



A Lover's Lament

by Art Green

I'M JUST BACK FROM YET ANOTHER TRIP TO JERUSALEM. PERHAPS MY THIRTIETH OR SO, BUT I'VE really lost count. Yes, wonderful to be there, as always. Seeing friends, drinking endless lattes in the Israeli version of middle European coffee houses, enjoying the special atmosphere of conversation that so characterizes that city as a Jewish intellectual hothouse.

I first visited Israel in 1961, six years before the Six Day War and Israel's conquest of the Old City of Jerusalem. In those days you could go up to the belltower of Notre Dame Monastery, right on the city divide, and for a fifty *grush* fee you could get a look over the Old City wall and peer into the marketplace. I came to Israel as a young man filled with dreams of holiness, of Jerusalem as the embodiment of heaven on earth. During that first visit, a year of study and teaching, the holy Jerusalem of my dreams and fantasies was transformed into a real place. I came to love the real Jerusalem—its people, markets, parks, and cafes. This was “new” Jerusalem, though it seemed plenty old to me. It was an all-Jewish city (except for the monks and nuns), rich with Hebrew and all the languages of the Diaspora, spanning an infinite Jewish ethnic and religious diversity. But it was no longer the Jerusalem of my prayers, of perfect wholeness, of messianic dreams. The pushing and shoving, the cursing and bargaining, the roughness of daily life made it clear that this place was real, not the stuff of fantasy. *That* Jerusalem, I decided, must reside over there, inside the Old City wall, a place I could not reach. I paid my fifty *grush*, peered over the wall, and dreamed.

When I went back after the war, I was able to walk through those markets, see the difficult conditions in which Jerusalem's Arabs lived, and feel the hostility behind their masks of commerce-driven friendliness. The markets were beautiful in their own backward way, and drew me to them frequently. But they were not holy; the air I breathed in them was not that of redemption, certainly not that of freedom. The proclamation of Jerusalem as a united city was clearly a myth. Old Jerusalem, too, became real, even profane, as I came to understand the deep conflict between its inhabitants and the multiple hatreds that lay just beneath its beautiful façade.

Where, then, was holy Jerusalem? I looked up at the Temple Mount, beyond the Western Wall, and decided that was where the true Holy City lay. Respecting both strict halachah and Muslim sensibilities, I decided I would not go up there, and I still have not done so, despite all those many visits to Jerusalem since then. But the truth is that it is neither Jewish nor Muslim strictures that have held me back. I fear that this Jerusalem too might turn out to be profane, and then there would be no holy place on earth at all. I

cannot allow that to happen.

This self-imposed taboo is a metaphor for much of my relationship with Israel. I so wanted to believe in it fully—in the rightness of our cause, in the high humanitarian ideals it represented, in the “purity of arms” of its soldiers, in the writing of poetry in Hebrew once again, in the clearing of swamps, the eradication of mosquitoes, and the raising of health standards throughout the Middle East, for Jew and Arab alike, as those old Zionist films used to proclaim. This was the Israel I learned about as a child. This was the Israel I believed in fully when watching Abba Eban address the United Nations, when hearing about David Ben Gurion's interest in the Bible and in Buddhist meditation, when corresponding in childish Hebrew with pen pals in Pardes Hanna, when reading the first Hebrew novel I mastered, S.Y. Agnon's *In the Heart of the Seas*, the tale of a fantasy journey to the Holy Land, many centuries ago.

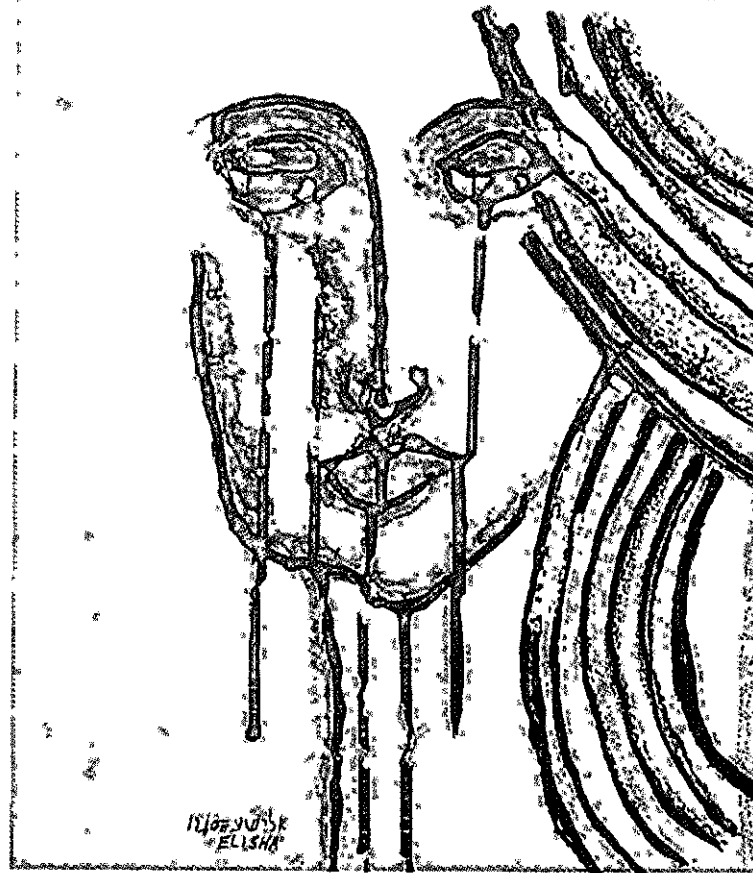
That Israel got lost, of course, in the clash with reality. If it continues to exist somewhere behind a wall, that wall stands deep within my own heart. Meanwhile, I have indeed come to love the real Israel, the one I visit so frequently and where I have many friends. I love the richness and naturalness of its Jewish culture, so much of which is borne by the Hebrew language itself. I love the directness of human encounter one has there, as though you are always dealing—and arguing—with half-familiar members of your own extended family. I love the closeness of Jewish historical memory that Israel represents, so dulled and almost forgotten among American Jews.

But that love combines with a deep sense of betrayal, disappointment, and hurt that I also feel when visiting Israel. In recent years I have refused to visit Jewish settlements across the Green Line. My feeling since 1967 has been that this territory belongs to the Palestinians, and should be kept in trust to be given to them when they are ready to make true peace. Settling that land in seemingly irreversible ways, creating “facts on the ground,” as they were called, betrayed the Zionist dream. It (combined with ongoing Arab intransigence and folly, both of which there are plenty of, I know) has made a two-state solution nearly impossible. Without a two-state solution, I believe, Israel is impossible, and will not survive.

Even inside the state's borders, the ongoing discrimination against Arabs, who have been second-class citizens for more than half a century, is a terrible stain on the moral reputation of the entire Jewish people. The inability of most Israelis, both individually and institutionally, to treat the Arab population with dignity, even to the point of learning their language, marks a major failing in the Zionist enterprise. One would have thought that post-Holocaust Jews would understand what it is to be a minority, and would empathize with those who entered that status because of our presence. Far from it. One might have imagined that Jews would feel impelled to treat others in our midst as the Bible tells us to treat strangers, "for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt." But this has not been the case. The memory of our own hurt, the terrible wound of the Holocaust and the lesser, but still traumatic memory of second-class status in the Arab world, are what count. Biblical imperatives mean less, especially, so it would seem, among the more traditionally "religious" sectors of the Jewish population.

I believe that it is very late. Great damage has already been done. Is it *too* late? Is it still possible to reverse direction? Could responsible leadership in Washington, Jerusalem, and Ramallah force a change, giving us a peaceful Israel behind safe borders, one not consumed by Holocaust-driven fears and not playing into and intensifying the hatred by which it is surrounded? I *try* to believe that time has not yet run out, but that belief gets harder to maintain, day by day. Meanwhile, I see Israel, the state and the society, as the great collective accomplishment of the Jewish people in the twentieth century. Its astounding successes—material, cultural, scientific, technical, and artistic—reflect the tremendous strengths and resources that are our people's legacy. But the essential moral failing of Israel, its inability to deal fairly with the rights and even the full humanity of the other people with whom it shares a homeland, remains deeply troubling. Whether this inability was caused by the intransigence of the other side, was fueled by memory and fear left over from the Holocaust, or was the predictable legacy of Jewry as an ancient covenantal community that never cared enough about the lives of those who stood outside it, is something we have no time to debate right now. Only history will be able to judge.

Visits get harder. My friends, members of the Israeli intelligentsia, will talk about anything except the one thing that matters: Is it *too* late? Is there any chance for a two-state solution any more? None of them has a shred of faith in any of the present or proposed Israeli leaders, in any political party, or in the current American-led "peace overtures." They'd rather talk about Mozart overtures, or ever Wagner. None of them believes in a possible Israeli government that could offer nearly enough to satisfy even the most moderate Arabs, without being instantly toppled by intransigent coalition partners. Most ominously, these dyed-in-the-wool Israeli leftists fear that there is no more Arab will for a two-state solution. We have given them so little hope, so little reason to believe, that



"Pain" by Elisha Ben-Yitzhak

they are turning more and more to groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, whose message is very clear: "Give those Zionists nothing. The Jews will tire of this. Just sit tight. Make more babies. We have the strength and numbers to wait them out."

I therefore need to violate the most terrible of taboos to talk about the alternative, my fears of what will happen without that two-state solution. If not two states, there will be one, reaching from the Sea to the Jordan. Within a decade or two, the Arabs will be a clear majority. Lebanon will be the model: a bi-communal state, supposedly built on equal protections, but where everyone knows who the real majority is.

At some point they'll stop taking—or counting—the census. The Jews have the guns, of course, and they will try for a while to rule in that way. But then the "Apartheid State" epithet will become too obviously true, and the world will not permit it. Israel will become a pariah, finally having to agree to equal citizenship rights for all. We'll be fighting increasing boycotts and denunciations, as we'll have progressively less and less stomach for it. But even after voting rights are acquired, the Arabs, feeling victory imminent, will not stop in their harassment of the Jewish populace. War, sniping, and suicide bombings will continue to make life too unpleasant for Jews to stay and raise their children in Palestine/Israel, or whatever it will be called at that particular stage. Jews who have the ability to do so will begin to leave in large numbers. I mean really large numbers, far beyond the Israeli émigrés we already see today. Ashkenazim, activating those EU passports they can all now



receive, will flee with their capital, education, and skills. Poor Sephardim, Ethiopians, the ultra-Orthodox, and others with no place to go will be left, led by a small fringe of ideological hard-liners. Can you imagine an Israel led by the sorts who now lead on the West Bank? Does it seem unimaginable? Just look to the north, at the growth of the Lebanese Phalange as the moderate Christian populace and resources re-established themselves in South America.

I won't go on. This nightmare gets worse, not better. The editor of *Tikkun* will attest (at my forthcoming trial in the Jewish public media) that I tried to beg off writing this article, having nothing to offer but an old-fashioned Jewish cry for *teshuvah*, for us to repent of our sins before it is *really* too late. What sins? You know the list: Arrogance, Deafness, Greed, High-handedness, Intransigence, Land-hunger, and all the rest. If Lerner hadn't already made up the full alphabet, we could certainly do it here and now.

Will repentance do any good at this point? Can we rebuild an Arab constituency for two states, one of them the Jewish State of

Israel (in which I fully believe, by the way)? I think that depends (God help us!) on the Arab governments, especially the Saudis. The solution will need to be imposed by the Americans, the Europeans, and the Arabs, acting in concert, with a fig leaf of "consent" given to both sides. If the outside Arab leadership gets fully behind it, I think there still is a slim chance. At least I *need* to believe there is. Israel's best—and only—hope lies in such an imposed settlement, replete with international guarantees and foreign troops to back them up. As a lover of Israel and all the best that she stands for, I pray that there are still some statesmen who understand this and are powerful and persuasive enough to make it happen. They will need the courage to ignore the screams and machinations of the American Jewish establishment, of course. I don't envy them that, but I urge them with my whole heart to stick it out. The day will come when we will thank them for it. ■

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Liberating Zionism

by Bonna Devora Haberman

IN 1992, ISRAEL LEGISLATED "TO ESTABLISH IN A BASIC LAW THE VALUES OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL as a *Jewish* and democratic state"—without suggesting what that Jewish content ought to be. Having revived Hebrew as a spoken language after 2,000 years of dormancy, it is time for Zionism to draw deeply from its Jewish sources.

One core narrative of the Jewish People is the biblical Exodus from Egypt. In the opening chapter of the book of Exodus, the midwives and birthing mothers are torn between the obligation to submit to the authority of Pharaoh—who commands them to kill all Hebrew male babies—and their commitment to enable life and creation. At that moment, the Exodus women activate their moral outrage and conceive liberation from oppression. Their bold rebellion seeds the ensuing redemption that sustains Jewish hope through thousands of years. Passover has been among the most celebrated traditions of Jewish families. Nurtured on the messages of social justice and freedom, Jews have contributed to the struggles of many oppressed groups, and ultimately waged our own—Zionism. Exodus sets out an unrelenting trajectory toward the homeland. The establishment of Israel, the airlift of far-flung Jewish communities in danger, and the opening of the former Soviet bloc all refer to the Exodus ideals.

Up until and including the Six Day War in 1967, Israel was a

favored protagonist in a modern Exodus drama. From the 1970s onward, Israel's detractors inverted the Exodus script. Since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, Israel has come to be viewed as a colonial power, preventing the Palestinians from achieving the self-determination that Israel enjoys. Casting the Jewish People in the Pharaoh role confounds Jewish consciousness. Once a youthful and bold adventurer, Israel has reached middle age and appears to many to have become part of a sordid and commandeering "establishment." Yet, even as the image of the ruthless Israeli military machine projects throughout the global media, Israelis feel little of the control and security that would accompany such strength. Particularly during the sequential Palestinian uprisings, the wars in Lebanon, ongoing terror attacks, and the threats of a massively hostile region, the sense of danger and injury to the Jewish body persists. Violence and occupation discombobulate the joyous sense of achieving the long-desired return to Zion. There is profound dissonance between external perceptions