



SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE מכון  
OF NORTH AMERICA שלום הרטמן

Letters to  
My Palestinian  
Neighbor



Yossi Klein  
Halevi

*Author of Like Dreamers*

## Book Club Leader's Guide

Guide for leading a book club  
discussion and text study program

Written by  
Rabbi Lauren Berkun

[shalomhartman.org](http://shalomhartman.org)



***Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor* Book Club Leader's Guide**  
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## **Book Club Leader's Guide**

### ***"Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor" by Yossi Klein Halevi***

#### **Welcome:**

We are thrilled that you have chosen to offer a Book Club program utilizing Shalom Hartman Institute Senior Fellow Yossi Klein Halevi's book, "Letters to my Palestinian Neighbor." This Leader's Guide is meant to serve as a resource and tool for you as the facilitator of the Book Club study and dialogue program. In addition to this written leader's guide, the Shalom Hartman Institute has archived articles, background readings, webinars, and video recordings to enrich your Book Club program. These resources are located on Hartman Online and can be accessed by leaders and book club participants through Hartman Online registration.

The written leader's guide provides a summary outline of each chapter, with selected quotes from the book. This outline can serve as a useful tool for preparing to facilitate a Book Club session and/or may provide some key quotes from each chapter to review with your students.

In addition, the Leader's Guide provides some recommended discussion questions for each chapter to help foster dialogue about each "letter" in "Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor".

Finally, this guide includes primary sources for each chapter to provide a text-study component for your book club program. These sources were selected to complement the content of each chapter. In some cases, Yossi Klein Halevi references those primary sources in his writing. In other cases, the sources provide traditional Jewish texts to support the ideas and arguments in the chapter.

## **How to Implement the Book Club Program:**

The book club guide contains ten chapters, each one rich with ideas and text for study and discussion. It would be possible to offer this program as a **10-part series**, devoting a session to each “letter” in the book.

As the facilitator, you might choose to offer this program in as many or as few sessions as you decide for your community. The Leader’s Guide, offered in a Word document, will serve as a resource for you to make your own educational decisions and to cut-and-paste into your own Book Club discussion study sheets. Whether you are offering a 10-part one-hour weekly class, or a 5-part two-hour seminar series, or a single book club conversation, we hope that this resource will provide you with ample support to achieve your educational goals.

## **Suggested Structure for a Book Club Program:**

### **A. 10-Part Book Club Series**

*Devote 10 one-hour sessions, to cover each of the letters.*

1. Review the chapter summary
2. Study primary sources in a guided chavruta
3. Discuss the main themes of this letter utilizing chapter discussion questions

### **B. 3-Part Book Club Series\***

*Session 1: Introduction and Opening Webinar*

1. Show an archived webinar or video lecture from Yossi about his book (from Hartman Online selection)
2. Review chapters 1-3 with select highlights from chapter summaries and discussion questions

### *Session 2: Book Club Discussion and Text Study*

1. Review and discuss Chapters 4-7, selecting key points from chapter summaries and discussion questions
2. Text Study: select one or two sources from each chapter to learn and discuss)

### *Session 3: Conclusion and Interviews*

1. Review and Discuss Chapters 8-10, selecting key points from chapter summaries and discussion questions
2. Show an archived interview of Yossi discussing his book with a Hartman scholar and/or Palestinian (from Hartman Online selection)

\*With the help of this Leader's Guide, you can create as many or as few study sessions with this material as your community calendar allows.

### **Contact Us:**

We hope that these curricular materials will provide stimulating, meaningful, and relevant high-level Jewish learning for you and your community.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions related to this Book Club Project and these resources.

May this learning help your community go from strength to strength,

Rabbi Lauren Berkun, *Director of Rabbinic Programs*  
Shalom Hartman Institute of North America  
[lauren@shalomhartman.org](mailto:lauren@shalomhartman.org)

## Letter 1: The Wall Between Us

### CHAPTER SUMMARY:

#### Background:

- **1998 Book Project “Entering the Garden of Eden”:** set out on a pilgrimage into Islam and Christianity to experience devotional life of neighbors. Goal to see whether Jews and Muslims could share sense of God’s presence.
- The interfaith encounter creates **religious humility**, recognition that truth and holiness are not confined to any one path.
- Coexistence in the Holy Land is often ensured by **mutual separation**. The four quarters of the Old City of Jerusalem—Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Armenian—reinforce the message: Safety is measured by the distance between us.
- The journey was an insistence on the possibility of intimacy.
- Learned that Islam imparts awareness of one’s own impermanence. Argument about ownership of land is pointless, because the land owns us. The identical sensibility exists in the Jewish tradition in Leviticus 25.
- **Relinquishing absolutist claims**: The courage to embrace transience could help create a religious language of peace between our peoples, a basis for political flexibility, for letting go of absolutist claims.
- **Confronting Counter-Narrative**: Stepped out of Jewish narrative to confront Palestinian historical attachments and the wrongs done by Israelis against Palestinians: counter-story of invasion, occupation, and expulsion. Living with two narratives.

#### From Yossi’s Window: Reflections Today

- We are intruders in each other’s dreams, violators of each other’s sense of home. We are ***living incarnations of each other’s worst historical nightmares***.
- As a Palestinian, you are denied the rights of citizenship that I enjoy as an Israeli. The ongoing disparity between your hill and mine challenges my deepest self-understanding and moral commitments as a Jew and an Israeli. Ending that disparity is one reason why I support a two-state solution.
- To solve our conflict, we must recognize not only each other’s right to self-determination but also each side’s ***right to self-definition***.
- I didn’t return home to deny another people its own sense of home. I have no intention of denying your claim or your pain.

### Shift in Israeli's perspective from First to Second Intifada:

- **After first intifada**: We believed that the onus was on Israel as the occupier to reach out to the Palestinians with a serious peace offer. For that reason, Yitzhak Rabin when he shook hands with Yasser Arafat on the White House lawn in 1993, officially launching the Oslo peace process.
- **After second intifada**: Most Israelis believe that our leaders at the time tried to make peace, while Palestinian leaders rejected compromise and turned instead to terrorism. You cannot understand Israelis today without accounting for how profoundly that narrative has shaped our worldview and our policies.
- The second intifada is the moment most of us guilty Israelis lost faith in the peaceful intentions of the Palestinian leadership; because the worst wave of terrorism in Israel's history came after Israel had made two offers to end the occupation (at Camp David in July 2000 and Clinton's plan in December 2000). Again in 2008, Olmert offers Abbas full withdrawal from territories with land swaps.
- Today, ordinary Israelis who desperately want to live normal lives in a normal country at peace with its neighbors regard those leftists who still insist that Palestinian leaders want peace as delusional.
- ***Underlying Motive of Second Intifada***: a denial of the Jewish people's right to exist as a sovereign nation in any part of the land we share, a denial of the idea that this is a land that needs to be shared by two peoples.
- We experienced the terrorism as an expression of a deeper pathology: an intention to destroy the Jewish presence in this land. A revolt not against occupation but against Israel's existence.

### Palestinian Denial of Zionist Narrative

- Palestinian leaders never stop telling their people that Israel has no historic legitimacy as a state.
- Those leaders have convinced us that this isn't a conflict about borders, settlements, Jerusalem and holy places. It is about the Jewish right to be here, in any borders. The right to be considered a people. ***An indigenous people.***
- This explains how I can live with the moral burden of the occupation.
- When I see how my people and its story are portrayed in Palestinian media, I feel close to despair. It seems that the one idea unifying the diverse Palestinian media is that the ***Jews are not a people and have no right to a state.***

## Making Peace with the Claims of the Other

- As a religious person, I am forbidden to make peace with despair. As the Qur'an so powerfully notes, ***despair is equivalent to disbelief in God***.
- To doubt the possibility of reconciliation is to limit God's power, the possibility of miracle—especially in this land. The Torah commands me, "Seek peace and pursue it," even when peace appears impossible.
- For the sake of both Israelis and Palestinians, I want my government to:
  - actively pursue a two-state solution
  - explore even the most remote possibility for an agreement
  - speak not only a language of security and threat but also of hope and coexistence and moral responsibility
  - stop expanding settlements
- I couldn't bear the impact of seemingly endless occupation on the lives of my neighbors—and on my own moral credibility as a Jew, a carrier of an ancient tradition that cherishes justice and fairness, that places the value of a human life, created in the Divine image, at the core of its worldview.
- Neither of us is likely to convince the other of each side's narrative. Each of us lives within a story so deeply rooted in our being, that forfeiting our respective narratives would be a betrayal.
- ***We have imposed our worst historical nightmares on the other:*** To you we are colonialists, Crusaders. And to us you are the latest genocidal enemy seeking to destroy the Jewish people.
- Can we see each other as ***two traumatized peoples***, each clinging to the same sliver of land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, neither of whom will find peace or justice until we make our peace with the other's claim to justice?
- I long ago realized that the historic claims and religious longings that connect me to this land cannot justify my possessing all of it at another people's expense. And so, however painfully, I accept partition as the practical expression of resolving a conflict between two legitimate claims.
- The key to ending the occupation is giving the Jews some hope that our withdrawal, our willingness to territorially contract, will be reciprocated by a willingness on your side to accept the West Bank and Gaza as the Palestinian state, without trying to undermine the state of Israel.



## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. How does this book project differ from Yossi's book, "Entrance into the Garden of Eden?" What were the goals of the earlier book? What are the goals of this book?
2. What did Yossi learn about Islam (and similarities in the Jewish tradition) that gave him hope for reconciliation and compromise towards a two-state solution?
3. What changed in the Israeli mentality between the first intifada and the second intifada?
4. According to Yossi, what is the greatest obstacle right now to peace? How can these letters to his Palestinian neighbor address that challenge?

## **SOURCES:**

### **1. Leviticus 25:1-24**

The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai: <sup>2</sup>Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. <sup>4</sup>But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. <sup>5</sup>You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. <sup>6</sup>But you may eat whatever the land during its sabbath will produce—you, your male and female slaves, the hired and bound laborers who live with you, <sup>7</sup>and your cattle and the beasts in your land may eat all its yield.

<sup>8</sup>You shall count off seven weeks of years—seven times seven years—so that the period of seven weeks of years gives you a total of forty-nine years. <sup>9</sup>Then you shall sound the horn loud; in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month—the Day of Atonement—you shall have the horn sounded throughout your land <sup>10</sup>and you shall hallow the fiftieth year. You shall proclaim release throughout the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: each of you shall return to his holding and each of you shall return to his family.

<sup>11</sup>That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, neither shall you reap the aftergrowth or harvest the untrimmed vines, <sup>12</sup>for it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you: you may only eat the growth direct from the field.

<sup>13</sup>In this year of jubilee, each of you shall return to his holding. <sup>14</sup>When you sell property to your neighbor, or buy any from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. <sup>15</sup>In buying from your neighbor, you shall deduct only for the number of years since the jubilee; and in selling to you, he shall charge you only for the remaining crop years: <sup>16</sup>the more such years, the higher the price you pay; the fewer such years, the lower the price; for what he is selling you is a number of harvests. <sup>17</sup>Do not wrong one another, but fear your God; for I the Lord am your God.

<sup>18</sup>You shall observe My laws and faithfully keep My rules, that you may live upon the land in security; <sup>19</sup>the land shall yield its fruit and you shall eat your fill, and you shall live upon it in security. <sup>20</sup>And should you ask, "What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?" <sup>21</sup>I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years. <sup>22</sup>When you sow in the eighth year, you will still be eating old grain of that crop; you will be eating the old until the ninth year, until its crops come in. <sup>23</sup>But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me. <sup>24</sup>Throughout the land that you hold, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

## **2. Derekh Eretz Zuta, *Perek Hashalom***

Hezekiah taught:

Great is peace, for all other mitzvot of the Torah are conditional:

"If you see..." (Exodus 23:5), "If you meet..." (Exodus 23:4) "If you happen upon..." (Deuteronomy 22:6) "When you build..." (Deuteronomy 22:8).

If the circumstance comes your way then you must perform the mitzvah [but if not, there is no obligation to fulfill it].

But what is written regarding peace?

"Seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:15).

Seek peace wherever you find yourself, and pursue it in other places, as well.

אמר חזקיה :גדול הוא השלום, שכל מצווה שבתורה כתוב בהן : "כי תראה" (שמות כג); "כי תפגע" (שמות כג); "כי יקרא" (דברים כב); "כי תבנה" (דברים כב). כשבאה המצווה לידך אתה זקוק לעשות. אבל השלום מה כתיב בו? "בקש שלום ורדפהו" (תהלים לד). בקשהו ממקומך ורדפהו במקום אחר.

### 3. Psalms 34:13-15

<sup>13</sup>Who is the man who is eager for life,  
who desires years of good fortune?

<sup>14</sup>Guard your tongue from evil,  
your lips from deceitful speech.

<sup>15</sup>Shun evil and do good,  
seek peace and pursue it.

מִי־הָאִישׁ הַחֲפֹץ חַיִּים  
אֲהָב יָמִים לְרֵאוֹת טוֹב :  
נֹצֵר לְשׁוֹנָד מֶרֶע וּשְׁפָתַיִךְ מִדְּבַר מְרֻמָּה :  
סוֹר מֶרֶע וַעֲשֵׂה טוֹב בִּקְשׁ שְׁלוֹם וְרִדְפֵהוּ :

### 4. Hafetz Hayim, Shmirat Halashon, Sha'ar Haz'chirah, Chapter 17

Seek it (peace) for your loved one and pursue it with your enemy. Seek it in your place and pursue it in other places. Seek it with your body and pursue it with your material resources. Seek it for your own benefit and pursue it for the benefit of others. Seek it today and pursue it tomorrow. With reference to “seek it tomorrow,” it teaches that one should not despair, thinking that one cannot make peace, but rather one should pursue peace today and also tomorrow and on the day afterwards, until one reaches it.

### 5. Mishnah Avot 1:12

Hillel and Shammai received [the oral tradition] from them. Hillel taught, “Be of the disciples of Aaron – loving peace and pursuing peace, loving your fellow creatures and bringing them close to the Torah.”

הלל ושמאי קיבלו מהם. הלל אומר, הוי כתלמידיו של אהרון – אוהב שלום ורודף שלום, אוהב את הבריות ומקרבן לתורה.

## 6. Leviticus Rabbah 9:9

R. Shimon bar Yochai said: Great is peace, since all blessings are comprised therein, as it is written, *The Lord will give strength unto His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace* (Ps. 29:11)...

R. Judan b. R. Jose said: Great is peace, seeing that the Holy One, blessed be He, is called Peace, as it says, "And he called Him *Adonai Shalom* -- Lord, Peace" (Judg. 6:24).

אר"ש בן יוחאי גדול השלום שכל הברכות כלולות בו (תהלים כט) ה' עוז לעמו יתן ה' יברך  
את עמו בשלום...

א"ר יודן ב"ר יוסי גדול שלום ששמו של הקב"ה נקרא שלום הה"ד (שופטים ו) ויקרא לו ה'  
שלום

## Letter 2: Need and Longing

### *Tisha B'Av*

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

- **Tisha B'Av:** Mourning destruction of both ancient temples in Jerusalem: the First Temple by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BCE, and the Second Temple by the Roman general Titus in 70 CE, and the subsequent dispersion of the Jews around the world in exile until the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.
- The Hebrew calendar reflects the natural cycle of the land of Israel. We celebrate freedom and renewal on the spring holiday of Passover; we mark the giving of the Torah, the spiritual harvest, on Shavuot at the end of spring, the time of the wheat harvest.
- It is appropriate that the fast of *Tisha b'Av occurs during the parched summer*, as the land itself seems to convey despair.
- Observing the commemoration of Tisha B'Av at Kotel: No sense genuine anguish today. It's hard to mourn the exile when the exile has ended.
- **Continuing Threat:** Pervasive presence of Israeli soldiers protecting us at the Wall reminds us not only of our restored sovereignty but of continuing threat. Tisha b'Av has been only partly negated.
- **Limbo Between Return and Redemption:** We reenact the choreography of mourning but are restless, disoriented. Home, yet not redeemed.
- Most Israelis are people of faith, sensing that their very existence is a miracle.
- Yossi to his son on the way to school: *"You know, in one sense here we are, sitting in a traffic jam, just like in any city anywhere. But sometimes it occurs to me that the most boring details of our daily life were the greatest dreams of our ancestors."*
- How can a Jew live in this country and not think about the improbability of our being?
- **Miracle of Ongoing Jewish Faith:** How did our ancestors in exile manage to retain hope? Why did they stay loyal to their fatally discredited faith? How did we resist the pressures and temptations to convert to the dominant faiths under which we lived?
- **Tisha b'Av presented Judaism with its greatest crisis.** Biblical Judaism was centered on the land of Israel and the Temple. But what to do now that a majority of the Jews had been uprooted from the land and the Temple destroyed?
- The Jews responded in a paradoxical way. They saw exile as God's punishment for their sins, and so they surrendered to their fate for as long as God decreed. Yet they refused to accept the exile as permanent. They actively nurtured the hope that one day God would retrieve them from the corners of the earth.

- **Messianic Hope:** the prospect of return was so inconceivable that Jews relegated it to the messianic age. Surely only the messiah could restore to sovereignty the most dispersed and powerless among peoples.
- **Dual Strategy:**
  1. accepting exile as fact
  2. rejecting it as permanent
- **New Custodians of Judaism:** rabbis, teachers, arbiters of Jewish law. Priests and prophets are no longer relevant.
- **Subversive expectation of Tisha B'Av:** The rabbis built into the Judaism of exile its own negation, a subversive expectation that one day Tisha b'Av would be reversed—turned into a holiday of redemption. According to Jewish legend, the messiah would be born on Tisha b'Av.
- **Carrying Land of Israel into Exile:** Throughout their wanderings, Jews carried Israel's seasonal rhythms, its stories and prophecies. They debated agricultural laws tied to the land of Israel in their study houses.
- **From Space to Time:** The Jewish relationship to the land of Israel shifted from space to time. The land exists in past and future—memory and anticipation. One day, Jews believed, the land would reemerge from its exile in time, back into space.
- **Preserving the Land in Prayer:** Jewish prayer became suffused with the longing for the land (i.e. prayers for rain, grace after meals, breaking of the glass under the *chuppah*).
- **Sephardic Poetry and Ritual:** Perhaps the most powerful expressions of longing for return were contained in the prayer poems of the Jews of Muslim lands. In their radically diverse exiles, Jews nurtured rituals of longing—like the holiday of Ethiopian Jews, known as the Sigd. Once a year, in late autumn, thousands of Jews from villages in remote Gondar province would trek up a mountain. Dressed in white, fasting, they turned north toward Zion and prayed for return.
- **Ethiopian Jewry:** Recounting the harrowing journey of Ethiopian Jews to Israel in the 80's, Yossi thinks of Ethiopian Jews whenever a Middle Eastern leader say that the only reason Israel exists is the Holocaust, and that the Palestinians have paid the price for Western guilt. Many Ethiopian Jews never even heard of the Holocaust until they got to Israel. Half of Israel's Jews come from the Arab world, where, for the most part, the Nazis didn't reach.
- **Power of Jewish Longing:** Israel exists because it never stopped existing, even if only in prayer. Israel was restored by the cumulative power of Jewish longing.
- **Enduring Jewish Presence in the Land:** But attachment to the land wasn't confined to longing from afar. Throughout the centuries, Jews from east and west came to live and be buried in the land.

- **19<sup>th</sup> Century Zionist Movement:** The impetus for creating a political expression of the longing for return was a dire need (Russian pogroms).
- The newly created Zionist movement was seeking a solution not just for Jews but for “the Jews”—a permanent solution to homelessness.
- Anti-Semitism and the need for refuge didn’t define the essence of Zionism. Need gave Zionism its urgency, but longing gave Zionism its spiritual substance.
- **Zionism was the meeting point between need and longing.** And when need and longing collided—as they did at a crucial moment in early Zionist history—longing won. Zionist Congress rejected Herzl’s pragmatic Uganda Plan.
- Had the Uganda Plan prevailed, Zionism would have become a colonialist movement. A tragic colonialism, impelled not by greed or glory but existential need. But by insisting on Zion, Zionism affirmed its legitimacy as a **movement of repatriation**, restoring a native people home.
- Precisely because Zionism is such a unique phenomenon, it is tempting to fit it into other categories, like nineteenth-century European nationalism. From there it is a small step to defining Zionism as a colonialist movement.
- Zionism was strongly influenced by European nationalism, but that was only the form that a two-thousand-year dream of return assumed. And though launched in the West, Zionism reached its culmination in the East. When the state of Israel was established, whole Jewish communities in the Middle East moved to Zion.
- A majority of Israelis today are descended from Jews who left one part of the Middle East to resettle in another. Tell them that Zionism is a European colonialist movement and they simply won’t understand what you’re talking about.
- Zionism came full circle by the end of the twentieth century, with the mass immigration to Israel of Russian Jews, refugees from seventy years of Communism.
- From a Zionist perspective, none of our waves of immigration is more or less “authentic.” Traditional Jews from Iraq and Yemen, assimilated Jews from the former Soviet Union: all are indigenous sons and daughters returning home.
- ***Is it possible to separate Zionism from Judaism?*** Is Zionism mere “politics,” as opposed to Judaism, which is authentic “religion”?
- The answer depends on what one means by Zionism. If it refers to the political movement that emerged in the late nineteenth century, then certainly, there are forms of Judaism that are independent of Zionism.
- But if by “Zionism” one means ***the Jewish attachment to the land of Israel and the dream of renewing Jewish sovereignty in our place of origin***, then there is no Judaism without Zionism.

- ***Judaism linked to Land:*** Judaism isn't only a set of rituals and rules but a vision linked to a place. Modern movements that created forms of Judaism severed from the love of the land and the dream of return all ended in failure.
- ***Yossi's constant anxiety: Are the Jews going to make it this time?*** We lost this land twice before. The great irony of Jewish history is that, for all the centrality in Judaism of the land of Israel, we've lived far more of our history outside of it than in it.
- We are a **people of both homeland and Diaspora**. A terrifying conditionality haunts our return.
- Jewish sovereignty has been entrusted to us; will we be the generation on whose watch it unravels?
- The challenges facing us are overwhelming.
  - How to refashion a single people out of scattered communities that had little communication for centuries?
  - How to balance religious and secular identities?
  - How to create a shared civic space between Jewish Israelis and Arab Israelis?
  - How to make peace with enemies who don't accept our right to be here?
  - How to defend ourselves against threat from every border?
  - How to empower Palestinians without endangering Israelis?
- It sometimes seems that we are intent on compensating for two millennia of lost sovereignty by cramming into mere decades the fulfillment of all our dreams, while repeating all the mistakes that other nations commit over centuries.
- In success or failure, in glory or disgrace: The fate of Israel is my fate, too, my shared responsibility. That, for me, is the meaning of Zionism.
- Judaism was intended to be lived communally, shaping a society's ethics and behavior. Here, then, is our chance to test our most noble ideas—abstractions in exile—against hard reality. This is where the worthiness of the Jewish story is being decided.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Do you commemorate Tisha B'Av? If so, how? What does this day mean to you in an era of Jewish sovereignty?
2. How do you understand Yossi's argument that we are in a limbo state: returned but not redeemed; home but not home?



3. Why is it important to Yossi that Palestinians understand the waves of immigration from Jews of Middle Eastern and Russian origin?
4. Do you think it is possible to separate Zionism from Judaism? What is Yossi's definition of Zionism? What is your definition of Zionism?

### **SOURCES:**

#### **1. Lamentations 1:1-4**

Alas! Lonely sits the city

Once great with people!  
She that was great among nations  
Is become like a widow;  
The princess among states  
Is become a thrall.

<sup>2</sup>Bitterly she weeps in the night,  
Her cheek wet with tears.  
There is none to comfort her  
Of all her friends.  
All her allies have betrayed her;  
They have become her foes.

<sup>3</sup>Judah has gone into exile  
Because of misery and harsh oppression;  
When she settled among the nations,  
She found no rest;  
All her pursuers overtook her  
In the narrow places.

<sup>4</sup>Zion's roads are in mourning,  
Empty of festival pilgrims;  
All her gates are deserted.  
Her priests sigh,  
Her maidens are unhappy—  
She is utterly disconsolate!

## 2. Psalm 126

A song of ascents.

When the LORD restores the fortunes of Zion  
—we see it as in a dream—  
<sup>2</sup>our mouths shall be filled with laughter,  
our tongues, with songs of joy.  
Then shall they say among the nations,  
“The LORD has done great things for them!”  
<sup>3</sup>The LORD will do great things for us  
and we shall rejoice.  
  
<sup>4</sup>Restore our fortunes, O LORD,  
like watercourses in the Negeb.  
<sup>5</sup>They who sow in tears  
shall reap with songs of joy.  
<sup>6</sup>Though he goes along weeping,  
carrying the seed-bag,  
he shall come back with songs of joy,  
carrying his sheaves.

## 3. Psalm 137:5

By the rivers of Babylon,  
there we sat,  
sat and wept,  
as we thought of Zion.  
<sup>2</sup>There on the poplars  
we hung up our lyres,  
<sup>3</sup>for our captors asked us there for songs,  
our tormentors, for amusement,  
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion.”  
<sup>4</sup>How can we sing a song of the LORD  
on alien soil?  
<sup>5</sup>If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
let my right hand wither;  
<sup>6</sup>let my tongue stick to my palate  
if I cease to think of you,  
if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory  
even at my happiest hour.  
  
<sup>7</sup>Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites  
the day of Jerusalem’s fall;

how they cried, "Strip her, strip her  
to her very foundations!"  
<sup>8</sup>Fair Babylon, you predator,  
a blessing on him who repays you in kind  
what you have inflicted on us;  
<sup>9</sup>a blessing on him who seizes your babies  
and dashes them against the rocks!

#### 4. Yehuda Halevi, "Songs of Zion"

"Zion, are you not concerned for the well-being of your prisoners?"

Zion, thou art doubtless anxious for news of thy captives;  
they ask after thee, they who are the remainder of thy flock

From West and East and North and South, from near and far;  
bring peace from every side.

And peace is the desire of the captive, who giveth his tears  
like the dew on the Hermon and yearns for the day they will fall on thy hills

I am a mourner who weeps for your poverty and when I dream  
of the return I am the accompaniment to thy songs.

#### 5. The Ethiopian Jewish Sigd Prayer, *excerpt*

And the priests and prophets will bow down in Jerusalem.  
And kings and princes will bow down in Jerusalem.  
And the great judges will bow down in Jerusalem.  
And they will come east and west and worship in Jerusalem.  
And they will come north and south and worship in Jerusalem.  
And they will come from four directions and will worship in Jerusalem.

ויבואו כהנים ונביאים וישתחוו בירושלים  
ויבואו מלכים ונסיכים וישתחוו בירושלים  
ויבואו גדולים ושופטים וישתחוו בירושלים  
ויבאו ממזרח וממערב וישתחוו בירושלים  
ויבואו מצפון ומדרום וישתחוו בירושלים  
ויבואו מארבעה כיוונים וישתחוו בירושלים

## **6. Leviticus 18:24-28**

<sup>24</sup>Do not defile yourselves in any of those ways, for it is by such that the nations that I am casting out before you defiled themselves. <sup>25</sup>Thus the land became defiled; and I called it to account for its iniquity, and the land spewed out its inhabitants. <sup>26</sup>But you must keep My laws and My rules, and you must not do any of those abhorrent things, neither the citizen nor the stranger who resides among you; <sup>27</sup>for all those abhorrent things were done by the people who were in the land before you, and the land became defiled. <sup>28</sup>So let not the land spew you out for defiling it, as it spewed out the nation that came before you.

## **7. Zechariah 8:1-9**

The word of the Lord of Hosts came [to me]:

<sup>2</sup>Thus said the Lord of Hosts: I am very jealous for Zion, I am fiercely jealous for her. <sup>3</sup>Thus said the Lord: I have returned to Zion, and I will dwell in Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be called the City of Faithfulness, and the mount of the Lord of Hosts the Holy Mount.

<sup>4</sup>Thus said the Lord of Hosts: There shall yet be old men and women in the squares of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. <sup>5</sup>And the squares of the city shall be crowded with boys and girls playing in the squares. <sup>6</sup>Thus said the Lord of Hosts: Though it will seem impossible to the remnant of this people in those days, shall it also be impossible to Me?—declares the Lord of Hosts. <sup>7</sup>Thus said the Lord of Hosts: I will rescue My people from the lands of the east and from the lands of the west, <sup>8</sup>and I will bring them home to dwell in Jerusalem. They shall be My people, and I will be their God—in truth and sincerity.

## Letter 3: Fate and Destiny

### CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Who are the Jews: a religion, a people, an ethnicity, a race?
- That question goes to the heart of the Arab world's rejection of Israel's legitimacy as the nation-state of the Jewish people.
- The Jews began as a family. Four thousand years ago, Abraham and Sarah founded a dynasty that became a people and a faith.
- **Judaism as a Family:** a basic sense of belonging to a community of fate, regardless of your religious or political beliefs, has remained at the core of Jewish identity ever since.
- **Soviet Jewry Movement:** formative experience of belonging to a global Jewish family was the protest movement to save the Jews of the former Soviet Union.
- **Family knows no borders:** It was self-evident to me that if my brothers and sisters were in crisis, my responsibility was to help save them.
- **Travel:** experience of connecting with Jews around the world as an extended and generous family.
- **Protection of Family:** Every attempt to destroy or undermine Israel over the years only strengthened the support for the Jewish state from Jews around the world.
- **Betrayal:** Paradoxically, the sense of family can also undermine Jewish solidarity. Mutual expectations can lead to feelings of betrayal. When Jews determine that fellow family members have betrayed either the interests or the values of the community, they can turn against each other with a ferocious contempt. *That is the dark side of Jewish family.*
- **Centrality of Jewish Peoplehood:** centrality of peoplehood in Jewish identity helps explain the seeming anomaly of Jewish atheists.
- The repeated Palestinian and general Muslim claim that Jews are not a people but a religion is one of the key divides between us.
- So long as Palestinian leaders insist on defining the Jews as a religion rather than allowing us to define ourselves as we have since ancient times—as a people with a particular faith—then Israel will continue to be seen as illegitimate.
- **Spiritual Dimension of Peoplehood:** If the Jews were just a family bound by shared fate, then it's doubtful we would have survived through thousands of years of wandering and adversity. The Jewish collective functions on two levels: as family and as faith.
- **Destiny and Fate:** What strengthened the Jewish family was its sense of destiny—that the Jewish people has an urgent spiritual role to play in the evolution of humanity. *Destiny gives meaning to fate.*

- ***Judaism is the love story between God and a people.*** That romance is often tumultuous. Sometimes, God accuses the Jews of faithlessness, and sometimes Jews reciprocate and accuse God of abandoning the covenant with them.
- The purpose of Judaism is to sanctify one people with the goal of sanctifying all peoples. According to this belief, God set aside a random group of human beings—emphatically not a nation of saints—and exposed them to mass revelation at Mount Sinai. The Jews were chosen, in other words, not because they were innately special but because they weren't: the national equivalent of “everyman”—every people, any people.
- Jews were to be a test case for what happens when a cross-section of humanity is subjected to an unmediated encounter with the Divine.
- ***Distinction between Particularist and Universal Faiths:*** Islam and Christianity are universal faiths, intended in principle for every human being. Each believes that, at the end of history, humanity will embrace its way. Judaism, by contrast, is a faith intended for a specific people. Judaism has no expectation that humanity will become Jewish.
- The role of the Jews is to be a spiritual avant-garde, attesting to God's presence and helping prepare humanity for its breakthrough to transcendence: ***a particularist strategy for a universal goal.***
- The structure of the Hebrew Bible reveals the purpose of the Jews. It begins as a universal story. The failure of humanity to fulfill God's plan required a new Divine strategy. And so God appointed Abraham to found a people, through whom, as the Bible puts it, “all the nations of the earth will be blessed.”
- The Bible narrowed its focus and became the story of a people, struggling to rise above human nature and become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” God's redemptive plan for humanity required a people to carry that vision through history. There is no Judaism without a Jewish people.
- The Hebrew Bible culminates with a universal vision—a time when the presence of God will be, in Isaiah's words, “as visible as the waters of the sea” and humanity will embrace its oneness.
- Each religious strategy—the universal approach of Islam and Christianity, and the peoplehood approach of Judaism—has a spiritual advantage and disadvantage. The advantage of a universal faith is that it sees all of humanity as its immediate responsibility. Yet all-embracing universal faiths must struggle against the temptation to define their path as the only legitimate way to God.
- Because Judaism is intended for a specific people, it can accommodate the validity of other faiths. The danger of a peoplehood-based faith is self-obsession. There is a tendency, especially among the most fervently traditional Jews, to ignore the rest of humanity and its problems.

- **Conversion:** The Jews are not a hermetically closed people. Judaism is open to converts. Fellow Jews are forbidden to remind converts of their origins, to avoid conveying, even subtly, the message of exclusion from the community of Israel. One of the most beloved Jewish figures is Ruth the Moabite, who converted to Judaism and is the great-grandmother of King David, founder of the messianic line. The tradition linking a convert to the messiah is a reminder to Jews: ***We are a particular people with a universal goal.***
- Ruth's pledge, "Your people will be my people, your God my God" reveals something essential about how ancient Judaism viewed the nature of Jewish identity. First Ruth declares her allegiance to the *people* of Israel, then she affirms her *faith* in God. The foundation of Jewishness is peoplehood.
- Having been formed for a Divine purpose, the Jewish people itself became a religious category. Loyalty to the Jewish people is, for Judaism, a religious act. That's why religious Zionists never hesitated to partner with secular Zionists, who love and protect their people. For religious Jews, strengthening the Jewish people contributes to its ability to function as a Divine messenger in the world.
- **Rejection of the Peoplehood Notion within Judaism:** The inherent relationship between peoplehood and religion hasn't always been accepted by every Jewish group (i.e. 19<sup>th</sup> Century Reform Judaism, Ultra-Orthodox Judaism).
- **Jewish Chosenness Means Responsibility:** The notion of a people chosen by God wasn't intended to bestow privilege but responsibility. Jewish history attests that this role carries more burden than glory.
- There are Jews who distort chosenness, transforming it from a basis for serving humanity into an aggrieved separatism from the world. Chosenness can become a form of conceit, a self-glorifying theology.
- But we also face the opposite problem. Throughout our history there have been Jews who, longing for the universal endpoint, opted out of the Jewish people altogether. If the goal is human oneness, why continue clinging to an outmoded separatism?
- **Sustaining the tension between the particular and the universal is one of the great challenges facing the Jewish people today.** In my Jewish identity, the particular and the universal coexist. One commitment reinforces the other.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Do you think that Judaism is a “Religion” or a “People” or both? Which aspect of Jewish identity resonates the most with you at this stage in your life?
2. Does the family metaphor inform the way you think about Jews across the world? Do fellow Jews feel more like siblings, cousins, distant relatives? Do you feel differently about Jews who live in America than Jews who live in Israel? Or in other parts of the Jewish Diaspora? In what ways do you see the Jewish people operating as a family? In what ways are they not operating as a family?
3. How do you understand the concept of Jewish Chosenness? Does it bother you? Inspire you? How would you explain Jewish Chosenness to someone in a different faith community? What are the implications of Jewish Chosenness in an era of Jewish sovereignty?
4. How do the tensions between Jewish particularism and universalism impact your own Jewish identity? How do you see these tensions impacting your Jewish community?

## **SOURCES:**

### **1. Genesis 12:1-3**

The Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you. **I will make of you a great nation**, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you; and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you.”

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמִּלְכֻתְךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר  
אֵרָאֶךָ : וְאָנֹכִי לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְאַבְרָם וְאַגְדָּלָה שְׁמִי וְהָיָה בְרָכָה : וְאַבְרָם מְבָרְכֶיךָ  
וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אָאָר וְנִבְרָכוּ בְּךָ כָּל מְשֻׁפָּחֹת הָאָדָמָה :



## 2. Ruth 1:15-17

So [Naomi] said: “See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Go follow your sister-in-law. But Ruth replied, “Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the Lord do to me if anything but death parts me from you.”

וַתֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה שָׁבָה וּבְמִתְךָ אֶל־עַמָּהּ וְאֶל־אֱלֹהֶיהָ שׁוּבִי אַחֲרַי וּבְמִתְךָ : וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת אֶל־תִּפְגַּעֵיבִי לְעִזְבֶּךָ לָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרֶיךָ כִּי אֶל־אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכִי אֵלָיוּ וּבְאֲשֶׁר תֵּלְיִנִי אֶלָּיו עִמָּךְ עָמִי וְאֱלֹהֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵי : בְּאֲשֶׁר תָּמוּתִי אָמוּת וְשָׁם אֶקְבֹּר כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה ה' לִי וְכֹה יִסִּיף כִּי הַמָּוֶת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינָךְ :

## 3. Exodus 19:1-6

On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, on that very day, they entered the wilderness of Sinai. <sup>2</sup>Having journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain, <sup>3</sup>and Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel: <sup>4</sup>‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Me. <sup>5</sup>Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, <sup>6</sup>but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

וַעֲתָה אִם־שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְהִיִּיתֶם לִי סֻגְלָה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ : וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי מְמֻלָּכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ

## 4. Talmud Yevamot 47a-b

The Rabbis taught: If a stranger comes to convert in the present era, we say to him: What did you see that prompted you to come to convert? Do you not know that nowadays the Jewish people are afflicted, oppressed, downtrodden and harassed, and that hardships are frequently visited upon them?” If he responds: “I know, and I am unworthy,” we accept him immediately. And we inform him of a few of the minor mitzvot and a few of the major mitzvot, and we also inform him of the sin of failing to observe the laws of *Leket*, *Shich’chah*, *Pe’ah*, and *Maaser Ani*. And we inform him of the punishments for one who violates the mitzvot.

We say to him: "Be aware that before you reached this level, had you eaten forbidden foods, you would not have been punished with *Karet*. Had you desecrated the Shabbat, you would not have been punished with stoning. But now, if you eat forbidden foods, you will be punished with *Karet*, and if you desecrate the Shabbat, you will be punished with stoning. And just as we inform him of the punishment for transgressing the mitzvot, so do we inform him of the reward for observing them. We say to him: "Be aware that the World-to-Come is made only for the righteous. And in the present era, the Jewish people are unable to receive an abundance of good or an abundance of punishment."

But we do not overwhelm him, and we are not too strict with him. If he accepts, we circumcise him immediately... When he has healed, we immediately immerse him in a mikveh. And two Torah scholars stand over him and inform him of some of the minor mitzvot and some of the major mitzvot. Once he has immersed and come up, behold he is like a Jew in every respect. If the convert is a woman, women position her in the water until her neck. Two Torah scholars stand outside for her, and inform her of some of the minor mitzvot and some of the major mitzvot.

גר שבא להתגייר בזמן הזה, אומרים לו: מה ראית שבאת להתגייר? אי אתה יודע שישראל בזמן הזה דוויים, דחופים, סחופים ומטורפין, ויסורין באין עליהם? אם אומר: יודע אני ואיני כדאי, מקבלין אותו מיד. ומודיעין אותו מקצת מצות קלות ומקצת מצות חמורות, ומודיעין אותו עון לקט שכחה ופאה ומעשר עני. ומודיעין אותו ענשן של מצות, אומרים לו: הוי יודע, שעד שלא באת למדה זו, אכלת חלב אי אתה ענוש כרת, חללת שבת אי אתה ענוש סקילה, ועכשיו, אכלת חלב ענוש כרת, חללת שבת ענוש סקילה. וכשם שמודיעין אותו ענשן של מצות, כך מודיעין אותו מתן שכר, אומרים לו: הוי יודע, שהעולם הבא אינו עשוי אלא לצדיקים, וישראל בזמן הזה - אינם יכולים לקבל - לא רוב טובה ולא רוב פורענות. ואין מרבין עליו, ואין מדקדקין עליו. קיבל, מלין אותו מיד. נתרפא, מטבילין אותו מיד ושני ת"ח עומדים על גביו, ומודיעין אותו מקצת מצות קלות ומקצת מצות חמורות טבל ועלה - הרי הוא כישראל לכל דבריו. אשה, נשים מושיבות אותה במים עד צוארה, ושני ת"ח עומדים לה מבחוץ, ומודיעין אותה מקצת מצות קלות ומקצת מצות חמורות.

## 5. Maimonides, "Letter to Obadiah the Proselyte"

You ask me if you, too, are allowed to say in the blessings and prayers you offer alone or in the congregation: "*Our God*" and "*God of our ancestors*," "*You have sanctified us through Your commandments*," "*You have separated us*," "*You who have chosen us*," "*You who have brought us out of the land of Egypt...*"

Yes, you may say all this in the prescribed order and not change it in the least. In the same way as every Jew by birth says his blessings and prayers, you, too, shall bless and pray alike, whether you are alone or pray in the congregation. The reason for this is that Abraham our Father taught the people, opened their minds, and revealed to them the true faith and the

unity of God; he rejected the idols and abolished their adoration; he brought many children under the wings of the Divine Presence; he gave them counsel and advice, and ordered his sons and the members of his household after him to keep the ways of the Lord forever...Ever since then whoever adopts Judaism and confesses the unity of the Divine Name, as it is prescribed in the Torah, is counted among the disciples of Abraham our Father, peace be with him. These men are Abraham's household, and he it is who converted them to righteousness...

Therefore you shall pray, "Our God" and "God of our fathers," because Abraham *is* your father... since you have come under the wings of the Shechinah and confessed the Lord, no difference exists between you and us, and all miracles done to us have been done as it were to us *and* to you. Thus it is said in the Book of Isaiah, "*Neither let the son of the stranger, that has joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying: The Lord has utterly separated me from His people*" (Is. 56:3). You shall certainly say the blessing, "Who has chosen us," "Who has given us" ... for the Creator has indeed chosen you and separated you from the nations and given you the Torah.

Do not consider your origin as inferior. While we are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you derive from God through whose word the world was created. As is said by Isaiah: "*One shall say, I am the Lord's, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob*" (Is. 44:5).

## 6. Isaiah 42:6-7

<sup>6</sup>I the Lord, in My grace, have summoned you,  
And I have grasped you by the hand.  
I created you, and appointed you  
A covenant people, a light of nations—  
<sup>7</sup>Opening eyes deprived of light

אֲנִי יְהוָה קְרָאתִיךָ בְּצֶדֶק וְאַתְּנֶק בְּיָדִי וְאַצְרֶךָ וְאַתֵּינֶךָ לְבְרִית עִם לְאוֹר גּוֹיִם: לִפְקֹחַ עֵינַיִם עִוְרוֹת

## 7. Amos 3:2

<sup>2</sup>You alone have I singled out  
Of all the families of the earth—  
That is why I will call you to account  
For all your iniquities.

רַק אֶתְכֶם יָדַעְתִּי מִכָּל מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה עַל־כֵּן אֶפְקֹד עֲלֵיכֶם אֶת כָּל־עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם:

## Letter 4: Narrative and Presence

### *Yom Ha'Atzmaut*

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY:

- ***Celebrating Yom Ha'Atzma'ut: Dramatic Changes over Seven Decades of Independence***
- Israel's greatest success is its population: nearly nine million citizens, close to two million of them Arabs. Israel contains the largest Jewish community—almost half of the world's Jews. If present demographic trends continue, a majority of the world's Jews will soon live here. When the state was founded in 1948, there were half a million.
- ***Curse of Israeli-Palestinian Relationship:*** My protection is your vulnerability, my celebration your defeat.
- ***Juxtaposition of Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers and Independence Day:*** intimacy of mourning and celebration, the insistence on remembering the price we paid for independence. On Holocaust Day, we mourn the consequences of powerlessness; on Memorial Day, we mourn the consequences of power.
- ***Nakba Day: The Palestinian catastrophe of 1948.*** The heart of the Palestinian grievance is 1948 (not 1967), Israel's national existence.
- ***Origins of the Conflict:*** Need to go back to 1882, when the first group of young Zionists landed in Jaffa harbor. We need to understand the competing historic narratives that we carry with us.
- ***Jews of the Old Yishuv:*** the Jewish community that predated the Zionist immigration and existed in the land for centuries as a minority was impoverished and religious. First Zionists felt contempt toward them. The young pioneers had left behind the ghettos of Europe to build a new Jewish life of working the land—only to encounter, in the old Jewish quarters of Jerusalem and Hebron and Safed, the same poverty of passivity. The old yishuv embodied the corrosive effect of exile on Jewish life: even those Jews living in the land of Israel seemed uprooted.
- ***The young Zionists arrived with a powerful narrative***—a four-thousand-year story that linked their people to this land. They came to be builders and plowmen and goatherds. Their success was to re-indigenize the Jewish people, raising one generation after another of Jewish natives in this land.
- The Jews succeeded where the Crusaders and the Ottomans and the British failed, because we didn't merely come here. We returned.
- ***Each side has tried to deny the legitimacy of the other's national identity:*** Some Jews continue to try to “prove” that Palestinian national identity is a fiction, that Palestinians are a contrived people. Of course you are—and so are we. All national identities are, by definition, contrived.

- ***Constructing National Identity:*** At a certain point, groups of people determine that they share more in common than apart and invent themselves as a nation, with a common language, memory, and evolving story. The emergence of a nation is an inherently subjective process. We need to respect each other's right to tell our own stories.
- ***The Way to Peace is Respecting the Right of the Other to Tell Their Own Story***
- The first intifada was the moment when many Israelis began to realize that we'd been wrong to dismiss Palestinian nationhood. An Israeli majority gradually coalesced around the two-state solution. The Palestinian right to self-determination became a part of mainstream Israeli discourse.
- Yet the Palestinian national movement, from Fatah to Hamas, along with much of the Arab and Muslim worlds, continues to dismiss the very notion of a Jewish people.
- Why, Muslims argued, should we accept the nineteenth-century reinvention of the Jews as a nation? That perception was based on a fundamental misreading of how Jews always understood themselves: as a people with a particular faith.
- When the conflict began, this land was largely empty. In the late nineteenth century, there were barely half a million residents—the overwhelming majority Arabs. (Today nearly thirteen million people, Israelis and Palestinians, live between the river and the sea.)
- Zionism's intention was to resettle the Jews, not dispossess the Palestinians. Even the most maximalist Zionist leader of the pre-state era, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, accepted as self-evident that the future Jewish state would include a large Arab minority, which, he wrote, would be granted equality with Jews.
- ***Was the clash between our peoples inevitable?***
- While the mainstream Zionist position in the 1930's supported two states for two peoples, the mainstream Palestinian position rejected any Jewish sovereignty on any part of the land, no matter how small.
- ***Conflict of "Hebrew labor":*** For socialist Zionists, the very future of the Jewish people depended on creating a Jewish working class. The young Zionist pioneers organized themselves into a union and competed with Arabs for field hand jobs. The purpose wasn't to deny Arabs work but to get Jews to work. The result was the emergence of a Jewish working class—sometimes at the expense of Arab workers.
- "Hebrew labor" is instructive because it reveals the impossible choices facing Zionism. Opt for the non-socialist way and you end up ruling over Arab workers; opt for the socialist way and you turn the job market into a struggle between two peoples.
- ***Conflict of Land:*** Zionist movement bought tracts of land—and every dunam settled by Jews during these decades was paid for. In this decisive phase of replanting an active Jewish presence, there was no land confiscation. The Zionist movement bought land from whoever was legally entitled to sell. That often meant absentee Arab landlords.

Sometimes the land was uninhabited. Some of these lands owned by absentee landlords were inhabited by Arab peasants who'd worked them for their entire lives and who were now evicted, though with some financial compensation.

- ***As I contemplate this history, one part of me cheers and another is deeply saddened.*** I cheer the heroic young people, sacrificing their best years to plant and till, to prepare the land for the Jewish return. And I mourn for the Palestinian people whose lives are gradually disrupted, uprooted and destroyed.
- We seem caught in the contradictory logic of an existential conflict, to which each generation adds its own measure of bitterness and mutual grievance.
- Any argument that either of us can offer—over history, ideology, politics—seems to contain its counterargument. How much energy have we wasted trying to prove the justness of our claims and the supposed hollowness of the other's claims?
- ***My definition for the Jews is this:*** We are a story we tell ourselves about who we think we are. That's why the central Jewish ritual that most Jews continue to observe is the Passover seder, the retelling of our ancient origins as a people.

#### **War Against Zionism:**

- The war against Zionism began in earnest after World War I. As Jews deepened their presence in the land, Arabs responded with increasing violence. Pogroms were imported from czarist Russia into Palestine. The worst occurred in 1929, in the holy city of Hebron, when sixty-nine unarmed Jews were massacred.
- ***1929 Hebron Massacre Turning Point:*** turning point in Zionist thinking. Until then many believed that coexistence was possible.
- ***Arab threats and rejection:*** Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, established alliance with Hitler and Nazis throughout World War II. Rejection of 1947 Partition Plan. May 14, 1948, five Arab armies invaded, with the intent of destroying the Jewish state at birth.
- ***Response to Muslim Rejection of International Community Recognition of Israel:*** the Jews didn't need the international community's agreement to prove the justness of our claim. The Israeli Declaration of Independence cites Jewish historical roots and attachment to the land as proof of our legitimacy; our claim to the land comes from our very being (not from Balfour Declaration or UN Resolution).
- Defenders of the Arab rejection of partition note that the UN plan awarded 55 percent of the land to the Jews, though they were still a minority. That objection ignores the fact that more than half the landmass of the designated Jewish state was desert, while the designated Arab state contained the most fertile land.

- But would any partition plan have been acceptable to the Arab side? Had the Jewish state been given only a fraction of the land, the Arab world would almost certainly still have rejected partition, because any form of Jewish sovereignty in this land was regarded as a crime.
- As teen, Yossi was member of Betar and its uncompromising insistence that all the land belonged by right to the Jews. As he grew older, he began to question how Palestinians perceive the conflict.
- ***Curiosity led to empathy—the great enemies of self-righteousness.*** Finally came the realization that compromise offers a kind of fulfillment no less “authentic” than maximalist positions.
- ***Competing Narratives of 1948:*** When I mention to Palestinians the massacres committed by your side, the usual response is: Yes, but your side started the war; we were only responding. Israeli Jews would say exactly the same. Wherever Arab armies were victorious, not a single Jew was left in place. Jews whose families had lived for centuries in East Jerusalem neighborhoods were expelled. Elsewhere Jews who were captured by Arab fighters were massacred, their communities uprooted. That was the choice: expulsion or slaughter.
- ***War of Survival was Jewish Advantage:*** In the war between us, each side had an advantage. Arab side had the backing of five neighboring armies. Jewish side was alone, with only three tanks and four combat planes at start of war. Desperation forced us to mobilize our entire society for a war of survival. The Jews fought with such determination that only a handful of our communities fell. There was nowhere left to run; we’d reached the final shore of Jewish history.
- ***Palestinian Refugee Tragedy:*** 700,000 Palestinians became refugees. Two competing narratives: 1) there was no expulsion, only voluntary flight from battle; Arab leaders had encouraged Palestinians to abandon their homes, to clear the way for the imminently victorious Arab armies. 2) Arab claim that expulsion had been the norm, a systematic and premeditated Zionist plan. Both versions were untrue.
- The refugee tragedy wasn’t the result of a systematic Israeli policy, but often of decisions made by local commanders. In some cases, there were expulsions; in some cases, massacres; in some cases, Arabs voluntarily left; and in some cases, the Arabs remained.
- By the end of the war, Israel had destroyed over four hundred emptied Palestinian villages, and Jewish refugees, many from Arab countries, were resettled on many of those sites. Palestinian refugees were dispersed in Syria and Lebanon and Jordan, in the Jordanian-held West Bank and the Egyptian-held Gaza Strip.

- As we Israelis celebrated our reclaimed sovereignty and achieved one success after another, your people exchanged homes and olive orchards for the scorched earth of refugee camps, where you raised children without hope, the unwanted outcasts of the Arab world. I mourn the lives wasted in the bitterness of exile, your despair against my joy.
- ***But I cannot apologize for surviving.*** If the Palestinian and Arab leadership had accepted compromise instead of declaring a war to the death, the Palestinian tragedy would not have happened.
- There's another reason why Israeli Jews refuse to be cast as criminals in the story of 1948. At least half of Israel's population is rooted in the ancient Jewish communities of the Middle East. Within two decades following the creation of Israel, those thriving centers of Jewish life were almost entirely erased. The invisible refugees, Mizrahi Jews called themselves. Nearly one million Jews lived in the Muslim world in 1948; today, barely 40,000 remain.
- Unlike India and Pakistan, where millions of Hindus and Muslims fled in either direction across the border and found a haven in their own homelands, Palestinian refugees fled to neighboring countries that share their religion and language but were treated as strangers. Their plight requires a solution. Israel, along with the Arab world, shares responsibility for healing this wound.
- ***Reparations:*** Israel will need to pay compensation to the descendants of Palestinian refugees, just as Arab countries will need to pay compensation to the descendants of Jewish refugees.

### **Remarkable Early Zionists:**

- The half million Jews who founded and defended Israel in 1948 may well have been the most remarkable Jewish community in history. They were builders, revolutionaries, mystics; writers and poets renewing a dead language, utopians dreaming of redeeming the world. They lived with the acute awareness of carrying a broken people on their backs.
- ***Threats to 20<sup>th</sup> Century World Jewry:*** Holocaust; Middle East mob violence and anti-Semitism; Soviet Union forced-assimilation -- that was the state of the Jewish people in the early 1940s. Through a combination of faith and realism, the Zionists salvaged their people and renewed its history.
- ***Today's Generation of Zionists Face Different Challenges:*** Unlike Ben-Gurion's generation, whose tasks of state-building required a turning inward, the challenge facing my generation of Israelis is to turn outward—to you, neighbor, because my future is inseparable from yours.



- ***Two-Narrative Problem:*** There may well be no way to bridge our opposing narratives about the founding of Israel. Even as we seek a two-state solution, we will likely remain with a two-narrative problem. But that historical divide must not prevent a political compromise. I honor history—up to the point where it no longer inspires but imprisons. Accommodating both our narratives, learning to live with two contradictory stories, is the only way to deny the past a veto over the future.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. If the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict is 1948 (not the consequences of the Six Day War in 1967), what hope exists for a compromise?
2. How do you relate to the term “Nakba?” Do you think it is important to use this term when speaking about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict? Why do you think Yossi uses this term repeatedly in this chapter?
3. Yossi writes, “we need to respect each other’s right to tell our own stories.” Do you agree that we must respect the Palestinian right to tell a story of national identity; as we request the right for the world to respect our story of Jewish national identity? Why or why not?
4. Yossi writes that, “My definition for the Jews is this: We are a story we tell ourselves about who we think we are.” Do you agree with this definition? Where do you see the role of story-telling in the Jewish experience? What is the story you tell about the Jewish people?
5. Yossi also writes in this chapter, “All national identities are, by definition, contrived: At a certain point, groups of people determine that they share more in common than apart and invent themselves as a nation, with a common language, memory, and evolving story. The emergence of a nation is an inherently subjective process.” What are the implications of this argument for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
6. What is your narrative about the founding of the State of Israel as it relates to Palestinian suffering? How do you understand the Palestinian narrative?
7. How do you celebrate Yom Ha’Atzma’ut? What gives you the greatest joy and cause for celebration when you think about the Modern State of Israel?

## **SOURCES:**

### **1. Deuteronomy 26:5-9**

“My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. <sup>6</sup>The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. <sup>7</sup>We cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. <sup>8</sup>The LORD freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. <sup>9</sup>He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

### **2. Amir Gilboa, “Suddenly a Man Gets Up” (*Song of the Morning*)**

Suddenly a man wakes up in the morning  
He feels he is a nation and begins to walk  
And to all he meets on his way he calls out ‘Shalom!’

Corn stalks are growing up behind him  
Between the cracks in the sidewalks and lilac trees  
Shower down rich fragrance on his head

The dew drops are sparkling and the hills are a myriad of rays  
They will give birth to a canopy of sunlight for his wedding

Suddenly a man wakes up in the morning...

And he laughs with the strength of generations in the mountains,  
and the shamed wars bow down to the ground,  
to the glory of a thousand years flowing forth from the hiding places,  
a thousand young years in front of him  
like a cold book, like a shepherd’s song, like a branch.

Suddenly a man wakes up in the morning...

He feels he is a nation and begins to walk,  
and he sees that the spring has returned  
and the tree is turning green since last fall’s tree shedding.

### **3. Israeli Declaration of Independence (excerpt)**

The Land of Israel, Palestine was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.

After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom.

Impelled by this historic and traditional attachment, Jews strove in every successive generation to re-establish themselves in their ancient homeland. In recent decades they returned in their masses. Pioneers and defenders, they made deserts bloom, revived the Hebrew language, built villages and towns, and created a thriving community controlling its own economy and culture, loving peace but knowing how to defend itself, bringing the blessings of progress to all the country's inhabitants, and aspiring towards independent nationhood.

In the year 5657 (1897), at the summons of the spiritual father of the Jewish State, Theodore Herzl, the First Zionist Congress convened and proclaimed the right of the Jewish people to national rebirth in its own country.

This right was recognized in the Balfour Declaration of November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1917 and re-affirmed in the Mandate of the League of Nations which, in particular, gave international sanction to the historic connection between the Jewish people and Eretz-Israel and to the right of the Jewish people to rebuild its National Home.

The catastrophe which recently befell the Jewish people - the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe - was another clear demonstration of the urgency of solving the problem of its homelessness by re-establishing in Eretz-Israel the Jewish State, which would open the gates of the homeland wide to every Jew and confer upon the Jewish people the status of a fully privileged member of the comity of nations...

On the 29th of November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish State in Eretz-Israel; the General Assembly required the inhabitants of Eretz-Israel to take such steps as were necessary on their part for the implementation of that resolution. This recognition by the United Nations of the right of the Jewish people to establish their State is irrevocable.

This right is the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State.

ACCORDINGLY WE, MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE'S COUNCIL, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF ERETZ-ISRAEL AND OF THE ZIONIST MOVEMENT, ARE HERE ASSEMBLED ON THE DAY OF THE TERMINATION OF THE BRITISH MANDATE OVER ERETZ-ISRAEL AND, BY VIRTUE OF OUR NATURAL AND HISTORIC RIGHT AND ON THE STRENGTH OF THE RESOLUTION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, HEREBY DECLARE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A JEWISH STATE IN ERETZ-ISRAEL, TO BE KNOWN AS THE STATE OF ISRAEL...

THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations...

WE APPEAL - in the very midst of the onslaught launched against us now for months - to the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve peace and participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions.

WE EXTEND our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness, and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land. The State of Israel is prepared to do its share in a common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East.

WE APPEAL to the Jewish people throughout the Diaspora to rally round the Jews of Eretz-Israel in the tasks of immigration and upbuilding and to stand by them in the great struggle for the realization of the age-old dream - the redemption of Israel...

#### **4. Mishnah Baba Metzia 1:1**

Two [persons appear before a court] holding a garment.

One of them says, "I found it," and the other says, "I found it."

One of them says, "It is all mine," and the other says, "It is all mine."

One shall swear that his share in it is not less than half, and the other shall swear that his share in it is not less than half, and [the value of the garment] shall then be divided between them.

שנים אוחזין בטלית. זה אומר : אני מצאתיה ,וזה אומר : אני מצאתיה, זה אומר : כולה שלי  
וזה אומר : כולה שלי, זה ישבע שאין לו בה פחות מחציה וזה ישבע שאין לו בה פחות מחציה  
ויחלקו.

## **5. Yossi Klein Halevi, “Two-Story Solution for the Middle East,” *Los Angeles Times*: May 13, 2018**

JERUSALEM: The seemingly endless war between Palestinians and Israelis isn’t only about substantive issues of borders and land and sovereignty. It is, in essence, a war of competing narratives. This week, as Israelis celebrate 70 years of victory over repeated attempts to destroy the miraculous rebirth of Jewish sovereignty, and Palestinians mourn 70 years of defeat, displacement and occupation, each side clings to its founding story as an affirmation of its very being.

One reason that peace between Israelis and Palestinians has been so elusive is that the real elements of the conflict — faith, memory, identity — have gone largely unaddressed. Diplomats focus their so-far futile efforts on the tangible issues dividing the two sides. But this is a fight over intangibles.

I recently appeared on a panel with Palestinian reconciliation activist Huda Abuarquob of the Alliance for Middle East Peace. A member of the audience asked us: Why can’t Israelis and Palestinians forget the past and look to the future? Huda and I nearly shouted together: “Impossible!”

It was a revealing moment in the disconnect between the West and the Middle East. For Middle Easterners, Jews and Arabs alike, we are our stories.

We are formed by the cumulative memories of millennia; we are contemporaries with our ancestors. Both Arabs and Jews, for example, cherish our ancient father Abraham/Ibrahim not as a mythic patriarch but an extant example of faith and perseverance. And no less than our exalted memories, we are formed by our collective traumas.

As we enter the eighth decade of the conflict, the two sides are further apart than ever. Palestinians see spreading West Bank settlements eroding the chances of a two-state solution. Meanwhile, Israelis witness the denial of their country’s right to exist, conveyed by Palestinian media, schools and mosques. And with the U.S. Embassy opening in Jerusalem, violence in Gaza and the West Bank will likely intensify.

And yet for all the fatalism on both sides, the Middle East is in greater flux than ever before. Fear of an imperial Iran is drawing together Israel and the Sunni Arab world. Israel’s massive retaliation against Iranian military bases in Syria last week was greeted with quiet satisfaction in Arab capitals.

Saudi Arabia’s government-controlled media publishes denunciations of anti-Semitism these days, and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has declared there is no Islamic obstacle to recognizing Israel’s legitimacy. He has also publicly faulted the Palestinian leadership for rejecting Israeli overtures for a two-state solution.

This radically shifting atmosphere requires a new conceptual language for peace. Each side will need to honor the other's narrative. That means Israelis acknowledging the shattering of the Palestinian people and the destruction of their homeland. That also means the Arab world acknowledging the shattering of ancient Jewish diasporas in the Middle East — a million Jews forced out so that today they are scarcely a memory from Yemen to Morocco to Iraq.

Along with respect for the wounds of the past, we need to recognize the maximalist territorial claims of both peoples. Each can make a compelling case for why the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea belongs by right to its side. For a Palestinian whose family fled Jaffa near Tel Aviv, what is now the state of Israel will always be part of Palestine. And for me, as a religious Jew, the West Bank isn't occupied territory but Judea and Samaria, the biblical heart of my homeland.

But solving our conflict will require each side to contract its maximalist dreams, a violation of its perception of justice. And each must acknowledge the sacrifice of the other.

A successful Middle Eastern — not a Western — peace process would also draw on religious language. In the past, diplomats tried to circumvent the religious sensibilities on both sides to reach a "rational" compromise. But for us, a peace process between secularized elites lacks legitimacy. Moderate rabbis and imams must be willing to probe their respective traditions to justify painful compromise.

This is not far-fetched: Meetings between Israeli and Palestinian religious leaders have quietly occurred even as talks between political leaders collapsed.

Finally, each side needs to acknowledge the right of the other to define itself as a people entitled to national sovereignty.

On the Palestinian side, one of the great obstacles to peace is accepting that the Jews aren't just members of a religion but a people. In conversation with Palestinians at every level of society, I have repeatedly heard the same refrain: We have no problem with you as a religious minority, but we can't accept your invention of yourselves as a nation.

On the Israeli side, much of the right denies the existence of a Palestinian people, insisting that it is a contrived identity whose sole purpose is to undermine Israel. Yet the majority that do acknowledge the legitimacy of Palestinian national identity understandably fear the creation of a Palestinian state when there is no sign of reciprocity.

Without illusions of an imminent breakthrough, Israelis and Palestinians can create an infrastructure for reconciliation resonant with our values and cultures. No outside power, however well-intentioned, can do that hard work for us. We need to hear each other's narratives, and acknowledge that two rightful claimants share this tortured land between the river and the sea. Seventy years on, there is still no other choice.

## Letter 5: Six Days and Fifty Years

### *Jerusalem Day*

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY:

- ***Celebration of Jerusalem Day:*** commemorating the reunification of the city on June 7, 1967.
- In the weeks leading up to the Six Day War, Jews around the world feared Israel's imminent destruction.
- Iconic image of paratroopers gazing up at Western Wall revealed not triumph but awe, like pilgrims at the end of a journey. At that moment they weren't representing the might of a sovereign state but the hopes of an ancient people.
- ***Israel's borders expanded in three stages:*** 1) through the land purchases in the pre-state era; 2) in the 1948 War; and 3) in the Six-Day War. As far as the international community is concerned, it is the third stage of territorial acquisition that is being contested.
- ***First Two Settlements were Reconstructions of Jewish Communities destroyed in 20<sup>th</sup> century:***
  - ***Kfar Etzion:*** first West Bank settlement after Six Day War was re-establishment of original Jewish settlement in which there had been massacre in 1948. Kfar Etzion was one of the open wounds of the Israeli psyche.
  - ***Hebron:*** Judaism's second-holiest city, after Jerusalem. Vehement debate among Israelis about the wisdom of inserting Jews into a major Palestinian population center. Hebron, burial place of Abraham and Sarah, is the basis for the Jewish biblical claim to the land. Hebron was also a kind of modern restoration after the 1929 massacre in which its ancient Jewish community disappeared.
- Many Israelis failed to perceive those initial settlements as the beginning of a mass movement.
- ***Arab Rejectionism Fueled Defense of Israeli Settlements:*** Immediately after the Six-Day War, the Arab League, reaffirmed its emphatic rejection of Israel's existence. That helped legitimize settlements for many Israelis, because land-for-peace was deemed naïve.
- ***Palestinian terrorism*** reinforced the message to Israelis that there was no chance for compromise. Yasser Arafat's men blew up a school bus, seized high school students as hostages, massacred pilgrims at Israel's international airport, slaughtered families in their homes, smashed the head of a child against a rock, murdered bound members of the Israeli Olympic team.

- Israelis experienced those attacks as small pre-enactments of the genocidal aim of the Palestinian national movement, proof that compromise was impossible.
- **1975 UN “Zionism as Racism Vote:”** in response, thousands of young Israelis gathered around an abandoned Ottoman railway station in Samaria and pitched tents in the winter mud. Public opinion shifted toward the settlers. Rather than evict the squatters, the government offered a compromise, and a group of settlers moved into an army base.
- **When Israel Feels Threatened: Right-Wing Dominates:** The Israeli public’s response to the UN resolution tells us something essential about the Israeli character: When we feel unfairly stigmatized, we toughen our position. *The greatest beneficiary of attempts to isolate and delegitimize Israel is the hard Right.*
- **When Israel Feels Confidence: Take Risks for Peace:** When Israel’s legitimacy is respected, Israelis tend to take risks for peace. That’s what happened in 1977, when President Anwar Sadat of Egypt came to Jerusalem and declared his acceptance of Israel. In response, the Israeli public supported a total withdrawal from the Sinai desert. Then, in the early 1990s, with the fall of the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc, the UN voted to repeal the Zionism-racism resolution, and dozens of countries established diplomatic relations with Israel. The change in Israel’s status was one reason why the Israeli government felt confident to initiate the Oslo peace process, and why a majority of Israelis initially supported it.
- The success of the settlement movement is a result of the convergence of Israel’s security fears with the call of history.
- **Conflicted Feelings about Hebron:** Nowhere in this land did I feel more like a returning son than when I went on pilgrimage to Hebron. How could Jews not live in Hebron? Emotionally I agreed with the settlers: If we didn’t belong here, we didn’t belong anywhere. Ironically, it was in Hebron that my romance with the settlement movement ended.
- Curfew on Palestinian residents during a 1984 Simchat Torah street celebration, became for me a metaphor for the fatal flaw of the settlement movement: **the sin of not seeing**, of becoming so enraptured with one’s own story, the justice and poetry of one’s national epic, that you can’t acknowledge the consequences to another people of fulfilling the whole of your own people’s dreams.
- **Jewish Value of Empathy:** The insistence on empathy with the stranger appears with greater frequency in the Torah than any other verse.
- I believe deeply in our historical and religious claim to Hebron—to all of the land of Israel between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. For me, that land isn’t “occupied territory” but Judea and Samaria, which is how Jews have called it since biblical times.



- But like many Israelis, I am ready to partition the land—if convinced the trade-off will be peace, and not greater terror. For those of us who support a two-state solution, ensuring the security of Israel—and not implementing historical claims—is the most important measure for deciding the fate of the territories.
- In 1989, serving in IDF unit in Gaza refugee camps -- we weren't soldiers as much as policemen, enforcing an occupation that seemed to me increasingly untenable. Along with many Israelis of my generation, I emerged from the first intifada convinced that Israel must end the occupation—not just for your sake but for ours.
- **Justice, mercy, empathy:** These were the foundations of Jewish life for millennia. There is a moral price of sustaining the Occupation.
- I learned something else in Gaza: The dream of Palestine wasn't only to be free of Israeli occupation but to be free of Israel's existence entirely. Graffiti promised death to the Jews. The most persistent image on Gaza's walls was of knives and swords plunging into a map of Israel, dripping blood.
- I veered between **moral and existential fears**. Both seemed to me reasonable Jewish responses to Gaza, to our Palestinian dilemma.
- **Be Compassionate; Be Alert:** Jewish history spoke to my generation with two nonnegotiable commandments. The first was to remember that we'd been strangers in the land of Egypt and the message was: Be compassionate. The second commandment was to remember that we live in a world in which genocide is possible, and that message was: Be alert. When your enemy says he intends to destroy you, believe him.
- What makes my dilemma so excruciating is that those two nonnegotiable commandments of Jewish history converge on our conflict: The stranger whom we are occupying is the enemy who intends to dispossess us. *And so how do I relate to you, neighbor: as victim or as would-be victimizer?*
- **Oslo Peace Process:** The night Rabin was elected, I wept with relief. Finally: Here was our chance to end the occupation. A year later, when Rabin shook Arafat's hand at the White House and began the Oslo peace process, I agonized: Was this a breakthrough to peace or had we just committed one of the greatest mistakes in our history? Arafat had devoted his life to the destruction of Israel, to undermining our legitimacy. No one in this generation had more Jewish blood on his hands. But if Rabin was ready to gamble on Arafat the peacemaker, then so was I.
- **Arafat's Double Speak:** Arafat and the leaders of what became the Palestinian Authority gradually convinced Israelis that their diplomacy was in fact war by other means. Arafat created his own diplomatic language: To CNN he spoke about the peace of the brave, while exhorting his people to holy war. Meanwhile, Hamas intensified terror attacks against Israeli civilians. Israeli intelligence warned Rabin that Arafat was secretly

encouraging Hamas and had created a division of labor: Hamas would continue the violence while Arafat won territory through negotiations.

- The cumulative impact of Arafat's rhetoric reinforced the deepest Israeli fears of being deceived, of lowering our guard. Like most Israelis, I came to believe we'd been played for fools. A two-state solution had never been Arafat's intention—except as prelude to a one-state solution, the end of the Jewish people's dream of sovereignty.
- The Israeli Right was vindicated: More Israeli concessions led to more terror.
- Rather than view our conflict as a tragedy being played out between two legitimate national movements—as many Israelis have come to see it—the uncontested official narrative on the Palestinian side defines the conflict as colonialists versus natives. And the fate of the colonialist, as modern history has proven and justice demands, is to ultimately be expelled from the lands he has stolen. Tel Aviv no less than Gaza.
- The Israeli novelist A. B. Yehoshua has called our conflict a ***struggle between "right and right."*** Where is the Palestinian A. B. Yehoshua to echo that tragic insight?
- In the Israeli media, thousands of op-eds have appeared over the years demanding that Israelis face the reality of a competing narrative. In all the years I've been following Palestinian media, I don't recall a single op-ed or editorial in any publication advocating a reassessment of the Jewish narrative.
- Most Israelis, even many on the left, have concluded that, no matter what concessions Israel offers, the conflict will persist. The goal of the Palestinian national movement, Israelis are convinced, isn't just to undo the consequences of 1967—occupation and settlements—but the consequences of 1948—the existence of Israel.
- If Palestinians believe that Israel is the embodiment of evil and so must be destroyed—and there is no other reasonable conclusion to draw from the messages conveyed by Palestinian media and mosques and educational system—then genuine compromise becomes impossible.
- If you were in my place, neighbor, what would you do? Would you take the chance and withdraw to narrow borders and trust a rival national movement that denied your right to exist? Would you risk your ability to defend yourself, perhaps your existence, to empower him? And would you do so while the region around you was burning?
- ***State of Limbo***: Having concluded that every concession I offer will be turned against me, I remain in limbo, affirming a two-state solution while clinging to the status quo. And yet I cannot accept our current state of seemingly endless conflict as the definitive verdict on our relationship.
- ***Trapped in a "Cycle of Denial"***: Your side denies my people's legitimacy, my right to self-determination, and my side prevents your people from achieving national sovereignty. The cycle of denial defines our shared existence, an impossible intimacy of violence, suppression, rage, despair. That is the cycle we can only break together.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. How do you think Israeli Jews should celebrate Jerusalem Day?
2. Do you think the source for the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict is 1967 or 1948? What are the implications of both positions?
3. Do you think of empathy and mercy as core, defining Jewish values? If so, do you think that the American Jewish people typically live up to this self-definition? Do you think Israelis Jews do?
4. Is there value in seeking to understand the Palestinian narrative, even if this value is not reciprocated by Palestinians?
5. Yossi has suggested that this book is written to a Palestinian neighbor, and also to a liberal American Jewish audience. How can better understanding the Jewish Zionist narrative help us as Jews, even if we do not have a willing Palestinian partner in this dialogue right now?

## **SOURCES:**

### **1. Amos 9:14-15**

<sup>14</sup>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.  
<sup>15</sup>And I will plant them upon their soil,  
Nevermore to be uprooted  
From the soil I have given them  
—said the Lord your God.

### **2. Exodus 23:9**

<sup>9</sup>You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.

### 3. Deuteronomy 25:17

<sup>17</sup>Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt—<sup>18</sup>how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. <sup>19</sup>Therefore, when the Lord your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!

### 4. Deuteronomy 16:18-20

<sup>18</sup>You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice. <sup>19</sup>You shall not judge unfairly: you shall show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just. <sup>20</sup>Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

### 5. Maimonides Hilkhos Issurei Bi'ah 19:17

We operate under the presumption that all families are of acceptable lineage and it is permitted to marry their descendants as an initial and preferred option. Nevertheless, if you see two families continuously quarreling with each other, you see one family that is always involved with strife and controversy, or you see a person who frequently quarrels with people at large and is very insolent, we suspect [their lineage]. It is fitting to distance oneself from such people for these are disqualifying characteristics.

Similarly, a person who always slurs the lineage of others, casting aspersions on the ancestry of families or individuals, claiming that they are *mamzerim*, we are suspicious that he himself is a *mamzer*. Similarly, if he calls others servants, we suspect that he is a servant. For whoever denigrates others, denigrates them with a blemish that he himself possesses.

Similarly, whenever a person is characterized by insolence and cruelty, hating people and not showing kindness to them, we seriously suspect that he is a Gibeonite. For the distinguishing signs of the holy nation of Israel is that they are meek, merciful, and kind. With regard to the Gibeonites, [II Samuel 21:2] states: "The Gibeonites are not of the Jewish people." For they acted extremely brazenly and would not be appeased. They did not show mercy to the sons of [King] Saul, nor did they show kindness to the Jews to forgive the descendants of their king, while [the Jews] had shown them kindness and allowed them to live.

## **6. Yossi Klein Halevi, “Pesach Jews vs. Purim Jews: The Agony of Our Dilemma,” *Canadian Jewish News*, March 11, 2013**

As I travel through North American Jewish communities, on a lecture tour about Israeli society in the aftermath of the elections, I sometimes feel as though I am in a time warp.

Find a large selection of articles, essays, videos, and more about Pesach from Shalom Hartman Institute scholars here: [Pesach's Many Questions: An Introduction](#)

Visiting an Orthodox community, I may find myself back in the 1970s and 1980s, before the first Intifada convinced a majority of Israelis that the occupation is a mortal threat to the Jewish state; instead, right-wing American Jews will insist, Israel must continue building settlements and creating facts on the ground. And when I visit a liberal community, I may find myself back in the 1990s, before the second Intifada convinced that same majority of Israelis that a one-way peace process is likewise a mortal threat to the Jewish state; instead, left-wing American Jews will insist, a peace agreement is always within reach and just a matter of Israeli will.

And so I try to explain that most Israelis have internalized the left-right divide and agree with the left's anxiety over the occupation and with the right's anxiety over a delusional peace. For most Israelis, I note, a Palestinian state is an existential necessity that would save us from the demographic threat to Israel as a Jewish and democratic state - and also an existential threat that could turn greater Tel Aviv into the next Sderot, the Israeli town near Gaza that has absorbed thousands of rocket attacks in the last decade.

Most polls confirm the centrist persona of the Israeli majority. Asked whether they support a two-state solution, upwards of 70 percent of Israelis respond affirmatively. Asked whether a two-state solution would bring peace, upwards of 80 percent say no. In other words: Israelis want to be doves, but reality forces them to be hawks.

The rise of Yair Lapid and his Yesh Atid party - appearing from nowhere to become the second largest party in the Knesset - is only the latest example of the longing of many Israelis for a centrist politics that embodies the realism of the left about the occupation and of the right about the peace process.

What most depresses me is that this insight - by now commonplace in Israeli discourse - comes as a revelation to many American Jews. The two most important Jewish communities in the world aren't communicating.

During the recent elections, a puzzled American Jewish journalist asked me: Why aren't Israelis debating the collapse of the peace process? My response was: Most of us have already resolved the issue. If there were a credible partner able to contain Hamas and address our red line issues, like the right of return, we would make the necessary territorial concessions. In the absence of a credible peace partner, we're moving on with our lives.

American Jews today are divided over two anxieties relating to Israel's future. Like Israelis, many American Jews are keenly aware of the external dangers facing the Jewish state. In a Middle East that is imploding and turning increasingly fundamentalist, and with Iran approaching the nuclear threshold, there is a whiff of May 1967, the anxious weeks before the Six Day War, when threat pressed against Israel's borders and war seemed imminent.

For many liberal American Jews, though, the primary focus of their Israel anxiety is on internal issues: the fraying of democracy, the seemingly irreversible occupation, the receding promise of peace.

A healthy people knows how to set its priorities of anxiety. It knows how to focus first on imminent threat. Yet a healthy people also knows that it cannot afford to allow even immediate threat to serve as pretext for denying long-term dangers.

Jewish history speaks to our generation in the voice of two biblical commands to remember. The first voice commands us to remember that we were strangers in the land of Egypt, and the message of that command is: Don't be brutal. The second voice commands us to remember how the tribe of Amalek attacked us without provocation while we were wandering in the desert, and the message of that command is: Don't be naive.

The first command is the voice of Passover, of liberation; the second is the voice of Purim, commemorating our victory over the genocidal threat of Haman, a descendant of Amalek. "Passover Jews" are motivated by empathy with the oppressed; "Purim Jews" are motivated by alertness to threat. Both are essential; one without the other creates an unbalanced Jewish personality, a distortion of Jewish history and values.

One reason the Palestinian issue is so wrenching for Jews is that it is the point on which the two commands of our history converge: The stranger in our midst is represented by a national movement that wants to usurp us.

And so a starting point of a healthy American Jewish conversation on Israel would be acknowledging the agony of our dilemma.

Imagine an Orthodox rabbi, a supporter of the settlers in Hebron, delivering this sermon to his congregation: My friends, our community has sinned against Israel. For all our devotion to the Jewish state and our concern for its survival, we have failed to acknowledge the consequences to Israel's soul of occupying another people against its will.

Now imagine a liberal rabbi, a supporter of J Street, telling his congregation: My friends, our community has sinned against Israel. For all our devotion to the Jewish state and our concern for its democratic values, we have failed to acknowledge the urgency of existential threat once again facing our people.

When American Jews internalize or at least acknowledge each other's anxieties, the shrillness of much of American Jewish debate over Israel will give way to a more nuanced conversation.

The good news is that parts of the Jewish community have begun that process. Jews from left and right are quietly meeting across the country, trying to nurture a civil conversation on Israel.

But civility is only the starting point. The goal is to create multidimensional Jews, capable of holding more than one insight about Israeli reality. It is to translate the centrist Israeli ambivalence into American Jewish discourse.

## Chapter 6: The Partition of Justice

- How do we end the cycle of denial?
- Borders and settlements and Jerusalem are tangible problems that require solutions. But those tangible issues are only *consequences of the intangible fears and longings* that animate our conflict:
  - survival and the right to exist
  - historical memory
  - the legitimacy of our national stories
- No political formula can address each people's deepest anxieties. We need to acknowledge why a two-state solution is so traumatic for so many of us, Israelis and Palestinians alike.
- The entire land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea—including the state of Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza—is less than 11,000 square miles.
- I dread inflicting a self-imposed wound on the Jewish people. How do we abandon Hebron without doing violence to our most basic sense of Jewish history? Emotionally I experience partition as self-mutilation.
- Settlers see their lives as undoing the wrongs of Jewish history, a belated answer to the Roman conquerors and to all who tried to erase us. They cherish their daily life as an affirmation of rootedness in our biblical homeland.
- To be the generation that restored Jewish life to the hills of Judea and Samaria, only to uproot ourselves—voluntarily—will be a historic trauma.
- I understand the Palestinian visceral rejection of the very word “Israel,” because I feel the same way about “Palestine.” Instinctively, I experience the very name “Palestine” as an act of linguistic aggression.
- **Partition as Amputation:** For both our peoples, partition is a violation, an amputation. Israel without Hebron? Palestine without Jaffa? Inconceivable.
- And yet—I see no sane alternative to partition. No matter how much each side tries to erase the other's map, Israel and Palestine persist.
- **Two Lands in One Space:** Between the river and the sea lie the land of Israel and the land of Palestine. Tragically, those two entities happen to exist in the same space. If you tell me, neighbor, that Haifa belongs to you, my response is: I understand, from your perspective Haifa does belong to you. But the problem is that, from my perspective, Hebron belongs to me.



- ***One State is Impossible:*** The only solution worse than dividing this land into two states is creating one state that would devour itself. No two peoples who have fought a hundred-year existential war can share the intimate workings of government. A one-state solution would condemn us to a nightmare of entwinement—and deprive us both of that which justice requires: self-determination, to be free peoples in our own sovereign homelands.
- I need a Jewish state -- a state where the public space is defined by Jewish culture and values and needs, where Jews from East and West can reunite and together create a new era of Jewish civilization.
- ***Israel as Safe Refuge for Judaism:*** with tens of thousands of missiles aimed at our population centers, it is less clear today that Israel is a safe refuge for Jews. But Israel is a safe refuge for Judaism. This is the only country where Jews are not concerned about disappearing into a non-Jewish majority culture.
- ***Partition is Only Option History Provides:*** If Jaffa belongs to you and Hebron belongs to me, then we have two options. We can continue fighting for another hundred years, in the hope that one side or the other will prevail. Or we can accept the solution that has been on the table almost since the conflict began, and divide the land between us.
- ***Ben Gurion: Zionist Humility:*** In accepting partition, we are not betraying our histories, neighbor; we are conceding that history has given us no real choice. David Ben-Gurion supported the UN partition plan in 1947. He noted that the peculiar circumstances of the Jewish return home after two thousand years required humility on the part of Zionism, a readiness to compromise even on what belonged to us.
- ***How to Accommodate Each Other's Maps?*** by acknowledging that we both love this land in its wholeness, and that we both must do violence to that love. A peace agreement should frankly accept the **legitimacy of each side's maximalist claims**, even as it proceeds to contract them.
- ***Partition is an act of injustice*** to both Palestinians and Israelis. It is the recognition of the borders to our dreams. Not only the land but justice itself is being partitioned between two rightful claimants.
- ***Partial Fulfillment of Our Dreams:*** The state of Israel cannot be identical with the land of Israel, the state of Palestine with the land of Palestine. Each people will exercise national sovereignty in only a part of its land. Neither side can implement the totality of its claim without erasing the claim of the other.
- The ***moral argument of partition:*** For the sake of allowing the other side to achieve some measure of justice, each side needs to impose on itself some measure of injustice.
- **The enemy of justice for both sides is absolute justice for either side.**

- I forfeit Greater Israel and you forfeit Greater Palestine. Partition will leave us diminished: lesser Israel, lesser Palestine.
- Peace can only be made when each side understands that the other has sacrificed some essential part of itself. (Natural peace partner for Palestinians is not left-wing Israelis who have renounced any claim to Judea and Samaria, but rather with Israelis who share the same attachment to the entirety of the land as Palestinians.)
- ***Only Right-Wing Israelis Have Initiated Substantial Withdrawals:*** Menachem Begin withdrew from the Sinai desert in 1982 and became the first leader to uproot settlements; and in 2005, Ariel Sharon destroyed the settlements in Gaza he himself built. The pattern in Israeli politics has been that the Right implements the vision of the Left.
- ***Two Obstacles to Partition:*** 1) settlement movement; 2) demand for return of Palestinian refugees. Both share the same goal: to deny the rival claimant national sovereignty in any part of this land.
- Withdrawal will require a strong leader committed to an agreement and a determined Israeli majority— and, to persuade skeptical Israelis, some sign of genuine Palestinian acceptance of a Jewish state. None of those conditions exist today. But in the Middle East, as we’ve learned, anything is possible.
- ***Right of Return:*** A key obstacle to a final-status agreement remains the “right of return”—the right of the descendants of Palestinian refugees from 1948 to return to Palestine. Jews insisted on their right to return after two thousand years; how can they deny the right of Palestinians to return after barely seventy years?
- ***Return to Where?*** I accept your right of return. But the question is, to where? Israelis who support a two-state solution envision return to that part of the homeland that will become a sovereign Palestinian state. But Palestinian leaders have demanded that the right of return include what is now the state of Israel.
- ***The 1950 Law of Return*** guarantees automatic citizenship to any Jew coming home from any part of the world. The Law of Return is the foundation on which the Jewish state stands, defining its moral responsibility to the Jewish people. The state of Palestine will surely enact a similar law for your people. A law of return is an immigration law, which sovereign states have the right to enact—very different from a “right” that would effectively deny sovereignty to another people by moving one’s own people into the other’s state.
- Each side sees “return” as an essential component of its national sovereignty. The settlement movement is an expression of my side’s right of return to the whole of the land—not only to Haifa but to Hebron. It is the analogue to your side’s right of return—not only to Hebron but to Haifa.

- To demand a Palestinian right of return to what is now Israel is the political equivalent of Israel demanding the right to continue building settlements in a Palestinian state. It is the “right” to sabotage and destroy the ability of the other side to construct a viable homeland.
- The practical implementation of partition, then, requires each side to limit its legitimate right of return to that part of the land in which each will exercise national sovereignty.
- ***Peace requires a mutual constriction:*** My side contracts settlements, and your side contracts refugee return.
- ***Trade-off is 1948 for 1967:*** I give up most of the territorial gains of 1967 in exchange for your acceptance of Israel’s creation in 1948. And neither side tries to encroach on the sovereignty of the other—not through settlements, not through refugee return.
- Each side is guilty of proclaiming its commitment to a two-state solution but proceeding to act in the opposite way. Our side has shown its lack of good faith in the most literal way possible—through concrete and mortar, expanding settlements. And the daily message your society conveys to itself is that a two-state solution is merely a Palestinian tactic on the way to a one-state solution.
- ***Destructive Fantasy of Palestinian Return:*** One generation after another of Palestinians is bound to the fantasy of “return” to vanished homes in Israel. The international community is complicit in the deception (UN creation of UNRWA). Palestinian refugees are the only refugee community in the world whose homeless status is hereditary—even if they live in Palestine. This has resulted in more international funding by far for Palestinian refugees than for any other refugee problem. And what is there to show for it? Only misery and rage.
- The Arab world has kept Palestinians as refugees, stateless and in camps, politicizing their misery as permanent evidence against Israel.
- The special status for Palestinian refugees is unsustainable. And given the certain opposition of any Israeli government to right of return to Israel proper, the issue has become one of the main obstacles to your hopes for national sovereignty.
- To convince Israelis to take frightening security risks in a disintegrating Middle East, we need to hear that the unbearable denial of our right to exist is finally over. We need to hear from our neighbors that Israel is here to stay.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. According to Yossi, why have only right-wing Israeli politicians initiated substantial withdrawals from settlements?
2. Do you think that Jews should be allowed to remain as minority citizens in a future Palestinian State in the area of Judea and Samaria? What problem does this solution resolve?
3. How is Israel's Law of Return (1950) different from the "Right of Return" demanded by most Palestinians?
4. Why is it important to accept each side's "maximalist claims?"
5. What does Yossi mean when he says that Partition is an injustice for both Israelis and Palestinians? Do you agree with his assessment that "for the sake of allowing the other side to achieve some measure of justice, each side needs to impose on itself some measure of injustice"? How is Partition an "injustice" for Israelis? How is Partition an "injustice" for Palestinians?
6. Do you agree that "the enemy of justice for both sides is absolute justice for either side"?
7. Do you agree that the Two-State Solution is the only option that history makes available to us?

### **SOURCES:**

#### **1. Mishnah Baba Metzia 1:1**

Two [persons appear before a court] holding a garment.

One of them says, "I found it," and the other says, "I found it."

One of them says, "It is all mine," and the other says, "It is all mine."

One shall swear that his share in it is not less than half, and the other shall swear that his share in it is not less than half, and [the value of the garment] shall then be divided between them.

## 2. Deuteronomy 16:18-20

<sup>18</sup>You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice. <sup>19</sup>You shall not judge unfairly: you shall show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just. <sup>20</sup>Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

## 3. Menachem Mendel of Kotzk

There is nothing as whole, or as perfect, as a broken heart.

## 4. Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 31a

On another occasion it happened that a certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him, "Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot." Thereupon [Shammai] repulsed him with the builder's cubit which was in his hand. When he went before Hillel, he said to him, "What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it."

שוב מעשה בנכרי אחד שבא לפני שמאי אמר לו גיירני על מנת שתלמדני כל התורה כולה כשאני עומד על רגל אחת. דחפו באמת הבניין שבידו. בא לפני הלל גיירה. אמר לו: דעלך סני לחברך לא תעביד זו היא כל התורה כולה ואידך פירושה הוא זיל גמור.

## 5. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Gittin 55a

AND THAT IF A BEAM WRONGFULLY APPROPRIATED HAS BEEN BUILT INTO A PALACE. The Rabbis taught: If a man wrongfully takes a beam and builds it into a palace, Beit Shammai say that he must demolish the whole palace and restore the beam to its owner. Beit Hillel, however, say that the latter can claim only the money value of the beam, so as not to place obstacles in the way of penitents.

תנו רבנן: גזל מריש ובנאו בבירה, ב"ש אומרים: מקעקע כל הבירה כולה ומחזיר מריש לבעליו, וב"ה אומרים: אין לו אלא דמי מריש בלבד, משום תקנת השבין.

## **6. Israel's Law of Return, 1950**

Every Jew has the right to come to this country as an *oleh*.

## **7. Law of Return (Amendment No. 2, 4a), 1970**

The rights of a Jew under this Law and the rights of an *oleh* under the Nationality law, 5712-1952, as well as the rights of an *oleh* under any other enactment, are also vested in a child and a grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew and the spouse of a grandchild of a Jew, except for a person who has been a Jew and has voluntarily changed his religion.

## **8. David Ben Gurion, Address to the Knesset on the Law of Return (July 3, 1950)**

The Law of Return and the Law of Citizenship that you have in front of you are connected by a mutual bond and share of common conceptual origin, deriving from the historical uniqueness of the State of Israel, a uniqueness vis-à-vis the past and the future, directed internally and externally. These two laws determine the special character and destiny of the State of Israel as the state bearing the vision of the redemption of Israel.

The State of Israel is a state like all the other states. All the general indications [of statehood] common to the other states are also to be found in the State of Israel. It rests on a specific territory and a population existing within this territory, it possesses sovereignty in internal and external affairs, and its authority does not extend beyond its borders. The State of Israel rules only over its own inhabitants. The Jews in the Diaspora, who are citizens of their countries and who want to remain there, have no legal or civil connection to the State of Israel and the State of Israel does not represent them from any legal standpoint. Nevertheless, the State of Israel differs from the other states both with regard to the factors involved in its establishment and to the aims of its existence. It was established merely two years ago, but its roots are grounded in the far past and it is nourished by ancient springs. Its authority is limited to the area in which its residents dwell, but its gates are open to every Jew wherever he may be. The State of Israel is not a Jewish state merely because the majority of its inhabitants are Jews. It is a State for all the Jews wherever they may be and for every Jew who so desires.

[...]

The Law of Return is one of the Basic Laws of the State of Israel. It comprises the central mission of our state, namely, ingathering of exiles. This law determines that it is not the state that grants the Jew from abroad the right to settle in the state. Rather, this right is inherent in him by the very fact that he is a Jew, if only he desires to join in the settlement of the land. In the State of Israel the Jews have no right of priority over the non-Jewish citizens. The State of Israel is grounded on the full equality of rights and obligations for all its citizens. This principle was also laid down in the Proclamation of Independence... The right to return preceded the State of Israel and it is this right that built the state. This right originates in the unbroken historical connection between the people and the homeland, a connection which has also been acknowledged in actual practice by the tribunal of the peoples.

## Letter 7: Isaac and Ishmael

### *Eid al-Adha*

- ***Eid al-Adha***: the feast of the sacrifice marks the Muslim tradition of Abraham's thwarted sacrifice of Ishmael.
- ***Commonalities in Islam and Judaism***: we share a common religious sensibility that sees law and spirituality as inseparable, that regulates permitted and forbidden foods to sanctify eating, that abhors graven images as a coarsening of the Divine. Both our faiths have strong mystical traditions.
- We are religious communities who knew the desert in our formative years and were shaped by the struggle for survival.
- ***Abraham/Ibrahim***: we share a common father, who in both our traditions is the exemplar of hospitality.
- ***Cave of Machpelah in Hebron (Ibrahimi Mosque)***: named from the Hebrew word for "doubling," because here are buried the founding couples of the Jewish people: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah.
- Perhaps *Machpelah* hints at another coupling—of Judaism and Islam, the faiths that emerged from Abraham's sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Perhaps, in the Divine plan, we were meant to be entwined, challenged to grow together.
- In the decades after the Six-Day War, Muslims and Jews would freely mingle together, until the 1994 Ramadan massacre committed by Baruch Goldstein.
- ***In response to the muezzin's call to prayer "Allahu akbar,"*** a visitor from New York said, "You know, when you think about what they're saying— ***God is great***: —it's a good thing, no?" Yes: so obvious, and yet in Hebron, Muslims and Jews can never take each other's goodwill for granted.
- ***The Status of Holy Sites***: But can we respect the other's religious commitments and longings when those seem to threaten our own?
- ***Temple Mount, the Haram el Sharif***: spiritual and emotional center point of our conflict. Many Jews fail to understand the depth of the Muslim connection with the Mount's Al-Aqsa Mosque, where worshippers come to experience the tangible presence of the Prophet who they believe ascended from there to Heaven.
- ***The Mount has become a symbol of occupation for Muslims***. The fact that Muslims cannot freely access and pray in Al-Aqsa without a security permit is an ongoing political and spiritual wound. Israelis need to recognize the deep pain we've caused in pursuing our security needs.



- ***Need a Discourse of Spiritual Dignity:*** In the Muslim–Jewish conversation about our shared holy sites, we desperately need a discourse of spiritual dignity, not a discourse that disgraces the very holiness we seek to uphold.
- ***Temple Mount is Holiest Place for Jews:*** Many non-Jews believe that our holiest site is the Western Wall. In fact, that is merely part of the retaining wall that once surrounded the Temple. For Jews, the Temple Mount is our holiest place, the literal center point of creation. Here, we believe, God’s Presence came to dwell among the people of Israel. Jews mourn the loss of the Temple not only as the end of our national sovereignty and the beginning of our exile from the land but, more deeply, the “exile” of the tangible Divine Presence from our midst.
- Rebuilding the Temple is not in human hands. Rabbinic tradition understood that God would restore the Temple in the messianic age.
- And so, while I cannot relinquish my claim to the Temple Mount without doing violence to a core vision of Judaism, I do relinquish its realization through human hands.
- Palestinian leaders must end campaign denying any Jewish connection to the holy places. The relentless message from Palestinian media is that there was no ancient Temple in Jerusalem, no Jewish attachment to the Western Wall, no archaeological proof of Jewish roots in this land at all.
- Under a Palestinian state, Jews would have no right to pray at the Cave of Machpelah.
- ***How to respond to systematic denial of Jewish connection to its holiest places?*** Citing archaeological or historical literary proof? Or say nothing, because even entering into a debate somehow legitimizes the assault?
- ***Accusations of threat to Al-Aqsa:*** terror attacks in the name of “saving” Al-Aqsa from a supposed Israeli government plot to undermine and ultimately destroy the Muslim presence on the Mount.
- There is no government plot to destroy Al-Aqsa or in any way lessen the Muslim presence on the Mount. The notion of a Jewish plot against Al-Aqsa is a baseless rumor that has been spread since the 1920s, often with disastrous results (1929 Hebron massacre).
- ***Israeli policy on Temple Mount:*** since the Six-Day War, Israeli policy has been to accommodate the Muslim presence and restrain the Jewish presence, going so far as to forbid Jewish prayer.
- ***Moshe Dayan ordered Israeli flag removed from Dome of the Rock in 1967:*** The Jewish people had just returned to its holiest site, to which we had been denied access for centuries, only to effectively yield sovereignty at this moment of triumph. Shortly after the war, Dayan met with Muslim officials and formally granted them veto power over the right to pray on the Mount.

- ***Law Against Jewish Prayer on Temple Mount:*** In forbidding Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount, the Israeli government is acting out of pragmatic rather than altruistic considerations, seeking to prevent a religious war. Still, pragmatism, especially over religious claims, is a precious rarity in our part of the world.
- ***Peace is about mutual respect.*** Israelis need to treat Palestinians with dignity.
- ***Israelis are Rude: Difficulty with Respectfulness:*** The truth is that, for many Israeli Jews, treating others with respect can be a challenge. Israel is a restless society of uprooted and re-rooted refugees and children of refugees, and the dark side of our vitality is a frankness that can easily become rudeness, the antithesis of Arab decorousness. Israelis often don't know how to treat each other with respect, let alone those we are occupying.
- We are a people in a hurry to compensate for our lost centuries of nationhood, a people that doesn't pay attention to niceties. Sometimes I think that, if only we'd known how to show your people simple respect, so much could have been different here.
- ***Need Palestinians to respect Jewish story.*** The campaign against our connection to this land and its holy sites tells Jews that our conflict isn't about occupation or settlements but is, instead, a war against Jewish history. The attempt to erase us conceptually, many Jews fear, is a first step toward erasing us physically.
- ***Each side needs to confront the psychological impact of our offenses against the other.*** We must recognize the ways in which we are, for each other, embodiments of our greatest fears, and learn to respect each other's difficult histories.

#### **Resources in Judaism and Islam to Achieve Peace and Dignity:**

- Does religion doom us to endless conflict? Our faiths contain resources to help us live in peace and dignity as neighbors. But we need to frankly concede that each faith also contains obstacles to compromise.
- Can Judaism accept partition of land it considers sacred? Can Islam accept the legitimacy of a Jewish-majority state located in the Muslim world, accept Jews not only as dhimmi, "protected people" relegated to secondary status under Islam, but as equals entitled to national sovereignty?
- The archetypes in both traditions are hardly flattering—yet they also contain a basis for respecting the other's spiritual dignity.
- We need to seek out those generous voices embedded in our traditions and offer new interpretations of old concepts.
- ***Shemitah and Jubilee Years:*** Every seven years the land is to be laid fallow; on the fiftieth year all ownership and debts are to be forfeited. The message is that a holy land doesn't belong to us but to God.

- ***Humans Cannot Own the Holy***: the elusiveness of possession is an expression of the land's holiness. The sacred can never be fully owned by mortal beings. Sacred space is an encounter with a world beyond boundaries, a dimension in which all human claims are irrelevant.
- The religious Israeli voices I find most compelling are those that are faithful to the terms of **conditional ownership**. We are custodians, not owners. Being faithful to the land means being prepared to relinquish our exclusive hold on it:
  - Holiness of life supersedes holiness of land
  - Zion will be redeemed through justice (Isaiah)
- ***Isaac and Ishmael's Greatness***: accepting and sacrificing for God's will. Sheikh Ibrahim encouraged Yossi to focus on the unifying message in the two narratives.
- ***Founding Story of Abraham Shapes Differences Between Judaism and Islam***: our Scriptures tell different version of Abraham's confrontation with God at Sodom and Gomorrah. Both stories offer models of the Divine-human interaction and tell us something essential about the differences between our two faiths—differences I celebrate. I cherish the holy chutzpah of the Torah's Abraham, who cannot abide suffering, even when Divinely initiated. And I cherish the wise surrender of the Qur'an's Ibrahim, whose humility acknowledges the ultimate futility of human ideas and ambitions.
- Today, each faith community suffers from a decline of one or the other aspect of religious vitality. Modernity has not been kind to Jewish spirituality: Large parts of the Jewish people have become severed from basic faith and devotion. The Muslim world has the opposite problem: an erosion of open inquiry and self-critique.
- ***Restoring Religious Balance***: Perhaps we can help restore each other to balance. Jews, I feel, need something of the Muslim prayer mat; my Muslim friends say they need something of the Jewish study hall. Can we inspire each other to renew our spiritual greatness?
- We need to draw on the deep resources of our faith and see ourselves as inseparable parts of a shared sacred story. In cherishing the legacy of our shared father, we partake of that seminal moment of the birth of a new human consciousness. And we share the longing for a world liberated from idolatry in all its forms, from all that clouds our perception of divine reality.
- Both our traditions note that Abraham/Ibrahim was buried by Isaac and Ishmael, who overcame their rivalry to honor their father. Along with conflict, that, too, is our legacy. So is our father's generosity: Perhaps the memory of his hospitality can help us find a way to accommodate each other's presence in this land.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. In this chapter, Yossi calls for a discourse of spiritual dignity. What does that mean to you? Have you ever witnessed or participated in a discourse of spiritual dignity? What would a discourse of spiritual dignity look like for Jews and Muslims talking about the holy sites of Israel?
2. Yossi criticizes a frequent Jewish dismissal of Muslim attachment to the Al Aqsa Mosque, “but it is only the third holiest Muslim site.” Can you think of holy Jewish sites that might be third or fourth on a list of “holiest” sites that are still deeply important to you? What does it mean in your life that Jews have access to those sites? What would it mean if Jews could no longer access them?
3. Have you been to the Temple Mount? If so, how did you feel when you were there? If not, do you aspire to visit there? Why or why not? How do you feel about the Israeli policy to forbid Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount?
4. Yossi explains why he believes it is difficult for Israelis to be respectful to Arabs. Have you encountered Israeli “rudeness” in your experiences in Israel? Do you think that the typical Israeli Jewish personality is different than the typical American Jewish personality? If so, in what ways are they different? In what ways are they similar?
5. Do you agree with Yossi’s assessment: “Sometimes I think that, if only we’d known how to show your people simple respect, so much could have been different here”?
6. How do you understand Yossi’s definition of “holy space”? If the land of Israel is “holy,” what does that mean for Jewish claims to own the land? What is the relationship between holiness and humility, according to this interpretation? How does this religious understanding of the land provide a path for compromise?
7. What are the resources within the Jewish tradition to promote peace, according to this chapter? What are the resources within the Muslim tradition?
8. What is the spiritual essence of Judaism, based on the Abraham narrative? What is the spiritual essence of Islam, based on the Ibrahim narrative? What do we need to learn from each other to reach our greatest spiritual potential?

9. Do you agree that Judaism has gotten out of “spiritual balance” in the modern world? If so, how do you see this imbalance manifesting in Judaism or in the Jewish community?

### **SOURCES:**

#### **1. Genesis 18:1-8, 16**

The Lord appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot. <sup>2</sup>Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground, <sup>3</sup>he said, “My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. <sup>4</sup>Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree. <sup>5</sup>And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on—seeing that you have come your servant’s way.” They replied, “Do as you have said.”

<sup>6</sup>Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Quick, three *seahs* of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!” <sup>7</sup>Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it. <sup>8</sup>He took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them; and he waited on them under the tree as they ate...

<sup>16</sup>The men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom, Abraham walking with them to see them off.

#### **2. Qur’an 11:69-72**

And Our messengers came to Abraham with glad tidings. They said, “Peace,” and “peace,” he said, rushing to bring them a roasted calf. Then when he saw that their hands did not reach toward it, he grew in fear of them. [But] they said, “Fear not. We have been sent unto the people of Lot.” And his wife was standing there, and she laughed. Then We gave her glad tidings of Isaac and, after Isaac, of Jacob. She said, “Oh woe unto me! Shall I bear a child when I am an old woman, and this husband of mine is an old man? That would surely be an astounding thing.”

### 3. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, *Divrey No'am*

*"And God appeared to [Abraham]... and he was sitting at the opening of the tent in the heat of the day"* (Genesis 18:1). And that it says that *"he was sitting at the opening of the tent in the heat of the day"* -- *Sitting* connotes delaying (prolonging, extending) for a long time, as in *"and they sat (stayed) in Kadesh man days."* Thus he (Abraham) merited that God revealed Himself to him, because he sat and waited for many days at the opening of the tent, which is the threshold of holiness. And the closer you are to the threshold, the more (the forces of resistance) strengthen and spread against you. So much so that there have been many who were already at the threshold, and returned (or gave up) because they didn't know they were already at the threshold.

### 4. Israel Baal Shem Tov, 18th century, *Keter Shem Tov*

Once there was a very wise king. He made an illusory castle with illusory walls, towers and gates. Then he commanded that his subjects should come to him through the illusory walls and gates and the towers. Then he scattered before each and every gate royal treasures. In this way when someone came to the first gate, he took the money and left. And so it went with one seeker after another until the beloved son came with great determination and proceeded to walk through one wall after another right up to his father the king. Then he realized that there was nothing separating himself from his father. Everything was an illusion.

### 5. Talmud Shabbat 127a

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: Receiving wayfarers [*hachnasat orchim*] is greater than welcoming the Divine Presence, for Abraham [wishing to attend to the wayfarers] pleaded with God, "My Lord, if now I have found favor in Your eyes, pass not away from thy servant [while I attend to my guests]."

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב : גדולה הכנסת אורחין מהקבלת פני שכינה, דכתיב (בראשית יח) ויאמר (ה') : [אדני] אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל נא תעבר וגו'.

### 6. Pirkei Avot 1:5

יוסי בן יוחנן איש ירושלים אומר, יהי ביתך פתוח לרוחה, ויהיו עניים בני ביתך

Yose ben Yohanan of Jerusalem said: Let your house be opened wide, and let the poor be members of your household.

## 7. Mishneh Torah Hilkhoh Evel 14:2

The reward one receives for accompanying guests is greater than all of the others. This is a statute which Abraham our Patriarch instituted and the path of kindness which he would follow. He would feed wayfarers, provide them with drink, and accompany them. Showing hospitality for guests surpasses receiving the Shechinah, as it states: *And he saw and behold there were three people* (Genesis 18:3). Accompanying them is greater than showing them hospitality. Our Sages said: “Whoever does not accompany them is considered as if he shed blood” (BT Sotah 46b).

## 8. Genesis 23:1-20

Sarah’s lifetime—the span of Sarah’s life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years. <sup>2</sup>Sarah died in Kiriath-arba—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan; and Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to bewail her. <sup>3</sup>Then Abraham rose from beside his dead, and spoke to the Hittites, saying, <sup>4</sup>“I am a resident alien among you; sell me a burial site among you, that I may remove my dead for burial.” <sup>5</sup>And the Hittites replied to Abraham, saying to him, <sup>6</sup>“Hear us, my lord: you are the elect of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold his burial place from you for burying your dead.” <sup>7</sup>Thereupon Abraham bowed low to the people of the land, the Hittites, <sup>8</sup>and he said to them, “If it is your wish that I remove my dead for burial, you must agree to intercede for me with Ephron son of Zohar. <sup>9</sup>Let him sell me the cave of Machpelah that he owns, which is at the edge of his land. Let him sell it to me, at the full price, for a burial site in your midst.”

<sup>10</sup>Ephron was present among the Hittites; so Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, all who entered the gate of his town, saying, <sup>11</sup>“No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead.” <sup>12</sup>Then Abraham bowed low before the people of the land, <sup>13</sup>and spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, “If only you would hear me out! Let me pay the price of the land; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there.” <sup>14</sup>And Ephron replied to Abraham, saying to him, <sup>15</sup>“My lord, do hear me! A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me? Go and bury your dead.” <sup>16</sup>Abraham accepted Ephron’s terms. Abraham paid out to Ephron the money that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites—four hundred shekels of silver at the going merchants’ rate.

<sup>17</sup>So Ephron’s land in Machpelah, near Mamre—the field with its cave and all the trees anywhere within the confines of that field—passed <sup>18</sup>to Abraham as his possession, in the presence of the Hittites, of all who entered the gate of his town. <sup>19</sup>And then Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan. <sup>20</sup>Thus the field with its cave passed from the Hittites to Abraham, as a burial site.

## **9. Genesis 25:7-10**

<sup>7</sup>This was the total span of Abraham's life: one hundred and seventy-five years. <sup>8</sup>And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and he was gathered to his kin. <sup>9</sup>His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, <sup>10</sup>the field that Abraham had bought from the Hittites; there Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife.

## **10. Genesis 35:28-29**

<sup>27</sup>And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, at Kiriath-arba—now Hebron—where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. <sup>28</sup>Isaac was a hundred and eighty years old <sup>29</sup>when he breathed his last and died. He was gathered to his kin in ripe old age; and he was buried by his sons Esau and Jacob.

## **11. Genesis 49:28-33**

<sup>28</sup>All these were the tribes of Israel, twelve in number, and this is what their father said to them as he bade them farewell, addressing to each a parting word appropriate to him.

<sup>29</sup>Then he instructed them, saying to them, "I am about to be gathered to my kin. Bury me with my fathers in the cave which is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, <sup>30</sup>the cave which is in the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre, in the land of Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site—<sup>31</sup>there Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah—<sup>32</sup>the field and the cave in it, bought from the Hittites." <sup>33</sup>When Jacob finished his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and, breathing his last, he was gathered to his people.

## **12. Genesis 50:12-14**

<sup>12</sup>Thus his sons did for him as he had instructed them. <sup>13</sup>His sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, the field near Mamre, which Abraham had bought for a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. <sup>14</sup>After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.



### **13. Qur'an 49:13**

O people! Behold, we have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another.

### **14. Qur'an 17:1-4**

Glory be to Him who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque [Mecca] to the Farthest Mosque [Jerusalem], whose precincts We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. Truly He is the Hearer, the Seer. And We gave Moses the Book [Torah] and made it a guidance for the Children of Israel—"take no guardian apart from Me"—the progeny of those whom We carried with Noah. Truly he was a thankful servant. And we decreed for the Children of Israel in the Book: Surely you will work corruption upon the earth twice, and you will ascend to great height.

### **15. Bukhari, Book 20, Hadith 2**

On the authority of Abu Hurayra, God's messenger said, "Do not set out for a pilgrimage except for three mosques: The Sanctuary Mosque [of Mecca], the Mosque of God's messenger [in Medina], and the Farthest Mosque [Jerusalem]."

### **16. Sunan Abi Dawud, Book 2, Hadith 67**

Maymunah ibn Sa'd reports: "I asked the messenger of God: Tell us about the ruling about the Sacred House [in Jerusalem]. The messenger of God [Muhammad] said: 'Go and pray there.' [But all the cities at the time were affected by war.] 'If you cannot visit it, send some oil to light its lamps.'

### **17. Moshe Halbertal, "On Holiness, Sovereignty, and Sacrilege," 2012**

It is actually places, times and people that cannot be controlled, which become holy.

Halacha instructs believers not to engage in any creation on holy days. This prohibition is the primary marker of holy days. On the Sabbath, man is forbidden to engage in any creative or sovereign activities. It is not manual labor that is barred – religious Jews are allowed to carry heavy objects from one end of the room to the other; but any attempt, as minute as may be, to alter the surroundings, constitutes desecration of the holy day.

On regular days, on the other hand, man is free to govern and control. On regular days man creates and conquers, and on the Sabbath he must treat nature as a gift that must not be tampered with. This perception of holiness, under which sovereignty and sanctity are a contradiction in terms, is evident in all Halachic definitions of sanctity.

This year is a *shmita* year [every seventh year, in which the land must be left fallow]. Produce from this year may be consumed, but must not be processed. For example, it may not be used to make medicine. Sanctity is that realm that is inaccessible and that cannot be controlled. This is why it is not allowed to use holy sites for any other purpose outside religious practice. One of the manifestations of the holiness of a synagogue is that people are not allowed to use it as a shortcut, as the Mishnah says: "He shall not enter Temple Mount with his cane and his shoes and his money belt and the dust on his feet, and shall not make it into a shortcut". The essence of holiness as it emerges from the Jewish Halacha is about surrendering power, and it is designed to limit man's governance and sovereignty.

## 18. Mishnah Kelim Chapter 1:6-8

There are ten degrees of holiness. The land of Israel is holier than any other land. Wherein lies its holiness? In that from it are brought the *omer* [barley offering brought on the second day of Passover], the first fruits, and the two loaves [offered on Shavuot], which may not be brought from any other land.

The walled cities are still more holy, in that they must send forth the *metzoraim* from their midst... The Temple Mount is holier, for neither *zavim* nor *zavot* nor menstruants nor women after childbirth may enter it.

The rampart is holier, for neither idolaters nor one who contracted corpse impurity may enter it. The court of women is holier, for no *tevul yom* may enter it, though no sin-offering is thereby incurred.

The court of the Israelites is holier, for a man who has not yet offered his obligatory sacrifices may not enter it... The court of the priests is holier, for no Israelite may enter it except when they are required to do so... The area between the *Ulam* and the altar is holier, for men afflicted with blemishes or with a wild growth of hair may not enter it. The *Hekhal* is holier, for one whose hands or feet are unwashed may not enter it. The Holy of Holies is holier, for only the High Priest, on the Day of Atonement, at the time of the Avodah service, may enter it.

עֶשֶׂר קְדֻשּׁוֹת הֵן, אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל מְקֻדָּשֶׁת מְכֹל הָאֲרָצוֹת. וּמֵהָ הִיא קְדֻשָּׁתָהּ, שֶׁמִּבִּיאִים מִמֶּנָּה הָעֹמֶר וְהַבְּכּוּרִים וּשְׁתֵּי הַלֶּחֶם, מֵהָ שָׂאִין מִבִּיאִים כֹּן מְכֹל הָאֲרָצוֹת :

עֲזָרוֹת הַמִּקְדָּשׁ חוֹמָה מְקֻדָּשׁתָּהּ מִמֶּנָּה, שֶׁמִּשְׁלָחִים מֵתוֹכָהּ אֶת הַמִּצְרָעִים, וּמִסִּבְבֵּיהֶן לְתוֹכָהּ מֵת עַד שִׁירָצוֹ. יָצָא, אֵין מִחֲזִירִין אוֹתוֹ

לִפְנֵים מִן הַחוֹמָה מְקֻדָּשׁ מֵהֶם, שֶׁאוֹכְלִים שָׁם קִדָּשִׁים קָלִים וּמַעֲשֵׂר שְׁנִי. הֵר הַבַּיִת מְקֻדָּשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ, שֶׁאֵין זָבִים וְזָבוֹת, נָדוֹת וְיוֹלְדוֹת נִכְנָסִים לָשָׁם. הַחֵיל מְקֻדָּשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ, שֶׁאֵין גּוֹיִם וְטִמְאָה מֵת נִכְנָסִים לָשָׁם. עֲזָרַת נָשִׁים מְקֻדָּשֶׁת מִמֶּנּוּ, שֶׁאֵין טָבוּל יוֹם נִכְנָס לָשָׁם, וְאֵין חֲיָבִים עָלֶיהָ חֲטָאֵת. עֲזָרַת יִשְׂרָאֵל מְקֻדָּשֶׁת מִמֶּנָּה, שֶׁאֵין מַחֲסֵר כְּפוֹרִים נִכְנָס לָשָׁם, וְחֲיָבִין עָלֶיהָ חֲטָאֵת. עֲזָרַת הַכֹּהֲנִים מְקֻדָּשֶׁת מִמֶּנָּה, שֶׁאֵין יִשְׂרָאֵל נִכְנָסִים לָשָׁם אֶלָּא בְשַׁעַת צָרָתָהּ, לְסִמִּיכָהּ לְשַׁחֲיָטָה וּלְתַנּוּפָה:

## 19. Mishnah Megillah 3:3

Rabbi Yehudah said, If a synagogue has been destroyed, they may not eulogize within it, and they may not twist ropes within it, and they may not spread nets within it, and they may not spread produce on its roof, and they may not make of it a shortcut, as it is written, “and I will bring your sanctuaries into desolation” (Lev. 26:31). They maintain their sanctity, even when they are desolate.

וְעוֹד אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוּדָה, בֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת שֶׁחָרַב, אֵין מִסְפִּידִין בְּתוֹכוֹ, וְאֵין מַפְשִׁילִין בְּתוֹכוֹ חֲבָלִים, וְאֵין פּוֹרְשִׁין לְתוֹכוֹ מִצּוּדוֹת, וְאֵין שׁוֹטְחִין עַל גִּגּוֹ פְרוֹת, וְאֵין עוֹשִׂין אוֹתוֹ קַפְנִדְרָא, שְׁנֶאֱמַר, (ויקרא כו) וְהִשְׁמוֹתִי אֶת מִקְדָּשֵׁיכֶם, קִדָּשְׁתֶּן אֶף כְּשֶׁהֵן שׁוֹמְמִין.

## 20. Genesis 18:17-33

<sup>17</sup>Now the LORD had said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, <sup>18</sup>since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him? <sup>19</sup>For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right, in order that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.” <sup>20</sup>Then the LORD said, “The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave! <sup>21</sup>I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note.”

<sup>22</sup>The men went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the LORD.

<sup>23</sup>Abraham came forward and said, “Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty?”

<sup>24</sup>What if there should be fifty innocent within the city; will You then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it? <sup>25</sup>Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” <sup>26</sup>And the LORD answered, “If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.”

<sup>27</sup>Abraham spoke up, saying, “Here I venture to speak to my Lord, I who am but dust and ashes:

<sup>28</sup>What if the fifty innocent should lack five? Will You destroy the whole city for want of the five?”

And He answered, "I will not destroy if I find forty-five there." <sup>29</sup>But he spoke to Him again, and said, "What if forty should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not do it, for the sake of the forty." <sup>30</sup>And he said, "Let not my Lord be angry if I go on: What if thirty should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." <sup>31</sup>And he said, "I venture again to speak to my Lord: What if twenty should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not destroy, for the sake of the twenty." <sup>32</sup>And he said, "Let not my Lord be angry if I speak but this last time: What if ten should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not destroy, for the sake of the ten."

<sup>33</sup>When the LORD had finished speaking to Abraham, He departed; and Abraham returned to his place.

## **21. Qur'an 37:100-113**

[Abraham said]: My Lord! Give me [an heir], a righteous [heir]. So we gave him the good news of a patient son. When he [the son] was old enough to assist in his work, he said, "My son, I see in a dream that I am sacrificing you. What do you think?" He said, "Father! Do whatever you have been commanded. If God wills, I will be patient."

So when they had both surrendered [to God's command] and he had laid him down on his temple, We called out to him: "Abraham! You have fulfilled your dream. Thus indeed do we reward the virtuous—for this was an undeniable challenge." Then We ransomed him with a great sacrifice, and left for him a good name for the ages: "Peace be to Abraham!" Thus do we reward the virtuous.

He is indeed one of Our faithful servants. We gave him the good news of Isaac, a prophet, and one of the righteous. And We blessed him and Isaac. Among their descendants are the virtuous, and those who oppress [wrong] themselves.

## **22. Qur'an 2:127-129**

As Abraham raised the foundations of the house [of God, the Ka'ba] with Ishmael, [they prayed], "Our Lord, accept from us: You are the Hearer, the Knower. Our Lord, make us submit to You, and from our progeny raise up a nation submissive to you, show us our rites, and turn to us in clemency. Indeed, you are the Clement, the Merciful.

## Chapter 8: The Israeli Paradox

- **Limited Encounters Between Israelis and Palestinians:** before the suicide bombings of the early 2000s, before the wall was built, Palestinians and Israelis had more human interaction. Now we've become abstractions to each other.
- **Coexistence Depends on Interaction:** [This book substitutes for human interaction, which has now become impossible.]
- **Modern Israeli Society is a Paradox:** a Jewish and a democratic state. According to the framers, Israel would be the homeland of Jews around the world, whether or not they are Israeli citizens. And it would be the democratic state of all its citizens, whether or not they are Jews.
- **Dual Identity:** Jewish and Democratic - the aspirational challenge bequeathed to us by the founders.
- **Secular or Religious State?** Seen from Tel Aviv, Israel is a thoroughly secular society. Seen from Jerusalem, Israel is a deeply traditional society. I define Israel as a secular state in a holy land. There is a permanent conflict between religion and state that can only be managed, never entirely resolved.
- **Israel is an uneasy meeting point between Jews from East and West.** Mizrahim, Jews from Muslim countries, often faced discrimination. Founders of Israel were overwhelmingly Ashkenazi and secular. At the same time, our music, cuisine, language are all increasingly influenced by traditional Mizrahi culture.
- **Israeli music** was once the carrier of the secular ethos; today it expresses the longing among Israelis to reconnect with Jewish tradition. Mizrahi Jews have inspired the use of piyyutim in modern Israeli rock music.
- **Paradox built into Society Created by Immigrants:** Jews brought home the wisdom and fears learned from their varied wanderings and imposed those on Israeli reality. Jews from America fear the weakening of democracy in Israel. Jews from former Soviet Union fear a loss of Jewish people.
- **Israel reflects the contradictions of the Jews:** We came home with opposite expectations of what a Jewish state should be. Secular Zionists longed for a state that would "normalize" the Jews by creating a nation among nations. Religious Zionists longed for a state that would confirm Jewish exceptionalism, become a "light to the nations," a trigger for the redemption of humanity.
- **How can the Jewish state be both normal and exceptional?** What was an abstract dilemma for Zionist thinkers is now basis for social conflicts.

- Those impulses—to be normal and to be exceptional—are the twin longings that run through Jewish history. Zionism’s genius—and one of the reasons for its success among the world’s Jews—was that it embraced those two longings and promised the Jews to fulfill them both.
- ***Failure to Achieve Either Vision: Normalcy or Exceptionalism:*** Israel is a nation-state, but hardly normal. We are often the great exception, the outcast—from the Middle East, from the UN. As for the wish to be an exemplary society, Israel often feels painfully normal, with political corruption and organized crime and all the ailments of modernity.
- The founders sought to create a nation that would be normalized in its relations with the world but internally exceptional. Sometimes it seems as if we’ve created the reverse dynamic: externally abnormal, internally unexceptional.
- Israel’s ability to fulfill both those aspirations will depend, in part, on our relationship with the Palestinians.
- ***Need for More Spirituality:*** growing materialism in our society, many secular Jews agree that Israeli society needs an infusion of spirituality, a renewed sense of purpose and direction.
- ***Separation of Religion and State:*** I want to keep religion as far away from politics as possible, but in Israel, there cannot be complete separation between religion and state. Religion is too much a part of the nation’s identity.
- ***Secularism*** is also an essential part of our identity. Because of the centrality of peoplehood for Judaism, the most strictly observant Jews have no choice but to accept the most secular as fellow Jews.
- ***Religious–Secular Tensions:*** marriage laws, Sabbath observance in public spaces. [Suggested compromise to permit limited public transportation and maintain entertainment while enforcing the ban on commerce is an example of religious–secular relations at their best: figuring out how to make a place in our public space for a range of approaches to Jewish tradition.]
- ***Jewish Values in Public Space:*** I want Jewish values and culture to shape our public space. (What constitutes “Jewish values” is part of the ongoing debate over our identity.) Each generation will need to renegotiate the delicate balance between our secular and religious identities.
- ***Prayer at the Kotel:*** I find the anger and anguish of Reform and Conservative Jews deeply moving. What they’re saying to Israel in effect is: You are supposed to be the homeland of all Jews, which means your public space needs to reflect our religious diversity; by granting exclusive control to one part of the Jewish people, the Orthodox, you are betraying the Zionist commitment to peoplehood.

- **Arab Israeli Citizens:** Not only does Israel have to manage its radical Jewish diversity; its even greater challenge is including Arab citizens—fully 20 percent of the population—in its national identity. Failure to embrace Arab citizens in the national identity and public space creates an existential threat.
- **Ha'Tikvah: Israel's National Anthem:** Arab Israelis do not feel Israeli when Israel's national anthem speaks of a "Jewish heart."
- How do Jewish Israelis and Arab Israelis celebrate Independence Day together, when for Jews it is a day of redemption and for Palestinians a day of catastrophe
- **Sense of Shared Citizenship is Possible:** Polls consistently show that a majority of Arab Israelis believe that Israel is a good country to live in; even more surprising, a majority say they are proud to be Israeli. Asked whether they would opt for citizenship in a future Palestinian state, the overwhelming majority say no.
- Mohammad Darawshe, one of the leading Palestinian Israeli activists, says that Israel's Arabs need to learn to act like a minority and Israel's Jews need to learn to act like a majority.
- Israel's Jews are a curious majority: We are a majority in our own country but are acutely aware of being a minority in a hostile Arab region. ***That means that both the Jews and the Arabs of Israel often feel at once like a majority and a minority.***
- Jews need to reassure Arab citizens that we see them as an integral part of our society. The first place to begin is by ending discrimination against Arab citizens, especially in government allocations for education and infrastructure.
- Israel's Arabs need to reassure Jewish citizens that they want to be part of Israel—beginning with electing Knesset members whose goal is integrationist, rather than nationalist or Islamist.
- Israeli Jews need to convey to Israeli Arabs that we see their place in our society not as a problem to be managed but as an opportunity for Israel to uphold its own moral standards.
- At its best, ***Israel is energized by paradox.*** I see Israel as a testing ground for managing some of the world's most acute dilemmas—the clash between religion and modernity, East and West, ethnicity and democracy, security and morality. These are worthy challenges for an ancient people that wandered the world and absorbed its diversity—and has brought the world with it back home.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. In this chapter, Yossi attempts to introduce his Palestinian readers to the internal realities of modern Israeli society as a kind of “human encounter.” Can a book function as a substitute for human encounter in the path towards coexistence?
2. Do you agree with Yossi’s definition of Israel as “a secular state in a holy land”? Why or why not? How would you define Israel?
3. Do you think that Israel can be both “normal” and exceptional?” Which aspiration resonates most with you?
4. Do you agree that Israel has failed on both of its aspirations and is “externally abnormal, and internally unexceptional?” What are some examples of ways in which Israel is externally “abnormal?” What are some examples of ways in which Israel is internally “unexceptional?”
5. In the balance between Israel as a religious and a secular state, how do you think Israel is faring today? In the balance between Israel as a Jewish and a democratic state, how do you think Israel today is faring?
6. Do you think that Israel should change its national anthem (or create an alternative stanza) to be more inclusive of Arab Israelis?
7. What does Mohammad Darawshe mean when he suggests that “Israel’s Arabs need to learn to act like a minority and Israel’s Jews need to learn to act like a majority”? What is Israel’s responsibility toward Arab Israelis? What are the responsibilities of Arab Israelis towards Israel?
8. In what ways can Israel be energized positively by its paradoxes: religion vs. secularism, East vs. West, ethnicity and democracy, security and morality?



## **SOURCES:**

### **1. Numbers 23:7-10**

<sup>7</sup>He took up his theme, and said:  
From Aram has Balak brought me,  
Moab's king from the hills of the East:  
Come, curse me Jacob,  
Come, tell Israel's doom!  
<sup>8</sup>How can I damn whom God has not damned,  
How doom when the Lord has not doomed?  
<sup>9</sup>As I see them from the mountain tops,  
Gaze on them from the heights,  
There is a people that dwells apart,  
Not reckoned among the nations,  
<sup>10</sup>Who can count the dust of Jacob,  
Number the dust-cloud of Israel?  
May I die the death of the upright,  
May my fate be like theirs!

ז וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר מִן-אֲרָם יִנְחֲנִי בָלָק מֶלֶךְ-מוֹאָב מִהַרְרֵי-קֶדֶם לְכָה אֶרְה-לִּי יַעֲקֹב וּלְכָה  
זַעֲמָה יִשְׂרָאֵל: ח מָה אֶקְבֵּל לֹא קִבְּהָ אֵל וּמָה אֶזְעַם לֹא זַעַם יְהוָה: ט כִּי-מֵרָאשׁ צָרִים אֶרְאֶנּוּ  
וּמִגִּבְעוֹת אֲשׁוּרֵנוּ הֵן-עַם לְבִדָּד יִשְׁכֹּן וּבְגוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשֵּׁב: י מִי מִנֵּה עֶפֶר יַעֲקֹב וּמִסָּפֶר אֶת-רִבְעֵ  
יִשְׂרָאֵל תָּמַת נַפְשֵׁי מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְתִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵיתִי כָמֹהוּ:

### **2. I Samuel 8:4-22**

<sup>4</sup>All the elders of Israel assembled and came to Samuel at Ramah, <sup>5</sup>and they said to him, “You have grown old, and your sons have not followed your ways. Therefore appoint a king for us, to govern us like all other nations.” <sup>6</sup>Samuel was displeased that they said “Give us a king to govern us.” Samuel prayed to the Lord, <sup>7</sup>and the Lord replied to Samuel, “Heed the demand of the people in everything they say to you. For it is not you that they have rejected; it is Me they have rejected as their king. <sup>8</sup>Like everything else they have done ever since I brought them out of Egypt to this day—forsaking Me and worshiping other gods—so they are doing to you. <sup>9</sup>Heed their demand; but warn them solemnly, and tell them about the practices of any king who will rule over them.”

<sup>10</sup>Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people, who were asking him for a king. <sup>11</sup>He said, "This will be the practice of the king who will rule over you: He will take your sons and appoint them as his charioteers and horsemen, and they will serve as outrunners for his chariots. <sup>12</sup>He will appoint them as his chiefs of thousands and of fifties; or they will have to plow his fields, reap his harvest, and make his weapons and the equipment for his chariots. <sup>13</sup>He will take your daughters as perfumers, cooks, and bakers. <sup>14</sup>He will seize your choice fields, vineyards, and olive groves, and give them to his courtiers. <sup>15</sup>He will take a tenth part of your grain and vintage and give it to his eunuchs and courtiers. <sup>16</sup>He will take your male and female slaves, your choice young men, and your asses, and put them to work for him. <sup>17</sup>He will take a tenth part of your flocks, and you shall become his slaves. <sup>18</sup>The day will come when you cry out because of the king whom you yourselves have chosen; and the Lord will not answer you on that day."

<sup>19</sup>But the people would not listen to Samuel's warning. "No," they said. "We must have a king over us, <sup>20</sup>that we may be like all the other nations: Let our king rule over us and go out at our head and fight our battles." <sup>21</sup>When Samuel heard all that the people said, he reported it to the Lord. <sup>22</sup>And the Lord said to Samuel, "Heed their demands and appoint a king for them."

### 3. Israeli National Anthem: The Hope (*Ha'Tikvah*)

As long as deep within the heart  
A Jewish soul stirs,  
And forward, to the ends of the East  
An eye looks out, towards Zion.

כל עוד בִּלְבָב פְּנִימָה  
נִפְּשׁ יְהוּדִי הוֹמִיָּה,  
וּלְפָנָי מִזְרָח, קְדִימָה,  
עֵין לְצִיּוֹן צוֹפִיָּה,

Our hope is not yet lost,  
The hope of two thousand years,  
To be a free people in our land  
The land of Zion and Jerusalem.  
To be a free people in our land  
The land of Zion and Jerusalem.

עוֹד לֹא אֶבְדָּה תִּקְוָתִנִּי,  
הַתִּקְוָה בֵּת שְׁנוֹת אֲלָפִים,  
לְהִיּוֹת עַם חֲפָשִׁי בְּאַרְצִנִּי,  
אֶרֶץ צִיּוֹן וִירוּשָׁלַיִם.

#### **4. David Ben Gurion, “National Autonomy and Neighborly Relations,” 1926**

Our attitude [toward our neighbors] will be tested by our deeds, not by our words. The question is: We who come to the Land of Israel in full consciousness and clear determination, and do not conceal our purpose; we who come to the Land of Israel in order to resolve the question of our historical existence on a territorial basis, what is our attitude toward the non-Jewish residents present in the land? The answer can only be this: We demand for ourselves that which we demand for others. That which we wish others to give unto us we are prepared to give [unto them]. There is one criterion for evaluating all attitudes, personal and political: whether what I wish others to do unto me (both positively and negatively), I am also prepared to do unto them. We wish that others not act unjustly toward us in exile by denying rights and obstructing justice, and we do not want or intend to act thus in our land to others. We do not want foreigners to rule over us and over our fate... If [equality] obligates the entire world in its attitude to us, then it obligates us [as well]. It makes no difference whether we are the minority and others the majority or we are the majority and others the minority.

#### **5. Zeev Jabotinsky on Arab Minority National and Civil Rights, 1923**

We consider it a duty of honor and justice to demand for the Arab minority of the future Jewish state no less than what we demand for the Jewish minorities of the countries of the Diaspora. The law of the Land of Israel must guarantee the quality of citizens, languages, religions and very large degree of “personal autonomy” for every group of citizens who wish for it.

#### **6. David Ben Gurion’s Farewell Address (1971), *Azure* no. 6, Winter 5759, [excerpt]**

...In the consciousness of the Jewish people—in its religious, ethical and national consciousness—embedded elements that are unique to the Hebrew nation became fused inextricably with human-cosmic elements which transcend all national frameworks, because they take in the world and everything in it. The supreme expression of this fusion is the vision of redemption. The deepest aspiration of the people’s prophets and teachers was a complete national redemption in the chosen land. This aspiration, however, was not limited to what concerned the Jewish people only. Rather, it heralded the advent of peace and justice and equality for all peoples: A perfect redemption of humanity and the eradication of malice and tyranny from the universe.

In envisioning redemption, the prophets of Israel wove an organic connection between the Jewish national redemption and the universal redemption of humanity. This is why the prophets demand that the people of Israel be an exceptional one. The prophet Isaiah, who denounced his people with the ferocity of one bound by the truth, who prophesied the extirpation of tyranny and evil in the world and the elevation of every man, spoke these words: “And I will visit evil on the universe and their iniquities on the wicked, and I will eliminate the conceit of the wicked and humble the pride of tyrants. I will cherish humans more than gold, and man more than the splendor of the finest gold.” (Isaiah 13:12) Isaiah believed in the grand destiny of his people, saying in the name of his God: “I, the Lord, have called you in justice, and I will hold your hand, and make you into a covenantal people, into a light unto the nations” (Isaiah 42:6).

These two motifs, the vision of redemption and the concept of an exceptional people, appear repeatedly in biblical literature and the Apocrypha, in the Mishna and in midrash, in the liturgy and in Hebrew poetry. And three hundred years ago, in his *Tractacus Theologico-Politicus*, Benedict Spinoza—the greatest philosopher of Israel, who seemingly distanced himself from the Jewish people after he was ostracized and excommunicated by his Amsterdam community, and who openly repudiated the religious tradition, laying the foundation for biblical criticism based on logic and reason—voiced his absolute confidence that the day would come when “the Jewish people would once again set up their state, and God would choose them anew.” In other words, upon renewing its independent sovereignty the people of Israel would again be a chosen people, an extraordinary people who showed the world the way. Moses Hess and Theodor Herzl, the nineteenth-century visionaries of the Jewish state, also believed that the reborn State of Israel would be an exemplary nation...

Only by being an exceptional people, in which every Jew will take pride as a Jew, will we preserve the love of our people and our fidelity to Israel. Our position in the world will be determined not only by our apparent material wealth, or our military valor, but by the moral luster of our mission, our culture and our society. Only in this manner will we acquire the friendship of other peoples. And although there are no few shadows in our lives at present—among them some very dark shadows—we have cause enough to believe that it is within our power to be an exceptional people. I would point to three forces operating in Israel that clearly indicate the ethical and intellectual talents contained within us: The agricultural settlements; the Israel Defense Forces; and the nation’s collection of scientists, scholars, writers and artists who, in relative quantity and absolute quality, are equal to those of any other nation in the world...

We must not underestimate the moral difficulties confronting us: The habits of exile, excessive divisiveness, the influence of hack journalism and vulgar fiction from both within the country and without, criminal activity among some immigrants who have not yet assimilated, and the segments of Israel's youth who have been emptied of all spiritual and social sensibility.

I am aware that our international position, security and well-being cannot be guaranteed in a day, that achieving economic independence will not be easy, that becoming an exceptional people will require unending effort. Our economic and political conditions are intertwined with our potential for moral and spiritual elevation. Body and spirit are not two distinct spheres. The health of the body and the light of the spirit are mutually interdependent. And we can expect a difficult and protracted struggle on all fronts: Economic, political, social, cultural and ethical. Yet the capacity of the Jewish people to survive in conditions under which no other people has, the abilities we have discovered within ourselves since the establishment of the state, the complex of interchanges among our hundreds of thousands of immigrants since the founding of the state—these suffice to strengthen our faith that we will act and we will succeed, although this will in no small measure depend upon the attitude, will, course of action, and participation of the diaspora.

This is what we require of the diaspora: (i) That they provide their youth with a Hebrew education—the study of the original biblical texts, the people's history and Hebrew literature; (ii) that they intensify their personal ties to Israel in every way—through visits, capital investments and sending young people to attend Israeli schools and educational institutions; and (iii) that they deepen their commitment to the vision of Jewish and human redemption that was expressed by the prophets of Israel.

These three endeavors can form a project that will unite Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and secular Jewry, and deepen the connection between the Jews of the diaspora and those in the State of Israel. This will make possible the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that the people in Israel will be a covenantal people and a light unto the nations—in other words, an exceptional people.

## 7. David Hartman, "The Third Jewish Commonwealth," *A Living Covenant*

I live with the guarded hope that out of this complex and vibrant new Jewish reality will emerge new spiritual directions for the way Judaism will be lived in the modern world. Israel expands the possible range of *halakhic* involvement in human affairs beyond the circumscribed borders of home and synagogue to the public domain.

Jews in Israel are given the opportunity to bring economic, social, and political issues into the center of their religious consciousness. The moral quality of the army, social and economic disparities and deprivations, the exercise of power moderated by moral sensitivity—all these are realms that may engage *halakhic* responsibility. From this perspective, the fact that Israel enables us to make the whole of life the carrier of the covenant is in itself sufficient to ascribe profound religious significance to the secular revolt that led to Israel's rebirth. I celebrate Israel's Independence Day with the recitation of the *Hallel* psalms, thus expressing gratitude to God for having been given the opportunity to renew the full scope of the covenantal spirit of Judaism. My religious celebration is not a judgment on God's activity, but only on the opportunity that Israel makes possible. The opportunity may be missed. But that does not in any way detract from the religious possibilities created by the event. The recitation of psalms of thanksgiving on Independence Day does not entail any divine guarantee regarding the successful realization of those opportunities...

## Letter 9: Victims and Survivors

### *Holocaust Memorial Day*

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY:

- ***The Weight of the Holocaust Can Overwhelm.*** Confronting the Holocaust in our conversation is unavoidable. The Holocaust continues to shape our conflict, in obvious and subtle ways.
- The rebirth of Israel didn't occur because of the Holocaust. The Holocaust occurred because there was no Israel.
- Reuven Rivlin said, "The Jewish people was not born in Auschwitz. It was not fear that kept us going through two thousand years of exile, it was our spiritual assets, our shared creativity... the Holocaust is not the lens through which we should examine our past and our future."
- What is ultimately most significant about the Holocaust is that we survived it, not as victims but as victors. We are a people long practiced in endurance.
- I am the son not of destruction but of rebirth.
- Our annual Holocaust commemoration isn't about clinging to victimhood but the opposite: reaffirming the Israeli commitment to never again be victims. That is at the heart of the Israeli ethos.
- The early Zionists looked at the flaws in the Jewish character, developed over centuries of homelessness and insecurity, and set out to transform their people (economically, socially, politically, spiritually).
- ***Abhorrence for victimhood*** is one of the key reasons for Israel's existence, and for its ongoing success. In the face of relentless and sometimes overwhelming threat, Israelis maintain the pretense of daily life. I live among heroes who don't consider themselves heroes at all. I came to Israel to be among those who refused to be defeated by history.
- The Israeli character can be edgy, aggressive; my wife, Sarah, who grew up in genteel Connecticut, calls Israel the ***post-traumatic stress capital of the world***. We cut each other off on the road and in lines. Our politics can be brutal. There is growing violence in our schools. Political corruption is on the rise. We live with accumulated layers of unresolved trauma.
- ***Dark Side to Holocaust Memory:*** Fear that we can never escape being the permanent Other.
- ***Two Essential Elements of Holocaust:*** 1) The criminalization of Jewish existence. If the crime was existence, then the only possible punishment was death; 2) Anti-Semitism, which isn't mere hatred of Jews but their transformation into symbol—for whatever a given civilization considers the most loathsome human qualities.

- ***Those Two Elements in Today's Conflict:*** 1) Denial of Israel's right to exist, turning the Jewish state into the world's criminal, and 2) trying to isolate Israel from the community of nations, a classic anti-Semitic pattern. Israel isn't just accused of committing crimes; it is a crime. When the UN routinely votes to criticize Israel more than all other countries combined, it reinforces the notion of the Jewish state as uniquely evil.
- ***Israel in Survival Mode:*** When Jewish fears are incited, Israelis don't respond with flexibility or contrition; we move into survival mode. The war against Israel's legitimacy reinforces our obtuseness.
- ***There is good reason for me to be in survival mode:*** Hezbollah in the north, Hamas in the south, Islamic Revolutionary Guards from Iran on the Golan Heights
- Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, sarcastically invited Jews around the world to move to Israel because it will be easier to kill them all once they are concentrated in one place. One lesson Jews learned from the Holocaust is this: When your enemy says he intends to destroy you, believe him.
- ***Split Screen: David and Goliath:*** On one side there's Israel versus the Palestinians, and I am Goliath and you are David; on the other side of the screen there's Israel versus the Arab and Muslim worlds, and I am David.
- Israelis and Palestinians need to free each other. In joint mission to Auschwitz, an Arab woman explained, "I've come because I fear the anger that is distorting me." Maybe that's why I came, too: not to save the Middle East but myself. The result of our risk taking was an exchange of sensibilities. Jews acknowledged that Auschwitz isn't just a Jewish but a universal wound, while our Arab partners discovered in themselves Jewish rage.
- I regard ***Holocaust denial*** as a backhanded affirmation of the Holocaust's uniqueness, its literal unbelievability. In the West, Holocaust denial is the currency of crack-pots; in the Muslim world, from Egypt to Iran, its message is broadcast on state television. The attitude toward the Holocaust in parts of the Muslim world could be summed up, only half-ironically, this way: It never happened, we're glad it did, and we're going to do it again.
- Our Palestinian partners in the pilgrimage to Auschwitz were telling us: We are not at war with Jewish existence. We will not side, even indirectly, with those who tried to erase you from history. We are ready to hear your story, to live together as neighbors. But we need you to see us, too; we need you to hear our story and our pain. Without resorting to foolish and unnecessary historical comparisons. Each side in its wound.
- In the end, did it matter that Arabs and Jews went to Auschwitz? Muslims and Jews—in the midst of an intifada—actually did this together. That gesture of radical goodwill, that defiance of political common sense, is now part of the story of Arabs and Jews in this land. And by writing to you now, I am passing on that memory of the possible.



### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Why is it so difficult to speak with Palestinians about the Holocaust?
2. What is the danger in remembering the Holocaust that President Reuven Rivlin was warning against?
3. What is most significant about the Holocaust for Yossi? What is most significant about the Holocaust for you?
4. Do you agree with Yossi's wife Sarah, that Israel is the "post-traumatic stress capital" of the world? What evidence do you see to support this claim?
5. Have you been to Auschwitz? Can you imagine visiting Auschwitz with Palestinians? What would that achieve? Are there places you could visit with Palestinians to better understand their wounds?

### **SOURCES:**

#### **1. David Hartman, "From Auschwitz to Sinai" (1982)**

There is a healthy spirit of serious self-evaluation and criticism in the land today. The triumphant ecstasy of the Six Day War no longer dominates the consciousness of many Israelis.

In retrospect, the jubilant sense of victory created by the Six Day War was a mixed blessing. Besides the positive effect of awakening the Jewish world to the centrality and importance of Israel, it also gave rise to national self-adulation and hubris.

Widespread in Israeli society today are a sober appreciation of political and moral complexities and a serious sense of responsibility for the unintended consequences of our actions. These elements made themselves felt during the recent war and are positive and hopeful signs of a mature orientation to life.

The fact that our country tolerates serious and often heated disagreement is a sign of its internal health and strength. There is no doubt that Israeli society contains the vital moral forces needed for regeneration and renewal.

In the Judaic tradition, belief in renewal resulted from respect for mature and intelligent self-criticism. *Heshbon ha-nefesh* (self-examination) is a necessary condition for *teshuva* (repentance and renewal). Honesty to oneself and to others is a precondition for authentic human growth and creativity. Self-praise and adulation are deceptive and lead to moral sloppiness and to reveling in the status quo. Breakthroughs in the human spirit are facilitated by the courage to admit to moral failures.

The belief in the power of renewal is a central motif in Judaism. Such concepts as psychological determinism, historical inevitability and fatalism are alien to our tradition's understanding of human action. Belief in radical freedom, in an open future, in surprise and novelty is crucial element of Judaism's vitality and perseverance.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between the yearning for a new future that reflects wishful romantic dreams and the judicious hope that has been tested by suffering, failure and tragedy.

Although we are a young nation, the intensity of our political reality and our long historical memories provide us with the experience and insights necessary for finding new and mature directions for our society.

One of the fundamental issues facing the new spirit of maturity in Israel is: Should Auschwitz or Sinai be the orienting category shaping our understanding of the rebirth of the State of Israel? There are important differences resulting from the relative emphasis we place on these two models.

In the 20th century we have again become a traumatized nation. The ugly demonic forces of anti-Semitism have horrified our sensibilities. We can never forget the destruction of millions of Jews in World War II. Many, therefore, justify and interpret the significance of our rebirth in terms of Jewish suffering and persecution.

One often hears in speeches in the Knesset and at the UJA fund-raising dinners phrases such as: "Never again will we be vulnerable. Never again will we expose our lives to the ugly political forces in the world. Our powerful army has eliminated the need to beg for pity and compassion from the nations of the world".

While I respect and share in the anguish expressed in these sentiments, I believe it is destructive to make the Holocaust the dominant organizing category of modern Jewish history and of our national renewal and rebirth. It is both politically and morally dangerous for our

nation to perceive itself essentially as the suffering remnant of the Holocaust. It is childish and often vulgar to attempt to demonstrate how the Jewish people's suffering is unique in history.

Our bodies have painfully tasted man's indifference and inhumanity to his fellow man. We have witnessed in our own flesh the moral evil present in human society. But this should not tempt us to become morally arrogant. Our suffering should not lead us to self-righteous postures, but to an increased sensitivity about all human suffering.

Nonetheless, there are individuals obsessed with the trauma of the Holocaust who proclaim that no one can judge the Jewish people. "No nation has the right to call us to moral judgment. We need not take the moral criticism of the world seriously because the uniqueness of our suffering places us above the moral judgment of an immoral world".

Those who make such statements judge others, but refuse to be judged. In so doing, a basic Judaic principle is violated: no one may judge if he refuses to be judged himself.

Although it is right to appreciate the dignity that comes with power and statehood, with freedom from the inconsistent and fragile goodwill of the nations of the world, it is a serious mistake to allow the trauma of Jewish suffering to be the exclusive frame of reference for understanding our national renaissance.

Israel is not only a response to modern anti-Semitism, but is above all a modern expression of the eternal Sinai covenant that has shaped Jewish consciousness throughout the millennia. It was not Hitler who brought us back to Zion, but rather belief in the eternal validity of the Sinai covenant. One need not visit Yad Vashem in order to understand our love for Jerusalem. It is dangerous to our growth as a healthy people if the memory of Auschwitz becomes a substitute for Sinai.

The model of Sinai awakens the Jewish people to the awesome responsibility of becoming a holy people. At Sinai, we discover the absolute demand of God; we discover who we are by what we do. Sinai calls us to action, to moral awakening, to living constantly with challenges of building a moral and just society which mirrors the kingdom of God in history. Sinai creates humility and openness to the demands of self-transcendence. In this respect, it is the antithesis of the moral narcissism that can result from suffering and from viewing oneself as a victim. The centrality of *mitzvah* in Judaism shatters egocentricity and demands of the Jew that he judge himself by the way he acts and not by mystical myths regarding the purity or uniqueness of the Jewish soul. *Na'aseh ve-nishma* (we will do and we will understand) was the response of our people at Sinai. We understand ourselves through our doing.

Sinai does not tell us about the moral purity of the Jewish nation, but about the significance of aspiring to live by the commandments. Sinai permanently exposes the Jewish people to prophetic aspirations and judgments. Jews were never frightened for the failure to implement covenantal responsibilities.

Immediately after the account of the revelation at Sinai, we are reminded of Israel's unfaithfulness to the covenant in the vivid description of the Golden Calf incident. Sinai teaches us that there is no meaning to election without judgment - there are no privileges without demands.

Sinai requires of the Jew that he believe in the possibility of integrating the moral seriousness of the prophet with the realism and political judgment of the statesman. Politics and morality were united when Israel was born as a nation at Sinai. Sinai prohibits the Jewish people from ever abandoning the effort of creating a shared moral language with the nations of the world.

The rebirth of Israel can be viewed as a return to the fullness of the Sinai covenant - to Judaism as a way of life. The moral and spiritual aspirations of the Jewish tradition were not meant to be realized in Sabbath sermons or by messianic dreamers who wait passively on the margins of society for redemption to break miraculously into history. Torah study is not a substitute for actual life, nor are prayer and the synagogue escapes from the ambiguities and complexities of political life.

The Jewish world will have to learn that the synagogue is no longer the exclusive defining framework for Jewish communal life. Moral seriousness and political maturity and wisdom must come to our nation if we are to be judged by the way we struggle to integrate the Sinai covenant with the complexities of political realities.

The establishment of the modern State of Israel has removed us from the insulated world of the ghetto and has exposed Judaism and the Jewish people to the judgment of the world. We can no longer hide our weaknesses and petty failings. We live in total exposure.

We must therefore define who we are by what we do and not by any obsession with the long and noble history of Jewish suffering. In coming back to our land and rebuilding our nation, we have chosen to give greater moral weight to our actions in the present than to noble dreams of the future or to the memories of our heroic past.

In choosing to act in the 20th century rather than wait for perfect messianic conditions, we permanently run the risk of making serious mistakes in our moral and political judgments. We must, therefore, respond maturely to anyone who is critical of our shortcomings. The time has come for us to free ourselves from the exaggerated rhetoric of moral superiority (“no one can teach us morality”) and to face the awesome task implicit in the Sinai covenant.

The prophets teach us that the state has only instrumental value for the purpose of embodying the covenantal demands of Judaism. When nationalism becomes an absolute value for Jews and political and military judgments are not related to the larger purpose of our national renaissance, we can no longer claim to represent the Judaic tradition. Rather, we have ironically become assimilated while speaking Hebrew in our own country.

In being open and appreciative of criticism, regardless of its source, we demonstrate that we seek to walk humbly and responsibly before the Lord of all creation, who demands that Israel bear witness to the demands of justice within an imperfect world.

It is important to remember that the Jewish people did not go from the suffering conditions of Egypt directly into the land. We first went to Sinai, made a covenant with God, and pledged absolute allegiance to the commandments. We spent years in the desert casting off the mantle of the suffering slave.

After we overcome the humiliating memory of slavery and persecution and understood that we were called to bear witness to God’s kingdom in history, only then did we enter the land. The memory of suffering in Egypt was absorbed by the conventional normative demands of Sinai. We were taught not to focus on suffering outside of its normative and moral implications.

Because of Sinai, Jewish suffering did not create self-pity but moral sensitivity: “And you shall love the stranger because you were strangers in the land of Egypt”.

Auschwitz, like all Jewish suffering of the past, must be absorbed and understood within the normative framework of Sinai. We will mourn forever because of the memory of Auschwitz. We will build a healthy new society because of the memory of Sinai.

## 2. Hayim Nahman Bialik, "In the City of Slaughter" (1903)

To the graveyard, beggars!  
Dig up the bones of martyred father and brother,  
fill your sacks, sling them on backs  
And hit the road  
to do business at all the fairs;  
advertise yourselves at the crossroads so everyone sees,  
in the sunshine on filthy rags spread the bones  
and sing your hoarse beggar song,  
beg the decency of the world!  
Beg the pity of *goyim*!  
Eternal beggars!

## Letter 10: A Booth at the Edge of the Desert

### *Sukkot*

- ***Sukkot***: The side of our sukkah facing your hill is entirely open. Throughout the week I live with a heightened sense of intimacy between our hills.
- ***Fragility and Protection***: The sukkah is a reminder of fragility, transience. Yet leaving the comfort of one's home for the holiday also implies a trust in Divine protection.
- ***Sukkah as Symbol for Redeemed World***: where human beings will have learned to live with each other in peace.
- From my porch, I clearly see three distinct political entities: 1) sovereign territory of the state of Israel; 2) Palestinian Authority in the distance; 3) and in the farthest distance, the hills of Jordan.
- ***Four Species***: these are the fruits of the land through which Jews for millennia have sought to transmit blessing. The ritual feels even older than the Bible, a remnant perhaps of a shamanistic tradition. I cherish the way it transforms me into someone archaic, a contemporary of the past.
- ***World is Burning, Yet Possibility of Human Transcendence***: With our scientific and technological achievements, we can conceive of an end to hunger and disease. The world is in instant communication. When natural disaster hits one country, others immediately respond.
- ***Choose Blessing, Choose Life***: When Israelites entered the land, the twelve tribes divided and stood on two mountains – one of blessing and one of curses. All of humanity is now standing on those two mountains.
- ***What Can Jews Offer the World?*** What does it mean for humanity that the Jews have maintained a core identity and consistent memory over four thousand years? What wisdom does my people, history's ultimate survivors, need to offer now?
- ***Sukkah vs. Bomb Shelter***: The very act of building and inhabiting the sukkah is an expression of defiance against despair. This open and vulnerable structure is the antithesis of the fortified concrete room in my basement, which every Israeli family is required by law to build, against possible missile attacks.
- ***The sukkah is our spiritual air raid shelter***, promise of a world without fear.
- Can we draw on our souls to help us overcome our wounds and our fears? What is our responsibility as religious people in a land sanctified by the love and devotion and expectations of myriads of souls through the centuries? What is our responsibility as "custodians" of one of humanity's most intractable conflicts, in the most dangerous moment in history?

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. How do you celebrate Sukkot? How do you decorate your Sukkah, if you have one? Why do you choose to decorate your Sukkah in that way?
2. How do Yossi's Sukkah decorations reflect his spiritual sensibilities?
3. For Yossi, the waiving of the Four Species, like the cessation of technology use on Shabbat, is a way to experience an ancient life. Do you have the same experience with those rituals? Do you think it is important to experience premodern life?
4. Do you resonate with Yossi's experience of Jewish ritual as a way to transform you "into someone archaic, a contemporary of the past"? What does it mean to be a "contemporary of the past"?
5. Do you think that Israel needs more "sukkot" (vulnerability and openness to the Other) or more bomb shelters (walls of protection to separate us)?
6. What is your responsibility, as a Jew in the Diaspora, to help promote peace and resolve this conflict? What do you think you can do improve the situation?
7. In the balance between despair and hope, what do you feel about the future of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict? Did this book give you more hope? Why or why not?
8. Which letter was your favorite letter in this book? Why?
9. If you were going to write a letter to a Palestinian, what would you say?

*[Optional Creative Writing Exercise: hand out paper and ask your Book Club participants to write their own "letter to a Palestinian."]*

10. If you were going to write a letter to a Jew who holds very different views about Israel than you do (politically and/or religiously), what would you say?

*[Optional Creative Writing Exercise: hand out paper and ask your Book Club participants to write their own "letter to my Jewish neighbor."]*



11. If you were going to write a letter to an Israeli to explain your views about Judaism, Israel, and Zionism, what would you say?

*[Optional Creative Writing Exercise: hand out paper and ask your Book Club participants to write their own "letter to my Israeli cousin."]*

12. If you were going to write a response letter to Yossi, as a reader of his book, what would you say?

*[Optional Creative Writing Exercise: hand out paper and ask your Book Club participants to write a response letter to Yossi. You can share those letters with Yossi by sending to Rabbi Lauren Berkun at [lauren@shalomhartman.org](mailto:lauren@shalomhartman.org). Rabbi Berkun will make sure that Yossi receives them.]*

## **SOURCES:**

### **1. Leviticus 23:39-43**

<sup>39</sup>Mark, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the yield of your land, you shall observe the festival of the Lord [to last] seven days: a complete rest on the first day, and a complete rest on the eighth day. <sup>40</sup>On the first day you shall take the product of *hadar* trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. <sup>41</sup>You shall observe it as a festival of the Lord for seven days in the year; you shall observe it in the seventh month as a law for all time, throughout the ages. <sup>42</sup>You shall live in booths seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in booths, <sup>43</sup>in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I the Lord your God.

אֶדְ בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאַסְפְּכֶם אֶת־תְּבוּאֹת הָאָרֶץ תַּחֲגֹגוּ אֶת־חַג־יְהוָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בְּיוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן שִׁבְתֹּן וּבְיוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי שִׁבְתֹּן : וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בְּיוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר כִּפְתַּת תְּמָרִים וְעֵגֶלף עֵץ־עֵבֶת וְעַרְבֵי־נָחַל וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים : וַחֲגַתֶּם אֹתוֹ חַג לַיהוָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי תַחֲגֹגוּ אֹתוֹ : בַּסֻּכֹּת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל־הָאֶזְרַח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשְׁבוּ בַסֻּכֹּת : לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ דֹרֹתֵיכֶם כִּי בַסֻּכֹּת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם :

## 2. Deuteronomy 16:13-15

<sup>13</sup>After the ingathering from your threshing floor and your vat, you shall hold the Feast of Booths for seven days. <sup>14</sup>You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities. <sup>15</sup>You shall hold a festival for the Lord your God seven days, in the place that the Lord will choose; for the Lord your God will bless all your crops and all your undertakings, and you shall have nothing but joy.

וְשִׂמְחִתָּ בְּחֻגֵּךָ אֶתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְעַמְּךָ וְהַלְוִי וְהַגֵּר וְהַיְתוֹם וְהָאֵלֶּמְנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ :  
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֵּחַג לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה כִּי יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־  
תְּבוּאָתְךָ וּבְכָל מַעֲשֶׂה יָדֶיךָ וְהָיִיתָ אִךְ שָׂמֵחַ :

## 3. Mishnah Sukkah 1:1

A *sukkah* more than twenty cubits high is invalid. R. Yehudah declares it valid. A *sukkah* less than 10 handbreadths high and which does not have three walls and which has more sun than shade is invalid. An old *sukkah* Bet Shammai declare invalid; and Bet Hillel, valid. What is an old *sukkah*? One made thirty days prior to the Festival. But if it was made for the sake of the Festival, even from the beginning of the year it is valid.

סִכָּה שֶׁהִיא גְבוּהָה לְמַעַל מֵעֶשְׂרִים אַמָּה, פְּסוּלָה. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה מְכַשִּׁיר. וְשִׂיאִינָה גְבוּהָה  
עֲשָׂרָה טַפְחִים, וְשִׂאִין לָהּ שְׁלֹשׁ דָּפְנוֹת, וְשִׁחְמָתָהּ מְרַבָּה מִצִּלָּתָהּ, פְּסוּלָה. סִכָּה יִשְׁנָה, בֵּית  
שְׁמַאי פּוֹסְלִין, וּבֵית הַלֵּל מְכַשִּׁירִין. וְאִיזוֹ הִיא סִכָּה יִשְׁנָה, כָּל שֶׁעֲשָׂאָה קֹדֶם לַחֹג שְׁלֹשִׁים  
יּוֹם. אֲבָל אִם עֲשָׂאָה לְשֵׁם חֹג, אֶפְלוּ מִתְחִלַּת הַשָּׁנָה, כְּשֶׁרָה :

## 4. Talmud Sukkah 28b

Our rabbis taught: In the verse “*You shall sit in booths*” (Lev. 23:42), “sit” means “reside.” Hence, they went on to say: During the seven days of Sukkot, a man is to make his sukkah the permanent abode, and his home the temporary one. How? If he has beautiful vessels, he should bring them into the sukkah. If he has beautiful couches, he should bring them into the sukkah. He should eat and drink, pass his leisure time, and study in the sukkah.

תנו רבנן : (ויקרא כג) תשבו כעין תדורו. מכאן אמרו : כל שבעת הימים עושה אדם סוכתו קבע  
וביתו עראי. כיצד? היו לו כלים נאים - מעלן לסוכה, מצעות נאות - מעלן לסוכה, אוכל ושותה  
ומטייל בסוכה, ומשכן בסוכה.

## 5. Isaac Aboab, Menorat Ha-Ma'or III 4:6

The commandment to dwell in the Sukkah is intended to teach us that a man must not put his trust in the size or strength or salutary conveniences of his house, even though it be filled with the best of everything; nor should he rely upon the help of any human being, however powerful. But let him put his trust in God whose word called the universe into being, for God alone is mighty and faithful, and God's promises alone are sure.

## 6. Midrash, Pesikta Rabbati 51:2

Just as the Etrog has taste and fragrance, so there are Jews who are both learned and doers of good deeds; as the Lulav, whose fruit has taste but no smell, so there are Jews who are learned but without good deeds; as the myrtle has smell but not taste, so there are Jews of good deeds, but who possess no knowledge; as the willow is neither edible nor of fine fragrance, so there are Jews who are neither learned in Torah nor possessed of good deeds. The Holy One says: "In order to make it impossible for Israel to be destroyed, let all of them be bound together as plants are bound into a cluster, so that the righteous among them will atone for the others."

## 7. Leviticus Rabbah 30:14

כָּל עֲצָמָי | תִּאֲמַרְנָה ה' מִי כָמוֹךָ

*All my bones shall proclaim: 'Lord, who is like You?' (Psalms 35:10).* This verse was said in allusion to the Lulav. The back of the lulav resembles the spine of man; the myrtle resembles the eye; the willow resembles the mouth; and the etrog resembles the heart. Thus David said, "There are no limbs greater than these for they equal the entire body in importance; hence: *All my bones will proclaim...*"

## 8. Hashkiveinu Prayer (Blessing after the Evening Recitation of the Shema)

Help us, Lord our God, to lie down in peace; and awaken us to life again, our Sovereign. Spread over us Your sukkah of peace, guide us with Your good counsel. Save us because of Your mercy. Shield us from enemies and pestilence, from starvation, sword and sorrow. Remove the evil forces that surround us, shelter us in the shadow of Your wings. You, O God, guard us and deliver us. You are a gracious and merciful King. Guard our coming and our going, grant us life and peace, now and always. Praised are You, Lord, eternal guardian of Your people Israel.

הַשְׁכִּיבֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְשָׁלוֹם, וְהַעֲמִידֵנוּ מִלְּכֵנוּ לְחַיִּים וּפְרוֹשׁ עָלֵינוּ סִכַּת שְׁלוֹמְךָ וְתַקַּנְנוּ בְּעֶצֶה טוֹבָה מְלַפְּנֶיךָ, וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ, וְהַגְו בְּעֵדֶנוּ, וְהַסֵּר מֵעָלֵינוּ אוֹיֵב, דָּבָר, וְחָרָב, וְרָעָב וְיָגוֹן, וְהַסֵּר שָׁטָן מִלְּפָנֵינוּ וּמֵאַחֲרֵנוּ, וּבְצֹל כְּנָפֶיךָ תִּסְתִּירֵנוּ. כִּי אֵל שׁוֹמְרֵנוּ וּמַצִּילֵנוּ אַתָּה, כִּי אֵל מְלָךְ חַנוּן וְרַחוּם אַתָּה, וְשׁוֹמֵר צִיאָנוּ וּבּוֹאֵנוּ, לְחַיִּים וּלְשָׁלוֹם, מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, שׁוֹמֵר עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַד

## 9. Deuteronomy 11:26-32

<sup>26</sup>See, this day I set before you blessing and curse: <sup>27</sup>blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I enjoin upon you this day; <sup>28</sup>and curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn away from the path that I enjoin upon you this day and follow other gods, whom you have not experienced. <sup>29</sup>When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and possess, you shall pronounce the blessing at Mount Gerizim and the curse at Mount Ebal.—<sup>30</sup>Both are on the other side of the Jordan, beyond the west road that is in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the Arabah—near Gilgal, by the terebinths of Moreh. <sup>31</sup>For you are about to cross the Jordan to enter and possess the land that the Lord your God is assigning to you. When you have occupied it and are settled in it, <sup>32</sup>take care to observe all the laws and rules that I have set before you this day.

## 10. Deuteronomy 27:11-28:14

<sup>11</sup>Thereupon Moses charged the people, saying: <sup>12</sup>After you have crossed the Jordan, the following shall stand on Mount Gerizim when the blessing for the people is spoken: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. <sup>13</sup>And for the curse, the following shall stand on Mount Ebal: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphthali. <sup>14</sup>The Levites shall then proclaim in a loud voice to all the people of Israel:

<sup>15</sup>Cursed be anyone who makes a sculptured or molten image, abhorred by the Lord, a craftsman's handiwork, and sets it up in secret.—And all the people shall respond, Amen.

<sup>16</sup>Cursed be he who insults his father or mother.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

<sup>17</sup>Cursed be he who moves his fellow countryman's landmark.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

<sup>18</sup>Cursed be he who misdirects a blind person on his way.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

<sup>19</sup>Cursed be he who subverts the rights of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

<sup>20</sup>Cursed be he who lies with his father's wife, for he has removed his father's garment.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

<sup>21</sup>Cursed be he who lies with any beast.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

<sup>22</sup>Cursed be he who lies with his sister, whether daughter of his father or of his mother.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

<sup>23</sup>Cursed be he who lies with his mother-in-law.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

<sup>24</sup>Cursed be he who strikes down his fellow countryman in secret.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

<sup>25</sup>Cursed be he who accepts a bribe in the case of the murder of an innocent person.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

<sup>26</sup>Cursed be he who will not uphold the terms of this Teaching and observe them.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

Now, if you obey the Lord your God, to observe faithfully all His commandments which I enjoin upon you this day, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. <sup>2</sup>All these blessings shall come upon you and take effect, if you will but heed the word of the Lord your God:

<sup>3</sup>Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the country.

<sup>4</sup>Blessed shall be the issue of your womb, the produce of your soil, and the offspring of your cattle, the calving of your herd and the lambing of your flock.

<sup>5</sup>Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

<sup>6</sup>Blessed shall you be in your comings and blessed shall you be in your goings.

<sup>7</sup>The Lord will put to rout before you the enemies who attack you; they will march out against you by a single road, but flee from you by many roads. <sup>8</sup>The Lord will ordain blessings for you upon your barns and upon all your undertakings: He will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. <sup>9</sup>The Lord will establish you as His holy people, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways. <sup>10</sup>And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the Lord's name is proclaimed over you, and they shall stand in fear of you. <sup>11</sup>The Lord will give you abounding prosperity in the issue of your womb, the offspring of your cattle, and the produce of your soil in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to

assign to you. <sup>12</sup>The Lord will open for you His bounteous store, the heavens, to provide rain for your land in season and to bless all your undertakings. You will be creditor to many nations, but debtor to none.

<sup>13</sup>The Lord will make you the head, not the tail; you will always be at the top and never at the bottom—if only you obey and faithfully observe the commandments of the Lord your God that I enjoin upon you this day, <sup>14</sup>and do not deviate to the right or to the left from any of the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day and turn to the worship of other gods.

### **11. Rabbi Irving Greenberg, “Sukkot: The Zionist Holiday,” *The Jewish Way* (1988), pp. 109-111**

Because of its strong agricultural ties, Sukkot kept alive a strong identification with the land of Israel for Jews who were in exile. The Geshem (rain) prayer was chanted at the same time as it had been in the land of Israel. This was the Jews’ way of maintaining an unbroken tie, a statement that as Jews they were living on Jerusalem Standard Time, not Greenwich Meridian or Central Mountain time.

Sukkot kept the folk connected to the land and to the dream of living in Israel again. When the first Zionist halutzim came to Israel, they emphasized the renewal of Jewish life through the restoration of the land. Early on, especially under the leadership of the late, great Chief Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, etrogim became a prize cash crop that helped support the new settlement. A controversy erupted in the last century when the charge was made that Israeli etrogim were products of forbidden grafting and breeding with other (non-citron) fruits. As a result of that controversy, the Lubavitch-Chasidic group recommends non-Israel etrogim to its followers. Religious Zionists feel that Lubavitch has erred in this case. Rabbi Kook fought for the religious supremacy of ritually proper Israeli etrogim precisely because he saw how this mitzvah could support the reborn commonwealth of the Jewish people.

But there is a deeper Zionist dimension to the holiday. In this generation, the rebirth of the state represents the resumption of the Exodus journey by the Jewish people. Creating the state was a bold affirmation of Exodus values – of the power of life and renewal – in the face of the greatest triumph of death in Jewish and world history. In many ways, the ability to manage the challenges of sovereignty will be the test of Jewish maturity and vitality in the next stage of the journey.

Increasing the productivity of the economy is essential to Israel's ability to hold its own population. Enjoying greater material well-being without loss of meaning and responsibility is critical, both to Israel's ability to attract world Jewish *aliya* and its capacity to serve as a model to the world. The ability to wrestle with day-to-day frustrations while not surrendering covenantal values will be crucial to the outcome.

In all candor, many Jews are not prepared for the constant demands and risks of power. Many who applauded and danced when Israel's independence was proclaimed and when it won a glorious victory in six days threw their hands up in despair because inflation ran rampant for a few years. There are internal divisions and external threats to Israel, so some people question the validity of the entire Zionist enterprise. Some Israelis grow intoxicated with the land, which leads to the absolutization of possessing territory. Some are willing to sacrifice peace prospects; other are ready to commit crimes.

All too many cannot deal with the results of Israel's freedom, namely, the anxieties of choice. Was a policy error made in Lebanon? (Actually, that is exactly what sovereignty is all about – policy choices.) In panic, some projected total collapse of support for Israel. If the government uses force to control the West Bank, some claim immediately that Fascism and apartheid have come to Israel, as if policy cannot be changed, as if any opening for peace would not change all the options.

After Israel's narrow escape from catastrophe in the Yom Kippur War, a leading rabbinic scholar would no longer recite the phrase, "the beginning of the growth of our redemption," in the prayer for the State of Israel. The war made him see the limits of Israel's power; he now saw the phrase as exaggerated and idolatrous. The Temple Mount is not the site of a rebuilt Holy Temple, so some traditional Jews rationalize that Jews cannot yet celebrate redemption. But the joy of redemption need not be postponed until the final consummation. True joy lies in the daily acts of planting the land, meeting the payroll, celebrating the Jewish calendar, yes, even deploying the Israeli army.

Those who give disillusioned reactions miss the whole point of Sukkot. In the desert, the people of Israel met their God at Sinai, ate the bread of heaven, and followed the pillar of fire. In that same desert, the Amalekites attacked, the water springs were bitter, the Israelites lusted after meat, the flocks were thirsty. Sukkot celebrates freedom's way – the risks, the failures, the boredom, the persistence, the responsibility. Sukkot is a celebration of the *s'chach* that falls into the soup, the rain that washes out a dinner, the frailty and persistence of human accomplishment.

Like Sukkot, Israel is not a one-time event of liberation. Like Sukkot, Israel with all its failings and risks, is the way contemporary Jews go toward liberation. In the twentieth century, re-enactment moves from ritual to reality, and the covenantal way is renewed.

In the reestablishment of the State of Israel, the Jewish people are recreating the balance of vision and process, of rootedness and mobility, of possessions and sharing, of human mastery and restraint. The ability of Sukkot values to nurture the population will make or break the Jewishness of the State of Israel, just as Sukkot's capacity to lend insight for dealing with the journey's endless complications will quite possibly decide the state's levels of achievement.