



"Honoring Tradition, Celebrating Diversity, and Building a Jewish Future"

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Second Naiveté and Mature Zionism

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Do you remember discovering for the first time that your parents could be really, really wrong? And a little later, after taking that in, realizing that you could still love them?

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur taught about the arc of faith development – and how we can gain wisdom – over the lifespan. When we are very young, our parents are the source of guidance and the font of care and goodness. We may remember our own experience as young children, or as the parents of young children – the joy and comfort when reuniting with a parent after even a short separation. For the little child, the parent can do no wrong and we take literally what they say about the world. In the context of religious faith, which is actually where Ricoeur maps this process, this stage is called *first naiveté* – when we accept the stories, texts and received teachings of our tradition at their literal, face value.

The adolescent comes to see the world more widely. Having gained a perspective on the world through encounters with literature and culture, teachers and other adults, we may come to fault our parents and be disappointed in them. We realize that there are multiple points of view and alternative paths to explaining and moving through the world. This is the stage of alienation and distance – as we establish ourselves as separate people, we need to grieve the loss of innocence, letting go of that original naiveté. For religious faith, according to Ricoeur, it is modernity – with its rational critique, commitment to science and multiple points of view – which makes it impossible to accept either scripture or a faith-tradition's teachings in the simple, literal sense that was so satisfying before.

Yet we yearn to renew the relationships that were once so important and ultimately remain so. "Beyond the desert of criticism," says Ricoeur, "we wish to be called again."¹ In the context of religious faith, we learn to interpret both scripture and religious ideas not so much as literal truths but as myths, metaphors we are able to embrace because they point to deeper meanings and enduring truths beyond the literal sense of their words. If fortunate, we then discover a *second naiveté*, enabling us to embrace and live with these stories, images and ideas even as we have come to understand them in a more nuanced and mature fashion. With our parents, we move from infatuation to critical distance and disappointment; and then we come to accept them as they are, whole people, with hurts and limits and challenges of their own. Especially on this Yom Kippur evening, we can acknowledge that those we cherish the most are indeed multi-faceted, and that there are, for many of us, lasting disappointments and hurts which we carry; the idealized images we treasured once are not possible to maintain. But this need not keep us from being in deep, enduring relationships – rooted in love, rooted in history, rooted in mutual caring and responsibility.

I started out by talking about our parents – but isn't this true too of others in our lives too? We are our children's fiercest defenders, advocating for them to teachers, lobbying principals and counselors and coaches, speaking up on their behalf. But, sometimes when we get home, we look at each and just sigh and say out loud or silently, "Nu? Did they have to be so dumb?" We love them, we understand them better than anyone else who they are and what is going on...and we acknowledge to ourselves our disappointment and their limitations. But we love them all the same.

Not just our parents and our kids, but our adult siblings and our old friends – and even ideas. We have a certain way of thinking or knowing that is precious to us – and then we are disappointed or we discover another side of the story or there is more that we didn't fully understand...and we move away for a while. But, if we are able, because, as a teacher of mine taught, "love is what remains when you know the whole truth," we reconnect and ultimately reengage, not in denial but also without letting one quality or dimension overwhelm or color the entirety of our relationship. For Ricoeur, this stage of variously *second* or *recovered naiveté*, is a one-time linear process. But his model of first naiveté, separation and distance, and then reconnecting with recovered naiveté, helps me think about relationships, and *teshuvah*, covenant trust and renewal – for there is often a cyclical process as we deepen our connections and grow in empathy towards those we love.

This evening, I would like to apply these ideas to our connection to the Land and State of Israel.

On Rosh Hashanah morning, as part of our series of member talks about their personal Jewish journeys, Jim Gilbert told about growing up in West LA and how the annual Walk for Israel make him feel proud "to support Israel in such a public and communal way." Most of us of a certain age grew up learning about a mythic Israel – a tiny country, surrounded by hostile forces, a home to victims of the Holocaust and persecution, that made the desert bloom, innovated in technology and science, and showed the world – as it proved in the 1967 Six Day War – that Jews could really kick (you fill it in). Like many of my generation, my earliest memory of Israel is the Six Day War and appeals at the High Holidays to purchase Israel bonds. (Here's one from the Canadian Jewish Appeal from the late 70's...Its titled "Start the New Year by strengthening your bond with Israel"...and has two purchase options...one for Israel's economic security and an additional purchase for "Jobs for Russian Jewish immigrants." Apparently my Bubbie never turned her pledge card in.) My parents, like all of their friends, were passionate supporters of a country they had never seen; their first trip was when they came to visit me when I spent a year of high school on a kibbutz near the Lebanese border in 1973.

Now I hasten to affirm that the mythic Israel narrative – a persecuted people returned to its ancient homeland, and in a tiny country, surrounded by hostile forces, made a home to victims of the Holocaust and persecution, made the desert bloom, became a worldwide source of innovation in technology and science, and proved to the world that Jews could, in fact, fight and defend themselves – is a true one.

Israel was founded as a safe harbor for tens of thousands of displaced Jews after the Holocaust. In 1947, the United Nations approved the partition plan for Mandate Palestine; Israel declared independence in May 1948. Sixty-five years later, the legitimacy of the state is still up for discussion it seems, at least in some circles. The Zionist idea is a simple one – the recognition of the Jewish people's right to live in safety and with responsibility for their own destiny in their national homeland. Modern Zionism derives its legitimacy not from the claims of religious text or divine promise to the land. If that were the basis for modern nation-states, the map of the entire Western hemisphere would need to be redrawn as we returned the Americas to their first peoples! Instead the founding of Israel was the resolution to an existential danger that threatened the Jewish people during the first half of the 20th century.

We can and should lift up and celebrate Israel's accomplishments and triumphs – from its ingathering of the exiles, to its commitment to education, science and innovation, resulting in its citizens winning fourteen Nobel prizes, to its leadership in water desalination and conservation and solar energy, to its democratic processes and free press, to its commitments to respond to traumas and natural disasters around the world. And, I believe, there are many individuals and forces in Israel that seek to nurture a society and a state informed by the highest of Jewish and enlightenment values. There is so much to be proud of and to celebrate and honor.

There is a part of us – and a part of the organized Jewish community – that would like our relationship to stay right there. If we just focus on the historical record of why our people deserve it and lift up the country's accomplishments, won't that be enough? But I cannot come to Israel's defense in the

present if we can't be honest about all of our concerns about the past; nor, I believe, can we ever have an adult-adult relationship if we don't move beyond the first *naiveté*.

Over the summer and thinking about tonight, I read three books by Israeli authors that deeply affected me. One was a memoir by the writer Etgar Karet, entitled *The Seven Good Years*; its opening story begins with his wife in labor in an unstaffed maternity ward – all the doctors and nurses have rushed to the ER to treat the victims of a terror attack. Isn't it amazing that there is a country at all? The second was a biography of David Ben Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, by Israeli historian Anita Shapira; and the one that challenged my naiveté the most was Israeli journalist Ari Shavit's *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel*.

Reading these books, especially Ari Shavit's *My Promised Land*, put me in touch with how my first naiveté was lost. I grew up on stories of the *chalutzim*, the brave pioneers who managed to make their way from Eastern Europe to Palestine, braving poverty, malaria and deprivation in order to renew and rebuild the land. However, as both these books made clear, those *chalutzim* and their successors never made room for the people who were already living in the land, whose families, history, villages and fields were either bought up, overrun or, in more instances than we care to name, forcibly pushed away and rendered invisible. In this country, the narrative of America's founding and growth is a much more nuanced story than it was a generation or two ago; there is room in the American narrative for the devastating impact of the arrival of Europeans on the lives and civilizations of native peoples. I do not intend to suggest that the 20th century Zionist return to Eretz Yisrael is parallel to the colonization of the Americas; the Jews of Europe had much more in common with the colonized than the colonizers. Internally, the Zionist enterprise was a reverse colonial project – the goal of European Jews was to escape their marginalized place on the continent; they wanted to unbind their links to Europe, not extend them round the globe. Yet, the very discussion in Europe of where to settle its unwanted Jews – Uganda, Palestine, Alaska – could only take place in the wider context of European colonialist world-views and *realpolitik*.

Israel has been a sovereign state for 67 years. It is a democracy in which all citizens are entitled to vote. While Israeli society has significant social challenges, and there is no question that there remains deep-seated inequality, discrimination in the provision of public services and racism within Israeli society, Arab Israeli citizens serve as government officials and members of the Knesset and sit on the Supreme Court. The critiques of Israel's racial and ethnic divides are remarkably similar to the ones that have been raised over the last year in the United States. If we are going to boycott, sanction and divest, should we not consider the democratic and human rights records of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, China, Singapore, Hungary, Russia, Croatia...or perhaps the State of Missouri?

But not everyone who is subject to the control of the Israeli state is a citizen. For more than forty-five years, Israel has ruled over and occupied the land of 3.5 million Palestinians. What began in 1967 as a military campaign to secure Israel's borders has since been fetishized into a new idolatry. In a perversion of Jewish values and teaching, *yishuv ha-aretz*, the settlement of the land, has been raised up as an ultimate goal more important than life and human dignity. Israel Prize winner Prof. Ze'ev Sternhell once wrote:

If settlement is not ended once and for all by an unequivocal political decision and in the framework of a comprehensive peace agreement, Jewish settlement in the territories is a process that will continue until the last [inch] of land in the West Bank is "redeemed," or until the last of the Arabs who refuses to accept the sentence of Jewish overlordship is thrown out.²

If the legitimacy of the founding of modern Israel is rooted in response to the devastation of the Holocaust and the urgency of creating a home for displaced people, then the nation-state that was established in 1948 had a purpose and the Zionist dream turned necessity had, in small part, begun to come to realization. But, if there is no distinction between those borders – with everyone living within them being guaranteed the rights of citizenship – and the territories that were occupied in 1967, whose

residents are still 48 years later without citizenship or freedom, then, as Prof. Sternhall cautioned, what stops anyone from believing that the goal of the Zionism has never been, “a national liberation movement or a movement to save Jews from physical and cultural extinction, but rather [as its opponents have always claimed], an imperialist movement that aims at constant expansion.”³

Some years ago, Rabbi Donniel Hartmann of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem suggested that it would be in Israel’s best interest to direct its resources into creating housing within the pre-1967 borders of Israel, since eventually many people who are now living in the West Bank would want or need to move back. Instead, every subsequent government has continued to build housing, roads and infrastructure within the territories, often on illegally appropriated land or turning its back on the on-going expansion of settlement activity, while continuing to ignore and neglect the needs of the Palestinian villages next door.

Now I am entirely aware that it is unclear who among the Palestinians is capable of negotiating any kind of resolution. Nor do I harbor for a moment any false consciousness that even were Israel to unilaterally withdraw all its settlers tomorrow that this would have any impact on Hezbollah or the Iranian Ayatollahs’ verbal threats or real military danger. As Ari Shavit writes:

On the one hand, Israel is the only nation in the West that is occupying another people... On the other hand, we are the only nation in the West that is existentially threatened. Both occupation and intimidation make the Israeli condition unique. Intimidation and occupation have become the two pillars of our condition.⁴

Yet the danger to Israel as a democratic state – and the continuing erosion of its moral claims – continues to advance with each passing month when the normalcy of occupation continues. As the Orthodox chief rabbi of South Africa wrote a few years ago:

While the case can be made that Israel’s strong and often harsh security measures imposed on Palestinian Arabs living in the West Bank are a necessary evil in light of terrorism, we cannot ignore the fact that holding this territory for more than 40 years and keeping the residents there under occupation has had a corrupting moral influence on Israeli troops who have served in the West Bank and upon Israel as a whole.⁵

Over the summer, when colleagues asked me what I was speaking about this year, I explained: “Israel, yes; settlements, no. All the rest is commentary.” Israel is inevitably headed towards a permanent colonialism until and unless it disentangles itself from its occupier status. The ever expanding presence of Jewish settlers in the West Bank – whether authorized or tacitly ignored by the government, along with their increasingly violent tactics – are a constant assault on my vision and dreams for Israel.

But I don’t wish to be cut off – family is the place where they take you in when you have no place to go – and Israel is part of our family. I wish to reconnect; to retell the mythic story with the honesty of recovered naiveté. I wish to find my home and place, like Jews of generations past, in Zion. While early Zionists were variously naive, ignorant or willfully dismissive of the presence and claims of the people already living in Palestine, this does not change the historical circumstances that propelled them to Eretz Yisrael in the first place. Just as my American patriotism has room to acknowledge the very mixed record of America and its leaders, to be a Zionist today – to believe in the historical necessity of renewing a national homeland for a decimated and persecuted folk by granting self-determination to the Jewish people – does not require us today to be apologist defenders of all that has ever been done in its name nor to be asked to defend every policy of the government.

We do need to “grow up” our Zionism to a more mature understanding; my own relationship to Israel has evolved, growing as my understanding of the historical importance of Israel for the Jewish people has deepened and as my capacity to take in a more complicated, nuanced story about Israel’s past and Israel’s present has expanded. I have moved, I hope, as Rabbi Alvin Fine wrote, “From innocence to awareness/And ignorance to knowing;/From foolishness to discretion/and then perhaps, to wisdom.”

As part of my own effort to renew and sustain my relationship to the land and people and nation of Israel, I am excited to be planning an extended stay in Israel next summer and, more importantly tonight, a congregational trip for this April; I hope you will consider joining me. Because, I have to tell you, I really do love the mythic Israel – from the corny singing of “*Haveinu Shalom Aleichem*” by El Al flight attendants (I know, they don’t do it anymore, but I wish they did!) to being immersed in the Hebrew language starting with the signage at the airport and the entirety of Jewish history spelled out in the street signs on every corner, and then having all the people on the street corner – who aren’t particularly noticing the impossibility of the intersection of King David with King George – wish you a “Shabbat shalom!” I love visiting the places that are in mentioned in the Torah and prophets – and walking on the same stones that the priests, rabbis and people of the second Temple did. I can go on...

But because we cannot live in that myth alone, our trip will include tours of the border fence and sites of terrorist attacks, discussions with Palestinians in Ramallah and activists of all kinds in Israel...such that our relationship and connections with Israel will be deepened, extended and, it is my prayer, more caring, loving and accepting than before – while leading us to organize, lobby and speak out about what is most important once we are home. Even if you can’t come on this trip, I hope that you will deepen your learning and your connection through participating in the activities and programs sponsored by our active Israel Committee; they have modeled for us how people of diverse political perspectives can listen to each other and cooperate towards the common good.

In ancient days, on the festivals of Sukkot, Passover and Shavuot, pilgrims from all over the country would make their way to Jerusalem. I am not so naive as to believe that they all showed up; some never did return their ticket requests to the office and others just couldn’t get it together or take the time off. But I completely identify with all the generations of our people who declared:

שְׂמַחְתִּי בְּאִמְרֵי לִי בֵּית יְהוָה נִלְדָּה:

*I rejoiced when they said unto me:
“Let us go unto the house of the Eternal.”*

They didn’t ride in a bus from the airport nor travel through a new road that makes me think of the Broadway Tunnel and pretty much ruins the view, but reaching across four thousand years – returning from exile, rebuilding the city again and again, standing amongst the ruins, and now today - I am as joyful and awe-struck as any pilgrim ever was, when I arrive and say:

עַמְדוֹת הָיוּ רִגְלֵינוּ בְּשַׁעְרֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם:

Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem;

Jerusalem is a modern, disputed, deeply divided city, increasingly unlivable for many and a place that many Israelis would never think to visit, but its name and its places resonate to the depths of our spirits: So let us be guided tonight by these words of generations past. Let us speak tonight words that are true in their most literal meaning; and let us speak, in the very same breath, words that overflow with symbolism and mythic association, with language that expresses so much more than the words it contains. With the ancient Psalmist we say:

שְׂאֵלוּ שְׁלוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַם יִשְׁלִי אֶהְבִּיד:

יְהִי-שְׁלוֹם בְּחֵילֶךָ שְׁלוֹה בְּאַרְמְנוֹתֶיךָ:

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; may they prosper that love you.
Peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces.*

לְמַעַן אֲחִי וְרַעִי אֲדַבְּרָה-נָא שְׁלוֹם בְּךָ:

לְמַעַן בֵּית-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲבַקֶּשׁה טוֹב לְךָ

*For the sake of my companions and my friends, I say now: “Peace be within you.”
For the sake of the house of the Eternal our God, I will seek thy good.*

¹ Ricœur, Paul. *The Symbolism of Evil*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967, pg. 249.” See <http://www.exploring-spiritual-development.com/Paul-Ricoeur.html>.

² Zeev Sternhell, “Zionism or Colonialism?” *Haaretz*, June 28, 2002. Elsewhere he has said:
I am not only a Zionist, I am a super-Zionist. For me, Zionism was and remains the right of the Jews to control their fate and their future. I consider the right of human beings to be their own masters a natural right. A right of which the Jews were deprived by history and which Zionism restored to them. That is its deep meaning...” [Ari Shavit](#). "[Amazing grace](#)". *Haaretz*. 6 March 2008.

³ Zeev Sternhell, “Zionism or Colonialism?” *Haaretz*, June 28, 2002. I have slightly rearranged the sequence of phrases from the original.

⁴ Quoted in Dwight Garner, “Son of Israel, Caught in the Middle” (Review). *New York Times* (Nov. 19, 2013). ([Link](#)).

⁵ Warren Goldstein, “An Open Letter to Archbishop Desmond Tutu,” *International Jerusalem Post*, November 12–18, 2010.