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### The Oslo Delusion – Or the Collapse of Axioms<sup>i</sup>

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#### Groundless Assumptions

Since the onset of the Oslo peace process between Israel and the Palestinians (1993), an entire structure was erected which had no foundation to lay on; an entire set of axioms was woven which assumed that once addressed, negotiated and agreed upon, the fundamental problems pitting the parties against each other would become soluble. For example, it was, for a time, assumed that Israelis and Arabs depended on outside mediation to negotiate, and the various Camp David conferences were cited as “proof”, while in effect the Sadat Peace Initiative (1977) and the Oslo Accords (1993) were the result of secret and direct bilateral negotiations between the parties. Another assumption that was repeated *ad nauseam* in all international forums posited that the Israeli settlements were an obstacle to peace, while they proved not to be so in the Israel-Egypt Peace Accords (1979) and even in the ongoing Israel-Palestinian negotiations. In any case, when the discussions faced crisis or were aborted, it was due to other issues dividing the parties, such as Jerusalem and the right of return of the Palestinians, not specifically the settlements. If anything, the case can be made for the argument that without the settlements which lend urgency to the issue of territory, maybe it would have been that much more difficult to coax the Palestinians to go to the negotiating table in the first place.

Foremost among these assumptions was the untested fixation which posited that the Palestinian issue was “the core of the Arab-Israeli dispute”, as if it were impossible to resolve other problems without first addressing it or, conversely, as if resolving it would usher in solutions for all the rest. The fact is that the Egyptian-Israeli and Jordanian-Israeli Peace Accords (1979 and 1994, respectively) were signed, for what they are worth, regardless of the continued festering of the Palestinian issue, and that the threats of Iraq, Syria or Iran do not appear to diminish when the prospects brighten for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. If anything, the Palestinian issue, far from constituting the incentive behind the ongoing Arab and Islamic enmity towards Israel, has been the pretext and rationalization for their continuing hostility. Instead of urging the Palestinians to settle with Israel, they put shackles on their hands through coaxing, threats and promises of ultimate victory if they should wait for outside deliverance. In fact, two decades into the peace accords between Israel and Egypt, the cold peace persists, visits of Egyptians to Israel are curtailed by Cairo, anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli campaigns

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prevail in the government controlled media, and Israel, the Jews and Zionism, independently of the fortunes of the Israeli-Palestinian track, are treated with scorn and abuse, not much unlike the pre-peace period.

Until the 1967 War, which catapulted Israel into the stage as a power to be reckoned with, the very existence of the embattled Jewish state, within its dangerously impossible boundaries, attracted much of the western world's sympathies. For in the Arab-Israeli equation, the Arabs were numerous, overwhelming, wealthy and powerful, while the fledgling Jewish nation seemed small, resourceless, teetering on the edge, threatened and besieged. It appeared to owe its survival to its pioneering and innovative spirit, and to world Jewry and its western benefactors. But following Israel's stunning victory in that war, roles were inverted: Israel now appeared as the conqueror, the expansionist, the victor and the successful, while the hapless Arabs gladly took on the appearance of the defeated, the victims, the conquered, and the humiliated, who needed the world sympathy to deliver them from the claws of Zionism. It was then also expedient on their part, with the active support of intellectuals in the West, including Israel itself, not to speak of the diplomatic and military support of the Communist Bloc, to narrow the equation of the conflict to the Israel-Palestine arena, where Israel appeared more threatening, oppressing and evil as ever, while the occupied and underdog Palestinians warranted the support of the world, materially and morally.

Against that backdrop, the Palestinian national struggle attained its apogee, the PLO and Yasser Arafat became household names both in the chanceries of the world and in the living rooms of practically everyone. It was in those years that the myth was cultivated that the Palestinians were the "core of the conflict" and the rest of the Arab-Israeli dispute was made subservient and hostage to them. So much so, that through a long process of guilt cultivation among the Left in general, and self-flagellation of the Israeli Left in particular, which prompted them to revise the basic ethos of Zionism and question the very validity of the Zionist enterprise, they lent credence to the Palestinian claim that Israel had been born in sin and that unless that wrong was redressed, the Arab-Israeli dispute would remain insoluble. The moral burden was then shifted from the negativist and politicidal broadsides of the Arabs against the existence of Israel to the latter's obstinacy to deny the Palestinians what it had itself struggled to achieve: a place under the sun, recognized by the world community.

The steady erosion in Israel's stance in the world, when faced with this systematic onslaught on its decency and *raison d'être*, ultimately produced Israeli governments who were ready to go to Madrid, Washington, Oslo, Cairo and Sharm e-Sheikh to engineer a peace accord with the Palestinians, precisely after the latter had evinced their commonality of purpose with Saddam Hussein whom they enthusiastically raised on the pedestal during the Gulf War and its aftermath. The reversal in Israel, and in consequence in the USA, was so complete that the order of the day became a quick, complete and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian issue. By shouldering that responsibility alone and exonerating the Palestinians themselves, and other Arab countries from the search for a solution, Israel was soon left in solitude like a thorn in the desert, to produce the panacea. And the deeper Israel delved into this impasse, the higher the expectations were from her to deliver. In other words, most of the concessions were Israel's while the Palestinians neatly aligned themselves on the receiving end, as if they had no responsibility to shoulder and no self-reckoning to undergo. Any snag, any friction, any misunderstanding, any prolongation of the debate, were then systematically laid at Israel's door, due to her "procrastination" and lack of "good faith".

Chief among those concerns which caused the negotiations to stall once and again, were Jerusalem and the Palestinian unexpected insistence on the right of return for their refugees. Contrary to Israel's foregone conclusion since 1967 that Jerusalem would remain "forever united under Israeli sovereignty", the Palestinians meant business when they stood by their resolution that their Palestinian state must be crowned by Jerusalem as its capital. Thus, another of Israel's long held assumptions was found to have no leg to stand on. It became clear that Israel's self-delusion that it could attain peace

with the Arabs and at the same time maintain the whole of Jerusalem under its rule has evaporated. Similarly, all the “understandings” under which the Palestinians were supposed to have internalized and digested the unfeasibility of the repatriation of their four million refugees to Israel proper, proved to be deep and irreconcilable misunderstandings. With these two fundamental assumptions vanishing, the gaps between the parties grew truly unbridgeable.

Probably the most disappointing among the collapsed assumptions was the realization that the substantive change that Oslo was to introduce in the relations between Israel and the Palestinians, namely that differences were to be settled peacefully by way of negotiations, proved totally illusory. In fact, as an immediate result of the signing of the Accords, the intensity of Palestinian violence against Israel dramatically increased in comparison to the era preceding it. Distraught Israelis were told that they were asked to make the “sacrifices for peace”, an interesting innovation for an embattled people who had been urged to make sacrifices for survival during the preceding decades. It also soon appeared that the Palestinian Authority, which was to ensure the peace and rein in the terrorist groups under its aegis, was either turning a blind eye to their anti-Israeli activities, at times even condoning and aiding them, sometimes condemning the acts of violence, not their perpetrators, as if they were natural calamities, and often blaming them on the Israelis themselves.

This enabled the Palestinians to pursue, simultaneously, a two-pronged policy of negotiating with the Israelis while at the same time allowing a controlled level of violence to prod their interlocutors to submit to their demands. For a time, this behavior raised doubts about whether the Palestinian Authority exercised effective control over its citizenry, especially when Arafat condemned the acts of violence, declared that he had no part in them and that they were perpetrated by the “enemies of peace”, and vowed to avert their recurrence. But it turned out that he did move decisively against them, notably the Hamas, when they posed a danger to his rule. Otherwise, he lauded their martyrs and even participated in their funerals, as in the case of the “Engineer”, Yihye Ayyash who was eliminated by Israel. Moreover, Arafat himself never desisted from his incitement against Israel and of calling a holy war (*jihad*) to liberate Jerusalem from her. His campaigns of incitement, which ran contrary to his commitments in Oslo, were reflected in the official Palestinian media and in the Authority’s school textbooks.

The Israeli government went along with this line of thinking, claiming that the Palestinian Authority’s “100% efforts” to prevent terrorism did not necessarily mean “100% success”, thus letting Arafat off the hook. Moreover, by calling the Hamas terrorists “suicide-bombers”, it implied that those were unpredictable and insane people who acted alone and therefore could not be stopped. The Israeli public was asked to brace itself for more acts of this sort and it did get them. Had the Israeli government acknowledged that the terrorists were trained, financed, indoctrinated and dispatched by an organization within the Palestinian Authority (Hamas or Islamic Jihad), it would also have come under pressure to move decisively against their bases and eliminate them, something it would not do in order to preserve the “peace process”.

And so the reciprocity that was embedded in the Oslo Accords, and that is inherent in any contract or treaty between parties, was gradually eroded, with the Palestinians overlooking their obligations and the Israelis overlooking their partners’ oversight. Paradoxically, the Palestinians who were on the receiving end of the deal and should therefore have been interested in implementing the agreement to the letter, soon learned that they still could make Israel deliver its part even when they procrastinated on theirs, while the Israelis seemed so eager to finalize the deal and prove that the Oslo strategy was sound, that they became more and more forgiving until they unwittingly contributed to the collapse of the Accords. Indeed, Israel had committed itself to evacuate territories gradually, in return for Palestinian pledges to eliminate terror and incitement, collect illegal weapons, cut the Palestinian Police to the agreed size, and extradite criminals who found refuge in its territory. Much of that was not done, yet the demand that Israel should evacuate territory was constant. Netanyahu’s innovation in

the Wye Agreements of October 1998, was to link specifically Israeli withdrawals with Palestinian implementation of their obligations, and summarized in the catchy phrase: “When they give they will receive, if they do not give they will not receive.” But soon the Labor opposition to his rule began mocking that slogan and unilaterally accusing Netanyahu, not the Palestinians, of obstructing the peace. All the Palestinians had to do, then, was to demonize Netanyahu with the Israeli Left’s support, and to wait him out until he was dethroned and replaced by Barak.

When that happened in May 1999, the Palestinians were elated and their expectations were raised. The new Prime Minister energetically and confidently re-launched the peace process, assuming that the Palestinians would accept with gratitude his far-reaching concessions which violated the taboos that previous Israeli governments had imposed. Instead, the entire Oslo process blew up in his face. Only now he finally realized that, regardless of who leads Israel in the negotiations, its maximal concessions for the sake of peace would remain far beneath the Palestinians’ minimal demands short of which there can be no agreement between the parties. That realization, which started with Barak’s sobering up in Camp David II (July 2000), came full bloom when the Palestinians decided in late September 2000 to back it up with large-scale acts of violence which delivered the *coup de grace*, and finally buried, all the assumptions upon which Oslo had been erected. The realization was that what is at stake is not a quantitative issue of assets and territory, which can be negotiated and settled through compromise around a negotiating table, but a value-loaded and qualitative matter which cannot be negotiated away and which touched upon the very existence of the Jewish state. Moreover, as the Palestinian stance on these matters is endorsed by the Arab and Islamic worlds, and powerful doses of religious vocabulary and symbols are injected into this already difficult debate, the dispute becomes anything but soluble.

The Middle East has experienced a wide gamut of situations between the two poles of war and peace, therefore one is not necessarily only the absence of the other. Otherwise put, one does not have, perhaps, to achieve some sort of utopian peace as a prerequisite for terminating a state of war. Hence the need to define what peace is. Is peace value and culture bound? Is it enough to agree on words which have an accepted dictionary meaning, or is one bound to deal with the agreed upon terms in their relative cultural dimension so as to avoid the pitfalls of misapprehension and misinterpretation, which produce frustration and bitterness? Aren’t the gray areas of armistice, cease-fire, truce, interim agreement, disengagement and the like more realistic a pursuit than the elusive total peace, just like agreed armistice lines, no man’s lands, separation and demarcation lines, and demilitarized zones, seem more down to earth than constantly contested and challenged boundaries and international borders in this part of the world? Not only Israel’s borders with the Arab world are indeed under constant controversy, but among Arab states themselves territorial disputes abound: Iraq-Kuwait, Algeria-Morocco, Morocco-Mauritania, Syria-Lebanon, Yemen-Saudi Arabia, etc. So, Israel’s disenchantment with temporary or ongoing territorial arrangements with its neighbors ought perhaps to occasion some rethinking.

### **Eyesores and Dissonances**

One day of January 2001, at the height of the *al-Aqsa Intifada*, the Israeli press carried the picture of a procession in Ramallah, which paraded a donkey donning a Jewish prayer shawl and a Star of David in the shape of a swastika. The Israeli public was deeply shaken, regarding this act of profanation and abuse as a continuation of the torching of the Jewish synagogue in Jericho and Joseph’s Tomb in Nablus during the initial stages of the current upheaval. In all those cases, what transpired was a Palestinian determination, born out of frustration and hatred, to take revenge on Jewish religious symbols, knowing full well the hurt and anguish they would cause among the Israeli public. The angered and disappointed readership of the papers was reminded that when in 1997 a settler from

Hebron held in public a poster where the Prophet Muhammad was reviled by the drawing of a pig in his proximity, she was arrested, tried for anti-religious incitement and incarcerated for three years. That event, which rightly caused Muslim outrage, was condemned, across the board, by Israeli politicians and religious leaders, who understood the sensitivity of such provocations. Israelis therefore expected to see a similar reaction on the part of the Palestinian authorities and their religious hierarchy, but in vain.

This phenomenon of poking the Jew in the eye in order to demean him by diminishing his national and religious symbols, has been repeatedly manifested in the age-old desecration of Jewish sanctified objects, such as the Israeli national flag or parchments of the Torah or anything the Arabs could lay their hands on. The burning of the flag, which is usually done in conjunction with the American flag throughout the Islamic world, has grown into a ritual whenever dissatisfied mobs gather to air their frustration against Israel or the Jews. More ominously, even more respectable gatherings, such as the annual commemoration by the Egyptian Lawyers Association of the peace their country signed with Israel in 1979, have adopted the custom of burning the Israeli flag at the height of the ceremony. “They are angry and frustrated”, we are told, and therefore we are asked to “understand”. The current *intifada* erupted during the Jewish High Holidays and no respect was paid to it by the Palestinians. Violence was launched against the Israelis across the width and length of the West Bank and Gaza, rocks were pelted against worshippers at the Western Wall, and the police was constrained to arrest their prayers for fear for their safety. But when Ramadan set in, it was the Israeli Police who protected the right of the Muslims to worship freely on the Temple Mount, and it was taken as a matter of course that the Israeli authorities should handle with extra care Arab disturbances so as not to arouse Muslim sentiments.

The result is that the Muslims under Israeli rule or in the neighboring Palestinian territories became accustomed to thinking that their lofty faith deserves the respect of everyone, as of right, while other religions, especially Judaism, must absorb without protest all the scorn, humiliation, calumny and abuse they might care to heap on them. Thus we find the Chief Mufti of *al-Aqsa* Mosque in Jerusalem, who was appointed by Arafat, denying any Jewish link to the Temple Mount and refusing to recognize any remote Jewish right there, while aggressively declaring the place as a Muslim *Waqf* (Holy Endowment), namely that the Muslims alone have the exclusive claim to that compound. And lest the Jews advance the argument that the rubble of their Holy Temple is buried under the Mosque, he declared that the validity of the *Waqf* also extended seven stories above and seven beneath the actual level of the contemporary Muslim buildings. The experiment in sharing that the Israelis had instituted in the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron since 1967, far from serving as a precedent and model of tolerance, on the contrary sharpens the acuity of the totally negative stance of the Muslims towards the Jews.

The total deprecation of the Jew as such in the Arab and Palestinian thinking and media is not new; it has accompanied the fortunes of the Arab-Israeli conflict since its inception. It has Islamic, anti-Semitic and specific roots which are linked to the immediate grievances of the Palestinians in view of their dispute with Israel. It is evident that in a confrontational situation no one expects the parties to love one another or even to develop empathy towards one another. However, even in a state of hatred, where there is contempt and deprecation of the rival, there must be some measure of respect for facts and reality, for otherwise one begins to project on the other one's own defaults and to indulge in such an exercise in self-delusion as to end up harming oneself and one's own interest. One may take the basic deficiencies of the enemy and inflate them so as to score propaganda points. But when one invents “facts” and “events” that have no leg to stand on, one by necessity creates a devil larger than life with which no accommodation is possible. Because then, one becomes trapped in one's rhetoric and understandably abhors any settlement that the Satan one has fabricated.

We are not talking about Goebbels-style libel and calumnies in the belief that if lies are repeated often enough and insistently enough they end up becoming the recognized “truth”, but about the fabrication of verifiable delusions, and the manufacturing of “histories” to elevate oneself and deprecate the others. In the first category one is reminded of the legendary “map hanging on the Knesset wall” which allegedly depicted the coveted boundaries of Israel “from the Nile to the Euphrates”. There are Palestinian members of the Israeli Knesset (those mistakenly dubbed “Israeli Arabs”), who could confirm as first hand witnesses the vanity of that claim, but the Palestinian leadership would not let the facts confuse it. It is said that when Sadat visited the Knesset in November 1977, some of his aids unabashedly asked to see the map for themselves and could not be convinced that it had never existed. Of late, the Palestinians have discovered another “irrefutable proof” to their allegation when they spotted on the Israeli flag the two blue stripes which, for them, represent those two rivers. Go explain to them that the stripes are taken from the Jewish prayer shawl, that same artifact that they desecrated when they paraded a donkey donning it in the streets of Ramallah. Incidentally, on a previous instance, Arafat presented in a press conference the coin of the Israeli ten *agorot* (dime) which carries an ancient historical stamp, as “proof” of the territorial ambitions of Israel.

To the second category belongs the invention of the myth which uncritically relates the origins of the Palestinians to the Canaanites as a fact of history. If they did that only in order to create a normative national myth that would cement in a remote past their claim on the land, one could perhaps nod with a smile of understanding. But when they, at the same time, deny the existence of one millennium of documented Jewish history on that land, with its two commonwealths and exiles, just in order to brand the Jews as liars, forgers of history, and usurpers of the truth, and they end up believing in their own concoction to boot, this is self-delusion pure and simple. Or when they invent a “text” and claim in their official publications and textbooks that it is a “citation” from the Talmud, and they repeat that with conviction, this is nothing short of a pathological deficiency which deceives them and prevents them from comprehending their enemy or sensing his true nature, motives and ambitions.

In June 1967, as the Arab air forces lay in tatters, President Nasser of Egypt was assuring King Hussein on the telephone that Israel was being beaten and decimated, and urged him to join the glory of victory, which he disastrously did. During the 1973 War, it was Sadat who assured his Arab audiences that the Americans were fighting side-by-side with Israel, hence the temporary difficulties that his armies were experiencing in the Sinai. And when his attack was repulsed, and his troops were trapped by Israel’s pincer maneuver, he still claimed that he had vanquished Israel and won a victory. In all those cases, it is not that the leaders did not receive adequate reports from their subordinates in the field, but they were constrained by their shame culture to deny defeat and create an illusory world of success, against an enemy that had always been depicted as cowardly, weak, dependent on others, and shunning battle. How else could they explain to themselves and to their audiences this incomprehensible reversal of events? The end result was that when they woke up from their delusions they felt deeply humiliated, inexorably bent on vengeance in order to redress the wrong. That is hardly conducive to reconciliation and peace making in the post-conflict era.

There are two contradictory aspects to these distortions which feed Arab beliefs regarding the Jews and Israel. On the one hand, they harbor a natural propensity to demean the enemy, to deprecate and despise him, but at the same time also to impute to him supra-natural demonic forces. For one has to explain his occasional successes which seemingly run counter to his inherent despicable nature. Therefore, only if Israel is linked to a great power, for example, can its military or technological prowess be explained; when an Arab defeat is imputed, not to Israel’s courage or *savoir faire*, for that does not fit their image of the cowardly Jew, but to some mysterious weapon that Satanic Israel has its ways of attaining by Satanic means, that provides a plausible, if incorrect, rationalization to hang on to. Then, the shame and humiliation becomes more bearable, pending devising a way of avenging it.

In this state of affairs, where Jews are inherently evil, the scum of the earth, cruel, devoid of human feelings, scheming, greedy and treacherous, anything that can be attributed to them, even the most incredible and outlandish, is possible. Similarly for the state which they created, and is by necessity tinged and stained by their murky and negative character. Therefore, there is no limit to the imaginary atrocities that Israel can be blamed for and there is no boundary, in time or space, to its evil doings across the world. Muslim writings accuse Israel of having caused all wars by undermining all societies in order to conquer them from within, and denouncing the Jews for having instituted both capitalism and communism, by taking over the media and financial centers, so as to enslave the world. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which are considered a century old worn out anti-Semitic propaganda, citation of which is a punishable crime in most Western societies, fares well and is alive and kicking in contemporary Arabia, including Palestinian, writings, political platforms, propaganda incitements, media commentaries, school textbooks, popular stereotypes and religious sermons. Therefore, any lie, story, accusation, libel or calumny about the Jews and Israel is easy to diffuse and quick to absorb, and finds fertile grounds to grow, bloom, prosper and multiply.

These are not necessarily lies that are concocted in propaganda offices, that are notoriously part of the ministries of “national guidance” in the Arab world, but simple delusions and wishful thoughts that are imagined on the spur of the moment in a public square, in a classroom, in an editorial room, on the pulpit of a university or a mosque, or in a political speech. And that is enough to ensure their instant propagation as a verified and irrefutable Gospel. And the more the story sounds unlikely or unreal, the more easily it would be circulated and the more “authoritative” it would grow. In this mental make-up where reality and imagination are intertwined and indistinguishable, what is unfeasible in the real world becomes a fact of life once the mind that wished it imagined it to be so.

Hence the horror stories about the Jews and Israel that we hear and read, day in day out, in the Arab media, in sermons in the mosques, in political speeches, in “scholarly” textbooks, and in the Arab discourse in general among the Palestinians in particular. They are not only the fruit of premeditated viciousness, but the produce of popularly crafted stereotypes, beliefs and rumors, which have become part and parcel of the mental make-up of the Arabs, especially now during this time of Israeli-Palestinian strife. The Jew, the Zionist and Israel are the negative models to be looked at and hated, because they are the devil personified, and their demonization makes them legitimate prey for attack, humiliation and channeling out of anger and frustration. This is the picture they construct in the eyes of their children, soldiers, refugees and media consumers because they truly believe it reflects truth and reality. They need that negative image of the Jew in order to aggrandize themselves, by comparison, as the “noble Arab nation”, the “lofty Faith of Allah” and the “righteous Palestinian people”, who face the cunning but undeserving Jews, the treacherous and rebellious Judaic faith, and the heartless and wild Zionists.

The Blood Libel, for example, is a sum total of those innate Jewish depredations and perfidy. Mustafa Tlas, the Syrian Defense Minister for the past 20 years, has made an “academic” career of this abomination which he never tires to peddle, as a “fact of history”, based on his “research” and “experience”, to his eager Arab audiences and to his revisionist audiences in Paris. Denial of the Shoah, and the concurrent praise of the European revisionist historians who champion the same are current in the Arab world, including among intellectuals and academics who ought to know better. Incidentally, such movies as “Schindler’s List” which show some aspects of the Holocaust are prohibited in all Arab countries, including the Palestinian Authority, lest they shake the established belief that denies the tragedy as a Jewish invention and as yet another manifestation of their expert forging of history.

It may well be that all these patterns of behavior emanate from naive or simply misinformed data that the Palestinians and the rest of the Arabs are constantly fed. More serious, however, is when these anti-Semitic utterances don a religious cloak which makes them not merely devices of hatred for

Arab/Muslim self-preservation, something that could theoretically be altered via education, enlightenment and open-mindedness, but absolute statements that are backed up by citations from the Holy Qur'an, the Hadith or from latter day luminaries of Islamic fundamentalism that render them divine-like, immutable and eternal. Like the Hamas and the Hizbullah, Arafat personally often engages in religious rhetoric, calling upon his followers to join the *jihād* to liberate Jerusalem, or lauding the fallen in attacks against Israel as martyrs. Whether the anti-Jewish statements are taken from Islamic or Christian anti-Semitic sources, they become axiomatic, they do not require verification or criticism, and once pronounced by a public opinion maker or a cleric, they are recited like mantras *verbatim* and *ad nauseam* throughout the Arab and Islamic world. The fact that they fit neatly with the perceived demonic picture of the Jew that is familiar to them is proof of their validity

If they are valid, then it is incumbent upon the Arabs and the Muslims to spread the word throughout the world, both in order to explain their plight in their confrontation with such an enemy, and to warn others to beware the Demon incarnate. It is therefore imperative to deny any link between those unworthy people and the Temple Mount, or the Noble Haram a-Sharif in their parlance. Since the current Jews are the descendents of those who had invaded the Canaanites, the forefathers of the Palestinians, why should Arafat and his people concede to them anything today? They are frightened by any act of the Jews that seems benevolent because that destroys the irrevocably negative image they have of them. For example, when Israel dispatched a team of agricultural experts to Egypt, and they did a very useful and laudable work, they were accused by the Egyptian press, followed by the rest of the Arab world, of spreading diseases in order to contaminate Egypt's land and ruin its farming. The rationale is clear: how could miserable Israel, populated by those Jews that were born for humiliation, extend any help to the most ancient and experienced farming culture of the world? Something does not add up, therefore it is better to deny that they are of any use and accuse them of ill will. Since no Egyptian leader dares to come out against those calumnies, they are taken as valid and true.

Similarly, in the West Bank and Gaza, where Israel introduced modern agriculture and raised productivity manyfold, you can only hear a long litany about the destruction that the Zionists inflicted on Palestinian agriculture in order to bring about their impoverishment. The six universities allowed by Israel when it ruled the territories, the many training courses for medical, educational, legal and other civil servants that were run by Israel over the years, are all denied, because Israel is only bent on the destruction of the Palestinian infrastructure. Some time ago, a rumor was circulated in the Arab world about a chewing gum emanating from Israel which had the power to enhance sexual lust in women. That was calculated, of course, to drive Arab women to sexual corruption in order to destroy the values of Arab and Islamic society. Many thousands of Palestinians go to Israel for medical treatment, including during the days of the *intifada*, but the official Palestinian line of argument is that it is better to fly their casualties to Baghdad and Amman in order to rescue them from the Zionist mortal danger. The main thing is not to have to acknowledge that the Jews are sometimes capable of doing good deeds, that they stand in many countries in the forefront of philanthropy and human rights, and that the aid that Israel is giving to dozens of third world countries is sought and appreciated.

In May 1983, the Palestinians accused Israel of having "poisoned" schoolgirls in the West Bank, who were in fact fainting in a wave of mass hysteria. The affair was taken up by the rest of the Arabs and Muslims, then by the UN bodies and the Western press, which was wondering "how the Jews who had experienced the gas chambers now treated the Palestinians the same way". Cries of genocide flew from all quarters, until an international medical inquiry team came up with the mass hysteria explanation. But the Palestinians did not budge, they had adopted the much more "plausible" theory that the Jews had schemed to "sterilize" young Palestinian women in order to affect the demographic balance which was ticking adversely in their disfavor. This calumny was duplicated in 1996 by the Palestinian Ambassador in Geneva, Mr. Ramlawi, who accused the Jews of "once again", "true to

their genocidal designs against the Palestinians”, injecting 300 of them with AIDS virus. Even though the Palestinian delegate could not substantiate his claim, the fact that it was not firmly refuted by anyone present, save the Israeli delegate, was “proof” for the Arabs of its validity. Israel is “known” for its genocidal schemes, therefore there is no need to prove them, and even if the accusations are false this time, they will materialize another time.

The moral depravity of the Jews is evinced in their systematic “desecration” of Islamic holy places, in particular the al-Aqsa Mosque. Since the 1970s Israeli men and women soldiers were accused in the Palestinian and other Arab press of performing drinking and sex orgies within the Mosque compound. It is interesting to note that the two taboos in their puritanical culture (alcohol and sex) are given liberty when they are projected onto the enemy. When the al-Aqsa Mosque was burned by a lunatic Australian tourist in 1969, Israel was directly blamed by the Palestinians and the entire Muslim world of having caused the arson. The fact that the arsonist was apprehended and sentenced, that he was Christian, and that it was the Israelis who rushed to extinguish the fire, did nothing to exonerate the Jews from their guilt, because it is in their “nature” to do acts of profanation. Similarly, when Israel reopened an old Hasmonean tunnel in the Old City of Jerusalem in September 1996, that was good reason enough for the Palestinians to cause a conflagration which ended in many casualties, because they spread the rumor that Israel was purposely digging under the Mosque in order to totter its foundations. No assurance that the tunnel was parallel to the mosque, at a safe distance, could alleviate Arab suspicions.

The *al-Aqsa Intifada* also began on the Temple Mount when, using the pretext of the visit of Ariel Sharon the day before, Palestinians erupted in violence during the Friday prayers of September 29, 2000, in what appeared as a pre-meditated attempt to obtain through the use of force what they failed to achieve during the Camp David Conference the previous July. A pretext, because had they wished to keep the quiet, in spite of what they regarded as a “provocation”, they could have contained their “anger” and “frustration”, otherwise what would prevent the Israelis too, at any time they are angry and frustrated, from causing a conflagration? The question here is one of maturity and responsibility: the Palestinians are supposedly not deranged children who would irresponsibly break loose and cause hundreds of casualties to themselves and to others just because they are frustrated. But the pattern is not new: anything Israel does, even an act of self-defense against overwhelming force, is provocation and aggression, but anything they do, even the most murderous and cowardly attacks, is a commendable act of bravery for which they often win the title of *Shahid* (Martyr). They would pit children, armed with rocks and bombs, in their hundreds, against Israeli soldiers, and dub their unprovoked attacks, *jihad*, but when they are hit in the ensuing test of force, then the Israelis are the cruel enemy who shoots indiscriminately at teen-aged Palestinians. It does not occur to them that had they not sent children to the front, they would not have been hurt, exactly as they could avoid the entire *intifada* had they contained their repeated “days of rage”.

These days of rage are, in their eyes, merely the legitimate expression of their rejection of Israeli occupation. They have the right over any territory they consider theirs, to the exclusion of all the others. And if the others resist, they are dubbed “Nazis”. One would assume that Palestinian (and other Arab) intellectuals and educated people would not only understand the difference between what the Nazis did in Europe and what they are subjected to under Israeli rule, but that they would refrain from using that comparison, knowing how offending and poking the eyes of the Jews it is. And perhaps precisely because of that, it is so widely used in the media, politics, religion and education. To “prove” that, there is a flurry of Palestinian accusations against the Jews, especially focused around the theme of “poisoning”, a blunt reversal of what had been done to the Jews by the Nazis, and a reversion to the old European anti-Semitic theme of well poisoning. Suha Arafat delivered an impassioned speech in December 1998, in the presence of Hillary Clinton who was visiting Gaza with the President, where she accused Israel of having systematically poisoned Palestinian lands and waters. The lack of reaction

on the part of the American First Lady only emboldened the speaker to pursue her broadsides, and the audience to believe them.

These depictions fit perfectly with the image the Palestinians had of the Jews and Israel. Furthermore, following the reports about Western troops who were exposed to depleted uranium ammunition during the Kosovo venture, and the suspicion that they may have been inflicted with cancer, the Palestinians also picked up that new avenue of attack against Israel. Reports were vented for a while in the Palestinian press that the Israeli bullets that killed or maimed them during the current disturbances, were made of uranium, of course in order to poison the innocent Palestinians and to harm their health in the long run. Those reports receded when no evidence was provided and the Israeli military denied any use of that sort of ammunition. But the pattern was clear: this was no different from the previous blaming of Israel for having “poisoned” the Jenin schoolgirls and injecting Palestinian children with positive HIV virus.

This concentration of hatred and venom against the Jews and Israel has ceased to provoke sharp reactions in the world, and most Israelis are not even cognizant of it! Small wonder that the Arabs regard it as a confirmation of their veracity. While one could claim that the underdog Palestinians have no other way to vent their anger, one is advised to look at the same intensive use of this vocabulary in Egypt 22 years, and Jordan 6 years, after their peace accords with Israel. The infrastructure of deprecation and disdain of Israel not only has remained intact, but has become so deeply ingrained in Arab thinking and mental make-up that there is no point in asking them to forego it by signing an “end of the conflict” statement. Egypt and Jordan have signed it, but to no avail. Breaking the thermometer will not cure the fever. Assuming that violent rhetoric, which delegitimizes the enemy, produces physical violence when the opportunity arises, Israel must maintain its power of deterrence if it wishes to survive. For the Arabs have never hesitated to use their power to the maximum when they thought they could overwhelm Israel, while it is the latter who exercises restraint even when attacked, in order to avert a holocaust of major proportions.

For the Arabs, it is always a *jihad*, a war to the finish, without limits or constraints. At times it is expressed in terms of annihilation, “throwing the Jews into the sea”, or sinking them in a bloodbath, or Saddam’s vow to “burn half Israel” with his weapons of mass destruction; at other times it appears in more euphemistic terms such as “battle until victory”, “cutting them to size”, or sending them to “drink the water of Gaza” (or of the Dead Sea, which is as deadly). Their inability to achieve that in one stroke, in a “mother of all battles” as Saddam has pledged, prompts them to derive pleasure from smaller feats which point to that direction. For example, while Israel has never dared to use unconventional weapons in combat, its bombing by missiles from Iraq during the Second Gulf War (1991) drew a tremendous enthusiasm among the Palestinians and the rest of the Arab street, which came to regard Saddam as the new Saladin who will deliver the *coup de grace* to the hated Zionist entity. Short of that, murdering innocent Israeli passers-by, mutilating corpses of their victims and dragging them in streets, or luring Israelis into their domain and ambushing them, have been their way to achieve, in the meantime, a long series of small total annihilations. On the symbolic level, torching and destruction of Jewish synagogues and holy places, digging up tombs and crashing bones, burning Jewish books and Torah parchments, trampling, tearing, stabbing and then setting ablaze Israeli flags and effigies provided them the same partial satisfaction.

### **The Inextricability of the Dispute**

Viewed in this light (or rather obscurity), one can see that the long-term goals of the parties are not symmetrical. It is not the case that both parties seek a settlement and a compromise; the Palestinians (and the rest of the Arabs) want victory, justice, and restoration of Arab splendor and hegemony, while the Israelis have a much more modest ambition of security and being accepted and recognized by their

neighbors. In the total war that the Arabs, mainly the Muslim fundamentalists among them, are ready to wage, every means is sacred and no means is abhorrent: *jihad*, unconventional war, annihilation, using children, lying, calumniating, inciting, murdering, oppressing their own people and sometimes executing them, self-deprivation and what not. Admittedly, some of those methods are also used by Israelis in self-defense, when faced with a situation of no choice in this ugly battle. But at least appearances of, and concern for morality are kept. Many Israelis who were thought as hurting unjustly Palestinians were prosecuted and serve their term (long or short) in jail; in the Palestinian Authority killers are hailed as heroes. The Israeli military often conduct investigations to monitor abusive behavior of its troops, and punishments (heavy or light) are often imposed on the culprits, and many outstanding officers have paid with their careers for their abuses; no parallel to this has come to light in the Palestinian (or Arab) camp.

When Baruch Goldstein committed his abominable act in Hebron, he was universally, and as a matter of course, condemned by all camps of Israeli politics, but when Yihye Ayyash, the super murderer, was killed, Arafat attended his funeral, and words of praise were showered on him from all quarters. We have never heard a Palestinian leader condemn any perpetrator of crime against Israelis. At the most, they would condemn the *act* of murder or terror as if it were a natural calamity, but they would never have the guts, or the nerve, to condemn the perpetrators, much less by name, unless the act was directed against the Authority itself. In any case, the statement would be diluted by a general condemnation of violence “on all sides”, or “against civilians”, meaning that terrorism against Israeli soldiers is valid and to be expected. Worse, in not a few cases, the Palestinian Authority, and Arafat personally (i.e., the Beit Lid horror in 1994 where 21 Israeli soldiers commuting back to their units on a Sunday were decimated by two bombs), have imputed those acts to Israeli provocateurs who self-inflicted them in order to smear the good reputation of the Palestinians or to justify retaliation against them.

Often, these atrocities are dismissed by the Palestinians as part of the excesses on the part of “extremists on both sides”. But there are no two sides to this story. True, there are individual lunatics and fanatics, like Goldstein and Popper, or a settler who unjustly and unprovoked harms or kills a Palestinian, but one would be hard pressed to find in Israel a mainstream organization like the Hamas, or even the Fateh Tanzim, whose stated purpose and *raison d’être* is to indiscriminately kill the enemy. And if such a group is suspected to exist in Israel, it would be hounded, hunted down and monitored by the Israeli security apparatus, and often brought to justice when it transgresses the boundaries of law. There is no organization in Israel which systematically places bombs in market places and in buses, just to kill or maim citizens; there is no leadership, religious or otherwise, which supports such acts, and there is no prize, fame or popular following to sustain the perpetrators. No Israelis stab Arabs in the streets and no Palestinians were murdered in Israeli restaurants or buses. Palestinians can circulate in full safety in Israeli streets, hotels, hospitals, beaches, and universities (admittedly with the unpleasantly intervening security checks and roadblocks) but should Israelis dare to visit, or even to stray by mistake, into Palestinian territory, they risk their lives.

With this kind of moral make-up, for a leadership who claims to be fighting for independence, peace and good neighborliness, one should not be surprised from unpredictable and puzzling modes of behavior. They can argue, with the generous assistance of the Israeli Left, that Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount had triggered their anger, because he was the “butcher of Sabra and Shatilla”, and they rationalize thereby the ensuing orgy of killings. If we were to follow that logic, then every time Arafat, the man who is directly responsible (not indirectly like Sharon) for killing thousands of Israelis and Arabs, sets foot somewhere in Israeli controlled territory, an effusion of Israeli anger should decimate entire Palestinian villages.

This is the reason why every time Israel is close to a settlement with the Arabs, be they Syrian or Palestinian, and after it makes far-reaching concessions for the sake of peace, but short of total

surrender, the Arabs back down and retreat. Israeli negotiators, and many a Western observer, are stunned in disbelief, unable to comprehend the “Arab propensity to miss yet another opportunity”, and instead they would rather wait for the whole, for the sake of satisfying their honor and sense of justice, rather than bend to the humiliation of accepting the part, which signifies that they have reconciled themselves to injustice. Justice is whole and indivisible, therefore they educate their children to claim it all and to deny their rivals any part of it; and when they report about their clashes with Israelis, there is never an understanding of the other’s pain, losses and ambitions. In Israel, there is a whole political camp which sympathizes with the Palestinians, diffuses their grievances and expresses them in the media. No trace of that is found on the Palestinian side, and if there should be one, the “culprit” would be condemned, arrested, or worse – gunned down or executed. In “moderate” Jordan, those who visit Israel, entertain any links with her, or come out in favor of peace and normalization, are excommunicated by their communities and, more ominously, are excluded from their trade unions, which means in effect that they are denied the right to work and make a living.

After every incident, Palestinian spokesmen are allowed to voice their grievances in the Israeli media, where the damages and casualties inflicted on the other side are reported, while the Palestinian media never interview any Israeli or anyone critical of them and disregard the casualties and damages they inflicted on the others. This then presents Israel always as the aggressor who pesters the lives of Palestinians for no reason, and cultivates the feelings among the Palestinians that they are the innocent victims who can do no wrong. The very notion of being a refugee derives from this situation, inasmuch as it ceased being only a socio-economic status and became a state of mind. Thus, the Palestinians will be the eternal poor victims to whom the world owes everything. They make children, but the UN has to feed them. They build 13 different security apparatuses, but the donor countries have to finance them. They are dipped in corruption, but the Arabs and the Europeans have to foot the bills. It does not occur to them that if they had rolled up their sleeves and applied themselves to work, construction and peace, they would have solved all those problems in the past 50 years instead of perpetuating them and throwing the blame on others.

This is often interpreted as the result of the humiliation, the conquest, the oppression and the travesty of justice occasioned by Israeli occupation. But the historical record shows that these attitudes are as old as the relations between Jews and Muslims/Arabs, or at the very least since the re-establishment of the Jews in Palestine in modern times. In the times of the Jerusalem Mufti, in the 1920s through the 1940s, the Jews in Palestine were a minority, certainly not conquerors or oppressors, and very often close to extinction due to the Palestinian onslaughts on them (1929, 1936-1939, and 1947-1949). The Jews survived and prospered, but the Palestinians refuse to alter their attitude of contempt, exclusion and hatred towards them, or their victim mentality. It seems absurd and paradoxical that even as the negotiations between the parties are being held, the attention is focused on the Temple Mount instead of on resolving those fundamental issues; the Israelis, who are supposed to be the cruel oppressors, the champions of force etc., are those who are ready to withdraw and share sovereignty over it, as if they were the losers in this struggle, while the weak and conquered are those who behave with intransigence as if they were the victors, and they insist on total and exclusive sovereignty over the holy shrines. This is a reversed logic, the like of which one cannot find elsewhere.

What allows the defeated and occupied Palestinians to behave as if they were the victors and the occupiers is the strength and self-assurance of their Arab and Muslim history, culture, traditions and legacy with their 200 and 1,200 million followers, respectively. It is no coincidence that at these crucial moments Arafat clings to the claim that he represents all of them, even though no one has delegated that power to him. His pretense goes even beyond, as he also demands the right to represent the Christian world, for Jesus Christ was Palestinian, and his own daughter, the fruit of his marriage with the Christian, Suha, is the perfect combination of those two worlds under his aegis. The Jews did not have the nerve to advance the argument that they ought to watch over the Christian holy places in

the Holy Land because Jesus was Jewish, therefore it is the Palestinian claim that is under consideration, while the more natural, and more credible, Israeli guarantee for the safety of the Christian shrines under its aegis, is even not heard. Israel cannot be entrusted, as far as the Arabs are concerned, with anything that might hint to its permanence or continuity, since it is a Crusader-like fleeting entity. From the peaks of Arab and Islamic history, Jews are looked down upon as an inferior and unnatural religious group, not worthy of statehood and certainly not of acceptance and recognition by the Arabs and Muslims.

The Arab and Muslim contempt for the Jews, which is deeply engraved in their historical and political consciousness, is fed by the inexplicable gap between their inferiority and the curse that were cast on them by Allah and History, and their rather stunning success as a modern state in the Middle East, in spite of their minority status and their long record of evident persecution and seeming rootlessness. Particularly incomprehensible and unacceptable to them is the status of the Jewish communities in the Western countries, especially in the US, where they enjoy a far greater influence in the economic, cultural, scientific and political domains than their small numbers would warrant. Especially humiliating to them is the fact that the Muslim community there, with its large Arab component, equals in numbers, and certainly in years of existence, its Jewish counterpart, but is nowhere near it in terms of impact. Due to the considerable assistance that American Jews have extended to Israel, the imperative has become primary in Arab thinking to weaken American Jewry in order to help cut Israel down to its “natural size”. Hence their attempts to reduce this influence, then achieve parity with it, then eliminate it and replace it, both in America by means of Islamic/Arab growth and awareness, and in the Middle East by presenting the Arabs as more worthy allies than Israel.

The Arabs have begun attaining the first phase of parity with the Israelis via the various peace processes. It is not the case that the Arabs have become tired of war and have converted to Isaiah’s prophecy of universal peace. Egyptian intellectuals, since the 1970s, have floated the notion of letting Israel merge into the Arab world by peaceful means, sort of “giving them enough rope to hang themselves”. Sadat was the first to understand that without formal peace with Israel he would not be able to ward off the then Soviet threats from the West (Libya) and the South (Ethiopia), nor could he obtain American assistance to rehabilitate his economy or modernize his troops. By effecting the turn-about in 1977, he indeed attained near-equality with Israel in the US, and turned his country into an American ally. During the Second Gulf War, it was the Arabs, including the intransigent Syrians among them, who became America’s war partners, while the Israelis were asked to sit quietly and absorb the missiles showered on them by Saddam. After the war, it was Arabs, including those who sided with Saddam (Jordan and the PLO) who were forced upon Israel in Madrid, thus setting off the roller coaster of pressures against Israel that would produce Oslo and its aftermath.

Today, the American military holds more frequent and more visible joint maneuvers with Egypt than with Israel. The latter, the supposed “strategic ally”, who was repeatedly assured strategic upgrading and funds for the concessions it was made to accept, was abandoned by President Clinton at the dusk of his rule, without making good on his promises and after having set a dangerous baseline for future negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, though he knew that neither the Israeli Knesset, nor the Israeli public, were ready to stomach those far-reaching departures from existential red lines. This was accomplished, all the more so, by rewarding Palestinian violence, by overlooking their disregard for their obligations under Oslo, Sharm e-Sheikh and Arafat’s various pledges, and by ending up being totally ignored, snubbed and thwarted by Palestinian negotiators. This was made possible when Israel legitimized the PLO in Oslo, raised funds for it, armed it and submitted territory to its control, and introduced Arafat to the White House. The end result was that, far from toeing the line of peace jointly with the Israelis, the Palestinians have gathered enough self-confidence to push the Israelis aside, to gain their own access to the corridors of power in Washington, and to aspire to replace Israel there. But no enhancement of the peace process occurred as a result.

Were the Arabs to solidify their position of parity, and then gain an edge over Israel in Western chanceries, on the political, moral and international levels, they could then move to overwhelm it, again with its generous help. Because while the Palestinians, and the Syrians, like the Lebanese and the Egyptians before them, insist on their complete and uncompromising rights (e.g. Jerusalem and the Temple Mount), Israel resorts to compromise and “understanding”. Like the Solomonic trial, justice rests with the firm and unflinching, not with the hesitant and spineless. Similarly, the right of return of a refugee to his home sounds much more credible, and draws much more support, than the counter claim of those who are prepared to yield part of their country, their holy places and their very security, “for the sake of peace”. How can one convince anybody of one’s right to his home if one is also prepared to yield the basement thereof? In negotiations, the mediators always seek the middle ground between declared positions, and those who advance concessions will be pressured to concede more in order to meet the recalcitrant party closer to his stance. Barak had started with far reaching compromises in Camp David II (July 2000), and he was refuted by the Palestinian who would not budge and learned that they can get more if they stonewall; better yet if they shoot and kill in order to show their determination. Because then, in order to appease the obstinate, the mediators and the other party would rush to offer more concessions. Do we need a better lesson merely two or three generations after Munich?

The Arabs have then learned that unless they can get their whole desire fulfilled, better to avoid any compromise settlement that might freeze the present balance of parity and scuttle their efforts to revert to their aggressive policy once new opportunities are open to them. In fact, after Egypt signed the peace treaty with Israel 22 years ago, it did not desist one day from its anti-Semitic propaganda nor from its stated wish to diminish Israel and reduce it to a more controllable scope that would ensure Egyptian hegemony in the area. That was necessary in order to keep alive the infrastructure of hatred that can be mobilized once again when the day comes. Similarly, all those who hoped that after the concessions they obtained in Oslo, Wye and Camp David, Palestinian hatred and incitement would be scaled down, were soon to discover that they were scaled up, and lately garnered with open hostilities and shooting to boot. We are told that they are “angry” and “frustrated”, therefore they are justified in their uncontrolled outburst. They were made to promise in those peace conferences to desist from violence, and they did under duress. But exactly as you cannot extort from a person a pledge to stop breathing, you have to take as a premise that any Arab assurance to alter or amend their attitudes towards Jews and Israel has no viability nor longevity, regardless of what Israel might concede.

The Arabs are ready to sign a treaty with Israel only if it leaves them enough leeway, and promises a firm enough potential, to bring about Israel’s demise. Hizbullah first demanded Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon, then unconditionally so as to leave the border area in chaos and Israel on its toes, then the Shab’a Farms, then the liberation of Lebanese prisoners of war, followed by Palestinians and other Arabs, and now they are talking about the return of all occupied Arab territories. To make their point, they kidnapped Israeli soldiers and an Israeli national in Europe, and their men daily scale the Israeli fence in order to defy its guards, while the Lebanese authorities refuse to deploy their soldiers along the border for fear that they might be misconstrued as “defending Israeli territory”. Lebanon, Egypt and the rest of the Arabs will continue to hound Israel until it relinquishes her strategic assets in the West Bank and the Golan, gives up her unconventional weaponry and establishes a hostile Palestinian state at a stone’s throw from its heartland. Syria, likewise, will not be content to get the Golan Heights; it also covets Israel’s water sources, so that the Zionist state could be helplessly reduced to Arab mercy. This is the Israel with which the Arabs wish to make peace.

One of the most offending elements that the Arabs find unbearable is Israel’s tremendous achievements, in the space of 50 years, and against all odds, in the fields of government, economy, society, science and technology, which stand in deep contradiction with the negative and contemptuous image they have of the Jews and Israel. Hence the urgency of redressing that balance.

Not, Allah Forbid, by revising upwards the convoluted data they have been treasuring to fit their concepts and beliefs, but by pulling Israel downwards to make her concur with the distorted knowledge they possess. If Israel has been successful economically, then instead of learning from her how a developing nation can make progress, they accuse her of Neo-Imperialism in order to take over the Middle East. Even Shimon Peres' book, which envisioned a "New Middle East", for the benefit of all its inhabitants, was greeted in Egypt as "new evidence" of the validity of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, this time via economic means. Thus, instead of learning how they can attain a GNP 20 times larger than theirs, in order to extricate their people from poverty, the Arabs would do everything to boycott Israeli goods, to limit their commercial relations with the Jews, and anything that would reduce Israel rather than recognize its edge.

And if there is no way to impose their way on Israel via peace talks, they resort to violence: a daily and draining *intifada* which sets aflame every city and village in Israel, terrorizes its people, kidnaps and maims people, and car-bombs urban centers, all calculated to make life in Israel untenable and drive the Israelis to despair, and to abandon their property in order to pave the way for their own departure. World Jewry, which is conceived as the main life artery of Israel, is also similarly harassed. Together with the *intifada* in Israel, Muslim/Arab communities throughout the Western world launched violent attacks against their neighboring Jewish congregations. In Sydney and Paris, London and Johannesburg, hundreds of events of this sort have rattled cities and towns which had seemingly nothing to do with the Middle Eastern events: synagogues were torched, Jews were assaulted, cemeteries were desecrated, Israeli flags were burned or trampled upon, anti-Semitic slogans were voiced, and *jihad* summons were uttered urging Muslims to join in the liberation of Jerusalem from the Zionists. Unlike parallel Jewish gatherings of identification with Israel that were held with dignity and composure in the synagogues, without any disturbance to the public order, the Muslim demonstrations were violent and scary.

These manifestations of hostility and intolerance highlighted throughout the Western world the increasingly burdening issue of the Islamic penetration there mostly via illegal immigration. This means that the demographic balance will be affected in the long run, especially in immigration countries such as the US, Canada and Australia, exactly as it already is in Western Europe which accords political asylum to refugees from Islamic countries. More ominously, it means that these immigrants, both the already established and the newcomers, including the illegal among them, import to their countries of shelter their hatred to Israel and the Jews. This in itself is likely to undermine the enviable status that the Jews enjoy in those countries, out of proportion to their numbers. The Muslims are determined to eliminate this primacy, both by the sheer numbers they will bring to bear in the local democracies, and by violence and intimidation towards the Jews themselves and signaling to the general population that Jews are "dangerous" and that they and their neighborhoods should be avoided. It is easy to foresee the sentiments of anti-Semitism that will be raised when common people who never liked the Jews in any case would be made to feel that the latter have become a cumbersome liability.

In our days, the globalization of information has caused the universalization of Arab and Islamic sentiment and solidarity. In a paradoxical way, the local media in each Islamic country provide immediacy and help break the local siege on information. International Arab and Islamic concerns were hijacked by activist groups who not only transmit instantly messages regarding the oppression of Palestinians and the dangers that the Jews pose to the Muslim holy places, but also raise funds, urge coreligionists to demonstrate, violently if necessary, in support of those causes, and even provide instructions on how to join terrorist lodges or to concoct explosives. Thus, what happens on the ground in Gaza or Nablus has immediate reverberations in the streets of Melbourne and London, not to speak of the Arab street from Rabat to Baghdad, or the Islamic street from Teheran to Jakarta.

Had the Arabs been able to isolate Israel from the world and turn it into another Gaza, instead of lifting themselves to its level, then the demographic pressure, corruption, poverty, chaos and backwardness would have exercised their adverse impact and eroded the Jewish edge. The way to attain this is to press for the “right of return”, cause disorder and initiate shootings in order to thwart tourism, to disrupt production and normal life, and cause irreparable damage to Israel, even at the price of self-inflicted harm, for they have not much to lose at any rate. This is exactly the soft point that they have detected in Israel: this prosperous, advanced, modern and industrious country, which attracts foreign investment, especially in the high tech domain, needs tranquility and stability. Indeed, the greatest proponents of the peace delusion are the industrialists, who have paradoxically associated with the ideological socialist left in Israel because they are both to derive from it the greatest benefits. These are precisely the characteristics of a “soft state” which is no longer ready to defend its strategic and cultural assets if they levy too heavy an economic and human price, thus lending top priority to immediate short-term “peaceful” gains at the expense of the long term existential interests of the country and the Jewish people.

Another paradox is that it will be precisely the concessions for the sake of economic growth that will engender the next rift with the Palestinians and the Arab world. For a great part of the Palestinian and other Arab wrath against Israel stems from its success, which exposes for all to see their own incompetence in comparison. They have a hard time explaining to themselves and to others, how a small and persecuted people, which has been in their eyes, for many centuries, the paradigm of misery and humiliation, has dared and succeeded, in a relatively short time, against the odds of war and of a difficult starting point, to achieve goals that the Arabs can only dream of attaining. This is something they cannot bear, and the more the Jews are successful and prosperous, the more the hatred, born out of jealousy, will increase. There is no basis to the worn out assumption that economic development in the Arab world will blunt extremism and make Israel acceptable to them. We have already noticed that it is much more important for them to pull Israel down than to elevate themselves to its level. The hypothesis which posits that loans and allowances for development could override ideological and doctrinal considerations is not only incorrect but also patronizing and condescending and does more harm than good.

Thus, the right of return from the Palestinian point of view, which is calculated to bring Israel down, is the supreme test-case: if it is accepted in one variety or another, then all is well, because that would trigger the process which will end with the removal from the scene of all the values of the Jewish state which pose an inimitable challenge to the Arab world. They understand full well that a mass return of Palestinians to Israel, together with the million Palestinian Arabs already living in Israel, would turn the country into another Gaza, hence their insistence to become its full-fledged citizens upon their return to the land. One wonders, why should they want to be the citizens of a state they hate and complain against its oppression, unless they want to dismantle it from within? And then, when they gain the majority and make the land into another corrupt, poor, backward, dictatorial and overcrowded country of their liking, Israel’s sin of her unwarranted and humiliating excellence would be wiped out. They also understand full well that all the symptoms of successful and democratic Israel will persist only as long as the Jewish majority leads it, and will vanish when the Arabs take command and control. The fact is, that in spite of their legendary wealth, not one of the 22 Arab countries has succeeded in adopting Western culture, government, economics and mode of life. Better then not to achieve a settlement than see a recognized and accepted Israel pursuing her course that can only deepen Palestinian and Arab humiliation.

Successful and westernized Israel, like the West itself, is deeply hated by the Arab and Islamic worlds. It is in the nature of things that the backward and the poor would detest those whom they cannot resemble. Therefore Israel and the West are always intertwined. One can hear in campuses around the world that both are Neo-Colonialist or Neo-Imperialist, enemies of Islam and of the Third World. In

these demonstrations the Israeli and American flags are always burned in tandem. Israel is the Western corrupting arm in the heart of the Arab and Islamic world, that does the ground work of undermining Islam, of corrupting its youth with foreign values, music, pornography and permissiveness. Hence the commitment to fight them both relentlessly and ruthlessly, even at the price of self-perdition.

The Arabs' ultimate demand is for "justice" ("peace with justice", a "just peace"), as if justice were absolute and not in the eye of the beholder. Justice (*'adalah* in Arabic, which is also, incidentally, an Arab civil right group in Israel) is for the Arabs linked to the notion of balance between the two saddlebags on the camel back, short of which the camel cannot march at length to cross the desert. Justice is also connected to honor, and the maintenance of honor hinges on the ability to protect one's property, and his women, and his proven capacity to retrieve them if they are violated. Otherwise, his reputation is irretrievably compromised. Thus, one's honor is constantly on the line, and it is tested by one's daring in the service of his honor. An Arab will not rest until the wrong done to him is redressed and his property is recuperated. Then, justice is done, and one can go back to functioning normally. There are no objective criteria to examine the feeling of right or wrong, or the encroachment on one's honor; they hinge upon the subjective sense of the wronged individual.

When the Arabs, the Palestinians included, demand justice, they mean their justice, i.e., the return of their rights and property as they perceive them, regardless of whether, what and how others might advance as a disclaimer in historical, legal, logical or human terms, for all these are irrelevant. First, the Arabs must get full satisfaction, in accordance with their sentiments and convictions, their right must be recognized and stated, and only then they might show generosity and give back out of their own volition, not as a result of coercion or force. Thus, the whole notion of compromise does not come into play, because if something is yours, you must obtain it first. Sadat in his speech at the Knesset in November 1977, the Syrians in their negotiations with Israel, the Hizbullah in Lebanon, and now the Palestinians in the peace process, have all demanded a total Israeli withdrawal before the negotiations can proceed, or at the very least an Israeli commitment to retreat at the end of the day. Not because, as some diplomats have thought, the Arabs wish to obtain the result of the negotiations before they even begin, but in order to signal that their belongings are not subject to negotiation. It is theirs, period.

The Palestinians, like the rest of the Arabs, sense in their deepest consciousness that the Holy Land in general, and Jerusalem in particular with its innermost *sanctum*, the Temple Mount, have been the exclusive patrimony of the Arabs/Muslims since they became included in the *futuh* (holy conquests by Islam) and were bequeathed to them by Allah, for all generations to come, as a *Waqf* (Holy Endowment) land, never to be parted with or negotiated away. Hence, the right of return is not only a human and political need, but also a religious duty which imposes on them to struggle and pay any sacrifice so as to snatch the land from its usurpers who have subtracted it from Islamic dominion. This is valid in particular with regard to the *Haram a-Sharif* (the Temple Mount) which was the very site of the Prophet's mystical nightly visit (*Isra'*) and ascension to Heaven (*mi'raj*). Thus, only after this right of theirs is recognized as a matter of course worldwide (what they call "international legitimacy"), may they evince *ex-gracia* generosity and allow others to collect some crumbs from their table. Until then, all means are allowable to retrieve the loss by peaceful means if possible, through violence if necessary, for in any case its holy character prescribes *jihad*.

Theoretically, the right of return could be implemented by dividing the land between Muslims and Jews, and let each of them return to his part of the land. However, by acquiescing in this solution, the Muslims would be lending a stamp of consent to the existence of the Zionist entity on the Holy Land, something that is to be totally rejected. Hence Arab insistence that the Arab returnees to their land must enter Israeli territory, for only then can they, together with the Israeli Arabs, effect the demographic shift which will overwhelm Israel by democratic means. Never mind the complaints that Arabs are discriminated against in Israel and by Israel, and the contradiction between this repeated

grievance and the eagerness of so many Arabs to become nationals of the oppressive Zionist regime, together with the Israeli Arabs who are already suffering under the yoke of that oppression. This is not a hidden agenda, it is stated clearly, Israel has simply to bite the bait and believe that the right of return of the Arabs into its territory will produce peace. Israel's refusal to bite is one of the major reasons for the Palestinians' frustration and anger, for which Israel certainly owes them an apology.

The Islamists among the Palestinians add many more arguments to rationalize their right of return, beyond those advanced by other Arabs and Muslims. The Hamas platform, for example, claims that when Islam was not in charge in Palestine, e.g. under the Crusaders, the British and the Jews, the country knew only friction, conflict, war and bloodshed, while under Islam, love and fraternity, peace and tranquillity have reigned. Hence the urgency to return Palestine in its entirety, including what is now Israel, into Islamic hands. Then, the Jews can revert to their "natural" status as *dhimmi* (protected people) under the generous and protective wings of Islam, as long as they recognize and accept its superiority as the latest, and therefore the most valid and updated, divine revelation which has supplanted all its predecessors. Then, they must be content with whatever the Muslim masters grant them.

This is the essence of tolerance under Islamic rule, which is not to be confused with pluralism. In Western terms, a tolerant society is a pluralistic one where everyone is equal under the sun, and no one's culture, religion, race or ethnic group is superior over all the others. Namely, one is tolerant in spite of his difference from the other and without passing any value judgement on one or the other's group. But in Islamic belief, under which if one is not a Muslim one is either an unbeliever, or at most a protected *dhimmi* whose juridical, political and social status is inferior, tolerance means to accept the other **in spite** of his inferiority. This understanding of tolerance not only is not likely to produce an egalitarian and pluralistic society under Islamic rule, but is likely to perpetuate a patronizing condescendence towards the non-Muslim. This is precisely the socio-political framework to which the Muslims would like to return the Jews (and the Christians) if they could. This is what they would do if they could take over Palestine through the right of return.

Thus, the peace conditions offered to Israel by its Arab neighbors do not evince a mature and open recognition of reality and of the rights of others. It is no coincidence that even in the Arab countries that signed a peace with Israel (Egypt and Jordan thus far), the populace has not accepted the terms, normalization has been hampered by large and dominant groups in the Arab civil society, and the peace has remained one concluded by the ruling elites. All Israeli attempts to trigger a process by which the Arabs will come to respect the Jews as their peace partners and to share with them holy places to both, or land claimed by both, have been in vain. Furthermore, these Israeli concessions and offers for compromise, have raised the threshold of Arab demands, since what is conceded becomes the basis for the negotiations for a new "compromise", i.e., concession, etc. When Israel declared its willingness to return all the Golan to Syria, Damascus also demanded the shores of the Lake Tiberias; when Israel was ready to return Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem, the Arabs demanded all East Jerusalem, included the Temple Mount and the adjoining Jewish Western Wall. And when Israel exhibits its readiness to discuss these demands, the incredibly belligerent demand is advanced for the right of return in order to deliver the final *coup de grace* to the Jewish state.

### **Back to the Beginning**

If there is no maturity to accept Israel, much less to conclude peace with her, there is no urgency for Israel to rush into a settlement which can only prejudice its most vital interests. A long series of "agreements" were signed: Oslo I and Oslo II, Camp David Conferences I and II were convened, a Cairo Accord I and II were signed, Sharm e-Sheikh meetings I and II were held, and Taba and Eilat, and Wye and Washington, and no concrete and palpable result could be enlisted. If there are so many

agreements, maybe there was none? Israel and the Arabs did sign, under external prodding, masses of papers, raised expectations for the upcoming era of peace, but the result is frustration. Israel did not take a break to examine the consequences, to test the ramifications, to make further concessions conditional, equal and parallel to steps to be taken by her peace partners. For example, normalization should not have been left until after Israeli withdrawals are completed, but a long term phased withdrawal should have been made to hinge upon the gradual internalization and implementation by the Arabs of their obligations. Israel has demonstrated in all stages of negotiations with the Arabs a dismal misunderstanding of Arab purposes, overlooked Arab violations of their commitments, and pursued it withdrawals in spite of clear Arab indications that they had no intention to honor their engagements. And when Israel at times stopped to reflect upon the process, or slowed it down, she was accused by the Arabs and the world of hampering the peace process, compared to the euphoric assurances she publicized, and the high expectations she raised regarding a new era or a new Middle East, every time some “agreement” was reached.

When the right-wing government of Netanyahu (1996-1999) attempted to slow down the pace of Israel’s unilateral retreats and concessions, by floating after the Wye Conference (1998) the slogan “The Palestinians will get only if they also give,” he was ridiculed by the Israeli left-wing opposition and accused of destroying the peace process. Arafat heard and understood that all he had to do was to sit out the Israeli government until it would be ousted and replaced by a more forthcoming labor government. That happened in May 1999, but the newly elected Barak government soon learned that its proposed concessions not only would remain one-sided, but they would also generate more and more pressing demands for more concessions. That lesson was learned and internalized by Barak during the second Camp David conference in July 2000. Faced with the outbreak of Palestinian violence, precisely when Israel attained the peak of its concessions ever, which enjoyed neither Knesset nor popular backing, stunned Barak, who had staked his entire political career on this peace. He could either admit his monumental error and retire in disgrace, or entrench himself deeper and more perilously, in his lost positions, and offer even more concessions. He elected the latter in spite of the fact that his right wing opposition did support any strong handed reaction he sporadically adopted to counter Palestinian violence.

The collapse of the peace process forces Israel not only to reconsider the whole demarche in light (or rather obscurity) of Palestinian demands, but also to forge an alternative that will be acceptable to the Israeli public, whose support is essential to endorse any settlement. There is no choice, then, but to revert to square one. Israel must define its vital strategic and national assets, announce them, define the red lines that are not to be crossed under any circumstances, and stand by them regardless of what the Arabs like or dislike, accept or reject, exactly as they do not base their ambitions and demands upon Israel’s wishes or sensitivities. This is normal; each party is responsible for its dreams and nightmares. For we have seen that all Israeli attempts to “understand”, to be considerate, to share, to compromise, were thrust back to her face and only registered scorn, anger, contempt and more demands. Paradoxically, in the present ambiance of an oriental bazaar, where everything is up for grabs, and every item is open to bargaining, only maximal and uncompromising demands can bring one closer to what one wants. If you are intransigent, your interlocutors and mediators will knock on your doors, beg you, coax you, appease you, and do everything to satisfy you. Try to be nice, accommodating, responsible and understanding, and you are sure to invite more pressure to give in.

Thus, Israel’s stated desire for peace ought not obscure her interest. Again paradoxically, by compromising before the negotiations even started, Israel cannot attain peace. Quite the contrary; by embracing conciliatory attitudes without any retribution, Israel can only invite more pressures for a compromise. The best proof is what happened in the West Bank and Gaza following the far-reaching concessions Israel offered at Camp David. It became evident that if one begins negotiations from a position of begging and supplicating, signaling a need for peace at any price, spinelessness, lack of

resilience and a propensity to move back and forth at the whim of one's interlocutor, one is likely to encounter increasing and tougher demands than if one had shown determination to stand firmly, to wait out the partner, not to yield one inch without proper *quid pro quo*, and indeed no urgent interest to reach a settlement. At the same time, however, Israel must consistently indicate her interest in, and desire for peace, a peace of reciprocity, which is tested along a protracted period of time, without rush, after long deliberations and considered reasoning, insisting that the agreed upon is implemented before any further step is effected.

Before anything else, Israel must demand evidence for the political will of the Arabs to make peace, which she must welcome, and pledge her commitment to respond to such advances and reward them. Israel must also insist that no negotiation is possible when violence, incitement, education to hatred, and other measurable indicators are pursued. Israel should not accept any excuse or pretext from the Palestinians or the rest of the Arabs that anything within the purview of their obligations lies beyond their authority or their ability. The ludicrous Arab proclamations of "we are not responsible for the protection of Israel's borders," or "someone is 'angry' or 'frustrated'", or even that "some authority exerts 100% of its goodwill, which does not mean 100% efficacy" are unacceptable. Just as reciprocity is expected of Israel, Israel must demand that obligations under an agreement are absolute under any circumstances, and that every party is 100% responsible for what is happening within or from its territory. Secondly, the Arabs must declare their will to share, like normal human beings, historical and religious sites that are important to both sites. If they insist on exclusivity on the Temple Mount or the Tomb of the Patriarchs, for example, it is they who should be excluded until they comply, and not the Israelis who are willing to share. If they should disturb the order in those places, or desecrate them, like they did in Joseph's Tomb, they will have to be removed without ceremonies from all sites where they had demonstrated their unworthiness to rule or to access.

The oft-repeated slogan that "they understand only the language of force" is pretentious, patronizing and insensitive, because they too could say the same about the Israelis and then the parties would find themselves, once again, in the domain of argument and one-upmanship. Israel ought to render the language of talk, negotiations, sensitivity, sharing, trust, respect, hope, and reward for good deeds into the cornerstone of its culture of contacts and negotiations with the Palestinians and the rest of the Arabs, and expect the same from the Arabs. These values and techniques of discussion will not emerge overnight, certainly not among leaders such as Saddam Hussein who projects hopelessness and aggression. At any rate, all those who thought that the Palestinians were the heart of the conflict, and that a resolution to their plight would terminate the entire dispute, should rethink their concepts and look beyond the horizon. While Saddam is indeed a cruel, ruthless and bellicose leader for Israel and most of the rest of the civilized world, he symbolizes a great hope for the Palestinians and many other Arabs, a sort of modern Saladin, who holds the key for their salvation. Saddam's ability to break the UN and US siege of sanctions in recent months is only a hint to what awaits the Middle East in the years to come. Therefore, it is premature at this point to talk about the peace that is to descend on Earth should the Israeli-Palestinian dispute be somehow resolved, much less if it is not. It is to be hoped that with a strong and firm Israel as a prospective partner, the Arabs come to understand that short of a profound, indeed revolutionary, revision of their traditional views about the Jews and Israel, and their acceptance of their Jewish rivals as their partners in peace, in full equality, they can only hurt themselves. Israel's slogan should then be: "Only if you change will you receive, if you don't, you won't."