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ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

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WILL ISRAEL COME TO TERMS WITH ITS RECENT HISTORY

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Ancient Israel had vanished but from the ashes has come fire. The Israel of today is a flame: it warms certain hearts and burns others.

This Israel has evolved from a surge of humanism in search of a national home for a homeless Jewish people. That humanism sought a secure nest for Jews who had been orphaned and dispersed cruelly around the world. It looked for a refuge for Jews who had been uprooted and prevented from letting their roots penetrate in their locales. It burst out as a force to integrate the Jewish people with nature, the land, and the environment, in peace and tranquillity.

The Israel of today has realized most of those dreams. Its leaders may be forgiven if they seem arrogant, boastful, or overly self-assured. But will they be forgiven, or will they forgive themselves for the sins they have committed against Others on the way to the realization of their dream? Will they be at peace with their own conscience and moral values, having violated those same values which carried them to their triumph? Will they look into their turbulent recent past and extend a hand of conciliation toward those they have infringed upon on the way to victory? Only the Israelis can answer these questions, but we can and should do the asking, prod the Israeli conscience, and instigate deep thinking in order to arrive at those answers.

I was there when the Israel of today was founded, when the Jewish residents of Palestine became citizens of an Israeli state. I watched their jubilation, celebration, and boisterous expressions of triumph, relief, and hope. I was there also when Israel expanded its boundaries beyond the internationally legitimate borders. I was there when Israel caused the departure of native residents into a new Diaspora. And I was there when Israel of today seemed to justify its violation and rejection of United Nations resolutions in order to appropriate more of the land and water resources which belonged to Others.

The Israel of today has built a national home, at the expense of Others. It has gathered its people from around the globe, and has caused the scattering of Others. It has made citizens of its people and refugees and strangers of Others. It has brought security to those who were insecure, and has instilled insecurity in Others. It has nurtured humaneness among its people, and has violated the human rights of Others. The Israel of today has plowed and cultivated the desert, but it also has appropriated the gardens and livelihood of Others. It has globalized its sources of income and wealth as it has fragmented and compressed those of Others. It has built homes and settlements for its people over the ruins of homes and villages of Others. It has brought freedom to its people but imposed "bondage" on Others. It has practiced democracy among its people but violated democracy toward Others.

Those Others were on the land before the Israel of today

came into being, but they have been turned into strangers in their own land. They, like the Jews, are Semites, but for the Israelis they apparently are just Others.

The Israel of today is a land of contradictions. Freedoms of expression, religion, mobility, and equality before the law are held supreme, but not when dealing with Others. The Israel of today has virtually abolished the death penalty but its military forces visit death and destruction on the villages and homes of those Others. Opportunities for education, health, and shelter are extended to all, but not as equally or as liberally when the beneficiaries are those Others.

The Israel of today has created a national home for its people, but it has turned it into an armed fortress. In place of peace there is conflict and bullets in place of bread and butter. The Israel of today had aimed at peace and security but instead has concentrated on producing and exporting instruments of death, war, destruction, and instability. The Israel of today has sought and received apologies and reparations from those who had harmed its people. Will Israel have the courage to offer apology and compensation for the harm it has inflicted on Others?

The builders of Israel are happy to escape being a minority, yet they relish that status for Others. They feel deep agony when one of their people is hurt but they proceed to break bones and inflict pain and confinement on Others. They believe in the rule of law but fail to abide by decisions of their high court when applied to Others. Israeli law presumes one to be innocent until proven guilty, but one is considered guilty until proven innocent if that one is of those Others. They observe a day of remembrance of the Holocaust, and rightly so, but they fail to remember the tragic effects of their actions on Others. As victims they have received sympathy and aid to create a state, but they deny sympathy and obstruct cooperation when it is to create a state by those Others. And they have fought and still fight against policies of ethnic and racial discrimination and exclusion, and yet they practice these same policies toward Others.

The Israel of today is unique among nations, but will it sustain its positive uniqueness and perpetuate it on pillars of morality, clean conscience, and hope for the future? Will it sustain its uniqueness by recognizing the humanity of those Others as of its own? Will it nourish its uniqueness by building bridges where there are cleavages, by creating towers of security, or by reaching out to those Others? Will it nurture its young into a life of cooperation and peaceful co-existence with their neighbors--those same Others? Will it be able to overcome and eliminate the feelings of hate, fear, disdain, and aggression toward those Others?

Israel of today has the potential. Its people have the power and the ability to revitalize the values on which they founded the new Israel. The leaders of Israel have a legacy of values which deserves to be revived, strengthened, and sustained. Will they and their people have the wisdom, the courage, and the will to live by those values, and extend them beyond their borders to those Others? Will they come to terms with their "could be" glorious past and remove the gap they have built between themselves and those Others?

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