

President's Message

Welcome to the Thanksgiving edition of Israel Horizons! We hope you enjoyed your holiday, and are successfully avoiding the crowds of Black Friday. It's a good day to relax and take in some of the articles we are presenting.

We start with my own (comparatively optimistic) take on the situation of American Jews vis-à-vis the antisemitism so horrifyingly displayed a few weeks ago in Pittsburgh. For all we are now learning about ugly online white nationalist and antisemitic networks, I don't believe the favorable position of Jews in this country is seriously endangered. I welcome your comments, favorable or not.

Then, Peter Eisenstadt presents a historical meditation comparing Abraham Lincoln and Yitzhak Rabin, inspired by an upcoming conference on Lincoln in South Carolina. It is an (all too rare) sign of how things in this country have changed for the better that such a conference can be held there at all.

It is followed by a piece by Nitsan Gordon about her Israeli NGO, [Beyond Words](#). It is the first in what we hope will be a long series of articles highlighting the work of lesser-known progressive Israeli organizations.

We end with two articles on Israeli politics. Ron Skolnik analyzes Meretz's successes and setbacks in Israel's recent municipal elections, while Hillel Schenker examines them with an emphasis on existing and potential Jewish-Arab electoral cooperation. As I write this, Israel's government has been thrown into disarray by Avigdor Lieberman's resignation as Minister of Defense, and new elections may be held as early as the coming spring. In any case, Partners will bring you lots of fresh analysis, both in IH and through our ongoing telephonic Conversations with Israel and Palestine.

We hope you enjoy this and other issues of Israel Horizons, and please let us know your thoughts and [support our work](#). We will continue to bring you fresh information, analyses, and insights on progressive developments in Israel. ■

L'hitraot,



Paul Scham
President

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To all our friends in Facebookland and the Twitverse: As we hope you've noticed, Partners has ramped up our social media presence in recent weeks, with lots of content featuring the activity of many progressive voices in Israel - often items you won't find elsewhere in English. But we can't do it alone, and we really need you to help spread the message: Please take a minute to like our [Facebook](#) page and follow our [Twitter](#) account, and then please share and retweet our posts as often as you can. TYVM ☺

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On the Present Danger

By Paul Scham



Like many other Jews—and non-Jews as well—many of my conversations since the atrocious Pittsburgh massacre on Shabbat Chayei Sarah, Nov. 3, 2018, have been about current antisemitism in the US and elsewhere, and how it relates to the long history of Jewish persecution. I’ve found that my views on this didn’t necessarily match those of friends and listserv acquaintances, even those who generally share my political perspectives, so I thought I’d share them here as well. Partners doesn’t have any particular view on anti-semitism (except that we absolutely oppose it, of course) so these should just be understood as my own musings on the matter. Comments are welcome at the end of this – and every – Israel Horizons article.

What struck me most about the massacre – apart from the unwelcome fact that it took place at all – was the apparently universal condemnation it received along with the widespread support for the Pittsburgh Jewish community it engendered, notably from Muslim groups. While I have no doubt at all that Donald Trump’s dog-whistles and outrageous comments (e.g., “very fine people on both sides”) have emboldened and encouraged people like Robert Bowers and his ilk, I am particularly intrigued how unlike the current reaction is to most other times in Jewish history, when powerful people and organizations were arrayed, covertly or overtly, against Jews, and antisemitism was open and unconcealed.

This period was well portrayed in a [NY Times oped by James Kaplan](#) that appeared on Nov. 9, which happened to be the 80th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*. The article was actually commemorating the 80th anniversary of the first performance of Irving Berlin’s song “God Bless America,” and the reception it received, which included infuriated denunciations by American

Nazis (not yet “neo-“). While most Americans immediately loved it, a clearly visible fringe did not and, as the author notes, “the fringe was scarily close to the main fabric of American life in those prewar years. It was a time when Jews, even wealthy and famous Jews like Irving Berlin, had to watch their step...”

This is where our time decisively parts company with the 1930s, whether in the U.S., Germany, or most other places. We, as Jews, are not obliged to, nor should we, “watch our step.” While many of us seem to resist hearing that affirmation, for reasons I can only guess at, we are not guests at the US table who must watch our manners lest we be noticed and ejected. We are full-fledged members of the club because we fought for it and succeeded – and we should recognize that the antisemitism that clearly remains (as Pittsburgh horrendously showed us it does) pales in comparison with the prejudice, discrimination, and worse suffered regularly by African Americans, Muslims, Hispanics, and others, whether newly-arrived or not; or whether citizens, documented or otherwise.

I am particularly intrigued how unlike the current reaction is to most other times in Jewish history, when powerful people and organizations were arrayed, covertly or overtly, against Jews, and antisemitism was open and unconcealed.

I have heard all my life variations of “the German Jews too thought they were safe, and look what happened...” I reject the comparison, which reflects scant knowledge of that period. Jews were not only fewer (around 500,000 in 1933 Germany compared to about between 5.5. and 6.5 million in the US today), they were infinitely less integrated and accepted than we are. While I will leave statistics to the sociologists, there are very few bars, social or otherwise, to Jewish success today, while in pre-1933 Germany, despite seeming (for then) unprecedented acceptance, we can see that not only was antisemitism rife and open, but the social and other barriers were strewn everywhere, unlike today.

Perhaps most important is the curious fact that few of the most reactionary forces in the US today (the Koch brothers, for example, or other massive rightwing funders) are at all connected with any sort of antisemitism, or even are themselves vociferously Jewish (such as Sheldon and Miriam Adelson, the latter of whom will shortly [receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom](#). I and most other progressives would indict the Kochs and Adelsons

for any number of anti-social activities, but antisemitism is not among them. This may be contrasted to the German Junkers and industrialists of the 1920s and '30s, most of whom despised Jews and made no attempt to conceal it. Nor is there any group remotely comparable to the Nazi Party in the 1920s and '30s, for which antisemitism is a significant element. Rather, it is the lowlifes like Bowers who are the main carriers of the antisemitic virus in the US today, whose danger is hugely magnified by our criminally lax gun control laws.

Many, including me, are baffled by the undue attention and extreme demonization accorded George Soros, vilified internationally by the Right worldwide, including Bibi Netanyahu, another figure whose many sins do not include antisemitism. To my mind, Soros's Jewishness is incidental to, not the cause of his demonization. He is, however, the only billionaire philanthropist who spreads his largesse to progressive political causes worldwide, and in my view it is his political effectiveness and not his Jewish identity that explains the fury with which the Right attacks him. I particularly enjoy a quote from Steve Bannon in the NY Times: "Soros is vilified because he is effective. ... "I only hope one day I'm as effective as he has been — and as vilified."

History is not destiny, and I contend that our here and now is very different from other times and places, that antisemitism is not a virus carried in the bloodstream but a social attitude, and that such attitudes may and do change fundamentally over time.

None of the above is meant to imply that antisemitism worldwide – or even in the US – is a spent force or not dangerous. Much of it today, though not by any means all, is connected with opposition to Israel and Zionism – but I don't intend to set foot into that perennial quagmire here and now. Rates of antisemitic incidents in the US have risen lately – but my point is that it is invariably unaccompanied by support from the usual powerful forces except, albeit somewhat indirectly, from the one residing at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Of course, that by no means downplays the dangers of white nationalism to us and our fellow Americans, whether or not they include specific antisemitic manifestations.

Finally, I will freely acknowledge that my own geographical choices, and that of my parents, may have shielded me from antisemitic occurrences, whether due to ignorance or genuine antisemitism, that others may well have experienced. I grew up in New York City, and have lived most of my life there as well as in Berkeley, CA., Washington, D.C., and Jerusalem. Only in

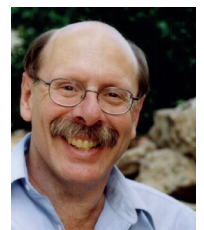


the latter location did I come very close to being blown up by a large bomb in the Hebrew University cafeteria during the Second Intifada, but that is a whole different subject. Others, who have grown up or lived in less Jewish-friendly environments have had their own experiences, which I absolutely do not belittle or downplay. Obviously, both their experiences and the views they formed, as well as mine, are part of current reality.

In my view, any serious identity is liable to become grounds for attacks on those who visibly wear it – and the Jewish experience of being on the receiving end of such attacks during the last 2000 years is probably unparalleled. Nevertheless, history is not destiny, and I contend that our here and now is very different from other times and places, that antisemitism is not a virus carried in the bloodstream but a social attitude, and that such attitudes may and do change fundamentally over time. I will never proclaim "It can't happen here," but I think it's clear it is not happening here. If conditions change, I will eat my words, but I doubt very much I'll ever have to do so.

All in all, I think the response of Jews and others to the dangerous trends of the last few years have generally been appropriate – and reasonably effective. I am proud that 76% of Jews voted Democratic in the midterms, and I am heartened that some of the mainstream Jewish organizations have been willing to take more courageous stands than in the past. Jews have an inside-outside relationship with American society, and we need to continue to use it to expand – and not contract – that space. ■

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Unfinished Work: A Historical Meditation

By Peter Eisenstadt



There's going to be a conference at the end of November on "Lincoln's Unfinished Work" at the campus of Clemson University, in Clemson, South Carolina. I am co-directing the conference, and if I say so myself, it's going to be a big deal. Vernon Burton, author of *The Age of Lincoln*, is the chief host, and speakers will include Eric Foner, Randall Kennedy, and a host of other luminaries. Those of you who think that organizing a conference on Lincoln in upstate South Carolina is like calling a rally for the two-state solution in Kiryat Arba will be pleasantly surprised. Come in person, or check it out online.

The title of the conference derives from two famous statements by Lincoln. In the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln spoke of the need to conclude "the unfinished work which they who fought here so nobly advanced." In his Second Inaugural Address, that greatest of all American political speeches, he spoke in a similar vein: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in." The conference is less about Lincoln than about his legacy, his unfinished work, and using our prerogatives as organizers, we are extending the scope of the conference to the politics of our own times,

when the call for social reconstruction has never been more important.

Ever since I got involved with the conference, I can't get the famous statement from *Pirke Avot* about unfinished work out of my thoughts: "Rabbi Tarfon used to say: You are not required to complete the work, but you are not at liberty to stand idly by" (2:16). The text does not specify what the work is, but most see it as an injunction to learn Torah, redeem the Jewish people, repair the world, i.e., any task that is at once both incredibly urgent and impossibly difficult. For the Jewish people today, probably no task is more important than a "new birth of freedom" in the relations between the Jewish and Palestinian peoples. Those of us who have spent large portions of our lives working for Israeli/Palestinian peace know exactly what Rabbi Tarfon was talking about: the more we work at the task, the more unfinished it seems to become.

Those who think that organizing a conference on Lincoln in upstate South Carolina is like calling a rally for the two-state solution in Kiryat Arba will be pleasantly surprised.

And when I think about Abraham Lincoln, Israeli/Palestinian peace, and Rabbi Tarfon's injunction, my thoughts turn to Yitzhak Rabin. The similarity between the two leaders is deeper than the fate that they shared. Both were assassinated by a fellow citizen on the cusp of great changes in their respective societies. Both were victims of political assassinations; there is no need to speculate about the motives or mental state of their assassins. Both were killed by political opponents in transparent efforts to destroy not only a beloved leader but, even more so, the fundamental political change that leader embodied. And, perhaps saddest of all, both assassins were strikingly successful in doing just that. Lincoln was succeeded as president by Andrew Johnson, a deeply racist southerner who was profoundly unsympathetic to the goals of Reconstruction and integrating the newly-freed slaves into the reborn nation, Lincoln's principal unfinished task. Likewise, many believe that Rabin was the indispensable man for holding the complex and tenuous Oslo process together, and that if Rabin hadn't been murdered in 1995, Benjamin Netanyahu would never have become prime minister in 1996. Netanyahu followed a similar course to Andrew Johnson, systematically

undermining a political settlement he was sworn to uphold but clearly opposed. Recently, at a commemoration on the 23rd anniversary of Rabin's assassination, Meretz Chair Tamar Zandberg argued that Rabin's murder "was the best [i.e., the most successful in terms of its consequences] political assassination in history." On the other hand, the Knesset Speaker, Likud MK Yuli Edelstein, argued that Rabin's murder had "no historical influence," that is, Oslo would have failed just as badly as it did even had he lived.

We cannot know how events would have transpired if Lincoln or Rabin had lived. Counterfactual histories have their fascinations, but they cannot answer the questions they pose. That said, the murders of Lincoln and Rabin force us to face identical and equally important counterfactual questions; were Reconstruction and the Oslo Accords doomed to failure? A large body of historical opinion holds that Reconstruction, with or without Lincoln at its helm, could not have succeeded. The federal support for the freed slaves was half-hearted, the argument goes; the ex-slaves did not get their 40 acres and a mule; the military was weak-willed when confronting the terrorism of the Klan; and that when push came to shove the white North just walked away, unwilling to put its political muscle and capital behind an unquestionably difficult-to-achieve program of racial equality.

And this, I think, is the deeper message of Rabbi Tarfon's injunction: don't ignore the possibility of transformative change, even when it seems unlikely.

Similar arguments are made about the inevitable failure of the Oslo Accords: Israel was never really committed to Palestinian statehood; Palestinians never truly accepted Israel; the expansion of the settlements was permitted; the political powers of the Palestinian Authority were too circumscribed or, conversely, it never really tried to catch terrorists; Israel entered into the Accords hoping it would find a reason to renege on its commitments, etc.

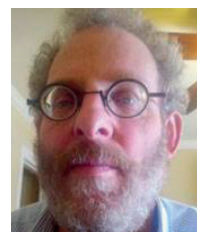
These questions cannot be resolved easily. I would just say that what most concerned both the opponents of Reconstruction and of Oslo was that these initiatives would, in fact, succeed, so they did everything in their power to ensure their failure, and that is why Abraham Lincoln and Yitzhak Rabin both died as martyrs. And one of the most important things they recognized and thus feared about Lincoln and Rabin is that both men had the respect and support of a broad range of opinion in their countries. Neither was a radical; both were able to transform

their personal politics and ideology to take advantage of the unique opportunity events presented them to correct a tragic flaw in their national histories. Both Reconstruction and Oslo could have had better, more successful outcomes.

The Oslo period was Israel's Reconstruction Era. With the hindsight of a century and a half we can see how tragic was the destruction of the achievements of Reconstruction. The so-called Second Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Era of the 1950s and '60s, addressed some of what happened (or what didn't happen) during the 1860s and '70s, and those results were in many ways noble and inspiring, but it is now painfully obvious that they were insufficient. Voices in recent years have called for a Third Reconstruction, and boy, do we ever need one! And I am confident, though I might not live to see it, that there will be a second Oslo, another time of promise and rapprochement, that will have the potential to overcome the deep and consuming wariness of the Jewish and Palestinian peoples to once again have high hopes and raised expectations of the other. And perhaps, even with the best of results, a third Oslo will be needed, some decades after that.

So the point of this sermon is that both Reconstruction and the Oslo Accords could have – and should have – had better outcomes. The American and Israeli political systems, as flawed as they were and are, were indeed capable of transformative change, of rising above their limitations, but powerful forces worked against this and destroyed these chances. But they will come again. And this, I think, is the deeper message of Rabbi Tarfon's injunction: don't ignore the possibility of transformative change, even when it seems unlikely. The main thing to remember about genuine reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians is that it remains absolutely necessary, and nothing short of this will ever solve the problems between the two peoples. And that at some point, one hopes in the not too distant future, this necessary change will again become possible to touch, as it seemed in the heyday of the Oslo years. ■

Peter Eisenstadt is an independent historian who lives in Clemson, South Carolina. He is completing a biography of the African-American religious thinker Howard Thurman, to be published by the University of Virginia Press. His first demonstration at the Israeli consulate in New York City against the Occupation was in 1968.



Meretz in Israel's 2018 Municipal Elections

by Ron Skolnik



The results of Israel's October 30, 2018 municipal elections were a mixed bag for Meretz in what was the party's first electoral test under MK Tamar Zandberg, who took over from Zehava Galon as party leader this past March. While the party scored significant gains in many midsized towns and cities, it also suffered setbacks in the country's two largest cities, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem – in part due to the impact of mayoral races there. More on that below.

Before diving deeper into the numbers, it's important to note that Israel's municipal elections, which take place once every five years, are held separately from the more attention-grabbing elections to the Knesset. And, as in local elections in other countries, the issues that dominate the races aren't always the same ones as those that top the national agenda. Questions like Iran, settlements and the Occupation, for example, which attract international headlines, are less of a concern when it comes to Israel's local contests.

In addition, as opposed to the U.S., where local elections tend to hew to the country's two-party system, Israel, over the last few decades, has seen a proliferation of local parties that compete in municipal races only. National parties do get involved in mayoral and city council contests, but they generally field candidates for only some of these races, and

even in the locales where they do, the national parties tend not to be a dominant force.

Back to Meretz. The party's central campaign theme was the fight against the growing level of theocratization in Israel – the term used in Hebrew being “*hadata*” or “religionization.” In campaigns across the country, Meretz candidates focused on the need to prevent further inroads by the forces of ultra-Orthodoxy, stem the tide of religious coercion, and uphold a politics based on pluralism and diversity rather than particularism and right-wing illiberalism.

On a nuts and bolts level, much of the attention was directed to the secular-religious tug-of-war over Shabbat observances. The Meretz campaign in Jerusalem, for example, warned that “the ultra-orthodox parties are trying to take over [the city]” and “impose their [version of] Shabbat on all of us,” which could lead to the closure of cultural spaces and restaurants. In Tel Aviv, the campaign focused on the need to maintain public transportation on Shabbat, and also keep grocery stores open – amid a push by the Netanyahu government to override municipal bylaws and shut down their Sabbath operation. Meretz candidates encapsulated this agenda in a commitment to keep their towns and cities “free.”

While Shabbat regulations were Meretz's main theme, they weren't its only one. In various races, the party touted its environmentalist credentials as well as its history of supporting LGBTQ and women's rights. On bread-and-butter issues, Meretz focused on housing and preschool prices, promising to help make them more affordable. Party candidates also expressed concern over growing right/religious calls for "separation" – be that of women and men at public events or Jews and Arabs in public spaces, such as beaches.

Meretz's most important gains were in Haifa and Rishon LeZion, Israel's third and fourth largest cities, respectively, where the party managed to elect representatives to the city council for the first time in many years. In Haifa, the party is led by Dubi Haiyun, a Conservative rabbi who made headlines this past July when he was detained by police for performing "illegal weddings" – i.e., without the authorization of the (Orthodox) Chief Rabbinate. Haiyun led a campaign based on a call for tolerance and preventing right-wing extremism from seeping into city life.

Meretz's other major successes were in three northern suburbs of Tel Aviv. In Kfar Saba, Ra'anana, and Rosh Ha'Ayin, the party became the largest faction on their city councils. The party also made gains in Rehovot, Givatayim, and Kiryat Tivon, and Meretz representatives were elected as heads of the Bedouin town of Tuba-Zangariyye and of the regional council of Bustan al-Marj (made up of four Arab villages), both in northern Israel. Overall, the party ran candidates in two dozen of Israel's 75 municipal races.

Tel Aviv and Jerusalem proved to be tougher challenges. In Tel Aviv, Meretz's vote share went from 16 percent in 2013 to about 10 percent this year. This caused the party's city council delegation to drop from six seats to three or four (depending upon the outcome of a pending legal challenge following vote tampering by a member of the city's religious faction). In Jerusalem, the Meretz vote declined from about six percent in 2013 to four percent in 2018. As a result, the party will have only one representative on the city council (Dr. Laura Wharton, originally from the U.S.), down from two last time (and from three following the 2008 election, when it had an eight percent showing).

Upon closer examination, though, these declines aren't as severe as they might seem at first glance. In 2013, Meretz ran a mayoral candidate in Tel Aviv, Nitzan Horowitz, and while he didn't win, his campaign raised the party's profile and helped to double its results from 2008. Meretz didn't run

a mayoral candidate this year. On the other hand, two other left-of-center local parties did, which translated into greater visibility and improved results for their "City Majority" and "We Are the City" parties.

This year's Jerusalem mayoral race impacted Meretz similarly: The local, secular *Hitorerut* ("Awakening"), a more centrist party than Meretz but one that also pushes back against growing ultra-Orthodox control, fielded a popular mayoral candidate, Ofer Berkovitch, who placed second and will face Moshe Leon in a November 13 runoff. Berkovitch's campaign allowed *Hitorerut* to gain greater public exposure, helping it to almost double its city council representation – to seven, up from four in 2013 (and two in 2008, the year it was founded). With secular residents now constituting only about 20 percent of Jerusalem's electorate, Meretz and *Hitorerut* were competing over the same limited voter pool, and the gains made by Berkovitch's party seem to have come at Meretz's expense.

Meretz's next major campaign effort will be the 2019 Knesset elections, the date of which has not yet been set. We can't really extrapolate from the municipal to the national plane since voter preferences are often different, given the absence of the local parties from the national race. Thus, the same local parties that cut into Meretz's vote share among its Tel Aviv base probably won't be a factor in the national elections, and a sizable percentage of their supporters are likely to choose Meretz for the Knesset. Indeed, polls indicate that it is likely to add one to two seats to its current five, perhaps even more.

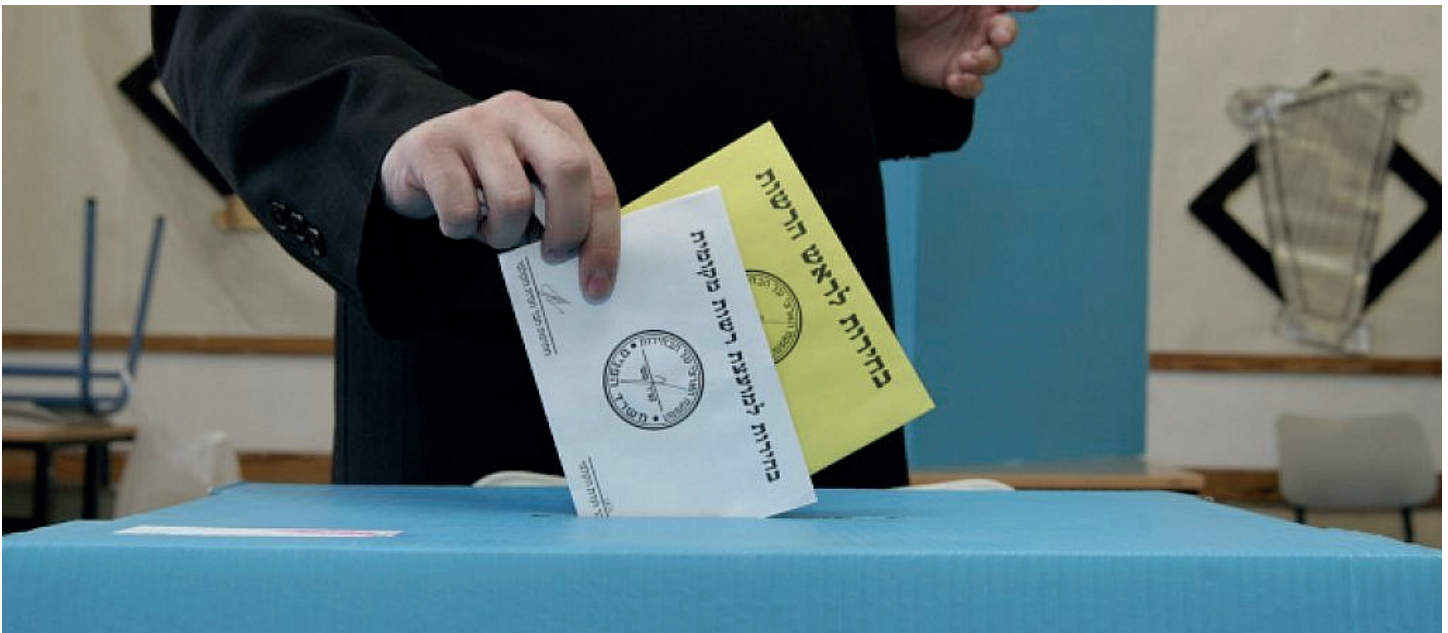
Meretz leader Tamar Zandberg is upbeat ahead of next year's Knesset campaign. Writing on the day following the municipal elections, Zandberg said the results had refuted the ongoing media refrain about Meretz having grown "weak" and "irrelevant": "We proved that we are stronger than ever," she asserted. "With a strong Meretz across the country, we're optimistic ahead of the general elections. Meretz is awakening!" ■

Ron Skolnik (@Ron_Skolnik) is an American-Israeli political columnist and public speaker, whose articles have appeared in a number of Israeli and US publications. He has been Executive Director of Partners for Progressive Israel and a political adviser to the British Embassy in Israel.



“Jews and Arabs are Not Enemies” Says the Slogan: But Can They Work Together Politically?

By Hillel Schenker



In the recent municipal elections in Tel Aviv held on October 30th, the Likud ran a campaign of incitement and hatred as only the Likud knows how to do it, with slogans like “It’s us or Hamas” and “It’s us or Meretz.” That sort of scare campaign may work nationally – recall Netanyahu’s desperate message on the last day of the 2016 national elections that “The Arabs are going to the polling stations in droves; bused in by the Left.”

But that clearly doesn’t work in liberal Tel Aviv, and the Likud dropped from 2 to 1 seat on the 31-member Tel Aviv Municipal Council. Perhaps in rightwing Jerusalem the scare tactic was more effective. A fake video was circulated showing a car with signs in Arabic urging people to vote for secular candidate Ofer Berkovitch accompanied by the statement: “The Arabs in East Jerusalem are now going to vote for Berkovitch. Watch Berkovitch’s car distribute flyers in Arabic saying ‘Berkovitch – only with me can you keep your home.’” That may have influenced the outcome, giving the rightwing religious candidate Moshe Leon a slim victory with 51.5 percent of the vote. His win was since confirmed in a runoff.

As for the Tel Aviv race for the mayoralty, Likud Minister of Science and Technology Ofir Akunis, primarily known for disqualifying leading Israeli brain researcher Prof. Yael Amitai for an Israeli-German scientific committee because she once signed a petition in support of soldiers who refused to serve in

the occupied West Bank and saying that “Senator McCarthy was right”, tested the waters and quickly got back on dry land.

All three candidates for mayor in Tel Aviv were on the left: Mayor Ron Huldai from Labor who was born on Kibbutz Hulda – writer Amos Oz was “adopted” by his father, the principal of the local high school when he came to the kibbutz as a teenager; Deputy Mayor “Youth Candidate” Asaf Zamir, married to the granddaughter of highly successful entrepreneur, left-wing Palmach underground veteran, and former Knesset Member Stef Wertheimer, who plastered Tel Aviv with posters with his smiling face saying it’s “Time for a Change”; and newcomer TV personality and former late night talk show host Assaf Harel.

Huldai, who had considered running for the Labor Party leadership and challenging Netanyahu, has been a good mayor despite some flaws, and was reelected to a 5th five year term. He declared that if “anti-Culture” Minister Miri Regev (that’s writer David Grossman’s title for her) tries to defund any cultural institutions in Tel Aviv because of violations of the proposed McCarthyite Cultural Loyalty Law,” the Tel Aviv Municipality would make up the lost funding.

The most interesting of the candidates was Assaf Harel, son of the late Labor Party (very) dovish Knesset Member Aharon Harel, who was active in the International Center for Peace in the Middle East and later Executive Director of the Beit Berl

Kibbutz Seminary and College. Assaf Harel became well-known for his biting and highly critical opening monologues on his late night show, similar to John Stewart, Stephen Colbert, John Oliver, Bill Maher, etc. His final mono-logue before his show was pulled for being too controversial contained a scathing critique of the Occupation. His monologues then moved to the *Haaretz* website.

What was particularly interesting about Harel is that he put together a joint Jewish-Arab list for the city council, called *Anachnu Ha'ir* (We are the City). All of their campaign posters and slogans appeared in Hebrew and Arabic, a clear provocation to the new Nation-State Law, which demoted Arabic from its status as an ‘official’ language to an undefined “special status.” The list also contained many Arab activists from Jaffa, as well as Jewish social activists from ‘south Tel Aviv’ (a code phrase for Mizrachim), alongside progressive Jews from the central and north Tel Aviv (i.e., Ashkenazim).

Harel received a respectable 15% of the vote, and elected 4 members to the City Council – Harel himself; #2 Jaffa lawyer and activist Amir Badran; #3 South Tel Aviv neighborhood social activist Shula Keshet, a leading defender of African migrant workers; and #4 Moriah Shlomot, a former Executive Director of Peace Now. Additional interesting members of the list who will have a say in municipal affairs include his uncle, Alon Garbuz, founder and longtime progressive director the Tel Aviv Cinematheque who lives in Yad Eliahu in south Tel Aviv; and filmmaker Maisalon Hamoud, who studied cinema with my son Adi at the Minshar School of Art College. Hamoud lives in Jaffa. I highly recommend her first film “In Between,” though its Hebrew title, *Lo Po, Lo Sham* (Not Here, Not There) more accurately reflects the film, which focusses on dilemmas facing young Arab women in Israel between their conservative village backgrounds and liberal Tel Aviv.

The appearance and initial success of the joint Jewish-Arab “We Are the City” list in Tel Aviv raises the question of whether the future of progressive politics in Israel can be based on joint Jewish-Arab cooperation. A civil society movement called “*Omdim Beyahad*”, (Standing Together), has had a prominent role in most recent demonstrations against racism and for peace. One of the most popular slogans at these demonstrations is “Jews and Arabs Refuse to be Enemies”, also held aloft by members of Meretz and Hadash.

However, the challenge is to channel this cooperation into the political sphere, and while it appeared to work in Tel Aviv-Jaffa (the official name of the city), it is much more difficult on

the national level. Meretz has one Palestinian-Israeli Member of Knesset, Issawi Frej, while the Joint Arab List has one Jewish MK, Dov Khenin. In Labor, Chair Avi Gabbay actually forced its one Arab MK, Zouheir Bahloul, to resign because he was too independent. Logic would suggest cooperation between Meretz and the Joint List, particularly with the Hadash component, i.e., the former Communists and their allies, who define themselves as a Jewish-Arab party and, like Meretz, support a two-state solution. However in the last elections, the Joint List, composed of 4 different Arab parties which are variously progressive, Islamist and nationalist, wasn’t even capable of coming to an excess votes arrangement with Meretz, thanks to a veto by the secular nationalist party, Balad.

The only time the Israeli (Jewish) Left seriously cooperated with the Arab parties was during the Rabin (later Peres) Labor-Meretz government of 1992-96. Although the Arab parties were not officially part of the government, they supported it externally, which was what enabled the Oslo I and II agreements to pass in the Knesset. That was also the period when the most attention was paid to the needs of the Palestinian sector of Israeli society. And it’s that sort of cooperation which is necessary if we are to counteract the powerful ultra-nationalist and extremist religious trends within Israeli society. However, it won’t be quick or easy to achieve.

The issue of potential cooperation between progressive Jewish forces and Palestinians in Jerusalem, who now number almost 40% of the city’s population in the city, is another story requiring another article. Right now, the overwhelming majority of Jerusalem Palestinians (who are defined as “permanent residents,” not citizens) believe that political cooperation with Israeli Jews in the municipal elections, or even participating in them at all, would be tantamount to recognition of the Israeli occupation of their side of the city. That is also the official position of the Palestinian Authority and the PLO. If the attitude towards voting changed and became widespread, it would truly revolutionize Jerusalem’s political equations. ■

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Together Beyond Words

By Nitsan Joy Gordon



*With this article, IH and Partners are inaugurating a new program, **Kolot: Voices from Israel**. Every issue, and in our other work, we will be featuring the work of a progressive Israeli NGO that is less well-known in the US than it deserves to be. Each article will contain a link to the organization's own website so you can learn more about them and perhaps contribute to their work.*

Partners is committed to building partnerships between progressive Israelis and Americans. During this ongoing and extended period of rightwing government, many Jews and others outside Israel have lost sight of the Israeli progressive tradition - and despaired of reviving it. We want to show that there are many hundreds of thousands of Israelis and hundreds of organizations of all sorts that are working in a wide variety of fields, who share our vision for a liberal, progressive, egalitarian Israel.

"Together we cried and screamed the pain that had been frozen in the body for many years, we experienced fear and terror, anger and hatred, and immense love, and passion and yearning, and such deep human connection. And we were able to see beyond all the stories, to truly see ourselves and one another. We saw that within us there exists everything, all of it, all the voices and the parts and feelings and needs.

I saw within myself all the narratives and points of view at the same time. I saw the voices of extreme rightists, and extreme leftists, Arabs and Jews, women and men, courage and fear, compassion and hatred. And mostly, I saw how much love I have in my heart, how much love there is in everyone's heart. I will not be the same again after this workshop."

Amichai (Jewish man) at the end of the five-day workshop organized and co-led by **Together Beyond Words**.

Together Beyond Words (TBW) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote the empowerment of women, the healing of emotional wounds and traumas, and the undermining of prejudice; all as a path towards building a just and peaceful society in Israel. We accomplish our goals through workshops and courses using our multidisciplinary approach "Beyond Words" and "Playback Theatre".

Background

Even though there is and has been for years an agreement on how crucial it is to address the importance of diversity in the Israeli educational system, yet according to the State Comptroller, the Ministry of Education has almost completely failed to address this issue. The disregard for diversity education in a country that is multicultural, has prominent minorities, and is deeply embroiled in a complex conflict, has led to an increase of racist behavior in our schools and colleges, a marked decrease in the ability to voice opinions that are pro-diversity and peace without being targeted, called names, and even physically threatened. The conflict continues and the situation along the border with Gaza and in the West Bank is getting worse.

We believe that much of the destructive behavior, the prejudice, and violence are driven by existential fear, anger, grief, and despair related to our history, to life in Israel, and to the ceaseless conflict. We also believe that women who are empowered have unique gifts they can bring to social change and peace-building arenas.

For the last 22 years we have been working with thousands of people, creating places where Arabs and Jews can transform their painful emotions so they are not transmitted; where empathy and understanding for "the other" are enhanced,

where women can reclaim their leadership in working for peace and justice, and where women and men can become allies in healing themselves and others.

For me, one of the most significant moments in our five-day Peace Leadership summer workshop was when Sharon, a 45 year old Jewish woman with a beautiful smile, spoke of her fear of Arabs. She was born and raised in Ariel, a settlement in the West Bank that her parents helped to build. From an early age, fear of what the Palestinians who live all around Ariel might do to her and her loved ones, hung like a heavy dark cloud that is always present even when the sky is totally blue.

Sitting near her was Jamal, a Palestinian from Bethlehem. He looked at her and asked if she had ever thought about what it was like before her family moved to Ariel...

"Who did the land belong to? Do you think there might be people who still feel the loss of this land?" he asked. "Maybe it was not just an empty space before your parents first came to settle there..." He continued looking directly into her eyes.

She held his gaze and I saw a tear slowly making its way down her face. "Please acknowledge our pain, too" he beseeched. "Please do not ignore it..."

Still holding his gaze she said: "Truthfully, I have never really considered your pain..."

Her honesty hurt. I felt as if an emotional marble was making its way up my throat.

Sharon then shared that she had been present in a bank during a terrorist attack. "I saw the man with the rifle run down the street shooting and was terrified he might enter the bank where I was hiding. Since then I feel stress every time I leave my house, thinking all the time when I choose a place to sit on a bus or in a restaurant where the best chances of not getting hurt by a terrorist are. My fears haunt me... I would like so much to just be able to sit outside on a sunny morning, relax, and enjoy a cup of coffee."

Jamal looked at her and I felt he deeply understood how fear can haunt us. He shared a moment from his childhood when he was seven and played hide-and-go-seek with some friends. "Suddenly I ran into a soldier who suspected that I wanted to throw a stone and began chasing me. For God's sake I was only seven years old!!! I managed to run home and hid under my bed, shaking with fear for a very long time."

I looked around the room and saw some people were crying. I too felt my heart aching. I have lived here most of my life and the fear they were talking about felt as familiar to me as the computer I stare into every morning when I begin to work. But I also felt a sense of relief, that right now, at this moment, we had created a space where both narratives could be held com—passionately without one shadowing the other. And our ability to cry and even scream our pain together is no small feat in this complex world. To me it feels like the basis of healing and peace.

As a confirmation "from the universe," I just received a WhatsApp from Dashi, a student in one of our programs whom I had not spoken to in six months. She was part of our From Stage to Change Playback Theatre Ensemble at Tel Hai College, the only Arab/Jewish women's Playback Theatre Ensemble in the world.

I am not sure why she decided to write this morning but here is what she wrote: "The truth is that life continues to challenge me, sometimes it's good and at other times not so much. I am not sure how, but somehow I am able to stay connected to myself. And throughout this process I can now understand how meaningful last year was for me [when she participated in our program].

I see how the process I went through with the Playback Theatre still influences my life today. How I have grown and matured, how much I learned about accepting those who are different from me...

It is still a challenge but I certainly feel that I am in a totally different place than most people I meet because of that experience. I ask myself: Is this good? Or is it something that plays against me? And I have decided to view this maturity as an advantage. It is a sensitivity that enables me to speak what I feel in my heart... To be open...

I hope you are OK...Sending love."

With love and deep gratitude for your support of this work... ■

Nitsan Joy Gordon is director of Together Beyond Words. She is trained and experienced in dance/movement therapy, healing touch and multi-level listening, and emotional healing techniques – all of which are used as part of the Beyond Words Educational Model. She has led many courses on understanding and healing prejudice, as well as workshops and trainings in Israel and the US using the BW model.





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