

Israel and American Jews

63 years after the State of Israel was founded

...fun a kasha shtarbt man nisht.

From a question, no one has ever died. (Yiddish proverb)

ויגבה ה' צבאות במשפט, והאל הקדוש נקדש בצדקה

YHVH is exalted by judgment, the Holy God is sanctified by justice. (Isaiah 5.16)

... an Israeli experiences the famous touch of God in his social dealings. Not that belief in God *incites* one to justice – it *is* the institution of that justice. Moreover, is this justice just an abstract principle? Doesn't religious inspiration ultimately aim to bring about the very possibility of Society, the possibility for a man to see the face of an Other?

The thing that is special about the State of Israel is not that it fulfils an ancient promise, or heralds a new age of material security (one that is unfortunately problematic), but that it finally offers the opportunity to carry out the social law of Judaism. The Jewish people craved their own land and their own State not because of the abstract independence which they desired, but because they could then finally begin the work of their lives. Up until now they had obeyed the commandments, and later on they fashioned an art and a literature for themselves, but all these works of self-expression are merely the early attempts of an overlong adolescence. The masterpiece has now finally come. All the same, it was horrible to be both the only people to define itself with a doctrine of justice, and to be the meaning incapable of applying it. The heartbreak and the meaning of the Diaspora. The subordination of the State to its social promises articulates the significance of the resurrection of Israel as, in ancient times, the execution of justice justified one's presence on the land.

It is in this way that the political event is already outstripped. And ultimately, it is in this way that we can distinguish those Jews who are religious from those who are not. The contrast is between those who seek to have a State in order to have justice and those who seek justice in order to ensure the survival of the State.

- Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*

Four Questions to Discuss

Our stories - What are the significant events and experiences of your generation that have shaped your relationship with Israel? In what way?

Our communities - In our community, are young people engaged and helping to shape the community conversation? Are we creating a community that invites questioning? Who needs to take initiative to make change?

What's at stake - How do we benefit from encouraging questions about Israel? How might we lose?

Israel's future - What are your greatest hopes for Israel's future? What are your greatest fears?

In the lives of individuals and of peoples, too, the worst conflicts are often those that break out between those who are persecuted. It is mere wishful thinking to imagine that the persecuted and the oppressed will unite out of solidarity and man the barricades together against a ruthless oppressor. In reality, two children of the same abusive father will not necessarily make common cause, brought close together by their shared fate. Often each sees in the other not a partner in misfortune but in fact the image of their common oppressor.

That may well be the case with the hundred-year-old conflict between Arabs and Jews.

The Europe that abused, humiliated, and oppressed the Arabs by means of imperialism, colonialism, exploitation, and repression is the same Europe that oppressed and persecuted the Jews, and eventually allowed or even helped the Germans to root them out of every corner of the continent and murder almost all of them. But when the Arabs look at us, they see not a bunch of half-hysterical survivors but a new offshoot of Europe, with its colonialism, technical sophistication, and exploitation, that has cleverly returned to the Middle East – in Zionist guise this time – to exploit, evict, and oppress them all over again. And when we look at them, we do not see fellow victims either; we see not brothers in adversity but pogrom-making Cossacks, bloodthirsty anti-Semites, Nazis in disguise, as though our European persecutors have reappeared here in the Land of Israel, put keffiyehs on their heads, and grown mustaches, but they are still our old murderers, interested only in slitting Jews' throats for fun.

- Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*

ושאבתם-מים בששון ממעיני הישועה

Joyfully you shall draw water from the fountains of redemption. (Isaiah 12.3)

Ufros Aleynu

ufros aleynu sukkat shalom

shalom

Spread over us wings of peace

shalom

mayim hayim, waters of life

shalom

draw water in joy from the living well,

draw water in joy from the living well

Rabbi Aryeh Hirschfield z"l