

The shock of Camp David

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Israel: Between Conflict and Peace



The keynote of Jewish history is not unity. The keynote of Jewish history is fragmentation, dispersion, and diversity. And to achieve a consensus out of this disruptive tradition is not the easiest of tasks.

Our starting point in recent days has been the certainty that there will be a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. I've had talks recently with the heads of the Israeli and Egyptian delegations and emerged convinced that a peace treaty will emerge despite some complex issues that remain to be solved. And thus we stand in the revolutionary era that begins, not in November, 1978, but in November, 1977, with Anwar el-Sadat's voyage to Jerusalem. What he achieved was to make a breach in the wall both of Arab rejection and of Israeli suspicion.

Now let us be frank with each other. Underneath the outer surface of Israeli life there has always been something choked and strangled, something cut off from expression, a terrible sense of insolubility, deadlock without end. The sense of being totally excluded from any affirmative contact with the neighboring world has been much more deeply at work on the morale and consciousness of the Israeli people than we might have wished to admit. And now all of a sudden the windows are open and the air comes rushing in.

The idea that the conflict in the Middle East would one day be resolved has played a large part in our rhetoric but not in our consciousness. The conflict has been the reality; peace has been a utopian fantasy. Why, there was even a school of thought within our academic movement that denied the very feasibility of conciliation. The conflict was portrayed by learned authorities as endemic, implacable, irrevocable, deeply rooted in the bloodstream of the Arab nation, capable of nothing more than occasional transient and illusory periods of ostensible calm.

According to this doctrine, siege is our destiny. Deterrence is our only strategy. Force is the only condition of our survival. This pessimistic view of the conflict as permanent and irredeemable never became the central principle of our academic movement or our political outlook. We believed that peace would come. But in the meantime conflict was our reality.

It is almost impossible to begin a discussion of the economic and social consequences of peace without a reference to the psychological repercussions of this change. (I've learned from my economist friends that economics is not an exact science.) The conflict determined everything. It filled our lives. It determined our military priorities. It created our political isolation. It corrupted our image. It was the starting point of our economic distress. It was the sustaining myth of our society. It cast its shadow on our educational system. It was the focal point of our scientific movement.

Now, the general effects of the conflict were, of course, disruptive and even oppressive. The conflict has been so pervasive in our lives that the end of it sets up repercussions of change across the whole length and breadth of our existence. But although the general effect was oppressive, although the conflict seemed to separate Israel from its better destiny, not all the results were negative. History works much more in paradox than in logic. The conflicts set up a defensive mechanism, a whole system of reactions and virtues, the fate of which is now in doubt.

The conflict had its response. Because of Arab hostility we developed a much stronger military valor than the early traditions of Zionism ever required. Because they denied us access to their markets and would sell us nothing we were forced to develop a system of commercial and economic links and connections going far beyond what is normal for so small a country in so small an area. And, therefore, we developed an economic resilience and resourcefulness much beyond our normal regional

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conditions. Above all, the conflict generated within our society/ solidarities and fidelities without which we might not have been able to overcome the elements of dispersion and disruption in our Jewish character and in our experience.

The response to siege generated certain nobilities in Israeli life, especially the capacity for unity and for sacrifice. Let us, therefore, understand the shock reaction that goes across the length and breadth of our lives. In a sense a historian might have to report that Arab hostility was the architect of Israel's strength. Now you might say that if hostility has forced us to strengthen our fidelities, to reinforce our economy, to build up an impressive military establishment, how are we going to live without it? And yet it is our most cherished ambition to live without it. We would prefer the affirmative challenge to the negative incentive. The hour is therefore right for a return to the old Zionist values: Jewish humanism, intellectual vitality, and social idealism.

In the long run these are a stronger assurance of our security than any that can be obtained by holding the Sinai Desert or permanently ruling a million Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza against their will and sentiment. But my point is that Israel, in relations of peace with the Arab world, is existentially different from an Israel in permanent conflict with its regional environment. We shall have an Israel smaller in size but greater in creative power and with a much larger field in which to deploy its resources of intellect and of spiritual depth.

To have brought the largest and strongest Arab states to a recognition of the inextinguishability of peace is a major achievement. This is the achievement of the whole Israeli people. I sent a sincere and warm telegram to Menachem Begin on the award of the Nobel Prize for Peace. But I'm sure that neither he nor any of us is in any doubt that the ability of Israel to accept a peace settlement at so heavy a price is possible only because certain Israeli and Jewish movements created an environment, a climate, and a system of political concepts favorable to hard compromises and to difficult sacrifices.

This is the great paradox of history. The pupil of Jabotinsky will, I hope, have the privilege of signing a peace treaty because the heirs of Weizmann and Ben-Gurion have tenaciously kept Israeli opinion at a moderate nonfeverish temperature. Therefore, the ideological diversity of Israeli political life is something in which Israelis and Jews ought to take pride. Stop summoning us to artificial unanimity. It is vital that we preserve our parliamentary balance between responsibility and criticism, between authoritative government and responsible opposition. The cabinet system is based upon this equilibrium. It is much better than the unanimity that usually brings about docility. Opposition is an honorable function in a democracy. Although I admit that it is the only honor politicians do not actively pursue.

The same arises in the context of our relations with Diaspora Jewry. Let me distinguish here between responsibility for decision and responsibility for consul-

tation. Israeli citizens alone have responsibility for deciding matters bearing on our security. If something were to go wrong, the price of blood and life would be Israeli life and Israeli blood alone. Because we are alone in the sacrifice of blood and life, we claim respect for our solitude of responsibility in deciding what the minimal conditions of Israel's security are. This does not mean that Jews across the world should be excluded from an intellectual contribution to the solution of our predicaments.

We must not at any point say to Diaspora Jews: Our flag is enough, we wave it in your face; we want your financial aid; we want your political solidarity; we don't want to hear your opinions. If we denied the intellectual dimension of the Jewish contribution, the Jewish intellectual community will be the first to peel off in silent and docile passivity. Zionism is a doctrine of universal Jewish responsibility. And, therefore, the entire Jewish people should be involved in the intellectual adventure of Jewish destiny.

In the meantime let us understand, not only the full potentiality, but the limitations of the present hour. All Israeli and Jewish leaders should be telling the truth to the Israeli and Jewish peoples. The truth is that Egypt, even after signing a peace treaty with Israel, will continue to be part of the Arab world with all the sensitivities this involves. Those of us who write books and articles sometimes sneak into a great library to find how we are recorded. And I find in the Library of Congress that the first reference to anything I'd written is called "The Modern Literary Movement in Egypt." This was an effort to describe how the Egyptian personality is caught up in a constant tension between Arabism and Egyptian particularism. Islam and Arab nationhood dominate but do not exhaust the fullness of the Egyptian personality.

In the literary movement and in the political leadership there is a consciousness that there is such a thing as Egypt *misr*, which is not entirely comprehended by the Arab-Moslem equation. There is a pre-Arab civilization and there is a special system of interests that are not solved by the pan-Arab myth. I believe that Egypt's initiative represents an expression of Egyptian particularism. I discern it in Anwar el-Sadat's interesting book. I wrote a review of that book in the *London Jewish Chronicle*. And the fact that, after my writing that review, he continues to invite me there proves the extent of his tolerance and patience. But the fact is that there is this element of concern for Egypt. Is not Egypt neglecting its particular interests by an excessive attachment to the militant and rigorous implications of the conflict? But even when we have said this, let there be no illusion. Egypt does not intend to resign from its Arab solidarities. These indeed are the difficulties that impede the peace-treaty negotiation today. And these sensitivities to what the rest of the Arab family thinks will continue to cast their shadow on Egyptian-Israeli relations thereafter. Let us tell this truth.

Another truth is that peace will be better served by serious intellectual exchange than by a wild rush for

unconsidered and uncontrolled commercial contacts. The truth is that Egypt and Israel will still have their particular memories, visions, and solidarities that pull their minds and hearts in different directions: the one toward the Arab-Moslem legacy; the other toward the somber drama of Jewish history.

Yet another truth is that the controversy is not ended. There is the other document concerned with the West Bank and Gaza. In a colloquium at Princeton I tried to distinguish between two terms that diplomatic historians often confuse: ambiguity and equivocation. Ambiguity occurs when you are in agreement but have a sincere difference on what the agreement means. Equivocation occurs when you know that you do not have an agreement but you have good reason for postponing confrontation by a formula which, as it were, cements over the cracks in opinion.

There is no agreement on the West Bank and Gaza. There is no agreement between Israel and Egypt. There is no agreement between Israel and the United States. There is no agreement between Israeli and Israeli within our own national consensus.

But the truth is that the Camp David agreements do involve the reduction of the Israeli involvement and control in the West Bank and Gaza and that those agreements contain concepts and formulas on the Palestine issue which Israelis have hitherto been unwilling to accept. The truth is that there is more chance that the million Arabs will have a fundamentally Arab political destiny than that they will ever come under Israeli sovereignty. In accepting and applauding the Camp David agreements, as I do, we should not fool ourselves about what it is that we accept and what it is that we applaud. Nor should our Arab neighbors or our American friends doubt the unity of Israeli opinion in defense of such vital interests as defensible boundaries and the unity of Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty.

Together with the contraction of territory there comes an expansion of our international role. I will refer briefly to one or two implications. I hold a conviction that I will here state dogmatically without proof: In the new conditions the natural arena in which Israel's economic and scientific talents should be deployed is not in the Great Power equation, or even in the Middle East itself, but in the Mediterranean world in conjunction with the European economic communities.

I believe that a study of the Israeli and Arab economies will not prove complementariness. And I believe the natural advantages of proximity of scientific cooperation and of commercial affinity will make the EEC the natural area in which Israel's economic and technological talents will be deployed; and a solution of the conflicts, and especially of the Palestine conflict, will reduce the major inhibition to that cooperation. I hope that we will investigate this vision, which stood before us when we signed our preferential agreements, but the development of which has been impeded by the conflict itself.

There is need not only for a new arrangement of our

political and economic values, but also for attitudinal change. War and peace are largely made in classrooms. I suggested to our negotiators that we try to include a provision for ensuring that the educational and information policies of Egypt and Israel be attuned to the new vision of conciliation, and that our institutions of higher learning and science be brought into fruitful collaboration. Now, whatever is said or unsaid in the treaty, this element in the new regional order should be given full weight. On the battlefield we had nothing to say to each other. In the great enterprises of peace we shall have need to probe each other's language, culture, and shape of mind. This means that Israeli political and intellectual leaders must acquire a new dimension and a new capacity if they are to be worthy of the changing hour. We cannot be totally segregated from the linguistic and cultural traditions of the Arab Middle East.

Finally, I am certain that students and scholars and observers for many months will be weighing the full implications and lessons of the Camp David accords. They have their intrinsic and their exemplary value. Intrinsic because it was a great drama in itself. Exemplary because there is much here to learn about the techniques of international conciliation in general.

First of all, we learn something about Israel's past political postures. Every Egyptian whom I have asked why it is that many of them have reconciled themselves to Israel's permanence has replied in terms of Israel's strength. And not in terms of Israel's rectitude. Now this means, whether all of us moderates like it or not, that the tough element in the Israeli diplomatic posture has had at least as great a role as the flexible element in bringing our adversaries into their present state of reconciliation. It was only by exhausting the possibilities of getting what they want without peace that they examined the idea of getting what they want with peace. My own experience teaches me that men and nations do behave wisely once they have exhausted all the other alternatives.

The other lesson is that negotiation is important. The Israeli Government in 1967, and all its successors thereafter, were bullied by world opinion and the media out of an attitude that was essentially just. We said we must have contact. We must have encounter. We must have negotiations. Under the pressure of enemies and friends we gave up the struggle. They said to us: What does it matter? It's a question of procedure, prestige; if you can get peace without meeting, what does it matter how you get it? I remember responding rhetorically: How can peace be born if the parents do not even meet once? The rhetoric was appreciated but the policy was rejected, and we had these fantastic efforts to bring about peace without encounter. There was the extraordinary effort of the Soviet Union in 1969 to achieve peace by the depositing of documents. We would put the territories in an envelope and slide them under the door. The Arabs would put peace in another envelope and deposit it in a post office box, and we would never have sight of each other. Sadat's visit proved the overwhelming importance of the

dramatic, the emblematic, the symbolic, and the human element. What he said in the Knesset did not differ from what he said in 1971. But in 1971 what he said was accompanied by a refusal to meet, to negotiate. There was, therefore, no credibility whatever to his statement. It was only the coherence and consecutiveness of human contact that made the negotiation feasible.

The cynical school of diplomats led by Harold Nicholson warns us against summitry. The heads of government, he writes, should not meet too often because, if they meet, there is a grave danger that they might get to know each other. The Camp David experience proves the inevitability of taking discussion to the highest point of responsibility and of decision.

Another lesson is reticence. This agreement would not have been achieved if every stage, every tentative proposal, every trial balloon had been submitted to domestic scrutiny before the final agreement was reached. And I think President Carter's greatest success was to insulate the discussion in its crucial stages from the pervasive penetration of the media. There is an inherent conflict of interest between the right to peace and the right to know. If you want to know anything, everything, you may not have peace. That which it is the newspaperman's duty to expose is the diplomat's duty to conceal. Agreements, of course, must become known. But not at every intermediate stage of negotiation. It is one thing when you see the heavy price together with the agreement so that the glitter of the achievement is compensation for the heaviness of the price. It is another matter to be obsessed with the price before you even have the agreement. It can't have been easy for the eminent newspaper and television commentators to be called to Thurmont, Maryland, to be informed that all the participants continued to have faith in the God of their fathers. That is a lofty sentiment, but nobody would call it hard news.

A final reflection: Mediation is necessary. The gulf of suspicion and mistrust that has grown up between the states of the Middle East in the past thirty years, some of them reaching deeper into the historic background, are such that without an intervening bridge of conciliation nothing could have been achieved. It is respectable in our own and in Arab political theology either to dispense with mediation or to hope that it will not be assertive. But my view is that the parties had reached a point of alienation so sharp that without President Carter's intervention they would not have been brought either to their last reunion or to overcome their remaining obstacles.

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The mediator must have not only wisdom but power; must be able to compensate the parties for what they renounce and lose in the act of their compromise. This means that there has to be a Great Power involvement.

And finally, we have proved the validity of the evolutionary against the comprehensive approach. The edifice of peace must be built like any structure—layer by layer, floor by floor. We must emerge out of the utopian illusions of comprehensiveness. Only a year and a half ago the international community was dominated by the concept that everybody must negotiate and achieve a solution of everything at once. This was the Geneva syndrome. Egypt and Israel and Jordan and Lebanon and Syria and the Palestinians and the United States and the Soviet Union and the United Nations must simultaneously solve the problems of Sinai and Golan and of Jerusalem and the Holy Places and the refugees and navigation.

Where does anything like that ever happen? There has to be a stage-by-stage approach. Therefore it was wise to attach importance to the Egyptian sector. If the iceberg has to thaw at any single place, where better than at that point at which Arab policy and culture are decisively determined? Egypt is not one of twenty-two Arab states; it is half the Arab world, the repository of the Arab military option, the recognized center of Arab policy and culture. It was right not to wait for all the twenty-two to move at the same time. If you have to wait for all twenty-two, for how long will you have to wait?

The lessons to be learned are, therefore, of broad exemplary significance. But the task of Israel and the Jewish people is to understand this great shock of psychological change that will have to communicate itself across the length and breadth of our lives.