ISRAEL: 1

PRIDE AND PARADOX: AN EXCHANGE OF LETTERS

ROBERT ALTER
SHLOMO AVINERI

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
BERKELEY
DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE
LITERATURE
DWINELLE HALL
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94720

July 8, 1974

Professor Shlomo Avineri
Department of Political Science
Hebrew University
Jerusalem

Dear Shlomo:

Writing to you now, I can't help feeling a certain eery sense of almost unreal change since our meeting here in Berkeley a year and a half ago. I recall sitting in the Northside Cafe with you and talking about what everyone concerned with Israel was talking about then: the future of the territories and what hanging on to them indefinitely might mean for Israel. You were saying, if I remember correctly, that whatever the political unwisdom of the standpat policy on the territories, critics on the Israeli left tended to exaggerate the deleterious social and political effects on Israel of keeping the territories. That placid conversation now seems as historically removed from present events as though it had taken place sometime early in the Mandate period, and especially because I have not been back to Israel myself since before the beginning of the October war, there are a couple of central issues in the present troubling situation which I would like to explore with you.

Perhaps the best place to begin would be the deep depression of national morale in Israel (or does the picture look exaggerated from this distance?) and what one is to make of it. Late last fall, all my Israeli friends were writing me in the blackest despair; by now, the only detectable improvement is that some of them say you get used to living with the blackest despair after a while. The editorial columns of the Israeli press are full of exhortations to calm and quiet determination. (A *Ha'aretz* piece, for example, a couple of weeks after the Ma'alot massacre, entreated Israeli citizens to "come down off the rooftops.") Responsible columnists try to remind their readers that Israel — and the *yishuv* before it — has undergone crises just as grim without panicking. Now, one might at least infer from all this that there is widespread incipient hysteria in Israel, something like a national "failure of nerve" since the traumatic surprise of the concerted attack last October. Such a state of mind, of course, would be repeatedly reinforced by the general disarray of Israeli political leadership, the diplomatic encirclement, the new wave of terrorism, runaway inflation, and so forth.

Shlomo Avineri is Professor of Political Science and Dean of Social Sciences at the Hebrew University. He is a recognized authority on the works of Marx and Hegel.

Israelis, I notice, like to observe of themselves that they are a people of extremes, unreasonably euphoric after 1967, unreasonably downcast after 1973, but I myself am suspicious of "national character" as a way of explaining public response to this sort of critical historical moment. I would like to know what, in fact, is the Israeli mood as far as you can gauge it from up close. If indeed there is widespread and abiding depression about Israel's prospects for the future, is it of a sort that might have a damaging effect on Israeli political judgment — in a period when some hard decisions will have to be made — or (to risk a melodramatic note) on Israel's resolution to face continuing threats to its survival? One side of this picture, of course, is the much-discussed public opinion surveys a few months ago that showed surprisingly substantial percentages of Israelis, especially among the young, who would seriously contemplate emigration. Another side is an apocalyptic sense of "Let my soul perish with the Philistines" which one hears some Israelis express — if the Arabs, with the direct backing of Russia and perhaps now the indirect complicity of the U. S., are irrevocably determined to destroy Israel, then let Israel be prepared to use whatever cataclysmic means it can to bring down its enemies with it, and perhaps through that to begin a world conflagration.

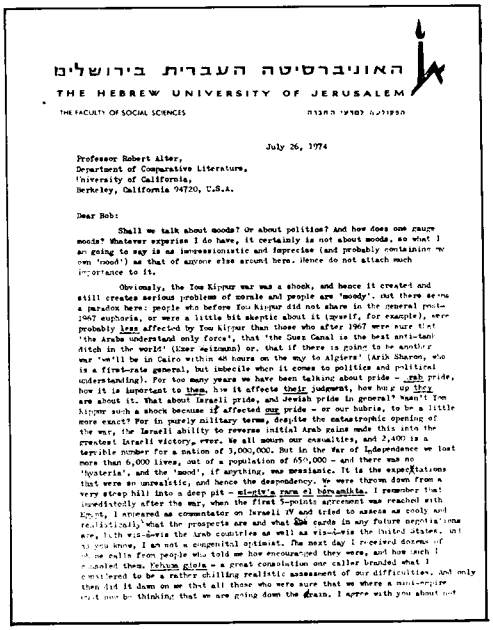
These are, admittedly, very dire thoughts, and while I don't know whether they really reflect any foreseeable political realities, they are troubling enough simply in reflecting a perceptible frame of mind in some Israelis, and so I am particularly anxious to know how you assess this frame of mind. Perhaps I should say frames of mind, since responses to the new situation seem to vary from apocalyptic fierceness to moralistic orgies of self-recrimination, with the only common denominator being what looks from here like an edge of panic.

I suppose it is not possible to separate the question of mood entirely from the actual issue of the political prognosis in the Middle East. Again from what I can gather from the Hebrew press, more and more people in Israel are talking about another all-out war within the next six to eighteen months. Sadat, of course, the supposed "moderate" of the Arab leaders, has been making more and more bellicose noises, to the point of issuing ultimatum-like timetables for total Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai, and some sober analyses I have read argue that there is every reason to take Sadat at his word. Could it be that those inclined to hysteria are simply justified by the objective situation? Do you see any developments either within Israel or (where one is much more helpless to do anything) on the international scene that might lead to an alternative other than renewed warfare?

Forgive me if I seem to be reaching half way around the world to spill my darkest doubts on your desk but it would appear that the only way to begin to understand what is going on right now is to do some resolute poking into unpleasant corners.

All best,

Bob Alter



האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים
THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM
THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

July 26, 1974

Professor Robert Alter,
Department of Comparative Literature,
University of California,
Berkeley, California 94720, U.S.A.

Dear Bob:

Shall we talk about moods? Or about politics? And how does one gauge moods? Whatever expertise I do have, it certainly is not about moods, so what I am going to say is as impressionistic and imprecise (and probably containing my own 'mood') as that of anyone else around here. Hence do not attach much importance to it.

Obviously, the Yom Kippur war was a shock, and hence it created and still creates serious problems of morale and people are 'moody'. But there seems a paradox here: people who before Yom Kippur did not share in the general post-1967 euphoria, or were a little bit skeptic about it (myself, for example), were probably less affected by Yom Kippur than those who after 1967 were sure that 'the Arabs understand only force', that 'the Suez Canal is the best anti-tank ditch in the world' (Ezer Weizmann) or, that if there is going to be another war 'we'll be in Cairo within 48 hours on the way to Algiers' (Arik Sharon, who is a first-rate general, but imbecile when it comes to politics and political understanding). For too many years we have been talking about pride - Arab pride, how it is important to them, how it affects their judgment, how hung up they are about it. What about Israeli pride, and Jewish pride in general? Wasn't Yom Kippur such a shock because it affected our pride - or our hubris, to be a little more exact? For in purely military terms, despite the catastrophic opening of the war, the Israeli ability to reverse initial Arab gains made this into the greatest Israeli victory, ever. We all mourn our casualties, and 2,400 is a terrible number for a nation of 3,000,000. But in the War of Independence we lost more than 6,000 lives, out of a population of 650,000 - and there was no 'hysteria', and the 'mood', if anything, was messianic. It is the expectations that were unrealistic, and hence the despondency. We were thrown down from a very steep hill into a deep pit - sic-gviy'a rare el bor'amikia. I remember that immediately after the war, when the first 5-points agreement was reached with Egypt, I appeared as commentator on Israeli TV and tried to assess as coolly and realistically what the prospects are and what the cards in any future negotiations are, both vis-à-vis the Arab countries as well as vis-à-vis the United States. As you know, I am not a congenital optimist. The next day I received dozens of phone calls from people who told me how encouraged they were, and how much I consoled them. Yehuda Gloria - a great consolation one caller branded what I considered to be a rather chilling realistic assessment of our difficulties. And only then did it dawn on me that all those who were sure that we were a mini-empire were thinking that we are going down the drain. I agree with you about not

July 26, 1974
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Clearly, the Yom Kippur war was a shock. It created and continues to create serious problems of morale, and people are "moody." But there seems to be a paradox here: people who before Yom Kippur did not share in the general post-1967 euphoria, or were a little bit skeptical about it (myself, for example), were probably *less* affected by Yom Kippur than those who after 1967 were sure that "the Arabs understand only force," that "the Suez Canal is the best anti-tank ditch in the world" (Ezer Weizman) or, that if there is going to be another war, "we'll be in Cairo within 48 hours on the way to Algiers" (Arik Sharon, who is a first-rate general, but an imbecile when it comes to politics and political understanding).

Israelis... like to observe of themselves that they are a people of extremes, unreasonably euphoric after 1967, unreasonably downcast after 1973, but I am suspicious of "national character" as a way of explaining public response to ... critical historical moment.

For too many years we have been talking about pride — *Arab* pride, how it is important to *them*, how it affects *their* judgment, how hung up *they* are about it. What about Israeli pride, and Jewish pride in general? Wasn't Yom Kippur such a shock because it affected *our* pride — or our hubris, to be a little more exact? For in purely military terms, despite the catastrophic opening of the war, the Israeli ability to reverse initial Arab gains made this into the greatest Israeli victory. We all mourn our casualties, and 2,800 is a terrible number for a nation of 3,000,000. But in the War of Independence we lost more than 6,000 lives out of a population of 650,000 — and there was no "hysteria;" the "mood," if anything, was messianic. In 1973, the expectations were unrealistic, and

AN EXCHANGE OF LETTERS

hence the despondency. We were thrown down from a very steep hill into a deep pit — *migiva rama el bura amikta.*

I remember that immediately after the war, when the first 5-point agreement was reached with Egypt, I appeared as a commentator on Israeli TV and tried to assess as cooly and realistically as possible what the prospects are and what our cards show for any future negotiations, vis-à-vis the Arab countries as well as the United States. And as you know, I am not a congenital optimist. The next day I received dozens of phone calls from people who told me how encouraged they were, and how much I consoled them. *N'chamah g'dolah* — a great consolation — one caller branded what I considered to be a rather chilling, realistic assessment of our difficulties. And only then did it dawn on me that all those who were sure that we were a mini-empire must now be thinking that we are going down the drain. I agree with you about not generalizing about national character, but the fact is that since 1967 so many Israelis were so totally unrealistic in their world perception that if anything, *anything* went wrong, they thought that their whole world was collapsing around them, while what was really collapsing were only their wild dreams.

What many Israelis — and Jews abroad (I'll come to that in a moment) — forgot after 1967 was that the basic equation in Middle Eastern politics did not change even though we inflicted a phenomenal blow to the Arab armies. *We* are David, and *they* are Goliath. Many thought that *we* had become, over six nights in 1967, Goliath, and no mistake could be more catastrophic to national morale. Those who continued to think that we had better look out because we are the weaker party, those who were not so much carried away by our military performance — to them, Yom Kippur was, perhaps, a little less of a shock, and they could keep their cool a little more than Dayan, who is reported to have said on the third day of the war that "the Third Commonwealth is in danger of being destroyed."

A word about world Jewry and the American Jewish Community. I have been in and out of Israel several times this past year, and have seen the tremendous effort made by American Jewry to help Israel during and after the war. I was involved in some of the moves and know how much time, effort and money went into this spectacular feat of *Ahavat Yisrael.* It is not out of ignorance or disdain that I am going to say the following: some of the dreary mood is sometimes attributable more to overseas Jewry than to Israel. Let's be frank and blunt: world Jewry had a fantastic ego trip at the expense of Israel, especially since 1967 (the phrase isn't mine, but that of a very prominent American Jewish writer and editor). Now the chickens have come home to roost. So much of the image of the Israeli Superman was not made in Israel but in Brooklyn: not that Israelis — and sabras in particular — lack *chutzpah.* But to them, it comes naturally; nor do they intellectualize, or verbalize or conceptualize it (maybe because so many of them aren't so good at intellectualizing, verbalizing or conceptualizing: the price of normalcy, if you wish; the dangers of *malchut bassar vadam,* the terrestrial kingdom, if you prefer — this was, after all, a little bit of what Zionism was about, at least to some).

For too many years we have been talking about... "Arab" pride, how it is important to "them", how it affects "their" judgment, how hung up "they" are about it. What about Israeli pride, and Jewish pride in general?

It was American Jewry, collectively and individually, that drew the enormous psychological dividends from the Six Day War. Jews can fight. Jews are *the* fighters of the world. We are the upper dogs. We can hit back as well as the Italians and Irish and Blacks — we can hit back even better. Maybe I am exaggerating, but I always felt that the *glorification* of Israel's might was always stronger among Diaspora Jews than in Israel proper. In Israel; it seems to me, it was in most cases functional: we need that strength in order to survive. In the Diaspora, it was in many cases psychologically compensatory: we shall show the *goyim.* And at a time when America wasn't doing that well in Vietnam while we were doing quite well in the Middle East, the ego-boosting dividends were even more satisfying.

As you say, one shouldn't generalize, but in this stock-taking of national morale, I feel that because we are tied to each other in an umbilical cord of *kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh,* we shouldn't push this vicarious glorification in the splendor of Israel under the carpet. It plays a tremendous role in Jewish identification with Israel; it also has its pitfalls.

But to come back to Israel. You raised the problem of emigration, especially among the young. Since no similar public opinion poll had been taken before Yom Kippur, we have no comparative data and do not know whether this potential tendency to emigrate went up or down after Yom Kippur. I am not being facetious, because emigration from Israel has *always* been a problem, and not only in years of difficulty or economic recession. The years 1967-1973 were certainly the best years in terms of Israeli national morale: it was in these years that emigration from Israel was not stopped, and many of the tens of thousands of Israelis whom one finds all around New York, for example,

came to look for their bit of the American Dream in the golden years after 1967, and a lot of things in Israel have contributed to that: the ultimate claustrophobia of a small state (or *shtetl*, if you please), our crazy taxation laws that give you a premium if you stay outside the country for a sufficient period of time to bring back all those goodies like cars and washing machines tax-free, the ambition of youngsters and their elders to make it, academically and financially, whatever the odds (familiar Jewish traits, aren't they?).

I really don't know whether these tendencies will become more pronounced in the wake of Yom Kippur; they may. All I am saying is that the problem of emigration from Israel is so complex that one survey — even if it made page 11 in the New York *Times* — should not be taken for a change in historical patterns just because the preceding patterns have not been equally sensationally reported. We have a problem, the perennial problem of Jewish restlessness — after all, that's the way the Diaspora was created in the first place, not because of Titus — and we should face it. But let's at least see it in its correct perspective.

Finally, you asked whether the mood in Israel will not make it difficult for the government to make realistic concessions necessary for peace. All indications are to the contrary — that the new government is much more realistic, much less hung-up on chimerical preconceptions, than its predecessor. It speaks the language of concrete reality, not of ideological obfuscation — "There are no Palestinians" (Golda) as opposed to "I do not know if there is a Palestinian entity, but there certainly is a Palestinian problem, and we should help towards solving it" (Rabin). It may be too early to assess the performance of the Rabin government — while I am writing, it is grappling with the illegal right-wing attempt to force its hands through establishing a Jewish settlement near Sebastia on the West Bank. But it seems to me, if we can go back for a moment to the question of "moods," that the very fact that a new government has been established and that the people mainly connected in the public mind with the Yom Kippur War have been ousted (Golda, Dayan, indirectly also Sapir) — suggests that the "mood" has been a little bit stabilized. Let's see how it goes on.

Yours sincerely,

Shlomo

Shlomo Avineri

Robert Alter is a professor of Comparative Literature at the University of California at Berkeley. He has written widely, and his books include AFTER THE TRADITION, a study of of modern Jewish literature.

The fact is that since 1967 so many Israelis were so totally unrealistic in their world perception that if anything went wrong, they thought that their whole world was collapsing around them, while what was really collapsing were only their wild dreams.

August 5, 1974

Dear Shlomo:

If your letter was in part a reflection of your own mood, I must say that your mood is bracing in being so sanely anti-apocalyptic. Once I was incautious enough to state in print that apocalypse was a far more central mode of historical (or perhaps post-historical) imagination in Christianity than in Judaism. Perhaps the historical evidence is more variegated and ambiguous than I suggested at the time, but there surely is a vigorously antiapocalyptic tradition in Jewish experience, and your letter is a reasurring illustration of its persistence.

I think you are quite right in what you say about the psychologically compensatory function that Israel tends to serve for American Jews. Even in America, at least the edges of Jewish consciousness continue to be gnawed at by the anxieties of minority status and the memories of earlier victimization; and for many the possibility of identifying with a Jewish majority culture, secured by a triumphant Jewish army, is positively seductive. This situation, as you note, was especially evident after the Six Day War, when Jewish triumphalism attained euphoric heights in this country that it scarcely could have reached in Israel, where the human price of the victory was all too apparent. For the same reason, I suppose, American Jews have always been particularly and embarrassingly susceptible to the cheapest pitches of that ineffectual exercise in image-making which Israelis euphemistically call *hasbarah*, and, even more, to the commercial exploitation of the heroic Israeli image in everything from *Exodus* to the *poshlust* of commemorative coins. (All this could hardly be what Ahad Ha'am had in mind when he thought of Israel as a spiritual center radiating out cultural vitality to the

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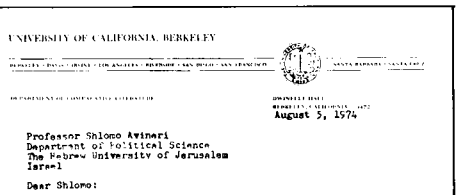


UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

August 5, 1974

Professor Shlomo Avineri
Department of Political Science
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Israel

Dear Shlomo:

If your letter was in part a reflection of your own mood, I must say that your mood is bracing in being so openly anti-apocalyptic. Once I was incautious enough to say in print that apocalypse was a far more central mode of historical (or perhaps post-historical) inspiration in Christianity than in Judaism. Perhaps the historical evidence is more variegated and ambiguous than I suggested at the time, but there surely is a vigorously anti-apocalyptic tradition in Jewish experience, and your letter is a reassuring illustration of its persistence.

I think you are quite right in what you say about the psychologically compensatory function that Israel tends to serve for American Jews. Even in America, at least the redoubts of Jewish consciousness continue to be powered at top by the evocations of minority status and the memories of earlier victimization; and for many the possibility of identifying with a Jewish majority culture, secured by a triumphant Jewish army, is positively seductive. This situation was especially evident after the Six-Day War, when Jewish triumphalism attained euphoric heights in this country that it scarcely could have reached in Israel, where the human price of the victory was all too apparent. For the same reason, I, like one, American Jews have always been particularly and embarrassingly susceptible to the cheapest pitches of that instinctual exercise in image-making which Israelis quasi-ironically call hasbara, and, even more, to the commercial exploitation of the Jewish Israeli image in everything from kitsch to the realities of consumptive color. [All this could hardly be what Ahad Ha'am had in mind when he thought of Israel as a spiritual center radiating out cultural vitality to the Diaspora like an area heater, but then Ahad Ha'am was never very strong on the kinky undersides of collective consciousness.] Everything you say, then, about American Jewry's suspect dependency on the Israeli image seems to me quite justified, but one point you make in passing needs some explanation. You seem to suggest that the gloom in Israel is in some degree, or at some moments, directly connected with — compounded by? — the gloom in the Diaspora. If this is in any sense true, it would be intriguing to know what were the channels through which a prevalent frame of mind among American Jews impinged upon Israeli awareness. Would you say that Israelis are much more involved in what is being thought in the Diaspora (perhaps since 1967) than they used to be? If I can play the devil's advocate of the *Galut* for a moment, would you say that Israelis have in any way come to use the Diaspora as a mirror for their own identity, perhaps have developed a degree of dependency on Diaspora acceptance of the superman image which they themselves know is basically spurious? Perhaps such fanciful questions don't deserve to be taken seriously; what I am wondering about (and it is difficult to determine from our end of the relationship) is whether over the past seven years some subtle but important shift has taken place in the underlying psychology of the Israeli relationship to the Diaspora.

In any case, the frequent expression of extreme pessimism on both sides of the world about Israel's situation suggests to me that though there may not be an issue of national character involved, there might be one of national memory. That is, I am skeptical about whether Jews are really more prone to hysteria or euphoria than other peoples, but as a nation we did, after all, suffer our most ghastly historical trauma only a generation ago, and I begin to suspect now that the potency of the Holocaust as a fact of imagination (it cannot quite be called thinking) for Jews is actually growing with the passage of time. When Israel's survival appears to be threatened, what I would guess most American Jews think of immediately is: Holocaust, and that somehow seems to imply a threat to their own survival. I would suppose that the reflex of disaster is slower for most Israelis, certainly for sabras, but I recall that after the October war more than one prominent Israeli intellectual responded to interviewers by saying that during the first dark days of the war they could feel a pervasive premonition of Holocaust. The awareness of genocide as a past fact and, alas, as a future possibility I would take to be a grim necessity for all Jews, like the awareness of personal mortality for every grown-up human being. But just as a person can become damagingly obsessed with the idea of his own death, a fearful brooding over the idea of the Holocaust can impair clear thought about actualities, leading to the overblown nationalistic grandiosity of, say, an Eliezer Livneh on the one hand, or to a perennial state of panic, on the other. I'm not sure whether Israel and American Jewry influence one another in this respect, but they certainly seem to share the problems of an unsettling common past. Perhaps, as you suggest, the most hopeful thing about the Rabin government, in contrast to Golda Meir's administration, is that it may be capable of a certain cool-headed pragmatism without inordinate mental static from the Jewish past.

In 1967, when the danger was much less imminent in terms of extinction, we feared the worst; in 1973, when there was much more to worry about, we were too sure of ourselves, and the gloom set in much later.

Whatever the mood in Israel, the most decisive element in the Middle East situation obviously remains Arab intentions (and, of course, beyond that, Soviet intentions), and as we approach what could be a diplomatically crucial fall season, I wonder whether you would be willing to speculate on what the Arabs are likely to do. Since I last wrote you, Arab saber-rattling has increased, especially from Egypt, the

supposed "moderate" of the two major aggressor states in the Yom Kippur War. Israel is calling up more reserves, and the argument for the plausibility of the Arab threats, which one repeatedly sees in the Israeli press, runs something like this: Two years ago we refused to take Sadat seriously when he promised to attack within a year, and when attack was much more of a long-shot for him. Now the Egyptians are persuaded that they achieved an impressive success primarily through military prowess, that the balance of power has clearly shifted to their side (especially with the oil weapon in the background), and that if Israel does not simply yield to all their demands, they can only gain from a renewal of general warfare. Does the seeming logic of this argument leave out any important considerations that might affect Arab policy? And, if you'll forgive me for moving once more from politics to mood, or at least to public opinion, do you find this an analysis that most Israelis tend to think of as accurate? If so, are people really steeling themselves to an indefinite period of war — one Israeli friend has spoken to me of a hundred years' war — with only temporary respites of a stretch of months, or at best a few years?

What was Zionism if not an attempt to put an end to the tentativeness of Jewish life in Exile, ... to secure ... a haven for the Jewish people? ... It may be that Israel today is the least secure place for a Jew on earth.

That is a rather grim question to conclude a letter that began by praising the virtue of opposition to the apocalyptic way of thinking, but at this difficult time, I suppose all questions have to remain open.

Sincerely,

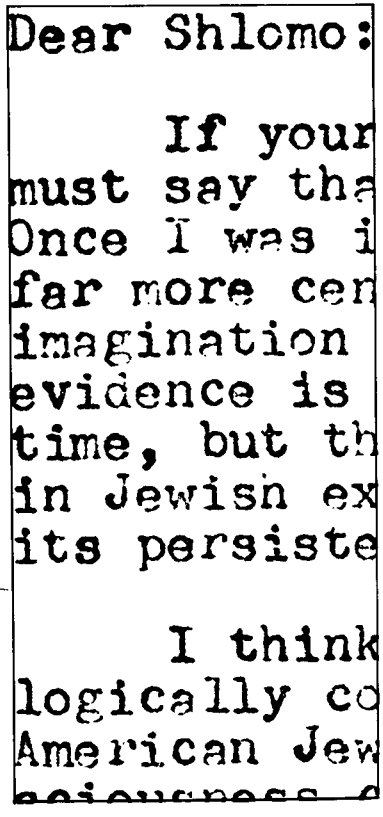
Robert Alter

August 20, 1974

Dear Bob:

Holocaust is a terrible word, but I am sure you are right; whenever Israel's survival seems to be threatened, most American Jews think immediately of the Holocaust. This is also what most Israelis think of in that context; until 1967 one can say fairly accurately that most Israelis never thought of Israel and its existence in terms related to the Holocaust. It Can't Happen Here, in Zion. The three weeks preceding the Six Day War were such a traumatic experience for most Israelis precisely because the reality of a holocaust, the existential danger to one's own individual and collective being, became for the first time a reality to many young Israelis. And this, of course, made them so much more aware of their being Jewish, not merely Israelis. Whatever views one had about *galut*, all of a sudden it became clear that we are all in the same boat. Its flag may be blue rather than yellow, but a very distinctive "J" was scribbled across its bow. If an Israeli-ness, distinct from Jewishness, was ever a possibility in New Canaan, the Six Day War, and of course later Yom Kippur made it a non-starter.

But the ironies here are compounded: the feeling of Holocaust was strongest, both in Israel and abroad, on the eve of the June War, when Israel's victory was felt by the army people to be assured; and so it was. On Yom Kippur, on the other hand, when a *real* danger to the very existence of Israel existed in a way it never appeared in 1967, most people (should I say: myself included?) felt that after a few hours we would repulse the invaders with relative ease and it would be 1967 all over again. The gnawing feeling of terror and agony began creeping over all of us only later, when it became clear it wouldn't be a walk-over. We were all a little bit unrealistic, both in 1967



and 1973, but in different ways. In 1967, when the danger was much less imminent in terms of extinction, we feared the worst; in 1973, when there was much more to worry about, we were too sure of ourselves, and the gloom set in much later, and in a way it still continues — our correspondence is, after all, one of its expressions.

There is, however, a much deeper irony here, which, to those of us who are used to dialectical thinking, is perhaps immanent in such a situation; it is nonetheless surprising. The whole idea of Zionism, of the Return to the Land of Israel, was imbued with the quest for security, for roots, for being a people like all other people, sitting under one's vine and fig-tree. What was Zionism if not an attempt to put an end to the tentativeness of Jewish life in Exile; to be back home again; to secure, in Herzl's memorable words, a haven, recognized in international law, for the Jewish people? What was it, after the Nazi Holocaust, that made the majority of the Jewish people accept the idea of the Jewish state if not the feeling that now, after the slaughter of six million, at least one place on earth should be safe for the remnants of the Nazi genocide? In a more naive and vulgar brand of Zionism, what was, say, American Jewry's contribution to Israel if not taking out insurance against the day of wrath when It will happen There as well? We all know how many American Jews must have been offended by such an instrumental view sometimes expressed by cocksure Israelis totally ignorant of the complex mechanisms of a Diaspora Jew's spiritual tortures.

I have said it before and I have to reiterate it again, though I don't like what I am saying: it may be the other way around. It may be that Israel today is the *least* secure place for a Jew on earth. As a matter of fact, the only place where I am existentially confronted with death and life questions *as a Jew* is in Israel. I may be mugged in New York, certainly discriminated against in Moscow — but only in Israel may I be killed by someone who aims at killing me because I am a Jew and because he feels I am his enemy and is out to get me. In Europe in 1940 it certainly was otherwise, but in 1974 this is the way it is: the Jews in Israel are in danger, much more so than anywhere else.

... The hawkishness of American Jews often appears as an inflexible given, the expression of an emotion rather than a political position, and as such you can't really debate it.

This I think is a truism, and I feel this was the case from the very beginning of the Jewish Return to Israel. But it seems that only now are many people beginning to realize it and to see that the naive belief that the establishment of a Jewish state would solve the Jewish problem was a little too simple-minded. Nor was the founding of Israel the end of the Zionist endeavor; in a way it was only the beginning.

You may then justifiably ask: the beginning of what? If Zionism did not give Jews security, if it did not free them from the terror of their very existence, did it fail? Wasn't it a failure, a misconception, from the very beginning?

It really depends on what you understand by Zionism. I, for one, never thought that Zionism was aimed primarily, or merely, at physical security. Nor do I think this was the aim of the pioneers of the First or Second Aliyah. After all, those thirty or forty thousand Jews who came to Palestine between 1881–1914 were but a trickle of the immense Jewish wandering which swept about three million Jews from Czarist Russia to North and South America, to South Africa, to England, and to Australia. The great majority of Jews were really looking for security; and they found it in the United States, in Canada, mainly in the liberal English-speaking West. The minority that went to Palestine looked for something else; not just for security (compare security under the Turks in 1905 with the prospects of Anglo-Saxon law-and-order!). They were looking for a focus for their national self-consciousness, to be maintained through the evolution of a national culture, a wide spectrum of social and economic occupations, a nucleus for a self-governing community, a Jewish body politic to take the place of the vanished modes of Jewish existence in the *k'hillah*. They also wanted to be the subject of historical action, rather than its mere object.

It is this which Zionism was about, and it is this which is being threatened now. The *physical* existence of the Jews in Israel may, perhaps, be guaranteed somewhere else, but the existence of their self-conscious, *spiritual* existence, cannot be expressed anywhere except in Israel. The *Bund* did not work, nor did Birobidjan — and not merely for physical reasons.

What I am really saying is that the existence of Israel is on a normative, not merely factual or physical level. I don't mean to imply that this makes Israelis better Jews than Diaspora Jews; on the contrary — it puts harder burdens on us. It really means that the criteria for the success or failure of Israel are not merely on the level of physical security, but on the level of the normative quality of life that is going to emerge in the New Zion. And it is precisely here that the difficulties and setbacks in the Yom Kippur War have brought out in the Israeli consciousness a strand of worry and preoccupation with moral, spiritual issues which was lacking before 1973.

Let me put it bluntly: like a *nouveau riche*, after 1967 we enjoyed our new real estate and were preoccupied with it. Many of Israel's writers (Moshe Shamir is a prime example of this corruption) spent much of their time defending what they considered the historical, if not prophetic, title for this real estate. Listening to some rabbis and poets, one could sometimes think that all the Bible was about was — who owns this or that piece of land. The prophetic mission was reduced by some to a divine invocation to maintain a title to real estate. Never mind politicians and military men — this was the true treason of the intellectuals in our society who thought that nationalism (and I *am* a nationalist) can be reduced to the thingness of *etzim v'avanim*. So much of our religious heritage was prostituted to this New Paganism—and here, American religious leaders did help us, let us not mince words about it. This happens even now; only recently, during the attempt of the right-wing group to force the hands of the government over settlement in the West Bank (the Sebastia Affair), I was told by an eminent American rabbi that American Jews are more hawkish than Israelis and are sometimes aghast at the dovishness of the Israeli government. Being polite, I did not tell them that I found this at best a sick joke. Not being religious myself, I did not feel I had the right to remind him — or many Israeli religious people — that the prophetic vision was not limited to a physical attachment to physical objects, dear as they are (and Hebron, and Jericho, and every piece of Eretz Yisrael *is* dear to me, but the lives of Israelis are dearer) — but that the prophetic vision related to social relations, and rectitude, and equity, and Thou Shalt Love Thy Neighbor.

We are now much more aware of these internal qualities of life: if you scan the Israeli press, so self-satisfied before Yom Kippur, its (somewhat hysterical) criticism of Israeli life today does not limit itself to politics and military affairs alone. There is a wide-spread feeling that with the economic post-1967 boom and the political growth after the Six Day War some pretty terrible things happened to Israeli society. Sapir's sometimes unwarranted unpopularity in Israel represents this revulsion against the crass materialism that engulfed so many areas of our life. What one expects of the new political leadership in Rabin's government is that they do something about this to reverse the course that made the elements of the American Dream into the ingredients of the Israeli Nightmare. Perhaps the subdued mood of post-Yom Kippur, perhaps some of the rethinking, will enable Israel to regain also some of the inner motivation for a kind of society that will not only be a society of Jews, but also a Just Society. It was for this reason that Socialist Zionism was the mainstay of the Yishuv in Palestine — it is for this reason that I personally believe that in order to be a good Zionist (in Israel — I am not talking about affiliations in the Diaspora) you also have to be a Socialist. Otherwise, you may fall prey to the New Paganism, be it that of the car or washing-machine or the biblically-invoked title to a collective piece of real estate, this or that side of the Jordan.

And about war and peace? Let us leave this to the next letter. Early in September, the radio announced this morning, Rabin will be in the United States. The Greek-Turkish situation, which will certainly have some bearing on our dilemmas, may also simmer down, one way or another. We may all be a little bit wiser by then.

Yours ever,

Shlomo

Shlomo Avineri

September 3, 1974

Dear Shlomo:

It may be true that one of the "spiritual" dimensions of the Zionist enterprise to which you allude is precisely that the existence of a Jewish state, all entangled in history, forces one as a Jew to be constantly confronting ultimate issues, as your letter so vividly illustrates. That is, we tend in other cases to think of political questions in terms of instrumentalities; once there is a Jewish political entity operating in history, we are repeatedly forced to think about values and ends. It is logical, perhaps inevitable, that any serious reflections on Israel's present predicament should move back (forward?) to considerations of continuity with the Jewish past, the choice of values offered by the Jewish tradition, the underlying purpose for the whole Zionist enterprise. Perhaps I am being ungenerous in this regard to my fellow American Jews, but I often find them unfortunately insulated from this kind of unflinching self-questioning because they are involved in history, as Jews, only at one remove. It is much easier for American Jews than for Israelis to concoct a sense of Jewish identity out of sheer nostalgia (the *Fiddler on the Roof* phenomenon), ethnic clubbishness, or attitudinizing that has little relation to concrete acts and historical institutions. In this specific connection, I would agree that the Jewishness of Israelis, secularism notwithstanding, has an authentic "spiritual" aspect that American Jewishness lacks.

The hawkishness of many American Jews is a case in point. Now, we are both aware that militancy and territorial maximalism enjoy a good deal of popular support in Israel itself, as the results of the last elections suggest, but I would like to propose that those same positions, as they are typically adopted by American Jews, reflect a different cast of

mind. In Israel, I would divide the hardliners into two groups: believers in manifest destiny and ruthless pragmatists (at least as they conceive themselves), with of course many people wavering between the two rationales or using both at once. The believers are, after all, fanatics, and as such they may be very dangerous, but there is also something authentic about their fanaticism, as distasteful as I may find it personally. I understand and in part agree with the connection you make between the real-estate view of Zionism and paganism, but I think we must admit that there is also a deep streak of xenophobic nationalist fanaticism running through Jewish history from its beginnings — fought against, to be sure, by the universalism of the prophets, but not without expression in the religious tradition itself. You and I, of course, can reasonably argue that these are just the kind of archaic values which, as modern Jews, we should now transcend, but it seems to me that the militant nationalists are in fact drawing upon something very potent within the Jewish heritage and by doing that they constitute a particularly troubling challenge to our liberal or socialist Zionist assumption that one can be an enlightened nationalist, a universalist rooted in a national community. As for the ruthless pragmatists, their argument is simple and obvious: since the Arabs want to destroy us, since they have given not the slightest evidence of ever swerving from this murderous aim, we must hold onto all the territories we have, make it clear we are prepared to use weapons that could annihilate the Arabs, and contemplate massive preemptive strikes when the Arabs are least ready for them. This whole calculus may involve a terrible simplification of complex political facts, but at least it is based on a real perception of an immediate physical threat, just as the position of the manifest destiny people is based on a real perception of an emphasis present in the Jewish past. Both views, in short, offer something one must argue with seriously.

Now, over against these Israeli attitudes, I find that the hawkishness of American Jews has a quality of automatic, unmeditated reflex, an ultimate *vagueness*. In addressing American Zionist audiences over the last few years, especially after I had voiced certain criticisms of Israeli government policy, the kind of objection I received was that somehow I wasn't "holding the line" firmly enough. Such an attitude, I suspect, relates only tangentially to the concrete facts of the Middle East conflict and even less to the imperatives of Jewish history, while it more directly reflects the psychology of a comfortable but never totally secure minority group in American society: in a situation of competitive pluralism and gradual assimilation, one must stick by one's guns, demand one's rights, insist on group solidarity, and so forth — a complex of feelings that seems to be translated wholesale to Israel's national existence, where in fact the rules of the game, and its dire consequences, are quite different. For this reason, and probably for others which at the moment elude me, the hawkishness of American Jews often appears as an inflexible given, the expression of an emotion rather than a political position, and as such you can't really debate it.

The classic Zionist position on Jewish existence, which half a century ago was still the subject of strident debate among Jews, has become a generally assumed fact for most Jews, even for many who are not officially Zionists.

I have been talking about American Jewry as though it possessed a totally different order of historical consciousness from that of Israeli Jewry, and this is obviously not altogether true. The crucial choice you describe that was made by the pioneers of the First and Second Aliyot, eventually flowering in a Third Jewish Commonwealth, has profoundly affected the self-perception of all those Jews who opted for physical security by emigration to the Americas and to Western Europe. The chief effect is simple enough, and it has, so to speak, sneaked up on all of us during the last quarter-century, yet I think we have hardly begun to think out its large consequences. What I refer to is that almost all of us — a group like the American Council for Judaism being a paltry futureless anachronism — now quite naturally think of the Jews as a people with a distinctive national culture, a recognized political center, and members scattered through the world outside the political center but deeply bound to it. In other words, the classic Zionist position on Jewish existence, which half a century ago was still the subject of strident debate among Jews, has become a generally assumed fact for most Jews, even for many who are not officially Zionist.

If the creation of a political and cultural entity by a minority of Jews could in this way alter the basic self-defining assumptions of world Jewry, perhaps Ahad Ha'am was not so far off base as I intimated in a previous letter with his notion of Eretz Yisrael as a spiritual center — especially if we adopt your sense of spiritual exis-

tence. Recent history and current events seem to have brought about a peculiar congruence of complementary participants in the Jewish condition: if Israelis, as you say, are forced to recognize that they cannot really escape from Jewishness into a new condition of Israeliness, Diaspora Jews, at the same time, by more or less the same circumstances, are forced to recognize that Jewishness is not merely ethnicity or religious persuasion, but means membership in a people (perhaps one might more pointedly say "nation"), and that in turn has rather complex historical and political implications.

All this suggests that one issue about which classic Zionism was dead wrong was the so-called "normalization" of Jewish life through the establishment of a Jewish state. The intrinsic terms of Jewish national existence are anomalous, and the cutting edge of the anomaly has, if anything, become more acutely felt since the creation of a Jewish state, supposedly *k'chol hagoyim*. Hanoch Bartov, you will recall, published a piece shortly after the Yom Kippur War on the theme of "Back to Abnormality," and that strikes me as apt a way as any to describe what has been crystalizing as a fact of consciousness in this year since the war. Danny Elazar once made the shrewd observation to me that the essence of the Jewish historical destiny is to be at the crossroads of communications and intersecting forces. This was true geopolitically in the ancient world, with Israel and Judea located at the center curve of the Fertile Crescent, at the point where political vectors from the north, east, and south collided. Diaspora Jews, in radically different circumstances, suffered a similar vulnerability in their function as economic middlemen, tax collectors and administrators, and, especially in modern times, in their location at the center of the communications media, even in their prominence in the arts. Now modern Israel repeats much of the ancient pattern of geopolitical exposure and encirclement. Perhaps to be a Jew means to be more densely surrounded by the pressures of history than most other peoples usually are, especially when those pressures involve explosive change, and sometimes when they are literally devastating.

This brings me to another aspiration of the Zionist founders to which you refer: the desire to become the subject of historical action instead of being its mere object. A few years ago, I was led to wonder in print whether the notion of making one's own history through an autonomous political state was not inherently illusory. I answered my own doubts then, perhaps a little facilely, by proposing that political independence had given Jews at least some control over their own destiny, some capacity for initiating action, some collective equivalent of the sense of free will we need in order to function as individuals, however illusory it may be when seen against the chains of complex determinisms that affect our actions. The circumscribed field of maneuverability in which Israel had to operate should have been obvious enough even before last October, had it not been for the groundless euphoria of the post-Six-Day-War period. After the Arab attack, the oil embargo with its worldwide ramifications, and the Great Power manipulations of an ostensibly local war, any Zionist notions of becoming the subject of historical action must surely be seen in a rather sobering light. Do you find this issue of historical autonomy to be a central one in the reassessment of positions that has been taking place in Israel since the October war? Do you personally think there are conclusions other than bleak or even despairing ones to be drawn about that issue at this point in time?

Meanwhile, the autumn is upon us, and I find it still rather difficult to get much sense of the prospects for war or peace. All I have is a perverse feeling that there will not be a resumption of general hostilities in the coming months precisely because so many Israeli news commentators think there will be. Meanwhile, I see in today's New York *Times* that the Palestine Liberation Organization wants to talk with Kissinger and to be invited in on equal footing at the Geneva conference. Does this suggest an incipient change in the whole situation? Is Israel likely to head off the maneuver by moving toward an agreement with Hussein?

In these uncertain times, one invokes traditional blessings with some trepidation, but in any case, let me wish you a happy, healthy, and peaceful New Year.

Cordially,

Robert Alter

... One issue about which classic Zionism was dead wrong was the so-called "normalization" of Jewish life through the establishment of a Jewish state.

AN EXCHANGE OF LETTERS

September 22, 1974

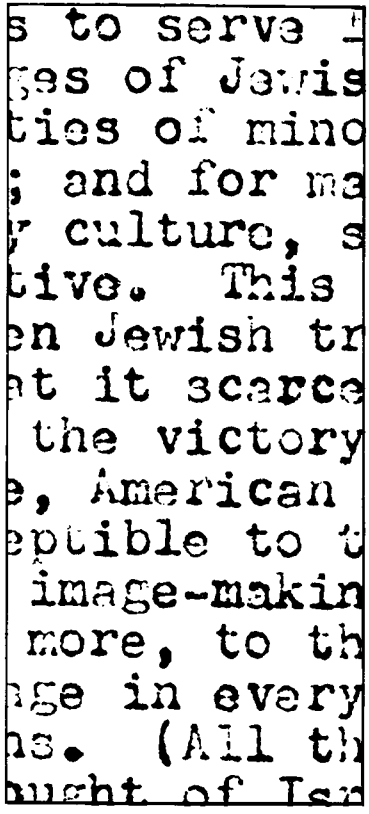
Dear Bob:

Since I last wrote to you I have been to the Soviet Union (my first visit there) and then for a week or so to New York, where I participated, among others, in a symposium on "The Centrality of Israel in Jewish Life." The visit to Russia, and especially the atmosphere at the Moscow Synagogue on Saturday morning, merit a special description, which I will not try to render here. But it ties in with some of the issues we have been discussing in our corrrespondence.

Example: during the service at the Moscow Synagogue, I noticed a small elevated enclosure up front, with some seats in it, but unoccupied. I knew what it was, but looked at it hard, and the man next to me, with whom I had been chatting during the service, caught my glance. "You know what this is?" he asked. "This is the place we reserve for members of the Jewish (sic!) Embassy when they come back to Moscow. This was their place when they were here, and we keep it for them when they will come back."

I do not know if this proves the *centrality* of Israel in Jewish life, but I know it proves that Jewish life cannot be the same after the establishment of the state of Israel. As you say, Israel reintroduced a normative aspect into Jewish life that wasn't there in the *galut*. It certainly did not make Jewish life *normal*, and the seats reserved for the "the Jewish Embassy" in any synagogue just stress the utter anomaly of Jewish life, the fact that it does not neatly fit into the categories of state/religion or secular/religious, so beautifully worked out by Western liberalism under the aegis of a secularized version of the dichotomic Christian distinction, going back to Pelagius, of the "two swords." We just don't fit into this, and hence also our immense and sometimes unintelligible squabbles about "Who Is a Jew" in Israel. As a secularist I certainly feel quite uneasy with rabbinical power in Israel: yet even as a secularist I cannot imagine a separation of religion and state in Israel *à la* the United States. Such a separation entails the possibility of someone being Jewish through his affiliation with the Jewish people and non-Jewish (say, Christian) by virtue of his affiliation with another religion. If one takes an exclusively secular definition of Jewishness, then such a monstrosity of being both Jewish (by nationality) and Christian (by religion) would become possible. I know some so-called Hebrew Christians believe this — but a Jewish state cannot come up with something like that.

Precisely because the movement of Soviet Jewry is not purely humanitarian but political and normative, it has become an issue of politics, and it is Israel ... which has made it such.



The view from my window is that of Beit Jalla, near Bethlehem. I certainly don't want us to continue there as occupiers. But neither do I want to accept the fact that Arab guns will ever again be positioned on this hill.

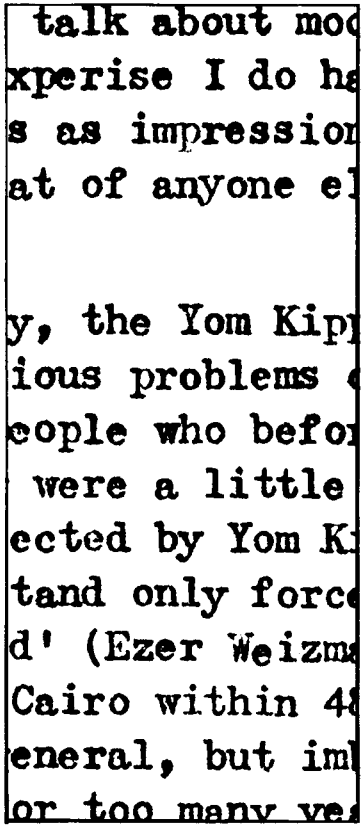
But to come back to the question of centrality: in New York, when we discussed the quest of Soviet Jewry to immigrate to Israel, one of the American participants remarked very shrewdly that there is a paradox here: that Soviet Jews want to immigrate to Israel is certainly an indication of the special place of Israel in their life. But does not the fact that this immigration is made possible through the political clout of *American* Jewry suggest that this alleged centrality of Israel may be much more problematical than claimed by Zionism? You surely needed the power of American Jews to make it possible for these Soviet Jews to go to Israel.

The point is obviously well taken, but the paradox does not end there. The centrality of Israel does not mean that Israel is omnipotent: it may, indeed, depend on Diaspora Jewry in more than one respect — I tried to suggest that much in an earlier letter. The point is that the Soviet Jews do not want just to *leave* the Soviet Union. There must be millions of people, of all nationalities and religions, who would like to leave Russia. The point is that they would like to leave *for*

Israel, and that they call this repatriation a return to their ancestral land. It is thus a political, if you wish, a normative demand, just like the demand of Germans, or Poles, living in the Soviet Union and wishing to *return* to their countries of origin. Suppose there would have been no Israel, and there would have been a movement among Soviet Jews to emigrate, say, to the United States. Could one imagine *this* becoming a political issue within the United States or between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.? I cannot see that it would have happened; precisely because the movement of Soviet Jewry is not purely humanitarian but political and normative, it has become an issue of politics, and it is Israel — and not the objective situation of Soviet Jewry alone — which has made it such.

Criticism is premised on responsibility, and paying the price ... If I, and other Israeli intellectuals prove wrong in our criticism of our government, "we" will pay the price, immediately. Some of us may not be there any more to admit we made a mistake.

We thus come back to the issue raised at the opening of your last letter about the nature of politics. My contention is that the existence of Israel has reinstated the political — i.e. normative — level to Jewish life, the kind of *public* life Jews did possess, albeit in a truncated form, in the medieval *k'hillah,* and which was destroyed by the enlightenment and the emancipation. You are right in suggesting that usually we think of political questions in terms of instrumentalities, but I do not think Israel is unique here in bringing a normative element into politics. As a Hegelian, I believe that the public dimension, i.e. the living with other people in a community which one values not for instrumental but for immanent reasons, is a necessary condition for human life. A person who does not participate in public life is not a whole human being. As Hegel would have said, he lives only in and for his family and in and for civil society — and modern Diaspora Jews have tended to do so, and this accounts for their close family ties as well as for their phenomenal economic success. But the price for this was rootlessness — not in the vulgar, possessive sense, but in the sense that they ultimately did not profess allegiance to anyone or anything. It meant that they had no responsibility, and without responsibility — for a community, for a polity, for an *other* — there is no freedom.



This is perhaps also the difference between Jewish intellectuals — of a sort — in the Diaspora and Israeli intellectuals when it comes to questions of political nonconformism. Some of us in Israel, who have criticized numerous policies of the Israeli government, have on occasion been castigated by Jewish American colleagues for not being outspoken enough. But it is here that a fine borderline must be drawn. Take an American Jewish intellectual criticizing his government on Vietnam: ultimately, he bears no responsibility, and in a way his criticism and commitment stems from abstract notions about Justice, Peace, etc. Whatever happens, he will pay no price: his way of life, his daily routine, his affluence, will not be affected. For an Israeli intellectual, it is slightly different: it is all very nice to be against occupation of Arab land (do I have to tell anyone that I am against it?), but even as I type this letter, the view from my window, which is also the view from my daughter's window down the hall, is that of the hills of Beit Jalla, near Bethlehem. Until 1967, this was Jordan; Arabs live there, and I certainly don't want us to continue there as occupiers. But neither do I want to accept the fact that Arab guns will ever be positioned again on this hill. It affects my life, the life of my family, the life of my neighbors, my city, my country. I am responsible to them, concretely, not only to the abstract ideas of Justice, Freedom and Equality. I have a responsibility towards my own life, the life of my daughter, the security of my country.

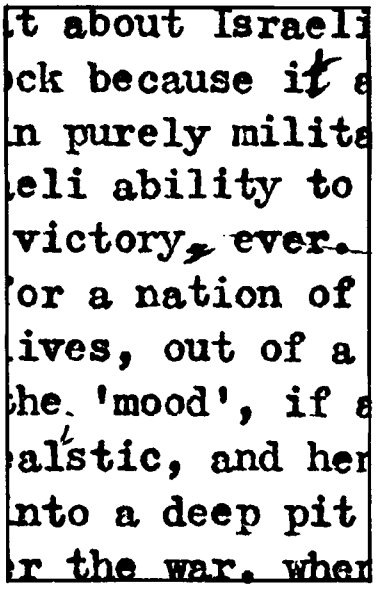
Ma'alot was not a pogrom: it was a terrible price we paid for our will not to survive but because we decided to live in a community, in a Jewish polity.

In a dim way, many Middle Americans, whose vulgarity and philistinism I detest, may have felt something similar about Vietnam: it was not their immediate security, but they felt about their country. Few of the critics of Ameri-

can involvement in Vietnam felt about their country: they felt about their feelings, their ideals — and that's a different matter. An American G. I. in Vietnam who disobeyed orders *there* is in a different category. I know I am looking for trouble in making such a statement (and let me tell you I felt America was committing a terrible blunder in Vietnam as early as 1966, when it still was bad form to do so). What I am saying is that criticism is premised on responsibility and on paying the price. If intellectuals who were criticizing the U.S. government about Vietnam would be proved wrong, nothing would happen to *them*. If I and other Israeli intellectuals will prove wrong in our criticism of our government, *we* will pay the price, immediately. Some of us may not be there any more even to admit that we made a mistake, and it is this agonizing responsibility which is involved in the political life on a concrete and not abstract level.

This applies also, sometimes, to American Jewish criticism of Israel. Again, let me be frank: I welcome criticism of Israel coming from Diaspora Jews, but there is again a thin borderline there, not always visible. A year and a half ago (it seems ten years ago), on Israel's 25th anniversary, the government decided to hold a giant military parade in Jerusalem. I was, like many other Israelis, rather unhappy about it and felt we should find other ways, not connected with our military might, to express our joy at the Resurrection of Israel. In a discussion I attended at that time in New York, a young psychologist from Harvard who considers himself committed to Israel criticized this military parade and then added in his peroration that, for this reason, he would not come to Israel that year and would not participate in the 25th anniversary celebrations.

I found this very cheap. I had to admit, when I spoke after him, that I was also extremely unhappy about the military parade, and said so publicly in Israel — in print, and on the radio. However, I am also a reserve soldier of the Israeli army, and it is *my* army. *I* cannot dissociate myself from it by not coming to join in the fun. Right or wrong, it *is* my army: it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does not mean that I accept everything it does, nor does it mean that I will always obey its orders. But it means that if I decide to disobey its orders it will *cost* me something. I will do it at a peril to myself and my country. It is also the army that stands between me and the people who consider themselves my enemies. With hindsight, after Yom Kippur, we may also say that it *did* stand between me, my family, my city, my country — and their enemies. Grandstand gestures such as not coming for the celebrations of Israel's anniversary are precisely those decisions which I call decisions without responsibility. If I will have one day to decide to disobey the orders of the Israeli army, I will have to bear the burden. Nor will I have a friendly border to Canada to cross over with impunity.

That it was this army that stood between us and our enemies did not mean that it could do the job alone: it might not have been a sufficient condition for our survival as a community, but it was a necessary one. And this brings me to the point you raised so delicately towards the end of your letter: I said that the existence of Israel was trying to make the Jewish people into a subject of history, not an object anymore. Do I feel, you asked, in the wake of the Yom Kippur War this postulate to have been borne out by events?

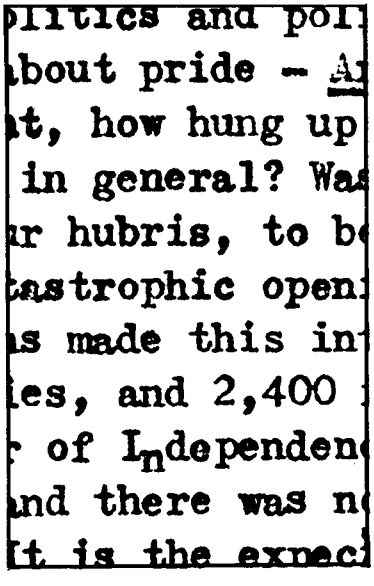
Being a subject — in a person as in a nation — does not mean that you always get your way, nor is it a guarantee for success or even survival. One can die fighting for one's freedom, while one's brother may continue to live — in servitude. I do not intend to sound grandiloquent, nor do I suggest that life in the Diaspora is a life of servitude. What I mean to suggest is that becoming a subject of history — dependent as one may find oneself upon World Jewry, U.S. arms, Henry Kissinger, Senator Jackson—is still an act of one's self-consciousness freely expressed. We are in trouble, no doubt, but not because someone decided that he was

going to take it out on the Jews but because *we* decided we would like to live the life of a community. Therefore Ma'alot was *not* a pogrom: it was a terrible price we paid for our will not to survive (this we can do in many places, and then there probably wouldn't be Ma'alots, only ordinary pogroms perhaps) — but because we decided to live in a community, in a Jewish polity, to have our own self-consciousness expressed in the objective world of states and nations, to have our own army. Perhaps foreign armies and police forces can on occasion defend Jewish life better: as I said before, Israel is the least safe place for a Jew today, but if I get hit in Israel it is because I choose to live there as a Jew. The terrorist may be *guilty* for murdering me: I, however, am *responsible* because I willed the life in Israel in a Jewish polity.

I saw Rabin on TV the other day when he reported on his trip to the United States. His message was really simple: what we have to move on to now is not another separation of forces, but accommodation. The question is not of Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, but the willingness of the other side to accept the legitimate existence of Israel; if such acceptance will be forthcoming, then the territorial question can — and will — also be solved.

It seems so simple, perhaps self-evident. But I feel Rabin brought out an element which became submerged in the years after 1967 due both to the Arab insistence on territories as well as to our own internal squabbles about the future of the territories, historical rights, the boundaries of Eretz Yisrael and other theoretical issues. The state of Israel, while it needs territory, as anything else that exists in time and space, is not aimed at territory alone: it is and was aimed at securing *a publicly recognized* homeland for the Jewish people. If you discern echoes of the Basle Program here, that's only to show that the enterprise of Zionism wasn't consummated with the establishment of Israel in 1948, and the Ben Gurion tradition, so much centered upon the very existence of the state, overlooked the fact that 1948 was only the *beginning* of the project called the Return to Zion.

Is ours a correspondence between two members of a "normal" community? I think it was Franz Rosenzweig who said (in the days when he was still opposed to Zionism) that he didn't want to see the Jewish heritage confined to the jejune trivialities of another Serbia or Montenegro. Shall we feel exhilirated, or perhaps sad that, despite all naive Zionist wishes, we are not back to "normalcy?" We are the perennial nonconformists, and even if we appeared to wish to be like all the gentiles, *k'chol hagoyim*, the ironies of Jewish history are still with us and we shall remain entangled in them, emancipation and Zionism alike notwithstanding. We are thus left in the same boat. If some Zionists sometimes believed that Zion Resurrected will emancipate them from what they considered the less appealing aspects of the Jewish heritage, recent history has shown this dream to be highly unrealistic. Israel needs the Diaspora, just as the Diaspora needs Israel, though they exist on different normative planes. But the feeling of utter interdependence, that *Kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh*, that we vouch for each other, that willy-nilly we *are* our brothers' keeper — this lesson has been brought out to all of us in the tribulations of the last years, 1967 just as 1973. Secularists and religious Jews, Israelis and Diaspora Jews, American and Soviet Jews — whatever the opinions, the beliefs, the life styles, the ideologies: in the existential moment of truth we are all tied in an umbilical cord, and this cord is now Israel. Maybe some would have been happier that it did not exist, but a Jew who today would turn his back on Israel is turning his back not only on three million Jews: he is retreating, in some way, from his *own* Jewishness, whatever definition he gives it. This, at least, is a consensus which I feel all of us share — and this is what the Jewish Revolution, Zionism, was after all about. This is a dimension which did not exist before Israel came on this scene.



Shanah tova,

Shlomo Avineri

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