

Why We Are Here The Jerusalem Post editorial January 11, 2010

Cast your mind back to before Muhammad destroyed the Jewish tribes of Arabia; before Islam expanded beyond the Arabian Peninsula reaching Jerusalem in 638. Before the ancient Roman Empire and the emergence of Christianity; before the Greek empire; even before the Persians came onto the stage of history.

Consider the distant 10th century before the Common Era when the ancient Israelites were consolidating their kingdom under Saul and David.

Over the weekend came a report that an ancient inscription had been deciphered testifying - yet again - to the age-old connection between the people and land of Israel.

On what in ancient times was a main road from the coastal plain to the hill country, Hebrew University of Jerusalem archeologist Yosef Garfinkel, digging in the northern Judean hills at Khirbet Qeiyafa - which borders on the Eila Valley (off today's Route 38) - found a piece of pottery with ink writing which dates back to the Davidic era.

The discovery was made a year-and-a-half ago. A number of scholars are examining the text though Prof. Gershon Galil, a biblical studies expert at the University of Haifa, just made his conclusions public.

The inscriptions, he said, are undoubtedly ancient Hebrew, using words such as *almana* (widow) that would have been written differently in other local languages.

It is easy to get carried away by academic hoopla. Some bible scholars and archeologists may disagree with the tone of Galil's revelations and the assertion that new ground is being broken. Other scholars have yet to weigh in.

Still, this much appears clear:

* There was an expansive Kingdom of David which extended well beyond the hill country.

* The Hebrew language was sufficiently developed in the 10th century. It reinforces what many scholars have long appreciated - that parts of the Bible are very, very old.

* During the reign of King David there were scribes who were able to compose complex literary texts such as the books of Judges and Samuel.

* The find establishes that scholarship was taking place away from kingdom's hub, implying that even greater learning was going on at its heart.

The text is equally significant because it shows that a key concern of the ancient Israelites was social justice:

You shall not do [it], but worship the [Lord].

Judge the sla[ve] and the wid[ow] / Judge the orph[an] [and] the stranger.

[P]lead for the infant / plead for the po[or] and] the widow.

Rehabilitate [the poor] at the hands of the king.

Protect the po[or] and] the slave / [supp]ort the stranger.

Galil told The Jerusalem Post he has no doubt that the inscription is ancient Hebrew and that only Jews, not Canaanites, could have authored it.

It is living - Carbon-14 dated - proof that in the 10th century Samuel could have written what traditionalists have ascribed to him all along. (Galil also remarked that ancient Hebrew was once written from left to right.)

It may seem obvious that the Jewish connection to this land dates back thousands of years. "By the rivers of Babylon" - but also by the waters of the Danube, Volga, Dnieper and Rhine - "we sat down and cried as we remembered Zion."

The Jewish lament for Zion knew no bounds.

Yet since the Jewish return under the auspices of the modern Zionist movement, an elaborate industry of denial has sprung up.

Many reputable scholars never set out to deny the ancient connection between Jews and Israel, but simply emphasized the lack of contemporary confirmation that Bible figures such as David were anything like their scriptural portraits. Unfortunately, their work was quickly manipulated and exploited by anti-Zionists. All the while, the Palestinian Arab leadership has remained adamant that evidence of an ancient Jewish presence in this land is a figment of the Zionist imagination. It's unlikely that anything will sway Palestinians out of their obdurate denial.

Still, the work of a generation of bible scholars and archeologists - along with their vibrant debates - continues to uplift the Israeli spirit. It is gratifying to observe - from Eila Valley pottery writings and Dead Sea scrolls to Beit Guvrin tablets - ancient Jewish history falling ever more vividly into place, reminding us why we are here.

Who Needs Peace, Love, And Understanding, Anyway?

By Dan Efron Newsweek Magazine January 11, 2010

Why many Israelis now believe that pursuing peace with the Palestinians is passé. For more than 15 years now, two Tel Aviv University political scientists, working with pollsters, have been asking Israelis roughly the same the two questions every month: Do you support negotiations with the Palestinians? And do you believe talks will bring about peace between the two sides in the near term? Their project, which started as the Peace Index and was rechristened in 2008 as the War and Peace Index, aimed to track Israeli opinion about a process that began with the 1993 Oslo accord. Optimism has waxed and waned over the years, peaking just after the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 by a right-wing fanatic, when more than 60 percent of respondents felt good about the peace process, and plunging during the suicide attacks of the second Palestinian *intifada*.

But rarely since the start of the project have the numbers been as low—consistently low—as in recent years. Only about 40 percent of Israelis now long for a rejuvenated peace process with the Palestinians. An even smaller number, about 20 percent, believe such talks would amount to anything. That doesn't mean Israelis are warmongers, although right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu often complains his government is portrayed that way. Palestinian negotiators were outraged last week when the Israelis approved construction of another roughly 700 housing units in East Jerusalem despite a freeze on new building in West Bank settlements; they claim Netanyahu's professed desire to sit down and talk is disingenuous. Yet in the long years since the Oslo process began, each side has had its turn—several turns—as the spoiler. And in fact, more Israelis than ever (including Netanyahu, though with major provisions) now say they're willing to live alongside an independent Palestinian state.

What's changed is that more Israelis than ever also seem to feel little urgency about reaching that goal. This, as much as any reluctance on Netanyahu's part, may pose the greatest obstacle to the Obama administration's efforts to reach a peace agreement before 2012. A combination of factors in recent years—an improved security situation, a feeling that acceptance by Arabs no longer matters much, and a growing disaffection from politics generally—have for many Israelis called into question the basic calculus that has driven the peace process. Instead of pining for peace, they're now asking: who needs it?

Few Israelis would have posed that question just a few years ago, when buses and cafés were blowing up with alarming frequency. But the almost total absence of suicide attacks since 2006 has changed

attitudes, in ways that were palpable to me when I visited recently for the first time in four years. In that unscientific way that a visitor takes in a national mood, I found Israelis to be more lighthearted and less angst-ridden than I had remembered—also less obsessive about what they call *hamatzav*, literally "the situation." The practice of turning up the radio when the hourly news bulletin comes on seems to have ebbed, a bewildering turn for anyone who has spent any amount of time in the country. Even Jerusalem, with its relentless feuding between Arabs and Jews, religious and secular, felt less tense. For an interview in the city with a top cabinet minister, I showed up 30 minutes early, recalling the rigorous security checks that precede such meetings. The guard who was supposed to frisk me couldn't get his handheld metal detector to work. Instead of fetching new batteries, he flashed a smile and said in accented English: "Just tell me we can trust you, and I'll let you in."

By the standard logic of Middle East peacemaking, this should be the perfect time to negotiate a deal. Israelis, after all, have long argued that real talks about land for peace cannot proceed until terrorism stops and some level of security is achieved. But, as so often happens in the Middle East, the standard logic no longer holds. If security was a prerequisite for peacemaking, now it's a goal unto itself. And it's been achieved, Israelis can plausibly argue, through their own hard-nosed measures.

Consider the numbers. Over a six-year period starting in September 2000, about 140 suicide bombers crossed into Israel from the West Bank, killing around 500 Israelis, a huge number for a population of 7 million (though only about one 10th the number of Palestinians killed during the same period). Since mid-2006, the year Israel completed large sections of the new fence around the West Bank (and a wall around parts of Jerusalem), not a single suicide bomber has infiltrated from the area and staged a successful attack. Built in part on Palestinian land, the barrier has generated criticism at home and abroad. But if you set aside the controversy, at least in the short run, the conclusion is clear: the barrier is working.

Gaza has similarly been subdued. In 2008, Palestinians launched around 3,000 rockets at southern Israel, an average of about 250 a month, according to an official tally. (The rockets have caused few casualties but have exacted a psychological and economic toll.) Then, a year ago, Israel waged a controversial war in Gaza. Critics of the campaign have focused, justifiably, on the high number of civilian casualties and the

disproportionate use of force. But the results are indisputable: since the war, the number of rocket attacks from Gaza has dropped by 90 percent.

The stability, in turn, has helped Israel's economy. While the global recession plunged other countries into crisis in the past year, nearly all of Israel's indicators have held steady. Tourism, a good gauge of overall welfare, hit a 10-year high in 2008. Astonishingly, the IMF projected recently that Israel's GDP will grow faster in 2010 than that of most other developed countries.

In short, Israelis are enjoying a peace dividend without a peace agreement. Clearly, that can't last. Without a resolution to its conflict, Israel will always face the prospect of international isolation and challenges to its very legitimacy. But the tendency toward short-term thinking is reinforced by another somewhat skewed cost-benefit analysis that Israelis are inclined to embrace: while the absence of peace is exacting a very low price, Israeli attempts to forge a peace deal have exacted a very high one.

Most Israelis, in this analysis, associate the Oslo accords not just with the historic handshake on the White House lawn but with the first suicide attacks by Palestinians. Ask Israelis what they got in return for their offer at Camp David nearly a decade ago to hand over most of the West Bank and they'll point to the second *intifada*. In Israeli minds, Palestinians should have been grateful for the 2005 withdrawal from Gaza—instead they fired rockets at Israel.

Of course, that version ignores Israel's own provocations and abuses, including the continued expropriation of Palestinian land, the dramatic growth of Jewish settlements in the 1990s and the siege Israel has imposed on Gaza. But it's an account of history that Israelis across the political spectrum accept almost unquestioningly, and it translates into a deep reluctance to push forward too far, too fast. As Tamar Hermann, one of the two political scientists who run the War and Peace Index, told me recently, "In a way, Israelis are looking around and saying, 'We've achieved normalcy. We don't have bombings. The stock market's OK. Why should we launch another messy peace process that may rock the boat again?'"

Hermann concludes that Israelis have intellectually disengaged from peacemaking. Their emotional detachment may run even deeper. In the hopeful period after Oslo, Israelis coined a phrase: eating hummus in Damascus. The expression was shorthand for coexistence in the "new Middle East" that finally appeared to be materializing. But it also had a literal significance. For citizens of tiny and hemmed-in Israel, regional peace would mean they could drive their cars across international borders, shop in the souks of Arab capitals, and take road trips from Tel Aviv through Turkey and on to Europe. The national debate between left and right

centered on whether that vision was attainable or delusional. But the potential benefits were obvious.

Today, hummus in Damascus has lost its appeal. This happened gradually, starting in the 1990s, when Israelis ventured into the Arab world like never before. The experience was often disappointing. The peace process failed to erase Arab animosity toward Israelis, who were often received with suspicion or even hostility. Those Israelis who had fantasized about combining Israeli know-how with Arab capital—enabling everyone to get rich—found the bureaucracy and inefficiency of Arab countries dispiriting. Meanwhile, Israel's booming high-tech sector has bound the country more tightly to the global economy, making trade with neighbors less important. As a result, even in the good years, Israel's commerce with the Arab world never amounted to more than 1 percent of its total international trade revenue. These days, says Ori Nir, the Israeli spokesman in Washington of Americans for Peace Now, Israelis would much rather eat pasta in Rome than hummus in Damascus.

Nir says that sense of disillusionment has helped to sink Israel's pro-peace parties, which suffered their worst defeat yet in elections last March. The drubbing has led some politicians on the left to shift their priorities. Nir told me that Nitzan Horowitz, a Parliament member from the left-wing Meretz party, had sought help from friends recently to set up meetings in Washington. When the friends inquired which American peace groups he'd like to meet, Horowitz said none: he was more interested in seeing environment and gay-rights advocates. Horowitz confirmed the account when I visited him at his office in Israel, where he had a photo on the wall of himself with the Dalai Lama, and a license plate inscribed with the words CHANGE WE CAN BELIEVE IN—OBAMA IN '08. "People want a clear agenda," he told me, explaining why Meretz had dropped from 12 seats in the 120-member Parliament in 1992 to just three seats last year. "It doesn't have to always be focused on the Arab-Israeli issue."

Of course, Israelis have turned away from politics generally in recent years, largely in response to a swell of corruption in government circles. In 2009 alone, former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert was indicted for bribery, former finance minister Abraham Hirschson was jailed for embezzlement, and former president Moshe Katsav went on trial for rape. At least two former cabinet ministers have been convicted of graft in the past five years, and an indictment against the current foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, is expected any day.

That malfeasance, though it has nothing to do with the peace process, has contributed to the Israeli disaffection for peacemaking. According to a recent study by the nonpartisan Israel Democracy Institute, one result of all the scandals is that Israelis feel their

politicians can't be trusted to take their interests into account—not in small matters, and certainly not in something as significant as peace talks. "Making peace is difficult," says Tamar Hermann, who coauthored the IDI paper. "If you don't trust politicians, you don't want to jump into that water at all." Among other things, the study found that 90 percent of Israelis believe the country is tainted by corruption, and 73 percent would advise their friends and relatives to stay out of politics. Israelis are "drawing away, at times in disgust, from the political establishment," the study concluded.

On some level, the changes Israel is undergoing are part of the normal evolution of a Western

democracy. It makes sense that Israelis over time would become less obsessed with politics, more cynical about their neighbors, less trusting of their leaders. But for Palestinians next door, nothing is normal. Hamas has rebounded from the Gaza war and is once again smuggling in weapons. In the West Bank, Israel's one reliable peace partner, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, has vowed to resign. Farther off, a conflict with Iran looms. Many Israelis know it's just a matter of time before another bomb blows up in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. But as one Israeli put it to me: the medication has become so effective at relieving the pain, there's little incentive to actually cure the disease.

Welcome to UC Islam By Mike Adams TownHall.com February 16, 2010

Muslim students are not always cowards. But the Muslim Student Union (MSU) is often the least tolerant and most cowardly student group on a given college campus. The gulf between the speech they prevent and what they practice with administrators' consent is enormous. What follows is a summary of a recent, and increasingly typical, incident. I have included links to video of the incident for verification. I have also included the chancellor's complete contact information so that "infidels" can express disgust with unchecked Muslim bigotry and intolerance on our nation's campuses.

Last week, MSU members sabotaged a speech by Israel's Ambassador to the U.S.A. This happened at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). UCI has a reputation for harboring a particularly aggressive Muslim student population. Ambassador Oren's well-publicized speech was open to the public. The audience numbered approximately 500. At one point, the ambassador had to leave the room, surrounded by body guards, for more than 20 minutes. Ultimately, he finished his remarks, but, due to the disruptions, there was no time for the planned question and answer session. It is worth noting that the speaker is American born and a Princeton and Columbia graduate. He has been a visiting professor at Harvard, Yale, and Georgetown.

Before entering the hall, protestors prayed loudly outside the building. Ambassador Oren's speech was interrupted ten times. Each interruption was by a lone male student of middle-eastern descent. Each time, dozens in the crowd loudly acted up in support. Despite faculty admonitions, even expressions of faculty embarrassment, the interruptions continued.

The interruptions appear to have been pre-planned then coordinated on site. Witnesses described text messaging between the disruptors and at least one reading his interruption from a crib note. Apparently the protestor was unable to memorize a one-sentence line. Welcome to UC Islam.

Oren maintained his composure despite the chaos. Several times he spoke gently to the

protesters, reminding them of mid-east hospitality customs and U.S. free speech rights. After the last interruption, the group loudly left in concert and continued protesting immediately outside the hall. Twelve were arrested.

UCI administrators had every reason to suspect trouble, yet did little or nothing to prevent it. Neither did they stop it once it began. At least one reliable organization gave UCI advance warning of the protest and how it would be orchestrated. Prior to Ambassador Oren's arrival, UCI MSU wrote a protest letter published in the school paper and on its own website.

For years, UCI MSU has sponsored a one week pro-Palestinian/virulently anti-Israel demonstration/fair. Recently it's grown to a two-week fair. Intolerance used to rule the day. Now, it rules the fortnight. Imported Arab and other speakers are viciously propagandistic. The hyperbole has increased year by year but there have been no shout downs. The MSU receives more tolerance than it is willing to give. The administration approves of this sort of free speech. For more than a year, the UCI administration has been "investigating" that certain MSU speakers publicly solicited, then forwarded, donations to Hamas. If true, this violates UCI regulations -- and federal law.

Readers of this column need to watch this five-minute video and ask themselves whether this looks more like a university in Iran than a university in California:

The UCI chancellor's contact information follows for those who wish to express concern for what they saw on the video:

Chancellor Michael Drake University of California, Irvine Office of the Chancellor Irvine, CA 92697-5125 (949)-824-5111 chancellor@uci.edu

To date, I've seen nothing about this in the main edition of the Los Angeles Times. But suppose the Syrian ambassador had been interrupted just once by the Jewish Student Association. Do you think they would have found that newsworthy? I'm just wondering.

Who Is a British Jew

By David Pryce-Jones **Commentary Magazine** February 2010

Anyone accused of racism in Britain stands in danger of extreme condemnation. The historical memory of the cost to the United Kingdom of defeating Nazism is carried along, apparently, by fear of a repeat. With forebodings of that kind in mind, the Race Relations Act of 1976 prohibited discrimination on grounds of “colour, race, nationality, or ethnic or national origins,” and subsequent acts have confirmed the thrust of it. The theoretical area between race and ethnicity is a slippery and undifferentiated zone, but the wording of the act seems intended to cover the prejudices that set people apart.

At about that same time, however, the United Nations passed the resolution declaring “Zionism is racism” with the very intention of *encouraging* ethnic or racist discrimination against Israel and anyone supporting it. This had a malign contemporary originality all its own. For if Israelis and Jews are truly to be perceived by the world as racist, then they are nothing more than criminals, and they are lost.

The UN resolution was eventually reversed, but the campaign to criminalize Israel as racist has ever since been pursued with persistence and considerable success by Arab and Iranian spokesmen and their well-wishers on the Left. Unexpectedly, indeed unimaginably, a small, localized, and very specific issue in London has added a new and potentially dangerous twist to it.

Last year, Mr. and Mrs. M applied to send their 12-year-old son E to the Jewish Free School, one of the most famous educational institutions in London (the three protagonists are identified only by initials). The Jewish Free School dates back to the 18th century. One of some 30 Jewish faith schools in Britain, every one subsidized by the state, it has 1,900 pupils and has been such an outstanding academic success for such a long time that every year there are many more applicants than places. Parents are reputed to go to great lengths to get their children in—entering them at birth, changing addresses, and so on.

Mr. M is Jewish and had brought his son up to be Jewish, so it appeared that the family had met the school’s essential precondition for entrance. Mrs. M, on the other hand, had been born into a Catholic family but converted to Judaism—and, by coincidence, she is a teacher in the school. A Reform rabbi had supervised her conversion.

Following the ruling of the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, Jonathan Sacks, the Jewish Free School decided that E did not qualify for admission because Mrs. M’s conversion did not pass the test of Orthodoxy, and therefore their son was not deemed Jewish by the standards of the Jewish community of Great Britain. For the past 2,000 years or so, Jews

have considered themselves Jewish by virtue of a Jewish mother—that is, by matrilineal descent.

Mr. M decided to sue the school on grounds of discrimination under the Race Relations Act. Stephen Pollard, editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, a London weekly that is almost an official voice for Britain’s Jewish community, expressed the sudden anxiety that things might well get out of hand: “This is potentially the biggest case in the British Jewish community’s modern history. It speaks directly to the right of the state to intervene in how a religion operates.”

The fact that there is controversy over E’s Jewishness springs from the well-known inability of Jews to devise a consistent answer to the question “Who is a Jew?” More precisely, there are several answers to that question, and some are incompatible with others. In all likelihood, Mr. M wanted only to do the best he could for his boy, but by bringing suit, he was obliging the state to address a question of identity that divides and vexes Jews—a question, moreover, that only Jews themselves are in a position to resolve, and that is, and should be, of no real concern to anyone else.

The case went to court, and the court found in favor of the school. Mr. M then appealed, and last summer the Court of Appeal overturned the earlier ruling. It was legal as well as fair, that court found, for the Jewish Free School to base its admission policy on religion; the JFS is, after all, a parochial institution. But to exclude a pupil on grounds of race or ethnicity would be illegal, and that is what the court decided had occurred. The status of Mrs. M decided the issue. The court held that basing admission to the school on the traditional precondition of having a Jewish mother was some sort of test of ethnicity, not a matter of faith, and therefore discriminatory.

Whether the rationale for the school’s policy of admission was “benign or malignant, theological or supremacist, makes it no less and no more unlawful,” the court decided. Beneath the obfuscatory complexity of such negatives and adjectives working against each other, there surely lurks a discernible degree of doubt as to whether the court was contented with the implications of what it was doing. The obscurantist language may be explained by an unexpressed fear that the appeals-court judges themselves might be accused of racism.

The case was brought to its final hearing in front of the Law Lords, a 19th-century institution of the House of Lords transformed just this past October into an American-style Supreme Court consisting of nine judges. The Law Lords affirmed the decision of the Appeals Court, deciding that the boy had been excluded on racial grounds in contravention of the

Race Relations Act. In its decision, Lord Phillips, the Lord Chief Justice, also detected the odor of ethnicity, without defining what exactly he meant by it: "one thing is clear about the matrilineal test; it is a test of ethnic origin by definition." Using matrilineal descent to determine who is a Jew for the purposes of admission to the school was, therefore, "discrimination on racial grounds."

The judges reached their verdict by the slender majority of 5 to 4. They reflected awareness of the delicate ground they were standing on when they said that the Jewish Free School had not been racist in a pejorative sense, and that they did not consider Sacks, the Chief Rabbi, racist either. Sacks did not return the compliment. He finds that the judgment has "branded racist" the Jewish faith, and he made a further point directed against Mrs. M: "One cannot convert to an ethnicity." A spokesman for Sacks summed up the view of Orthodox Jews: "Essentially we must now apply a non-Jewish definition of who is Jewish."

Lord Rodgers, one of the dissenting judges, said that the decision "leads to such extraordinary results, and produces such manifest discrimination against Jewish faith schools in comparison with other faith schools, that one cannot help feeling that something has gone wrong." In a thoughtful article in the *Guardian*, no friend of things Jewish as a rule, Naftali Brawer, a rabbi and an educator, spoke with dismay of what has become "a very heated, difficult and potentially divisive community debate." The ruling "betrayed an appalling insensitivity towards the Jewish community by deeming racist its definition of Jewishness." The *Independent*, also no friend of things Jewish, featured the bald headline, "Jewish School Racially Discriminated, Says Court." No one could have predicted, ran an article in the *Daily Telegraph*, that a modern liberal democracy would take it upon itself to say: "We decide who is a Jew."

Several commentators noted the irony that the Race Relations Act, set up to protect minority groups, has ended up punishing one of them. The court has declared that members of a particular religion do not have the final authority to define

themselves, although such a definition has to be the core element of all religions. Neil Addison, a lawyer at the Thomas More Legal Centre, went as far as to declare the ruling redolent of "the most insidious form of totalitarianism":

What the decision means is that the historic Jewish definition of "who is a Jew" is now illegal and Orthodox Jewish organizations and schools can no longer apply their own definitions of membership. As a lawyer I can understand the technical legal argument but as a human being I regard it as a profoundly dangerous extension of state power.

In response to the ruling, the Jewish Free School and the other Jewish faith schools are instituting what is called a Certificate of Religious Practice. Candidates for admission will have their level of Jewish observance tested. In other words, Jewish practice, rather than ethnicity or race, will now be the criterion that will keep the schools on the right side of the Race Relations Act. Parents are now taking their children to Orthodox synagogues to obtain these duly stamped certificates that will serve as passports to a school like the Jewish Free School.

Such a modification would have allowed young E to enter the school without all this fuss. By now there are evidently large numbers of men and women who are Jews merely because they think they are, not because Jewish law or tradition agrees. Edward Frankel, the great classical scholar who fled from Germany to Oxford in the 1930s, was one example among many, explaining to pupils that his mother was not Jewish, but "Hitler thought me Jewish and what was good enough for him is good enough for me."

That may well be, but the imagery of a religion being forced to comply with a fiat of the state through the means of a stamp—effectively compelling the bureaucratic enforcement of the ultimate private matter in which the state should have no interest—itself has, as Neil Addison pointed out, a whiff of Hitler as well. The ruling also suggests the dangers involved when any religious institution comes to rely on the financial munificence of government.

Those Who Destroy You Will Come From Among You

By Daniel Gordis The Jerusalem Post

February 19, 2010

Few biblical verses are more commonly misquoted than Isaiah 49:17, in which the prophet promises Israel that they have not been forsaken, that the day will come when "your destroyers and despoilers shall leave you." But the Hebrew words that mean "shall leave you" *-mimech yetzei'u-* can also be easily translated as "will come from among you." Taken out of context, therefore, Isaiah's promise of a secure future can be read to mean, "Those who destroy and despoil you will come from amongst you." And though it's not at all what Isaiah meant, the mistranslation still rings true.

Much has been written about the latest confrontation between Im Tirzu ("If You Will It," an obvious reference to Herzl's famous phrase), an organization of Israeli students committed to combating what it sees as post-Zionist or anti-Zionist forces in Israeli society and on Israeli campuses, and the New Israel Fund (NIF), which Im Tirzu accuses of funding many of the left-wing organizations that contributed to the findings of the Goldstone Report.

As in most such cases, both parties may have overreacted. Im Tirzu's shameful ad depicting

Naomi Chazan (president of the NIF) sporting a horn was in exceptionally poor taste, evoking the caricatures of Jews once common in Nazi publications and ubiquitous in today's Arab press. But the NIF's efforts to promote democracy in Israel, without question a laudable goal, also need calibration.

For any good to come out of the vicious battle of words between Im Tirzu and the NIF, certain elements of the Jewish world must recognize a plain truth that they would rather ignore. That truth is this - the Jewish People is at war. There were decades in which the Arabs believed that Israel could be destroyed by standing armies. But that, even our enemies understand, is not about to happen. Since 1973, no standing Arab army has dared attack Israel. In subsequent years, the Arab world tried economic boycotts and terrorism. But neither destroyed the Jewish state. Having failed on those fronts, therefore, the Arab world has adopted a new strategy - the delegitimization of Israel. In this, it is joined by countries and individuals far from the Middle East.

Our enemies are winning this trial in the court of international opinion. Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, Jimmy Carter, Richard Goldstone and British courts issuing arrest warrants for Tzipi Livni are only the best-known witnesses. The real list is much more extensive. One does not need a vivid imagination to envision a scenario in which the world simply imposes a binational solution on this region. If one is not absolutely committed to Jewish sovereignty, that solution actually makes some sense. Thus, this war over Israel's legitimacy is one that we cannot afford to lose.

Nor is the State of Israel all that is at stake. American Jewish life as we now take it for granted would not survive the loss of Israel for very long. It would take only a few years after Israel's demise for American Jews to lose the confidence and optimism that they now take for granted. After all, what is different about the Spanish, French and Italians, on the one hand, and the Basques, Chechnyans and Tibetans on the other?

All six nations have rich histories, cultures, languages, religious traditions and more. But three help determine the course of history - because they have states - while the latter three are peoples to which history simply happens. Israel is what puts Jews in the former category rather than the latter. And the transformation from our being the objects of history to shapers of history has been so thorough that most Jews simply cannot imagine the profound change in Jewish life that would ensue were Israel a vestige of the past.

Because this is a war of words with potentially lethal consequences, words matter more than ever. Thus, those who believe that territorial concessions might bring about peace must do more than simply say that. They must ask whether now, as the international community creeps steadily closer to deciding that the re-creation of the Jewish state was a grave mistake (and as Iran makes constant progress in its quest for a nuclear weapon virtually unfettered by Western sanctions), is the time for Jews to ascend the steps of Capitol Hill to convince congressmen and women to put more pressure on Israel.

Similarly, few thoughtful people would deny that Israel's democratic institutions need strengthening, or that as long as Israel's Arabs remain in Israel, Israel ought to provide them greater economic opportunity and increased inclusion in Israel's democratic processes. But commitment to our democracy must not come at the cost of commitment to our survival. No country at war maintains the same freedoms of speech or action that countries not facing existential threat can permit themselves. Since the Jewish people is at war, it must think as a people at war must think.

One can understand some American philanthropists' eagerness to support the Israeli-Arab organization Adalah, which purports to "promote and defend the rights of ... Arab citizens of Israel." Yet instinctive support for a vision of greater democracy isn't sufficient in this day and age. Harder questions need to be asked. Adalah's proposed Israeli "Democratic Constitution" calls for ending Israel as a Jewish state. Is that a proposition that American Jews should be funding, however indirectly? Adalah's Web site discusses the "Israeli attack on Gaza," offering no indication that Israel's Operation Cast Lead, whatever one might think of its conduct, was a response to years of shelling from Gaza. Is that the perspective that American Jews, regardless of their political dispositions, ought to be funding as the world inches closer to declaring Israel a pariah state?

Im Tirzu is not the issue. Nor is the NIF, or Naomi Chazan. The issue is what a people at war for its very survival can allow itself. The issue is whether as the world's noose tightens around the very notion of Israel's legitimacy, Jews can allow themselves the liberties we might otherwise permit ourselves were we not fighting for our very existence. As the fate of Isaiah's prophecy reminds us, it takes only a few words to move from a vision of a secure future to one in which those who could destroy us come from our very own midst.

J Street, Oren mending fences – but wariness lingers

By Ron Kampeas Jewish Telegraphic Association (JTA) February 17, 2010

The two sides have been talking with goal of ending hot-cold feud that dominated

professional Jewish chatter in latter part of last year. After months of high-profile feuding, the

breakout dovish lobbying group J Street and Israel's ambassador to Washington appear to be reconciling.

The two sides have been talking - through the media and directly in private - with the goal of ending the hot-cold feud that dominated much professional Jewish chatter in the latter part of last year.

Both sides say that while there have been strides in the rapprochement, much needs to be bridged - underscored by a persistent Israeli government wariness of the group.

Michael Oren, the Israeli ambassador, dropped J Street a bouquet in a Feb. 10 interview with the Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles in which he said that the organization had moved "much more into the mainstream." It marked a sharp turn from his characterization of the group late last year as having positions dangerous to Israeli interests.

"The J Street controversy has come a long way toward resolving," Oren said in the interview. "The major concern with J Street was their position on security issues, not the peace process. J Street has now come and supported Congressman [Howard] Berman's Iran sanction bill; it has condemned the Goldstone report; it has denounced the British court's decision to try Tzipi Livni for war crimes, which puts J Street much more into the mainstream."

Oren's comments come as some pro-Israel activists continue their efforts to marginalize Jewish groups on the left, including J Street, that they see as being hostile to Israel.

The comments were no slip of the lip, said sources close to the ambassador. They were a quid pro quo arising out of recent statements J Street has released, including an admonishment to the United Nations to treat Israel fairly and an endorsement of immediate passage of new US sanctions against Iran.

For its part J Street, which backs US pressure on Israel and the Palestinians in pursuit of a two-state deal, has endeavored to cast the embassy and the Israeli establishment as a friend and an intimate in some recent statements. At a time when some voices on the left were criticizing Israel's rescue mission in Haiti as a cynical ploy to distract attention from continued opprobrium arising from last year's Gaza war, J Street was effusive in its praise.

"Israel's swift response to another nation's needs speaks to the very best of the values underpinning the Jewish tradition and the best of what that country represents as the national home of the Jewish people," J Street said. "It did, in this instance, serve as a real model for the international community. We urge those who might otherwise disagree with Israeli policy and action to commend Israel for reacting so swiftly and making a positive contribution at this time of urgent international need."

And this month, when Oren came under verbal assault when he delivered a speech at University of

California, Irvine - a hotbed of anti-Israel activism - J Street was calling for civility.

"We believe that universities should be a place for an honest discussion about tough issues," the group said. "While appropriate and respectful protests are a legitimate and important part of the conversation on campus, anti-Semitic, racist, disruptive and inflammatory actions and language are simply unacceptable."

Hadar Susskind, the J Street policy director, said such statements arose out of recent efforts to reconcile after a tense 2009.

"We've been having ongoing discussions with the embassy making clear our different positions," Susskind said. "We've said all along we would welcome a good productive relationship with them."

Officials close to the Israeli Embassy confirmed the conversations.

J Street was established in early 2008. What little relationship it had developed with the embassy was shattered in early 2009 when the organization issued a statement that seemed to blame Israel and Hamas equally for the Gaza war.

Worsening the situation was J Street's position until December that the time was not right yet for sanctions targeting Iran's energy sector, even as many Jewish groups were pushing for such measures. Israel considers containing Iran's nuclear ambitions its signature issue, beyond how it deals with the Palestinians.

Oren, who assumed his post last summer, launched his tenure with a stated policy of reaching out to Jewish groups across the spectrum -- and then he pointedly avoided J Street. He declined to attend the group's inaugural conference in October, and in December told a group of Conservative rabbis that J Street's views are dangerous for Israel.

Neither side needed the tension. Oren's description of the group as "dangerous" earned a rebuke from Hannah Rosenthal, the State Department's anti-Semitism envoy -- an official with whom he would in theory work closely. Centrist and right-wing Jewish groups closed ranks behind Oren, but the Obama administration made it clear it was not unhappy with Rosenthal's remarks.

J Street has a dependable cadre of 40-50 members of the U.S. House of Representatives ready to heed its voting recommendations. Congressional insiders say J Street's green light in December for Iran sanctions nudged the bill from the super majority that traditional lobbying by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee usually turns out to officially "overwhelming": 412-12. That sent the Obama administration a clear message to hurry it on up, the insiders say.

And J Street, however much its reputation is made on a willingness to take Israel to task, also needs to work with the leadership in Israel in order to maintain any credible claim that its critiques will have an impact. Its first congressional delegation visiting the region this week met with top Palestinian

and Jordanian leaders -- but in Israel, its top interlocutor was Dan Meridor, one of five deputy prime ministers.

There's a way to go, both sides acknowledge: J Street is not yet on the "must call" list for the embassy when the ambassador calls a meeting of the Jewish leadership.

Centrist and right-wing pro-Israel groups also are watching the developments. J Street earned much pro-Israel resentment at its outset by "punching up" -- issuing blistering attacks on groups that were larger and better known such as AIPAC, Christians United for Israel and The Israel Project.

CUFI spokesmen said they welcomed J Street's recent efforts to pull back from such attacks, but noted that as recently as last week, J Street Executive Director Jeremy Ben-Ami maintained that the Christian group hoped to "precipitate" an Armageddon through support for right-wing Israeli policies. CUFI says its pro-Israel work is informed by political, not theological, sympathies for Israel -- and in any case, says its theology has no place for sparking the end of the world.

"J Street seems to employ a strategy of publicity through controversy without considering the harm that policy does to the pro-Israel community," CUFI spokesman Ari Morgenstern said.

Gary Erlbaum, a Philadelphia-area property developer who has been a major giver to an array of centrist and right-wing pro-Israel groups, said Oren was being politic where it was unwarranted.

"He's trying to not pick any additional fights, there are enough fights," said Erlbaum, who was among the most vocal critics of the decision by the Hillel at the University of Pennsylvania to rent space to J Street for a recent event. "I don't think J Street has changed its spots. You would think that Israel would be quite defensive about any group that believes that the American government should force Israel to do things that are against its interests."

Top Israeli officials remain wary, as the snub of the congressional delegation shows.

Meeting Tuesday with the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon was less than encouraging when asked about J Street.

"The thing that troubles me is that they don't present themselves as to what they really are," Ayalon said in remarks reprinted on the Foreign Ministry Web site. "They should not call themselves pro-Israeli."

That echoed a dismissal dished out earlier this month by Yuli Edelstein, the Diaspora affairs minister, who would not meet with J Street representatives.

"There's a very simple rule, and I leave it with a question mark: If J Street says it is able to represent every government in Israel, maybe they can be a lobby," he said. "If they can't be a lobby, call themselves Young Liberal Jews for whatever, for Better Jewish Communal Life in the United States, and then we'll speak with them."

In fact, a number of pro-Israel groups on the left and right have long been critical of Israeli government policies.

In a statement e-mailed to JTA, Ben Ami said Edelstein was setting an impossible benchmark for any U.S. Jewish group to meet.

"The minister clearly misunderstands what J Street is and how American lobbies that are not agents of foreign governments operate," he said. "We don't claim to, and in fact do not, represent the government of Israel. We explicitly reserve the right to agree with it at times and to disagree with it at times -- as we do with the U.S. government.

Such exchanges appear to be diminishing, however.

Susskind, hired by J Street in part because his "establishment" past as Washington director for the umbrella Jewish policy body, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, said he anticipated more friendliness going forward.

"I'm very happy to see [Oren's] positive comments," he said. "I'm looking forward to the relationship growing."

Why are we still threatening to arrest Israeli politicians?

By Philip Johnston The Telegraph (UK) February 15, 2010

A change in the law to prevent warrants issued on Britain's allies is long overdue, argues Philip Johnston. In the first episode of his BBC series *Getting Our Way*, Sir Christopher Meyer treated us to an enjoyable romp through the history of British diplomacy and power-broking and stressed the central importance to any government of a single, overriding principle: national self-interest. In the end, whatever else an administration might do to help other countries, such as using its good offices to facilitate negotiations among enemies or sending aid or military help to stricken lands, it has one inescapable function and that is to protect and secure the well-being of the country it governs. As

Meyer, a former diplomat who also worked in 10 Downing Street observed, this may well mean that other principles are compromised, and it may not always be comfortable; but it is the role of government. So, too, is keeping a good relationship with countries whose assistance we might need and whose interests and outlook we share, even if some vociferous and politically influential groups don't like it.

It is hard to conceive of circumstances further removed from this principle than those currently posing the threat of arrest to visiting Israeli politicians (and Americans, for that matter) by allowing politically motivated interest groups to

obtain court warrants should they visit Britain. This has been an issue for several years now, but it came to a head before Christmas when Tzipi Livni, the Israeli opposition leader who was foreign minister when her country's troops attacked Hamas strongholds in Gaza more than a year ago, had to cancel a trip to London for fear of arrest. It is thought that Hamas, which is considered a terrorist organisation by Britain, helped lawyers secure the warrant.

At issue here is how the concept of universal jurisdiction for war crimes, which was extended under the 2001 International Criminal Court Act, has combined with an ancient right in English law that enables an individual to bring a private prosecution. Under the Act, a warrant can be issued by a magistrate on prima facie grounds alone. When Mrs Livni cancelled her visit, an embarrassed British government promised to change the law. Although it must be mindful of its international obligations under the Geneva Conventions in trying to resolve this matter, this can actually be done quite easily. A simple remedy, and one that does not cut across either the UK's commitment to hunt down war criminals or its own legal traditions, would be to require a third party other than a magistrate to endorse any decision to issue an arrest warrant.

It is already the case that the Attorney General or Director of Public Prosecutions must consent before a private prosecution can continue; so it would not take much to move that process back a step to cover the point of arrest as well. Indeed, it would be logical to do so. If the law officers have the power to stop a prosecution that is not deemed to be in the public interest then they should also be able to prevent an arrest that is motivated not by the interests of justice or of preventing a war criminal using Britain as a safe haven (which was the law's intention, and one shared by Israel above all) but by politics. In addition, those seeking an arrest should have to make an evidentiary case, not just a prima facie one,

before a magistrate, thereby raising the hurdle. This would require primary legislation and could be achieved with a straightforward, one-clause addition to (yet another) Criminal Justice Bill that is now going through Parliament.

We were entitled to assume that this was about to happen. In December, David Miliband, the Foreign Secretary, said: "Israel is a strategic partner and a close friend of the UK. Israeli leaders, like leaders from other countries, must be able to visit and have a proper dialogue with the British Government... [We are] looking urgently at ways in which the UK system can be changed in order to avoid this sort of situation arising again."

Yet, seven weeks later, the Government has still not come forward with the promised measure; and with an election just weeks away, time is running out.

Jewish groups allege that Jack Straw, the Justice Minister, is reluctant to put his name to a change in the law for fear of losing Muslim votes in his Blackburn constituency, something he denies. Dozens of Labour MPs have signed a Commons motion opposed to any change, which is problematic, but would not bring about a Government defeat because the Tories would back an amendment. Gordon Brown, surprise, surprise, is said to be dithering.

While the law does not apply only to Israel, Mrs Livni is planning another visit to Britain soon to test it. Can you imagine the outcry if the opposition leader from a democratic country and key Middle East ally is met at Heathrow Airport by the police and then taken away for questioning, effectively at the behest of an Islamist terror organisation? Would that be in the UK's national interest? Since the answer is obvious, Mr Brown must set aside any party-political considerations preventing this change and put the country's interests first. That, after all, is his principal duty. He needs to get on with it before any more damage is caused.

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