just outside Ramallah for alleged collaboration following instant show trials. So the propensity that **Ehud Ya'ari** noted (JR, 16.12.00) about "Those who persevere in believing will always find enough 'evidence' that Arafat is ready and able to climb down from his tree, so long as he can be provided with a suitable ladder," (p. 24) has been severely undercut.

Further, Barak himself has said that there is no chance of reaching a peace agreement before the elections. And there is almost no chance of his being re-elected. Barak became

Prime Minister in May 1999 in a landslide. After creating the largest coalition in memory with 75 seats, he gradually watched a series of desertions from his government - David Levy, the NRP, Sharansky (Yisrael B'Aliya), Meretz over Shas, Shas itself. His support went from 75 to 30 seats. Barak is now lowest in the polls and is widely expected to suffer a mammoth defeat in the elections scheduled for February 6, 2001. In considering whether Barak had even a ray of hope, **Hirsh Goodman** wrote, "There is a clear choice between hope that the impossible can happen and belief that it can't" (JR 15.01.01, p. 10). In any case, Barak has re-iterated that he will not surrender sovereignty over the **Temple Mount – Al-Haram Al-Sharif** for the Palestinians – and will not allow the return of the refugees, both issues on which Arafat has dug in his heels. Further, even if Barak made a deal, Sharon has stated unequivocally that he would not honour it. How can even the most idealistic among us **not** take off their rose tinted glasses and set them aside? After all, no less a Palestinian authority than **Saeb Erekat** said, just before Christmas, that any "expectations of a summit to conclude a peace before Israel undertakes to end the occupation are nothing but untimely, baseless optimism." In short, Israel has to vacate Gaza, the West Bank, abandon protection for the settlers and even leave the Old City before there can even be discussions about a deal.

As **Gerald Steinberg** wrote this week in the CJN, "These developments reflect the disintegration of optimism generated by the 1993 Oslo agreements. Instead of the promised exchange of 'land for peace,' the territory given to the Palestinians has been used as the foundation for terror. Is anyone surprised when a peace activist, who worked for co-existence as Educational Director of the Bible Lands Museum, Amanda Weiss, has

now concluded that, “they (the Palestinians) adamantly declare their holy war, and their goal to maim and murder every Israeli” and “to push the enemy into the sea.”

Meir Ronen, the Israeli Consul General here in Toronto, said that in the past, “Israeli officials understood that in order to achieve peace with the Palestinians, there was a need for a win-win situation and not a zero-sum game. We believed that the more we invested in the development of the economy and in the well-being of the Palestinians, the greater the prospects for peace.” The situation has changed evidently. “Unfortunately, Arafat has decided to deviate from this path and opt for violence. Now we question whether he really desires peace with Israel, or ever truly did. We ask ourselves: Have we made a mistake? Has Arafat deceived us all these years? Is his aim still to destroy Israel?” (CJN, 18.01.01, p. 18) Does Arafat see himself as Saladin (Salah al-Din) in a holy war intent on driving the Jews into the sea? Do the centrists and left of center political activists now join the hawks like Moshe Arens? Arens’ assessment is that: “He (Arafat) and many Palestinians have such deep grievances against Israel and Jews that their aims are unlimited. The West Bank and Gaza are only their first step. My guess is that they likely want all of Palestine.” (CJN 16.11.00, p. 20)

There is a lot of hard information to justify this pessimism. Can you remember the storming of Joseph’s Tomb after Israel had withdrawn and been given promises that the Palestinians would provide the protection? Not only was Joseph’s Tomb destroyed and burned, but **Hillel Lieberman** was killed when he went to save the Torah scrolls. Arafat has not only **not** tried to suppress the riots, he has allowed both the Tanzim and his

security apparatus to participate in the assaults on Israeli positions. **Yossi Tabje**, a border policeman, was killed by his Palestinian police partner. Arafat released the Hamas bombers from jail. And they planted more bombs such as at the **Sufa** crossing in southern Gaza. The **Saludin Brigade** bombed **Dan Bus No. 51 to Petah Tikvah** in Tel Aviv. Settlers have been shot at **Alon Moreh**. Can anyone forget the lynching and dismemberment of the two reservists in **Ramallah**? Or the bombing of the Gaza children's school bus – yes children's school bus - at **Kfar Darom** in which 12 year old **Orit Cohen, 9 year old Tehilah Cohen and 7 year old Yisrael Cohen** all had legs blown off and two adults died. Is it any wonder that Israelis and Jews in general feel not only uncertainty and pessimism, but anxiety and anger.

And what about Jews in Canada? The United Church document – *Bearing Faithful Witness* – is now very positive about Jews and Judaism, but clearly identifies with the Palestinians in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and only recognizes Israel's right to live in peace and security, but not its right to Jerusalem. The actions of our own government have not been very reassuring. Just recall, long ago, before the federal elections, the Canadian government supported UN resolution 1322 that condemned Israel for excessive use of force, declared that Israel was the sole party responsible for the violence and deplored “the provocation carried out at ***Al-Haram Al-Sharif***” [not and/or the Temple Mount]. In other words, Sharon, the leader of the opposition in the Knesset, however ill-timed and politically insensitive his action might have been, was a *provocateur* responsible for instigating all the violence and the Israeli army for carrying it out - not the ones throwing the rocks, tossing the Molotov cocktails, shooting at Israeli positions and

settlers or bombing buses. And when the *New York Times* writes a story of a Palestinian beaten on the Temple Mount, one is not inclined to be optimistic about fair coverage of Israel when the reader learns that the body belonged to a Yeshiva student named **Tevia Grossman**.

What if Israel takes unilateral action and withdraws from the densely populated Palestinian towns as it planned to do anyway. The Lebanon precedent is seen by many to be very discouraging. After the IDF unilateral pullout from Lebanon on May 24th and the South Lebanon Army was abandoned and fell apart to flee, be arrested, or go to Israel or abroad, on 7 October, three Israeli soldiers (**Benny Avraham, Omar Souad [Swa'id] and Adi Avitan**), were abducted from the Israeli side of the border. A week later, an Israeli “businessman,” **Elchanan Tannenbaum**, was lured to a rendezvous and kidnapped.

But these are the surface observations. In a New York Times article early this month, **Tom Friedman** declared that there are fundamental structural flaws in the approach to peace of the different parties that can only reinforce pessimism. “In Israel, virtually every party favours a peace deal with the Palestinians, and the debate is over how much to compromise. In the Arab world, the debate is over *whether* to compromise – with one group rejecting peace with Israel on any terms and the others advocating peace with Israel, but only if the Palestinians get 100 percent of what they want.” (NYT, 02.01.01) As Tom concluded, Arafat, “is leading his people into an abyss instead of towards

However, for the first time since independence, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has spilled into Israel itself. In riots by Israeli Arabs, 13 were killed in the northern district. The riots are cause enough for a severe bout of the blues, but when one learns that not one civilian was killed or even wounded in the central or southern regions plagued by the same rioting, one has to wonder whether the charges of a trigger-happy interior police leader in the north are correct.

When we raise our perspective and look at Israeli-Arab relations, we cannot be very sanguine. Not only has Egypt withdrawn its ambassador and Jordan failed to send its ambassador and other Arab countries put the diplomatic thaw back on ice, but Saddam Hussein's star is rising. Syria would not make peace and insisted that Israel retreat to the 1967 armistice line rather than the 1923 recognized international border so that they could benefit from both their aggression and defeat. Peace negotiations were drowned over a few square miles on the shores of Lake Kinneret. It has been suggested that there is a deeper structural issue underlying the tension between Israel and the Arab states. Of 180 countries in the world, Freedom House claims that 145 are free or partly free. (There were only 35 democratic states thirty years ago and 115 ten years ago.) But Israel is the only one of 14 states in the Middle East classified as free.

The problem may go even deeper than the Israeli/Palestinian conflict or even the Arab/Israeli conflict. Don Carr suggests that the following comments of an Arabist are realistic, not pessimistic. "A former consul general of Israel in Toronto – a superb

intellect, well versed in Arabic and Muslim thought – told us that he did not believe there were any real prospects for peace as we know it, until the world of Islam itself reconciles the problems between those on the extremist wing and those who would have Islam come into the 21st century. His pessimistic view is that such a reconciliation may take hundreds of years.” (CJN, Nov. 16, 2000, p. 9)

Again, there is a great deal of evidence. There are a plethora of examples of Islamic and Arab anti-Semitism in **Arieh Sev**’s volume – *The Arabian Caricature*. Anti-Semitic and anti-Israel cartoons pervade the Arab press. Much closer to home, **Shahid Mahmoud**’s cartoon was displayed at Janice Stein’s Munk Centre as part of an Amnesty International promotion. The cartoon showed two body bags, one tagged “Jewish, the other tagged ‘Arab, Israel 2000,” clearly making an equivalence between the Nazi extermination of the Jews and the Israeli efforts to suppress the al-Aqsa intifada. The Protocols of Zion are widely distributed; beliefs in an international Jewish financial conspiracy are widespread in many Arab countries.

Not much apparently to smile about.

Optimism

Let me describe the view from the other side of the fence. In the last three years, before Arafat broke his solemn pledge not to return to the use of violence in dealing with the Israeli/Arab conflict, Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza grew 52.4%. In the seven years since Oslo and the pledge to return land captured in the 1967 war (not **all** the land mind you) the Palestinians have regained control of only 18% of that land, land which is now split into five – not two or even three - disconnected parcels. Even if Israel acceded to all of Arafat's current demands for exchanging land for peace, and Israel withdrew fully to the 1967 borders, including all of Old as well as East Jerusalem, the Palestinians would still only possess 22% of the original Palestine Mandate, when at the time of the war in 1947-8, Palestinians constituted roughly two-thirds of the population and owned or controlled about three-quarters of the land.

The PLO can state categorically that they have amended their Covenant and taken out their determination to eliminate Israel. They have accepted a two-state solution. On the other hand, the Jews have not amended their Covenant. *Numbers*, chapter 33, still reads: "When you cross over Jordan into the Land of Canaan, you shall dispossess all the inhabitants of the land before you...for I have given you the land to possess it." And the pattern of settlements and the increase in their numbers and size offers evidence to the Palestinian that this is, indeed, the Jewish intent.

Let us look at more recent events at what has happened since the Al-Aqsa intifada began on 29 September. The Palestinian death toll reached 319 in the 12 weeks that ended December 18th as against 40 Israelis killed, an approximately 10:1 kill ratio. Of these, 16% were under 16, 20% were 16-18 – that is, one-third were teenagers. 40% fell into the 19-29 age group, 12% were 30-39 and 8% were above 40. Further, over the period, the pattern of the insurrection has changed. What began as mass civilian protests and riots (most without the use of weapons), were replaced by organized armed clashes with the Tanzim militia and Fatah security personnel participating. But these, in turn, have now been put on the back burner in favor of stealth attacks on IDF soldiers and settlers as the IDF, using snipers and information provided by collaborators, started to kill off the militant leaders one by one. As a result, the war of attrition has begun and the events that receive so much news coverage have receded from the front pages. At the same time, the IDF has increased the kill ratio in its favour.

Further, there have been **relatively** few successful car bombings in Israel. There has been a de-escalation in the fighting. And negotiations continue in various streams not only with Foreign Minister, Shlomo Ben-Ami, but with Yossi Sharid, Yossi Beilin, Gilad Sher, Barak's Chief of Staff, and even Peres back in the picture.

And if we look at the larger picture, Issy Sharp and Prince Ibn Saud seem to still be able to do business together even though Issy is well known as a strong supporter of Israel. Shuls and cemeteries around the world are being maintained and paid for by goyim in places with a long history of anti-Semitism.

death as a victim of Israeli torture when he was actually killed in a car accident. There are deep cracks in the peace process and distrust is now much higher than the level of trust. However, the Al-Aqsa intifada has gone on for almost four months in a conflict that dates back almost ninety years.

And if you want real evidence for optimism, look at the Jericho casino. The Oasis has been closed since October after it was shot up by the IDF after having been used as a base for the Tanzim and PLO security forces to fire at the IDF. The thousands of Israeli gambling addicts have stopped flocking there to the great benefit of their families. But don't be too overjoyed about this piece of news. Oasis has advertised for new dealers to

begin their employment in February. Perhaps the gamblers who run casinos know more than the political experts.

However, I want to end my talk on a less fanciful and flighty note. I want to move from whether the objective conditions and circumstances warrant our optimism or pessimism to an examination of choosing which attitude to adopt. After all, if we do not look forward to peace, there are, contrary to what some say, other alternatives. We can continue to occupy the Palestinians. We can initiate ethnic cleansing. We can even go back to our biblical roots and give serious consideration to extermination. I am convinced that you, and the vast, vast majority of Jews, would find the latter two options anathema. So the real choice would seem to be continued occupation or peace. However, I suggest that continuing occupation is not a choice. It may be necessary, but it is not a choice. As my Orthodox colleague, a great biblical scholar, Marty Lockshin, describes the message of our Torah, Shalom is a categorical imperative. We are not enjoined to seek peace only under certain conditions. Our injunction – the one most repeated in our biblical text compared to any other – is not to say, “if such and such is the case, and if the conditions .etc., etc., then we should seek peace.” We are told to, “Seek peace if it is near,” and “Pursue peace when it is far off.” We are given no choice.

The Prerequisite Attitudes for the Pursuit of Peace

How do we seek peace if the other side seems so unreasonable and stubborn? I believe there are at least three dimensions to this answer. They entail:

1. How should we regard the enemy Other, that is, Palestinians?
2. How should we in the diaspora relate to Israel, particularly if Sharon is elected and victory replaces peace as a first priority?
3. What should our own fundamental attitude be towards the world, whatever the circumstances?

In answer to the first question, how do we treat the enemy-Other, we should not demonize the Palestinians. That does not mean that we should romanticize them and demonize ourselves. There has been a spate of recent Israeli films, produced largely by the children of Holocaust survivors, that do, in fact, see Israelis as colonizers. By contrast, the Palestinians are projected, if not as pure and noble, certainly as a better human specimens than the Israelis. At the same time as these film makers re-connect to Europe and the roots of their parents lives – rather than ignoring the Holocaust – they seem to disconnect from Israel. They criticize the use of the Holocaust as a justification for the creation of Israel (though Jewish settlement in Palestine and, in fact, continuity in Palestine, long preceded the Holocaust). Secondly, they seem to have bought into Edward Said's post-colonial discourse that what was first visited upon the Jews in Europe, was subsequently carried out against the Palestinians.

For example, Yosefa Yoshitzky, a Professor of Communications at Hebrew University, who herself is a child of Holocaust survivors, shares the perspective of many of these film makers that the Palestinians were forcefully **expelled** by the Jews in 1948.ⁱ At the same time, Israeli society is characterized by polarization. This sense of polarization naturally comes out most acutely in the Palestinian Arab versus Jewish Israeli divisions and emerges in films in Arab-Jewish tragic love relationships. In Loshitzky's words, these stories are tragic because, "The fear of mixing blood stems from a desire to maintain the separation between the colonizer and the colonized, the 'civilized' and the 'savage'" (Identity, p. 196) In other words, the Israelis are racists when, in fact, they share with Palestinians a common alienation. "(T)he basis of the identities of the Mizrahim and the Holocaust survivors is like that of the Palestinians, the experience of spatial/geographical and cultural/spiritual displacement." (Identity, p. 7)

These stories of forbidden love and efforts to cross the two solitudes are found in Dani Volman's *Hide and Seek* (1981), Daniel Waxsman's *Hamsin* (1982), Nissim Dayan's *A Very Narrow Bridge* (1985), Michal Bat Adam's *The Lover* (1986), Amnon Rubinstein's *Nadia* (1986), Judd Ne'eman's *Streets of Yesterday* (1989), Gideon Ganani's *Crossfire* (1989), Dini Tzvi-Riklis' *Observation Point* (1990), and, most recently, Amos Gitai's *Day-After-Day* (1998). The common theme in all of them is that sexual intercourse between Israeli Jews and Palestinians is regarded by the surrounding Israeli community as a national betrayal. That attitude is the source of the tragedy depicted.

These films often mix in other sub-themes of post-colonial discourse – Jewish expropriation of Arab land in *Hide and Seek*, the Palestinians who are attached to their land in contrast to the Jewish Israelis who treat the land as a commodity for sale. (Eventually the differences and anger emerges as a murderous bull and an expression of suppressed Palestinian rage that adumbrates the intifada in *Hamsin*.) In *A Very Narrow Bridge*, Benny Taggar, a military (and militant) prosecutor cut off from his Oriental roots and engaged in a nouveau riche life style, discovers in the Palestinian teacher, Talia, his true Oriental self. The ethical perspective of the author and the critic is that the tragedy results from homophobic, nationalist and racist intolerant and militant ideologues that destroy true love and the possibility of unity between the Jewish Israelis and the Palestinians. “Identity, particularly in the extreme forms of national and/or ethnic conflict, is marked by inclusion and exclusion, ‘us’ and ‘them’.” (Identity, p. 7)ⁱⁱ

Further, there is a clear admiration for the new proud Palestinian who kills the Israeli secret service agent instead of his sister for reasons of family honor. For Dayan, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is merely an inter-tribal rivalry rooted in blood revenge.ⁱⁱⁱ In contrast, in *The Lover* a reverse process takes place. Only through expulsion of the Other to reestablish ethnic boundaries and segregation is harmony and “normalcy” restored, but, of course, at great personal cost. In *Streets of Yesterday* betrayal of friends is what counts, not loyalty to a nation. Again, a secret service agent is lynched. The Israeli who had tried to merge his identity with the Palestinian through a love observes but stands by. Repulsed by what he sees, and reminded of the Holocaust, he turns his back on the effort

to unite the two nations through sexual intercourse and returns to identify with his own people. But this is portrayed as a failure, a tragedy.

In *Observation Point*, the Palestinian woman entraps the gaze of a soldier observing “all” from his roof-top post. When she returns his gaze, he averts his eyes and is freed to kill her husband for giving her brother explosives. In *Crossfire*, a Lehi fanatic is portrayed as the irate brother who, out of a sense of betrayal, kills his sister for her love affair with the enemy Palestinian. The movies still evoke Israeli Jewish dominance. Israel is characterized through the camera gaze of its artists as a colonizing power. And it is Israelis who are driven by revenge and a code of honor.

Now this is romanticization and inversion pure and simple. It is within the Palestinian community that one finds the predominance of the code of honour and revenge. One should not demonize the Palestinians, but one should also not romanticize them. Montaigne, in “Des Cannibales,” depicted cannibals as noble savages, as pure agents of the doctrine of a virtue ethics of honour. They were incapable of lying or dissembling and were driven solely by the military virtue of honour and never by avarice or the pursuit of imperial power.^{iv} According to Montaigne’s interpretation of the evidence of writers on the Brazilian cannibals, the whole society esteemed noble valour and an unstinting Stoicism in the face of defeat when consigned to the cooking pot. As men of honour, they sought the defeat and humiliation of the other and submission of the other to the

domination of one's own will. That submission was needed because they also desired recognition by the other of the honour they had achieved.

So these men of military virtue sought honour and recognition of that honour for themselves and defeat, and humiliation of the other through inhuman cruelty, torture and dismemberment of the other's body. But, if defeated themselves, they resisted submission with all their will and at the full expense of the most excruciating pain in their flesh. This value norm not only characterized the cannibals, but others as well. For example, Montaigne, drawing, as he says, from Josephus' account of the martyrdom of the Maccabees (2 Maccabees 7), the oldest of the Maccabee brothers is cooked alive in a frying pan on the orders of the tyrant, Antiochus Epiphanes. Yet Judah Maccabee does not bend or ask for mercy, but dies firm in his faith and convictions indifferent to the pain in his flesh. I would argue, that the Israeli filmmakers who begin to characterize Israelis as driven by a code of honour and revenge are ingesting a value far more characteristic and evident in Palestinian behavior. Israelis have to ensure that they not only do not demonize the Other, but they also should not demonize themselves.

2. The diaspora relation to Israel is another story. Already, there are some very worrisome trends. Sometimes they are manifest in very mundane ways. For example, evangelical Christians continue to go to Israel with confidence to visit the land of promise. This is in spite of such silliness as the Interior Ministry, because of a work slowdown, failing to issue visas to 650 evangelicals; a conference, ten years in the

planning, was recently cancelled just when Israeli tourism is in the doldrums. In contrast, Jews have cancelled their visits by the tens of thousands.

But this trend has been building as long as the self-flagellation of Israelis by their filmmakers, playwrights, academics and revisionist historians. Let me provide an example from a movie with which you are all certainly familiar - the film *Schindler's List*. In its actual portrayal of the Holocaust and its breach of taboos against portrayal, we find a victory of the image specialists dealing with popular culture over the historians. The film follows the American sensibility in the personalization of politics, consistent with the personalization of the Holocaust that we find in the new wave Israeli filmmakers. The redemption is accomplished, not by repression and creating the state on the grave of Europe, as in early films like *Exodus* where the new Israeli hero (blue-eyed, Paul Newman if you recall) displaces the old, small and passive Jew of Europe. In *Schindler's List*, instead, we have continuity and recognition that what was destroyed in fact lives on and is redeemed through the second generation, through artists who reenact the lives of those who went through the Holocaust and accompany them to the cemetery to place stones on the monuments of those who died. Tradition is not destroyed but lives on in a new generation.

The hero is not Ari ben Canaan of *Exodus*, the tall, handsome, strong and virile male figure of courage and determination, but the self-sacrificial Christian and Aryan savior. Further, unlike *Exodus*, where the old Jew, Karen's father who was destroyed by the Holocaust, is not able to enter the promised land, Schindler's Jews, all stereotypically

short rather than tall, go to Israel to survive. In *Schindler's List*, Israel is a refuge for the remnant of European Jews, and salvation is made possible via a Christian act. Instead of the image of self-sufficiency, a new image of dependency is projected. As Sara Horowitz puts it, Israel “exists in the film solely as a place for Holocaust survivors and cemeteries – a repository, in other words, of Jewish memory.” (p. 162) Israel is a place for focusing our sentiments and nostalgia.

In fact, and in spite of Spielberg's ostensible return to his Jewish roots, the fulfillment of the Jewish dream is actually found in America, the one place Jews can live as equals with Christians, with a Christian sensibility and without fear. If America and Israel were merged in *Exodus*, they are separated in *Schindler's List*. For Hollywood is the answer to the Jewish dream of a promised land, for it is the prime manufacturer of dreams. It is truly *Dreamworks*, the name of Spielberg's company. And Israel becomes the inheritor of traditional Jewish fears of the Other and an effort to build a self-enclosed ghetto safe from the incursions of that Other. But the center of Jewish life is really in America, reinforced by the act of treating Israel as a charity case. Israel is a place to return to for reasons of nostalgia and to connect with one's past, but as soon as there is any risk, the pattern of abandoning the ghetto for the open society is where the real future is to be found. That, unfortunately is the pattern revealed by North American image projections and general behaviour.

Does that mean that we adopt the viewpoint of Ruth Wisse, now holding the Yiddish Chair at Harvard, where the only authentic Jew is one who accepts Jewish autonomy and

self-determination as the exclusive essence of the Jewish experience. Thus, she excludes Bernard Malamud and Marcel Proust from her canon of Jewish literature because Malamud's themes are Christian, since redemption comes through suffering, and Proust was too detached from his Jewishness. I think not. I argue for the plurality of Jewish experience and an adoration and respect for the richness of both the Israeli and the Galut experience. We need neither romanticize nor denigrate either one. But neither can either be ignored. But if one is a Jew, then Israel cannot be relegated to the status of an old folks home or a nostalgic place to visit as long as it is safe.

3. Pessimism or Optimism - our fundamental outlook

The American journalist Ruth Gruber, in the re-issue of her 1948 book, *Destination Palestine*, interestingly retitled as *Exodus*, makes the following statement:

Given their insecure status in societies where they comprised the most obviously different group, Jews needed to deal with outside and often hostile authorities over matters that others took for granted. Jewish history generated a psychology characterized by "the hypervigilance of the haunted, the alert scanning of the insecure, and the continuous suspiciousness of the vulnerable." (Jay Y. Gonen, *A Psychohistory of Zionism*, Mason/Charter, 1975, p. 32.) Jews learned to dread events over which they had no control, and perfected great skill in detecting the potentially disastrous side of seemingly benign developments. This "gevalt syndrome," or "doomsday" mentality, expresses as well as anything the deep-seated pessimism and anxiety rooted in the vicissitudes of Jewish history.

In contrast to this gevalt syndrome, where pessimism is a standing order, the new Israel (as well as America) as depicted in *Exodus* was an idealized center of optimism no matter what obstacles were encountered. The gevalt syndrome characterized traditional Judaism for centuries. The vision of optimism and unbridled hope characterized the birth of the new Jew with Israel, even if he eventually wound up in America.

What I suggest is the following. In the midst of the greatest despair, we need hope and optimism. Anita Mayer - who shared a bunk with Anne Frank (CJN – 04.01.01), said that in the death camps, “I realized that if you weren’t hopeful, you couldn’t survive. You needed inner strength in order to survive.” However, this is not how we generally respond. Simcha Simchovitch described a typical response when he wrote on “The death of the Otwock Ghetto.” “Over the ghetto lanes, panic rises like a threatening cloud, an epidemic that quickly penetrates house after house.” What attitude should one adopt? Quoting the poet again, “I affirm my faith in days to come that will uplift mankind from the vale of tears and misery...A new reality will dawn, an earthly Eden of life and love, healing and forgiveness. Poets will express and sing of this felicity – yes, I do believe, I

This is the attitude that a Jew qua Jew should have - hope and optimism when in the deepest depths of despair. Criticism and skepticism when we are flush with the bounty of life and tend to forget that once we were slaves in Egypt.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Loshitzky's phrase taken from a Palestinian monograph (Nir Masalin, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of 'Transfer' in Zionist Political Thought*, Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992, rather than an Israeli revisionist historian) of the native Palestinians, denying thereby their right to national self-determination. Again the fact that the foremost expert revisionist historian on the Palestinian refugee flight argues that in the second phase of the flight, up until the end of the spring of 1948, Haganah operational orders "did not call for the expulsion or eviction of the Arab civilian population" (Benny Morris, *The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, 1947-1949*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 131) by which time the majority of the refugees had fled, is simply ignored. Expulsion only became a factor in the fall after several of the truces had been broken.

ⁱⁱ For an excellent analysis of this type of identity formation from the perspective of the Palestinians, cf. Rashid Khalidi's *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Though constructed as an identity in response to the Other, but not only the Other, Khalidi has a less romantic and more critical account of the formation of the Palestinian identity that proves to be as stubborn in holding onto their sense of a nation as the Jewish identity proved to be over a longer period. For a view of Palestinian identity formation through theatre, cf. Don Shinar's account of the El-Hakawati theatrical group's production of *The Story of the Eye and the Tooth* and their effort to use drama to express the national aspirations of a society under occupation in *Palestinian Voices: Communication and Nation Building in the West Bank*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1987. Given Abu-Salem, the theatre's founder, marriage to a Brooklyn-born Jew, his productions should be of particular interest to those who focus on miscegenation as a way of understanding the Jewish/Palestinian national dialectic.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ironically, the Palestinian critic, Zyad Fahoum, still complains that, "The conclusion one derives from the film is that the struggle of the Arab men against the occupation derives among other things from their objection to the liberation or kidnapping of their women by the Israeli occupier." (*Identity*, p. 223) and then asks, "how did it happen that a film that comes to preach tolerance and love between the Israeli and Palestinian people, East and West, or for that matter between the east itself, ends up forcing upon us a racist and distorted picture of the East? Does not the act of preaching itself constitute an act of occupation?" (p. 224)

^{iv} This position stands in stark contrast to John Locke and Thomas Hobbes in the next century for whom man in the state of nature who is driven primarily by economic interests rather than military virtues.