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Crosswinds

> And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel . . . Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: Say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it. Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the mortar wherewith ye should have daubed it?
>
> *Ezekiel 13:9–12*

> The existence of neighbors is the only guarantee a nation has against perpetual civil war.
>
> *—Paul Valéry*

On the morning of June 1, 1984, I drove from Beirut to Jerusalem. The taxi came early and Mohammed and I said our goodbyes in my sandy parking lot overlooking the Mediterranean, while Eddy the landlord watched us from his balcony. I cried more than I had ever cried since I arrived in Beirut. I cried for all that Mohammed and I had been through together, and for all that he would still have to endure living in the ruins of this broken city after I was gone.

The Beirut taxi driver took me as far south as the Israeli army lines, along the Awali River, where I had to get out with my suitcases and golf clubs and drag them through the Israeli checkpoint and down a mile-long stretch of road to link up with another Lebanese taxi that would take me to Rosh Hanikra, on the Israel–Lebanon border. The Christian and Shiite militiamen who stopped me at their checkpoints on the roads of south Lebanon were endlessly fascinated by my golf clubs. They assumed that any long steel shaft with a malletlike head on one end had to be a weapon.

The golf clubs also held me up at the Israel–Lebanon border station because the girl soldiers there *knew* what they were but simply refused to believe that anyone could be arriving from Hobbes's jungle carrying a set of Wilson Staffs on his shoulder. They tried to twist the head off my pitching wedge to see if I was smuggling bullets or contraband inside. Then they pulled all the golf balls out of the bottom pocket of my bag and placed them on a table. Naturally, it took only seconds for the golf balls to spill onto the floor and start bouncing around the customs hall, where the soldier girls and I scurried about trying to chase them down before they rolled back into Lebanon.

After collecting my gear, I hired a taxi for the drive to Jerusalem. As I watched the Israeli farm fields go by and my mind danced with memories of Beirut, I noticed a road sign I will never forget. It was located on the highway between Haifa and Tel Aviv, and it said in Hebrew something like BEWARE OF CROSSWINDS.

Imagine, I thought to myself as we sped past the sign, I am leaving a country where people are dying like flies and coming to a place where they warn you about the wind! Now, that's a real country.

I quickly discovered, though, that I didn't know which winds they were talking about—that this sign was not a meteorological warning but a political diagnosis. I quickly discovered that Israel and Lebanon, Jerusalem and Beirut, had much more in common than I ever could have dreamed.

The similarity between Israel and Lebanon is rooted in the fact that since the late 1960s both nations have been forced to answer anew the most fundamental question: What kind of state do we want to have—with what boundaries, what system of power sharing, and what values? For Lebanon, as I saw, it was internal demographic and social changes which forced these basic questions to be reopened; for Israel, I would find, it was the fortunes of war that did it. Either way, both the Lebanese people and the Israeli people have failed to resolve their differences on these fundamental questions, and have each become politically paralyzed as a result.

Only the style of their paralysis differs. Whereas in Lebanon the government became paralyzed because the various Lebanese political factions insisted on facing up to their differences, and literally fighting them out in the street, in Israel the government became paralyzed because the different political parties agreed not to face up to their differences, but rather to fudge them and find ways to reach pragmatic compromises that would maintain the status quo. Whereas in Lebanon the Cabinet was ineffectual because it represented no one, in Israel the Cabinet was ineffectual because it represented everyone. In Lebanon they called the paralysis "anarchy" and in Israel they called it "national unity," but the net effect was the same: political gridlock.

To fully appreciate the reasons for Israel's paralysis one must go all the way back to the birth of the nation. The Zionist Jews who founded Israel had three basic objectives in mind when they thought about the kind of state they wanted to build, Israeli political scientist Areyh Naor liked to tell me: They wanted to create a Jewish state, a democratic state, and a state that would be located in the historical homeland of the Jewish people—the land of Israel—which technically included all of Palestine from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, and even some areas beyond, in what is today Jordan. In November 1947, when the United Nations offered the Jews roughly half this area for their own state, while promising the other half to the Palestinian Arabs, the Zionist leaders were forced to answer that fundamental question: What kind of nation do we want to be? David Ben-Gurion, then the leader of the Zionist movement in Palestine, and a true statesman, did not shrink from clearly laying out the choice before the Jewish people and then building a constituency among them for the option he believed was most correct. Ben-Gurion essentially said in effect to his nation: "In this world we can only have two out of three of our objectives. We are being offered a chance for a Jewish state and a democratic state, but in only part of the land of Israel. We could hold out for all the land of Israel, but if we did that we might lose everything. If we have to compromise on our objectives, let it be on obtaining all the land of Israel. We will settle now for half a loaf, and dream about the rest later."

So between 1948 and 1967 Zionism lived, and even flourished, with two and a half of its goals satisfied. Israel was a Jewish state with a massive Jewish majority, it was a democratic state, and it was a state located in part of the land of Israel—but not all of it.

Then came June 1967. Israel, in the course of the Six-Day War, occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip, extending, in the process, Jewish control over virtually all the historical land of Israel originally sought by Zionism. From that moment on, Israelis again faced the monumental question: What kind of nation do we want to be? Once again, it could only have two out of three of its objectives. One choice was to keep all the land of Israel, including the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and to remain a Jewish state, but this could be done only by curtailing Israeli democracy. The only way Israel could permanently control the Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza Strip would be by physically suppressing them and ensuring that they were never given political rights.

The second option for Israel was to annex the West Bank and Gaza and remain a democracy, but this could be done only by giving up the Jewish character of the state, because if the 1 million-plus Palestinian Arabs then residing in the occupied territories were allowed to vote, along with the 500,000 Israeli Arabs, by early in the twenty-first century they would outnumber the Jews, if the same birth and emigration trends continued.

The third option was for Israel to remain a Jewish and democratic state, but this could be done only by either getting rid of large areas of the West Bank and Gaza or by getting rid of large numbers of West Bankers and Gazans, in order to guarantee a Jewish majority well into the twenty-first century. Since the world would never tolerate a forced transfer by Israel of Palestinians from the occupied territories, this option really came down to relinquishing territory.

So, on the seventh day of the Six-Day War, amid the jubilation and flag waving, a huge question once again hung over the Israelis: Who were they? A nation of Jews living in all the land of Israel, but not democratic? A democratic nation in all the land of Israel, but not Jewish? Or a Jewish and democratic nation, but not in all the land of Israel?

Instead of definitively choosing among these three options, Israel's two major political parties—Labor and Likud—spent the years 1967 to 1987 avoiding a choice—not in theory, but in practice; not on paper, but in day-to-day reality. I arrived in Jerusalem expecting to find crosswinds, as the sign said, but instead I found no winds of change at all.

My arrival in Jerusalem coincided with the July 1984 national election campaign, a campaign that will always be associated in my mind with Israelis on surfboards. Neither the Labor Party nor the Likud Party focused its television campaign commercials on the key existential issue facing the state of Israel—what to do with the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Instead, each party aired pop commercials, with lots of beaming faces and Pepsi-generation Israelis cavorting about and testifying in singsong voices how wonderful life was in a Likud-led Israel or how much better it would be in a Labor-led Israel. What I enjoyed most about these campaign commercials was that both parties featured brief film clips of Israelis surfing on Waikiki-size waves off the Tel Aviv coastline—as though surfing were a popular sport in Israel and surfing movies were the key to reaching a crucial uncommitted constituency of beach denizens. I realized only later that the surfing shots were an unintended metaphor for the way Israel's two major parties were being swept along by events and trying to glide over the painful choices lurking just beneath the waves.

The 1984 election campaign naturally required me to interview the senior Israeli politicians. My first encounter was with Labor Party opposition leader Shimon Peres. We met in the Labor offices on the Tel Aviv seafront, and he smoked nervously from the beginning of our conversation until the end. What struck me most about Peres was that when I asked him about his position on the West Bank and Gaza he began to choose his words very carefully, as though tiptoeing through a minefield. Despite several attempts on my part to get him to be more specific, he refused to use the words "territorial compromise." That is, he refused to be quoted as saying his party would exchange land for peace, because, his aides told me later, he feared that this would frighten off potential right-wing voters. When I pressed him on what Labor would do differently from the Likud regarding the West Bank and Gaza, Peres said that Labor would "stop putting settlements in the densely populated Arab areas," which did not exactly impress me as a strong alternative to the status quo. What struck me even more, though, was that Peres referred to the West Bank by the biblical terms preferred by the Likud—"Judea and Samaria." To name something is to own it, and it seemed to me that using the names applied to the West Bank by Israel's religious-nationalist right wing was hardly the way to go about convincing a majority of Israelis to give it up.

A few weeks later, I went to interview Likud Party Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. His remarks in general were far from memorable, but I will never forget that when I asked Shamir whether he still stood by the 1967 UN Security Council Resolution 242, which calls on Israel to withdraw from territories occupied in the 1967 war in exchange for implicit Arab recognition of Israel's right to live within "secure and recognized boundaries," he said to me, "We don't accept that formula anymore." Israel, he said, must keep building West Bank settlements everywhere, "without any pause."

Hmmm, I thought to myself. I hadn't realized Israel had drifted that far to the right. Here I had come from Beirut, where for years reporters had played this exhausting game with Arafat, trying to get him to say that the PLO accepted Resolution 242, only to be told by Israel's Prime Minister that he didn't accept this formula either, but for different reasons.

Several months after the 1984 election was over and, rather appropriately, produced a tie between Labor and Likud, forcing them to join together in a national unity government, I was at a dinner party at the elegant Jerusalem home of Gita Sherover, a prominent Israeli philanthropist. It was a Saturday night and Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, of the Labor Party, was at the dinner. At one point the telephone rang and the maid came in and announced that there was an urgent call for Mr. Rabin. He left the room for several minutes to take the call, and then slipped back into his seat at the dinner table. Gita could not resist asking him what the call was about.

"It was Weizman," grumbled Rabin, referring to the former Likud Defense Minister Ezer Weizman. "He wanted me to allow the Qawasmeh family to bring [Fahd] Qawasmeh's body back to Hebron to be buried. Weizman feels guilty for expelling him."

Fahd Qawasmeh was the former mayor of the West Bank town of Hebron whom Weizman had expelled in May 1980, after the killing of a Jewish settler in Hebron. Qawasmeh was assassinated in Amman on December 29, 1984, by what were believed to be Syrian agents. He was apparently targeted because of his moderate approach to Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. The day after his murder, his family asked Weizman to appeal to Rabin to at least allow him to be buried in his own hometown.

"So what did you tell him?" Gita asked Rabin.

"I told him no—I don't want any demonstrations," Rabin said, with a flick of his wrist.

This answer was followed by a few moments of uncomfortable silence around the dinner table as everyone contemplated the chill in Rabin's voice. I was not the only guest who was stunned by his absence of compassion for a dead man whose family wanted nothing more than to have him laid to rest in the soil of his forefathers, something I felt any Jew, and certainly one from the Labor Party, should have understood.

Gita, reading everyone's mind, finally pierced the quiet by saying softly into her soup, "What would have been so bad if you had let him be buried here?"

After encounters like these, I began to ask myself what the difference was between Labor and Likud, between Rabin and Shamir, between Shamir and Peres, or between Peres and Rabin? They all called the West Bank "Judea and Samaria"; they all believed that Israel's military occupation was benign, "the most enlightened in history"; and they all seemed prepared to set their ideological differences aside and maintain the status quo forever.

Why?

Maybe the most important reason Israeli leaders tended to avoid answering the question about what to do with the West Bank and Gaza was that for years they had Arab neighbors who did not pose the question in a clear-cut manner that might have forced Israelis to answer it. The Arabs never gave Israelis the feeling that they could leave these territories and still maintain their security, hence most Israelis were ready to stay at any price; the Arabs never really encouraged Israelis to come up with any alternative to the status quo. In August–September 1967, three months after the war, the Arab states convened a summit conference in Khartoum, Sudan, where they resolved not to recognize Israel, not to negotiate with Israel, and not to make peace with Israel—a policy they and the PLO would maintain for many years.

Only Egypt dared to break away from this approach in 1978 and offer Israel a proposition which it could not avoid: Are you ready to exchange all the occupied Sinai Desert in return for full peace? When the question was put that way, Israel answered yes. But, until only recently, this was the exception.

I was out shopping in downtown Jerusalem one drizzly afternoon in the winter of 1987, and as I hurried back to my office with my coat hood tied tightly over my head, I noticed a small circle of people, maybe twenty in all, gathered in Zion Square. In the middle of the crowd stood two young Israeli men, one of whom was carrying a sign that read in English: END THE OCCUPATION. STOP ISRAELI BRUTALITY NOW. Both young men were arguing jaw to jaw with Israeli members of the crowd. The rain was soaking the whole group, but no one seemed to notice. There was real anger in the air, veins bulging out of people's necks and spit flying from points being made a little too forcefully. I could pick up only snippets of the arguments, but they were the familiar litany: "The Arabs want to kill us," "You are so naïve," "Fascist." While this little throng conducted their sidewalk debate, many other Israelis and even a few Arabs walked by without taking any notice, let alone joining in. As I broke away from the crowd, I thought to myself that there was something emblematic about the scene—something about Israelis debating with themselves in the rain which evoked in my mind larger images of the state of the Israeli–Palestinian dialogue before 1988.

But while this scene may explain to some degree why Israeli politics became paralyzed over the question of what to do with the occupied territories, it is by no means the whole story. The truth is that as much as Israelis expected and even hoped that the Arabs would come forward and negotiate land for peace in June 1967, few Israelis were really in a hurry to give the West Bank and Gaza back, and Israel did not exactly go out of its way to encourage Palestinians, or the PLO, to pop the question.

The reason is that both the Labor Party and the Herut Party, which forms the backbone of today's right-wing Likud bloc, fell in love with these territories. After all, the Old City of Jerusalem, Jericho, Hebron, Nablus, and all the other West Bank towns were the real heartland of historical Jewish consciousness and the stage where the drama of the Bible was actually played out—not the coastal plain of Tel Aviv and Haifa. They were the core of the

land of Israel the Zionist founding fathers came to reclaim, and the mere mention of their names touched something deep in the Israeli soul, both among Likudniks and Laborites. Indeed, the Labor Party felt the metaphysical connection with the whole land of Israel just as much as their right-wing opponents—if not more. The very core of the Labor Zionist program was the ethos of redeeming and settling all the land—something most American Jews have never understood.

The differences between Ben-Gurion and Begin were more over tactics than ends. Hiking around Israel with the Bible as a map had been a weekly exercise of Labor youth movements since the very beginning of Zionism. When Ben-Gurion first accepted the notion of partition, as far back as 1937, he did it with the greatest of regret. In a speech on August 7, 1937, to the 20th Zionist Congress in Zurich, Ben-Gurion declared: "I say from the point of view of realizing Zionism it is better to have immediately a Jewish state, even if it would only be in a part of the western land of Israel [Palestine west of the river Jordan]. I prefer this to a continuation of the British Mandate . . . in the whole of the western land of Israel. But before clarifying my reasoning, I have to make a remark about principle. If we were offered a Jewish state in the western land of Israel in return for our relinquishing our historical right over the whole land of Israel, then I would postpone the state. No Jew has the right to relinquish the right of the Jewish people over the whole land of Israel. It is beyond the powers of any Jewish body. It is even beyond the power of the whole of the Jewish people living today to give up any part of the land of Israel."

That is why for Ben-Gurion's political heirs, the Labor Party generals who actually conducted the 1967 war—Moshe Dayan, Yitzhak Rabin, Mordechai Gur, Uzi Narkiss, David Elazar—coming back to Jerusalem and the West Bank was not like meeting a strange woman for the first time. Far from it. It was like being reunited with an old flame, and as soon as they were back in each other's arms, many deeply repressed desires came to the surface. No wonder the Israeli mood in the wake of the '67 war was best summed up by Labor Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan's famous remark about negotiating with King Hussein: If he wants to talk, "he knows my telephone number." Otherwise, Israel was happy to stay put.

It was the Labor Party Prime Ministers from 1967 to 1977—Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, and Yitzhak Rabin, with a boost from their ministers Shimon Peres and Yigal Allon—who laid the foundations of Jewish settlement in the West Bank, not the Likud. At first, the Labor leaders argued that only settlements necessary for security reasons, such as those along the Jordan River valley or around Jerusalem, would be allowed. But once Labor agreed to annex the Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount immediately after the war, fusing modern Israel with the very core of its biblical past, it set a precedent for other biblically inspired settlements throughout the West Bank. It was only a matter of time before these settlements would mushroom everywhere.

The time arrived on April 4, 1968, when on the eve of Passover a group of Orthodox Jewish families, led by Rabbis Moshe Levinger and Eliezer Waldman, went with their children to Hebron, where they rented the small Arab-owned Park Hotel for the holiday. They had told Israeli officials they would be in the hotel for the week of Passover only, but had an option to stay longer. The visitors took over the hotel, made its kitchen kosher, and then, when the holiday was over, vowed not to let anyone evict them from the town where the Jewish patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were buried, and where Abraham, the Father of the Nation, had purchased, for 400 shekels of silver, his first piece of land in Palestine (Canaan). As Rabbi Waldman later remarked, "We took out an option for a lifetime."

None other than Labor Party minister Yigal Allon, a kibbutznik, was among the first Israeli officials to visit the Jewish settlers and lend support, telling them, "There have always been Jews in Hebron, the cradle of the nation, until they were violently uprooted. . . . It is inconceivable that Jews be prohibited from settling in this ancient town of the patriarchs."

Eventually the Labor-led government, torn by mixed emotions, caved in to the settlers, allowing them to stay in a military camp in Hebron and later to build a Jewish settlement there called Kiryat Arba. When I asked Rabbi Waldman why he and his colleagues found it so easy to sway the Labor-led government to their position, he answered with two words: "Jewish roots."

Sitting in his apartment in Kiryat Arba, Waldman explained, "We were coming back to our roots. Moshe Dayan and Yigal Allon were competing with each other over who would be our patron. We had had contacts with [the Labor Party Prime Minister] Eshkol for months before we came to Hebron. He never said no, don't go. He just said wait, wait. Finally one day Yigal Allon said to us, 'If you don't create the fact, nothing will come of it. Don't wait for the government okay—just go out and do it.' Allon would come to us after every Cabinet meeting and tell us what was going on. I will tell you another thing. When Allon came out with the Allon Plan [which called for returning half of the West Bank to Arab control] we were surprised and hurt. We came to him and he, Yigal Allon—Yigal Allon!—said to us, 'Jews have to be smart. No Arab will ever accept this plan.' That was all he said. That was Yigal Allon."

To some extent Allon and his Labor Party colleagues were swept away by the sheer intensity and ideological devotion of the Jewish settlers, who probably reminded the tired Labor leaders of their own youth when they, too, danced the hora around the campfire and when they really believed in something with zeal. If there is one thing I have learned in the Middle East, it is that the so-called extremists or religious zealots, whether in Jewish or Muslim society, are not as extreme as we might think. The reason they are both tolerated and successful is that they are almost always acting on the basis of widely shared feelings or yearnings. As Israeli political scientist Ehud Sprinzak rightly put it, these so-called extremists are usually just the tip of an iceberg that is connected in a deep and fundamental way to the bases of their respective societies.

The West Bank Jewish settlers were no exception. As Israel became a more modern, materialistic, sterile, Americanized society after 1967, many Israelis identified in their hearts with those men climbing the rocky hills of the West Bank, rifles in hand and barbed wire at their feet, keeping watch for the Arabs gathering in the distance. The settlers worked out the increasingly bourgeois Israeli's repressed yearnings to once again be a pioneer. Because the Labor Party leaders got caught up in the intensity of what the settlers were doing, and because they had no real ideological vision strong enough to stand up against them, they never really stopped and examined the long-term consequences and never noticed that the passion of so many of the settlers was a subsidized passion—a passion that began by living in tents and caravan homes but would insist on swimming pools, paved roads, army protection, tax breaks, and ranch-style suburban homes before they were through.

Nevertheless, a pattern was begun in Hebron that would be repeated all over the West Bank during the next decade: Jewish settlers would go out and create facts, the government would respond halfheartedly, with some of the Labor ministers openly supporting the settlers, the government would reach some ambiguous compromise allowing them to stay, and then another group of settlers would go out and create another fact.

It wasn't only the tug of historical memories that encouraged Israel's Labor leaders not to face up squarely to the dilemmas imposed by the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. It was also the fact that they got drunk on their own power. One of the strengths of Labor Zionism had always been its strong pragmatic outlook, its philosophy that a new reality can be built only by careful planning and then constructing things brick by brick, acre after acre. It was precisely this relentless, anthill approach to politics and military planning which enabled the Jews to build a state and smash three Arab armies simultaneously in the Six-Day War.

But, as the Israeli philosopher David Hartman has argued, while Labor won the 1967 war thanks to this outlook, it lost the interpretation of the war by forgetting it. Israel's victory was so sweeping, and so much in contrast with the mood in the country on the eve of the war, when people were actually digging graves to get ready for what many thought would be another Holocaust, that many Israelis could not believe it was done only with their own hands. The result, said Hartman, was that "Israelis began to tell stories, all of which seemed to go something like this: 'There we were in the middle of the Sinai Desert, facing 5,000 Egyptian soldiers. We were only six men and one tank. But we fired off a few rounds in the air, said a few prayers, made a lot of noise, and suddenly, as if by miracle, all the Egyptians started to run away.' No one talked about the crack troops, the years of careful preparation, the endless hours of practice bombing. The 1967 war was an Auschwitz waiting to happen. That it didn't happen, Israelis decided, was all just a miracle."

This sudden passing from vulnerability to omnipotence produced an "intoxication," according to Abba Eban, who was Israel's Foreign Minister at the time. The 1967 victory, he explained, while it was a "military salvation, with enormous political gains . . . was a total psychological failure, because the victory was interpreted providentially and messianically. Once it became a messianic thing, the government and the parliament were no longer sovereign. . . . We lost sight of the fact that the Arab regimes, while defeated, were still intact. Our victory was not total. All of our statements, though, were in the imperative: 'We shall, we will, we demand.' "

The party leaders and generals, particularly Rabin, Dayan, and Allon, these once austere pioneers, became world-renowned figures. They were toasted in the best salons in America and Europe. The kibbutz boys were suddenly riding in limousines. The world fell in love with Dayan's eye patch. Caught up in the drunkenness of the moment, Labor lost touch with reality. They offered no vision of where the nation should be going, let alone a realistic guide to getting there. When they wanted to know what to do, they took a poll, and the polls told them that many Israelis loved their new real estate. In the deepest sense, no one was governing. The spirit of grandiosity was so pervasive that Rabin, the chief of staff in the 1967 war, declared in August 1973 that Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir "has better boundaries than King David and King Solomon."

This festival of grandiosity was punctured by reality only two months after Rabin's boast, when Egypt and Syria simultaneously attacked Israel on the Yom Kippur holiday in October 1973. Israel's defense line on the Suez Canal fell to the Egyptians in ninety minutes, as Israeli soldiers were caught totally by surprise. Practically overnight Israeli society went from a manic high to a depressive low. Four years later the Labor Party would be thrown out of power for the first time since the state was founded. It was somehow fitting that Labor, already tainted by several financial scandals, would finally fall after it was discovered that Leah Rabin, whose husband, Yitzhak, was then Prime Minister, had been maintaining an illegal bank account in Washington.

Labor was replaced by Menachem Begin's Likud Party, which in effect rode to power promising to restore the post-1967 grandeur and glory of Israel, which had been lost in the 1973 war. Begin and his Likud Party also loved the miracle stories, and it got hooked on them in a slightly different way, thanks to the Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) messianic Jewish settler movement, which really took off in the ideological doldrums that followed the '73 defeat.

Gush Emunim explained that the victory in 1967 was actually the work of the hand of God, reuniting the two halves of the land of Israel. Israel's reunification, Gush rabbis argued, was the necessary first stage for the redemption of the Jewish people and ultimately universal redemption. Hence to give up the land of Israel would be to reject the mandate of God and turn one's back on the redemptive revolution.

The Likud found two aspects of this Gush Emunim philosophy enchanting. First was its all-or-nothing outlook—the notion that if you did not have the whole thing you had nothing. For the Likud nationalists, if the Jews did not have the whole land of Israel, including the West Bank, then they simply were not fully home. And for the Gush Emunim messianists, if the Jews did not have the whole land of Israel, then there simply could be no redemption. Neither outlook allowed for a territorial compromise of even an inch. But, equally important, Gush ideology provided the Likud with an interpretation of history that enabled it to believe that it could have it all. Gush's version of the miracle story, that the 1967 victory was God's work, pushed Israeli politics further into the messianic realm, a realm in which strength did not grow out of one's perception of reality but out of one's belief. Gush rabbis said that as long as Israelis believed in the redemptive mission of the Jewish people returning to their homeland, they could hold whatever they wanted and ignore whatever anyone else wanted. Once settling the West Bank became part of a messianic process, no rational logic was needed to sustain it. So when a group of Hebrew University professors challenged Begin one day on how he would deal with the growing reality of 1.7 million Arabs in the occupied territories, he simply answered them by saying, "I don't understand you. Back in the early 1920s, when we were only 100,000 and they were a million, you did not lose hope then. So if you didn't lose hope when the odds were 1 to 10 in their favor, why give up now when we are the majority?"

In other words, why worry about consequences? If our cause could overcome objective reality once in our history, went the argument, then it can do it always, as long as we keep the faith. The minute you lose faith in the full myth, the minute you make even the smallest compromise with reality, everything is lost. This philosophy became so entrenched in the extreme right that it began to be taken to absurd lengths to justify virtually any policy that did not seem grounded in reality. Israel can't withdraw from Lebanon, a Jewish settlement leader told me in 1984, because the minute it loses faith in the army's ability to hold on to territory, no matter what the cost and how useless, it will be on a slippery slope to giving up the West Bank. The same people argued in 1987 that Israel had to go on building the multi-billion-dollar Lavi fighter jet well after it was clear that this would bankrupt the country, because the moment Israelis stopped believing that they couldn't do the impossible, then they would lose the strength to do the possible.

Every year on the Halloween-like Purim holiday the state-run Voice of Israel Radio does a spoof on the news. On Purim 1988, Voice of Israel began the day by announcing that Israel's most popular basketball team, Maccabi Tel Aviv, had been sold to a wealthy American Jew who was going to move the players to New York and rename them the Brooklyn Sabras. The news report was so realistic, including interviews with players about how happy they were to be relocating in America, that several Israeli politicians began calling for action to keep the team in Israel. My favorite reaction was that of Yuval Neeman, of the ultra-nationalist Tehiya Party, who, not knowing the radio was pulling everyone's leg, actually declared in an interview broadcast nationwide that if "today we lose Maccabi Tel Aviv, tomorrow it will be Judea and Samaria."

As long as the Labor Party was in power, it could at least keep the settlement movement limited to the sparsely populated Jordan Valley and those isolated locations "forced" on it by the ideological settlers. But after Labor was ousted by Begin's Likud bloc, all Begin had to do was take Labor's precedent of applying the Zionist ethos to the West Bank and play it out to its logical conclusion. Today there are more than 140,000 Israeli Jews living in East Jerusalem and 130 West Bank and Gaza cities and settlements, three-quarters of which were built after 1977. Not only did Likud and its right-wing allies extend Labor's logic, they actually ran off with its pioneering symbols. In the 1984 elections, the pro-settlement Tehiya Party used as its campaign poster a picture of the late Yakov Shabtai in an Iwo Jima–like pose, hoisting an Israeli flag. The picture had been taken in 1949, when Shabtai was attending a Labor Party youth camp, and it became the symbol of the young pioneer. A talented writer, Shabtai grew up to be an ardent supporter of the Israeli peace movement, so ardent in fact that he refused to ever set foot in the West Bank. But because his picture epitomized nationalist pride and the youthful vigor of settlement, Tehiya adopted it. Shabtai's widow had to engage a lawyer and threaten a lawsuit against Tehiya to force them to quit using her husband as its symbol.

Although Begin talked a hard line, the fact is, he, like the Labor leaders, also had to relinquish part of his ideology for a more pragmatic approach. Begin's nationalist ideology called for annexing the West Bank, but after he came to power in 1977, he discovered that he could not carry out his program because of American pressures, domestic pressures, and regional constraints. More important, in order to obtain the peace treaty with Egypt, Begin had to agree to the 1978 Camp David accords, which recognized the "legitimate rights of the Palestinian people" and affirmed that the Palestinians would be allowed to establish a self-governing authority in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for a transitional period, after which the final status of these territories would be negotiated.

Since he could not annex the West Bank, but had no intention of giving it back or even allowing the Palestinians the real autonomy promised them under Camp David, Begin simply continued Labor's functional pragmatic approach of leaving the final status of the West Bank formally open, while building a whole new reality on the ground: more roads connecting the territories to Israel, more land expropriations, more Jewish settlements. Both Labor and Likud found this pragmatic policy a convenient way to avoid having to face the existential and moral questions posed by the occupation. Labor officials could point to the *de jure* legal status of the West Bank and tell themselves that all options were still open, while at the same time enjoying cheap shopping on weekends in the West Bank marketplaces, low-cost housing in the new West Bank suburbs of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the security provided by all this extra land, and the psychic pleasures of walking the hills where Joshua once trod. At the same time, Likud officials could point to the *de facto* situation in the occupied territories and tell themselves that all options were being closed and that this land was effectively being annexed. But by not annexing it formally, they could have all the Jewish settlements they wanted without ever having to pay a real political price, either domestically or internationally. They could always tell the world that everything was just "temporary," until there was a final settlement; then they would add under their breath, "That would make it all permanent."

By the early 1980s, in other words, it was clear that the functional differences between most of Labor and Likud over the West Bank were quite insignificant. The only difference between them was in rhetoric. I once covered a Peace Now rally in Hebron, in which Jewish peace activists held a demonstration hand in hand with a group of dovish Palestinian intellectuals. A group of militant Jewish settlers tried to scuttle the rally by holding a sitdown strike. When I arrived on the scene, I found a dozen Peace Now buses all backed up on the highway into Hebron and a group of twenty army soldiers surrounding about twenty settlers, who were sitting in the middle of the road singing "*Am Yisrael Chai*"—"The Nation of Israel Lives," a popular nationalistic song. But what I remember most was that a girl soldier, who could not have been more than eighteen years old, was standing guard over the settlers along with her male colleagues. She had a rifle slung over her shoulder that might have been longer than she was. As the settlers clapped and sang their songs with great vigor, I watched this soldier girl, who was supposed to be helping break up the demonstration, mouth the verses of each song to herself. The way her lips moved silently up and down with the lyrics perfectly captured the difference between Labor and Likud. Likud wanted to sing at the top of its lungs that the West Bank was theirs, while Labor was ready to just quietly mouth the words.

Those in Labor and Likud who refused to accept this charade and demanded that their respective party leaders face up to the ideological positions stated in their party platforms were simply forced out. Labor did not want to face the reality that Israel's occupation of the West Bank was perverting the secular, socialist, and humanistic ethics at the core of Labor's ideology, any more than Likud wanted to admit that it would be impossible ever to annex "Judea and Samaria." So after Begin signed the peace treaty with Egypt in 1979, the true annexationists in Likud broke away and formed their own party—Tehiya, led by former Likudniks Geula Cohen and Yuval Neeman—while those members of the Labor Party who were truly committed to its stated principles of secularity, liberalism, and territorial compromise were either dropped from the parliament, like Abba Eban, or split off, like Shulamith Aloni, Yossi Sarid, and Amnon Rubinstein, and formed parties such as the Democratic Movement for Change (DASH) or the Citizen's Rights Party (RATZ), which demanded real humanistic politics and real withdrawal. As David Hartman put it, "All of Israel's moral prophets were farmed out by the major parties to these small factions, where they became insignificant voices in the wilderness and were easily ignored by Labor and Likud, who each traded in their ideological myths for functional pragmatism." (That was why Labor and Likud eventually found it possible, even easy, to form a national unity government together: In many respects, they have much more in common with each other than with the small radical parties on their extremes.)

Outsiders watching a debate in the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, would marvel over what a healthy democracy Israel had, when they saw all these politicians arguing with each other. But in fact all that was going on was that two minority fringes, one on the right and the other on the left, were shouting at each other across a massive, inert, Likud–Labor functional pragmatic alliance in the middle. It was a chorus of monologues in which everyone was speaking and no one was listening. In America, advertising is the most hysterical and competitive between products that are virtually the same, such as dog food or breakfast cereal. The same applied to Labor and Likud. They each pointed to their written platforms and said, "Look how different we are from them," but in daily life they were each selling the same Puppy Chow.

The unspoken pragmatic understanding between Labor and Likud was temporarily disrupted by the Lebanon war. Although Likud Defense Minister Sharon presented the war as being about "peace for Galilee," it had little to do with that part of Israel. In going to Beirut, Sharon was actually trying to solve the existential dilemma posed to Israeli society by the 1.7 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. He hoped that by destroying the Palestinians' representative, the PLO, he could force those in the West Bank and Gaza to abandon their demands for an independent state and accept whatever limited autonomy Israel offered them, thereby making it possible for Israel to retain the West Bank forever without feeling guilty that it was depriving Palestinians of their right to self-determination.

"Look," Sharon hoped to tell the world, "our Palestinians are ruling themselves. We can be Jewish, democratic, and still keep all the land of Israel, including the West Bank and Gaza. Who said you could have only two out of three?"

The Lebanon invasion, therefore, reopened the fundamental divisions in Israel over the questions: What kind of society is Israel to become? What kind of values does it stand for? Is it going to be a Jewish South Africa, permanently ruling Palestinians in West Bank homelands, is it going to be a Jewish Prussia, trying to bully all of its neighbors, or is it going to be a state with borders that will be based solely on considerations of what will preserve a secure, democratic, and Jewish society at peace with its neighbors?

In suddenly putting all these questions on the table again, the Lebanon war also revealed yet another reason why Labor and Likud could not answer them in a decisive way. It was that they each understood that if forced to confront the real and passionate ideological differences in their country on these questions, they could end up like the Lebanese: arguing first in the parliament and then in the streets. To put it bluntly, asking an Israeli leader to really face the question "What is Israel?" is like inviting him to a civil war.

That point was made clear to every Israeli on February 10, 1983, when Emil Grunzweig, a thirty-three-year-old Peace Now activist, was killed by a grenade thrown at him by a fanatical Begin supporter during a demonstration in Jerusalem against the Lebanon war. The *Jerusalem Post* reported that when the Peace Now demonstrators wounded by the grenade blast were taken to Shaarei Zedek hospital, some Likud supporters shouted insults at them as they were brought into the emergency ward.

"It is a pity they didn't blow them all up," the *Post* quoted one man as yelling.

Several years later, Avraham Burg, a young religious Labor Party member, who was slightly injured in the attack, told me he thought Grunzweig's murder was a major turning point for Israeli politics. It brought both sides back from the brink and encouraged Labor and Likud to shrink from addressing the existential question right when it began to seem inescapable.

"People saw what happened to Grunzweig and said, 'Oh-oh, this is too much,' " said Burg. "They got a glimpse into the real depth of the divisions between us and they decided to back away. It was too frightening."

Indeed, after Lebanon and after Grunzweig, Israelis wanted unity, not truth; they wanted quiet, not a painful debate about existential dilemmas. Israeli politicians were only too happy to oblige, which was why when I arrived during the July 1984 election campaign both Labor and Likud were focusing their campaign commercials on surfers, and promising, if elected, to form a national unity government. Maybe it is no accident that an increasingly popular new definition of a consensus comes from an Israeli statesman, Abba Eban. A consensus, said Eban, means that "everyone agrees to say collectively what no one believes individually."

Without Israelis realizing it, their country became almost as leaderless as Lebanon. Under the national unity government formed in September 1984, both major parties agreed to go back to postponing all the tough questions, and to deal only with consensus issues such as healing the economy. It was like postponing all real politics, because what is politics if not the making of hard choices, and what is leadership if not the framing of concrete choices for the public and then urging one over another? Peres, Rabin, and Shamir were too frightened to try to lead Israelis away from the status quo, too frightened to present them with a mirror of reality in the West Bank and then frame immediate choices out of it.

Instead, Israeli leaders fell into two categories: moderates with no guts and heroes with lost causes. Shamir declared that Israel must remain in Judea and Samaria for "eternity" and promised that "something would happen" in the future to free the Jewish state from the fact that the Palestinians could outnumber the Jews by the early twenty-first century: Russia would set free its Jews; there would be a pogrom in America; something would happen. Peres, by contrast, declared that Israel must and could do something about the West Bank and Gaza, but he promised that the way out could be painless. Israel would not have to deal with the PLO or any Palestinian demands for independence. Rather, it would convince Jordan to take back part of the West Bank in return for full peace, but only after a long, long transition period. Peres and Shamir, in other words, not only failed to lead, they actually made the Israeli public dumb: they got them to believe in the unbelievable, to hope for the hopeless, to feel weak where they were strong and strong where they were weak, and to feel that the winds of time were at their backs when in fact they were blowing in their faces.

David Ben-Gurion had always understood that his first constituency was the facts and that his second constituency was his people, whose subjective will had to be shaped to the facts. Shamir and Peres saw things in just the opposite way. They thought their first constituency was the subjective will of the people, which they measured religiously with polls, and that reality should be adjusted to the mood of the week. These were not incompetents, Peres, Rabin, and Shamir. They were all technocrats of substance, with real accomplishments. They helped to build a nation from scratch. Most of them were recruited as deputies and army officers by Israel's visionary founding fathers precisely for their administrative skills and their bland, unchallenging political personalities. They always saw their tasks as that of implementing the visions of others, not positing visions themselves. All three would have made good governors for Rhode Island or Delaware, but Rhode Island and Delaware are not faced with monumental existential questions and terrible moral dilemmas.

By the late 1980s there seemed to be a symbiotic paralysis between Israel's leaders and the nation they led. The major political and security issues facing the country appeared to both of them to be too awesome, too frightening, and too intractable. Leaders and led both seemed to feel that no one could really make a difference, so the Israeli politicians just went through the motions of leadership, always reacting to events, never taking the initiative, while the Israeli public went into emotional hibernation.

"Do me a favor, let's not talk about 'the Situation,' " became a common refrain among Israelis. When the state-owned Israel Radio and Television networks went on strike for almost two months in the fall of 1987, most Israelis loved it. For once they didn't have to listen to politicians screaming at each other and saying nothing. The public knew they were not missing anything because they knew that the politicians had long ago stopped being able to produce anything that could possibly be defined as real news. Israeli politics had become like a daytime soap opera—the Jewish equivalent of *As the World Turns*. You could go away for two months and tune back in and find that you hadn't missed a thing.

Confronted by daily newspaper headlines shouting, NO EXIT from the Arab–Israeli conflict, Israeli artists, too, increasingly dropped political themes and sought refuge in the abstract, anti-intellectual, postmodernist trend, in which the object was to say nothing, or at least nothing clear. This, after a decade characterized by sharp-tongued antiwar and protest art, some of the best of which was produced by Moshe Gershuni, a balding middle-aged painter who at the height of the Lebanon war was doing canvases dominated by blood-red smears and the theme of the sacrifice of Isaac, with Israeli eighteen-year-olds starring as Isaac.

Gershuni told me that several months after the Lebanon war began, at the peak of the daily death toll announcements, he decided on the spur of the moment to abandon the sacrifice of Isaac theme and started to paint only flowers, mostly cyclamens and anemones. When I asked him why, Gershuni said he asked himself the same question. "I asked myself, 'What are you doing? Are you crazy?' [But then] I realized that if I didn't stop being involved, I would ruin myself. It was time to take care of myself and stop carrying all the burdens of Jewish history. So I stopped reading newspapers and I stopped listening to the radio, and I am not a political animal anymore."

So it was with many Israelis. Shortly after speaking with Gershuni—in mid-1987—I went to see Israeli filmmaker Amnon Rubinstein and he told me an identical trend was apparent in Israeli cinema. "People don't want to know and don't want to hear," said Rubinstein. "We feel we are stuck in an impossible situation, and nobody has any solutions. It is like we are in a dark tunnel, and when we look around the only light we see is the train that is coming at us."

* * *

Veteran Israeli religious politician Yosef Burg used to tell a joke about two Israelis discussing philosophy. One says to the other, "Are you an optimist or a pessimist?" and the other answers, "I'm an optimist, of course. I am certain that today will be better than tomorrow."

Every Israeli I knew used to laugh at that joke, because they knew they were laughing at themselves. The Israeli political system is not only paralyzed today by a lack of leadership and clarity from the top, and not only by the fact that Israel's enemies, the Palestinians, were for so long unable to pose existential questions from their side; it is also paralyzed by a deep fatalism seeping up from the basement of Jewish history below.

The Zionist revolution was meant to liberate Jews from the age-old ghetto mentality of the weak, helpless victim. It set out to prove that Jews were not doomed to be objects, but that they could be subjects—that this people whose reality and destiny were always defined for them by external forces could become a community of choice, with the power to construct their own political history. It sought to accomplish this by creating a Jewish citizen, a Jewish government, a Jewish army, a Jewish Cabinet, a Jewish President, and by reviving the Hebrew language. The tragedy and the irony of the Zionist revolution is that although it created all these instruments and institutions from the ashes of the Holocaust, it failed to eradicate the collective self-image of the Jew as victim. Although they can now speak their own language and walk with their heads held high, many Israelis today still feel as though they are victims of circumstance and living on borrowed time as much as any Jewish ghetto dwellers in history. They have not really broken out of the prison of their past.

That is why despite the fact that Israel has one of the most powerful and advanced armies and air forces in the world, the country's leadership finds it almost impossible to imagine bold ways in which they could unilaterally use their overwhelming power to shape positive new options for themselves, particularly regarding the West Bank and Gaza. They still see themselves as a people who react to history, rather than shape it. Israeli leaders are always waiting for the phone call from the Arabs; few of them know how to dial themselves. Even the Camp David accords had to be initiated by Sadat; Begin never would have done it. If I were to draw a caricature of Israel today, it would be of a lifeguard at the beach. The lifeguard would be bulging with muscles from his head to his toes, but whenever someone pushed him into the pool, all he would do would be to tread water.

"It is all very strange," Abba Eban once remarked. "When we were really weak and vulnerable and objectively exposed to the prospects of destruction, we were more relaxed and buoyant and self-confident. Now, when talk of destroying Israel by the PLO is really ludicrous, there is a sense of vulnerability and tension. The reality of our power doesn't seem to enter into people's minds at all. The vision of Israel—embattled and in danger—and the use of such words as 'liquidation,' 'extermination,' and 'destruction'—these have all become part of the national vocabulary, and from our national vocabulary they have taken root among our friends in America as well. You'd think that we were a kind of disarmed Costa Rica and that the PLO was Napoleon Bonaparte, Alexander the Great, and Attila the Hun all wrapped into one. Israeli rhetoric is no longer based on contemporary realities but on Jewish memories, and that is a failure of leadership."

One of the most important works of Israeli Middle Eastern studies in the 1970s was a book by former chief of military intelligence Yehoshafat Harkabi entitled *Arab Strategies & Israel's Response*. I always loved that title. The Arabs have strategies; the Israelis only have responses. It is like all those Middle East maps that the Israeli Foreign Ministry propaganda department used to put out, showing a tiny Israel surrounded by Arab countries, and in each of these Arab countries there were little cannons and tanks all pointed toward Israel. The maps never showed any Israeli cannons pointing toward the Arabs.

Wherever you go in Israel today you can feel the past lapping up against society, whispering like a late-afternoon tide that the destiny of Israelis, like all Jews, is to be the victim. Remembrance Day, Yom Hazikaron, which commemorates those who fell in Israel's wars and comes every year one day before Israeli Independence Day, was when I would feel it most. On that day at 12:00 noon a siren is sounded across the land—from Metulla in the north to Eilat in the south—and every Israeli Jew stops in his tracks. The first year I was in Israel I was driving down a highway with photographer Micha Bar-Am when the siren blasted. Suddenly, without explaining anything to me, Micha veered over to the shoulder, screeched to a halt, threw open his door, and stood at attention by the side of our car. Every other driver on the highway did the same. It was a remarkable and eerie sight, as though everyone's mind had suddenly been taken over by some signal from outer space, and I, still sitting in my seat, was the only one not affected. The following year I saw the same scene repeated in the heart of Jerusalem: cars halted at all angles in the middle of intersections, people frozen on the sidewalks, at lunch counters, in classrooms, at gravesides, all locked at attention in order to remember. They remembered the dead from '48, '56, '67, '73, '82 and every battle in between. The siren wailed and they just stood there, while the past, silent and invisible, wrapped them in its web.

"So many Israelis walking the streets today feel that it was just by accident that they were not in Auschwitz, or Bergen-Belsen, or on the Suez Canal the day the Egyptians burst through in 1973," explained David Hartman. "When they look at scenes of the Holocaust, they say to themselves, 'There but for the grace of God go I.' They go to the funerals for their buddies from all the wars and they ask themselves, 'Why am I not dead?' So there is a sense that pervades this place that your presence here is not something that is organic and nurtured by the environment. You are not rooted. You are here against everyone's will. You can never really relax. The leaders here don't wake up in the morning, stretch their imagination, and say to themselves, 'I have all this strength at my disposal, what multiple options should I explore today?' They just want to get through the day, get through the week, get through the month. That is about as far as their minds can stretch. Imagine celebrating Independence Day the day after Remembrance Day. One day you are watching crying widows and orphans from all the wars, and then the next day, the very next day, you are told to go out and celebrate. Hey, happy Independence Day! Nobody knows what to do. So they go out and bop each other over the head with silly plastic hammers. How can you feel normal and gay after all this? It is a celebration out of nowhere. Every year you are celebrating at the edge of a volcano. Every day you are dancing on tombstones."

Sometimes literally. I was at a party once at the Bonanza Bar in Tel Aviv when Israeli rock star Yehuda Eder introduced me to another Israeli rock star, Danny Sanderson.

"Tom, meet Danny Sanderson," Eder said with a yank of his thumb. "He and I played the '73 war together."

I couldn't help but laugh. It was so natural. It wasn't "We played the Monterey Jazz Festival together." It wasn't "We played Woodstock together." It was "We played the '73 war together." Where else in the world would one rock star introduce another in such a way? Israeli musicians are assigned to special units to provide entertainment for the troops during wartime, and for many, like Danny and Yehuda, these concerts are the stepping-stones to stardom, not to mention some of the most intense moments they remember, musically and emotionally.

Israeli novelist David Grossman once recounted for me the most memorable moment of his wedding: "My Aunt Itka came, and she is a survivor of Auschwitz with a number tattooed on her arm. When she arrived at the wedding, she was wearing a bandage over her number. I asked her why she had on a bandage. Had she hurt herself? No, she said, she put it on because she did not want to take away from the joy of the moment by having people see her number. You see, that bandage is Israel. All of Israel is living on that bandage and everyone knows that underneath it is an abyss, a holocaust, that you can fall into at any moment."

This feeling that many Israelis have of living on borrowed time accounts for some of the more unpleasant aspects of daily life in Israel—everything from the way drivers honk at each other if the car in front of them does not move within a nanosecond of the traffic light turning green, to the way so many people cut corners in their business and personal dealings. There's no sense worrying about politesse or whether or not a customer will come back tomorrow if you don't really believe in tomorrow.

I once bought a tape recorder–radio in Jerusalem that came with a one-year warranty. After about nine months the radio broke, and I brought it back to the shop for replacement. The shopowner knew me well, as we had done a lot of business together. I put the radio and the warranty on the counter and said to the owner, "I need a replacement." He checked that the radio was dead, read over the warranty, and then just shook his head. "Mr. Thomas," he said, "if the radio had broken after one month, or maybe three months, okay, we would have replaced it. But nine months? I'm sorry."

"No, no, you don't understand," I said. "This radio has a warranty of one year. One year means one year. It is not optional. It is not at your discretion."

He just shook his head again. He did not understand one year. His mind could not see that far, no matter what the Japanese manufacturer had told him. By then I had been in Israel too long to try to fight this mentality. In the end, we worked out a complicated Middle Eastern barter deal, which involved me giving him the broken radio and several hundred shekels and getting a brand-new, bigger radio in return.

It, too, came with a one-year warranty.

And so does Israel. Israel is a country with a one-year warranty—that no one is sure will be honored.

If Israel wasn't founded on the basis of such a fatalistic outlook, then how did it take over?

The motto of Theodor Herzl, the Austrian journalist considered to be the founding father of Zionism, embodied the spirit of choice and initiative he hoped to instill in the Jewish people. "If you will it," said Herzl, "then it is no dream."

The first Jewish kibbutz collective farm built by the Zionist pioneers in 1909, Degania, was a monument to that motto. In the early years of the state of Israel it was common for native-born Israelis to feel contempt for the Jews who died in the Holocaust, and even for some of those who survived, because they were viewed as sheep who simply went off to slaughter, while the Zionists were men of bold initiative, who went out and fought the British and the Arabs and built a Jewish state.

Ruth Firer, a researcher at the Hebrew University School of Education and a specialist in the teaching of the Holocaust in Israeli high schools, recalled the spirit of those early days. Firer was born in Siberia, where her Polish parents were exiled by the Russians during World War II. Thanks to this exile, her immediate family survived the Holocaust, but all her parents' relatives were wiped out. In 1949, her father brought the family to Israel.

"When I was a student here in the 1950s, the Holocaust was a family secret—a shame," Firer explained one afternoon over coffee in her Jerusalem apartment. "In those days, we barely learned about the Holocaust in school. The feeling, the whole atmosphere, was that the future must triumph over the past. All of us, parents and kids, tried to cover up what had happened. When we taught the Holocaust then, we taught the heroism of the Warsaw Ghetto—that was it."

Unfortunately, a succession of traumatic events conspired to reawaken in every Israeli's soul the spirit of the Holocaust and everything it represented in Jewish history. In the process, Israel's motto changed from Herzl's "If you will it, then it is no dream" to *"Kacha, Ma Laasot?"*—which means "That is how things are, what can we do?" In other words, the future is fixed: a permanent struggle for survival against a hostile world.

The change began, I believe, with the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Otto Eichmann in 1961, which brought both the Holocaust and the survivors out of the Israeli closet. Older people were forced to reexamine their feelings, and the new generation of Israelis, who intently followed the gripping testimony of the survivors, developed an interest in this previously unmentionable chapter in the family album.

"For the first time in public the stories of the survivors came out and were legitimized," said Firer. "Every day people heard in the court and read in the papers the stories of the survivors. They were no longer seen as sheep led to slaughter. It turned out that many of them resisted, many of them were heroes—heroes we Israelis could understand. Theirs was a fight to survive and we could honor it."

After the Eichmann trial, Holocaust survivors were invited to speak in high schools, and for the first time the subject of the Holocaust was included in the Israeli twelfth-grade high-school curriculum. But it wasn't until five years later, in May 1967, that every Israeli got a whiff of the Holocaust in his or her own nostrils. It is easy to forget today that in the month before the June 1967 war, when Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser began beating his war drums, established a joint military command with Jordan, and threatened to wipe Israel off the face of the earth, many Israelis became convinced that their borrowed time was up. May 1967 was one of the most important months in Israel's history. It was the month when for the first time the widening awareness of the Holocaust among Israelis would begin to merge with their immediate predicament.

One can get a sense of the impending doom that was triggered in Israel in May 1967 by just glancing through the headlines in the *Jerusalem Post* from the eve of the war. For example, on May 25, 1967: SHELTERS INSPECTED. RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS MINISTER RECITES PSALMS IN THE KNESSET. 3,000 LEAVE [the country]. WAREHOUSES OPEN ALL NIGHT FOLLOWING RUSH ON SHOPS. TORAH SCROLLS TO FIELD SYNAGOGUES. RABBINATE CALLS FOR SPECIAL PRAYERS TODAY. This item went on to say: "The Chief Rabbinic Council yesterday called for special prayers to be recited in the country's synagogues at 4:30 p.m. today. The services are to begin with Psalms 20, 35, 38, to be followed by the Avinu Malkainu [a prayer extolling God's greatness and compassion], and the penitential prayers said during the Ten Days of Penitence between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur." The next day's *Jerusalem Post*, on May 26, reported that a "middle-aged self-styled inventor yesterday offered the army three of his patents: a cosmic death ray, an engineless airplane, and an instant water desalinization machine. This was one of a multitude of offers flowing into the Defense Ministry."

"No one in this country will ever forget that month before the Six-Day War," remarked Firer. "All the Arab countries around us were making military pacts in order to destroy us. We were filling sandbags outside our houses and stockpiling food. From all sides people really feared that we were going to be slaughtered. That moment was the strongest empathy I felt with the Holocaust. We suddenly realized that it is not only 'If you will it, then it is no dream.' We had this feeling of being caught in circumstances beyond our control, just like the people in the Holocaust. It made people think it can happen again—even here. Maybe the Third Temple will just be a short experience and Jewish history will repeat itself."

She paused for a second and then added, "Now all of us are carrying the past on our shoulders, and it is quite a heavy burden."

Although the victory in 1967 temporarily lightened that load, the 1973 war, in which Egypt and Syria engaged in a simultaneous surprise attack on Yom Kippur, brought it back in an even heavier form. Since then it has stayed. Virtually every Israeli carries it now. Whoever didn't have it when he came, whoever didn't inherit it when he was born, has it now. Israeli leaders such as Golda Meir, Menachem Begin, and Yitzhak Shamir, instead of fighting against the "Holocausting" of the Israeli psyche, actually encouraged it, turning the Palestinians into the new Nazis and Israel into a modern-day Warsaw Ghetto aligned against the world. Begin, more than any other figure, reintroduced into public rhetoric the language of the Israeli as the inheritor of the traditional Jewish role of victim, whose fate, like that of all Jews in history, is to dwell alone.

Today—unfortunately—the teaching of the Holocaust is an essential element of Israeli high-school education and in the Israeli army officers' course. No one goes to Kibbutz Degania anymore. Most Israeli youngsters I met had no idea what it represented. Degania is not viewed as the gateway to Israel. Instead, that role has been taken over by Yad Vashem, the massive hilltop memorial in Jerusalem honoring the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust. Where is the one place the Israeli government takes all official visitors? Yad Vashem. Today, all Israeli youngsters are not only taken on field trips to Yad Vashem but also go by the hundreds on field trips to Poland, where they visit firsthand the death camps of Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Treblinka. The subliminal message is that these camps are what the state of Israel is all about.

One day I came across a story in the *Davar* newspaper about how a typical Israeli seventeen-year-old preparing to enter the army was affected by a day-long Yad Vashem seminar on the Holocaust. It read:

> Avi Levy, a twelfth-grade student in the computer electronics program of the ORT school in Holon, did not think of building his future in Israel. Though he is a native of Israel, life here did not seem a bed of roses. Tourist advertisements about America and Europe appealed to him, and he decided he would leave Israel. He had the chance to leave before his military service. However, because "people died so that I could live here, I am willing to serve and contribute for those who will come after me," he said. The lecture by Avigdor Efron, head of the Holocaust Education Department of Yad Vashem for the Tel Aviv area, and other things he heard during the day-long seminar . . . convinced Avi to change his mind. Of course, even before this, he knew what had happened in the Holocaust. He had studied about the 6 million, the extermination camps, and the gas, but he never digested these things. Photographs he saw at Yad Vashem were not absorbed by his consciousness. "I felt a bit alienated and I did not see myself as part of them," he said, "but during the lecture I felt that they were actually me. Suddenly, I saw myself at the extermination camp. I felt that this could happen to me if I left Israel." Today he says, "I am not leaving Israel. This is my home—real, exclusive and concrete." He emphasized the last word.

It was no shock to me that when I left Israel in the summer of '88 one of the leading pop albums was a recording of songs, many on Holocaust themes, by musician Yehuda Poliker and poet Ya'acov Gilad—both Israeli-born children of Holocaust survivors. The album was called *Ashes and Dust*, and one of the most popular tracks was entitled "The Little Station Treblinka." It told the story of a ride on the death train to the camp at Treblinka, where an estimated 750,000 Jews were exterminated in the gas chambers. One of the verses in particular stuck in my mind. It went:

Sometimes the journey takes
five hours and forty-five minutes.
And sometimes the journey lasts
your whole life until your death.

Israel today is becoming Yad Vashem with an air force. The past has caught up with the Zionist revolution and now may be in the process of overtaking it. The Holocaust is well on its way to becoming the defining feature of Israeli society. Even Sephardic and Oriental Jews who came to Israel from Muslim countries and who never experienced the Holocaust now treat it as part of their personal family memories. "The Holocaust is no longer a trauma that affected certain families in Israel," said Sidra Ezrahi, an Israeli expert on Holocaust literature. "It has become a collective pathology affecting the entire nation."

This explains in part why Israelis have always been ready to tolerate almost any hardship from their government with barely a peep of protest. Whether it is outrageously high taxes or having to do an extra thirty days of reserve duty each year, Israelis just seem to swallow it. Sidra's husband, Yaron, himself a native-born Israeli, explained why: "As long as there are no gas chambers, and no genocide of Jews taking place, I'm afraid everything else seems tolerable to many people."

Fortunately, the "Yad Vasheming" of Israel is not quite complete. Not all Israelis have reverted to a pre-Zionist sense of their own strength. With proper and healthy leadership, the trend may still be reversible. I was convinced of that after a visit I made to Hatzerim air force base. While I was there I had the opportunity to interview the Israeli air force pilot who commanded the Israeli F-16 bomber squadron that in 1981 destroyed the Iraqi nuclear reactor in Baghdad; he is now in charge of the training of all Israeli pilots at the air force flight school. Colonel Z—I promised not to use his name—was born and raised on a kibbutz near Haifa. He has the handsome features, intelligent eyes, and erect bearing of a pilot who has just walked out of a recruiting poster. Like so many senior officers in the Israeli army, he had no doubt about Israel's real strength and power to shape its own future; he had not yet been totally infected by the apocalyptic rhetoric of the politicians.

I began our discussion by telling him that I had heard from a friend that the Israeli air force had sponsored a "Holocaust quiz" to see which pilots knew the most about the massacre of the 6 million.

"It was terrible," said Colonel Z. "I went to the head of the air force, [Major General] Avihu Binun, and I pleaded with him, 'Don't allow this. It is terrible.' They actually asked questions like 'How many Jews were killed in Treblinka? How many were killed in Buchenwald?' They wanted to make sure people knew the numbers. One question was about how many Jews were put in a concentration camp that was set up in Libya, and one boy answered 500,000, when the real answer was 500. But you see, you just build it all up into something that is so big that you lose all perspective and then you can't grasp what it means when five or six Jews are killed. If you take a club and beat a child with it constantly when he is three years old, when he is eighteen he is still going to be afraid. Our basic outlook is that of a beaten child. This is the basic orientation of Israel today. Look, I am named after my grandfather from Romania, who was killed by the Nazis. I grew up on stories of Jews being beaten, so even I have the complex to some degree. Rationally I know I should not, but I can't escape it."

If you could make a speech to the whole nation, knowing what you do about the power of the Israeli air force, what would you tell people? I asked the colonel.

"I would tell them that we have the strength to compromise, that a strong confident nation can make concessions with dignity," he answered without hesitation. "If people only knew what I know, they would be much less afraid of making concessions. If we see ourselves always as weak victims, we can't see our own strength and that we have options. Because of that, we have lost many opportunities. I am trying to teach my son that, but it is not easy."

No, I suppose it is not. A country that sees itself living on the lip of the volcano, or inside the eerie hallways of Yad Vashem, doesn't plan for the future and doesn't think about bold initiatives. It only holds on for dear life.

Shortly after Yitzhak Shamir became Prime Minister in October 1986, I went to see him with A. M. Rosenthal, then the executive editor of *The New York Times*. Shamir, whose entire family was wiped out in the Holocaust, exemplifies those Israeli leaders whose vision of tomorrow is yesterday.

As the interview drew to a close in the Prime Minister's office, Abe asked Shamir one of those cosmic questions reporters always ask heads of state. "Mr. Shamir," said Abe, waving his hand over an imaginary horizon, "two years from now, when your term of office is up, what would you like people to say about you?"

Shamir leaned forward, clasped his hands together, looked Abe in the eye, and said, "I want them to say that I kept things quiet."