



Photo: President Donald Trump welcomes Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House.  
Photo by Dan Scavino via Wikimedia Commons

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### Two Leaders on the Same Path

[Paul Scham](#)

Most of us remain bewildered and thrown off-balance by the shock and awe and “flooding the zone” tactic employed on a daily basis by Donald Trump and his administration since January 20. It has exceeded our expectations and even our imaginations as to what he would dare to do. We are still groping in the dark for strategies, and especially for leaders, to help us stymie Trump’s obvious intention to destroy our system of checks and balances and substitute a new authoritarian order based on the rightwing vision of the “unitary executive.” So far, he is apparently succeeding. To our dismay and horror, he has stocked his administration’s ranks with fringe individuals, many affiliated with far-right ideologies we are barely aware of, who are taking their wood chippers to governmental institutions we (naively) assumed were permanent.

The American Jewish pro-Israel left is experiencing all of the above as Americans, but we are essentially getting a double dose of anguish as we watch a similar process simultaneously taking place in Israel. The ongoing shredding of its governmental structures by Bibi Netanyahu – accompanied by the unnecessarily renewed war

## Contents

### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

- 1 Two Leaders on the Same Path  
By Paul Scham

### INSIGHTS 1

- 4 A Movement Built on Hope  
By Rabbi Ariel Naveh

### KOLOT: VOICES OF HOPE

- 7 Post October 7th Series -  
The Road to Recovery: Humanizing  
the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict  
through Patient Transport  
  
A Conversation with Yael Noy,  
CEO of The Road to Recovery

### INSIGHTS 2

- 11 *Dati*, but not *Leumi*: Reflections from  
*Smol Emuni USA*  
By Rabbi Margo Hughes-Robinson

### MEDITATION

- 13 Peter Beinart, Being Jewish After the  
Destruction of Gaza: A Reckoning  
(New York: Knopf, 2025)  
By Peter Eisenstadt

**Vote Hatikvah (Slate 16)  
in elections to the WZC  
elections**

on Gaza - are likely dooming those hostages left alive and killing perhaps thousands more Gazans in a futile quest to “destroy” Hamas. That this is abetted by the Trump administration, which is the USA, that is “us,” adds to our anguish and non-comprehension.

At the same time we have to acknowledge that it was the same Donald Trump (through his minion Steve Witcoff) who induced Bibi Netanyahu to accede to a 2-month cease-fire, something that Joe Biden, with whom we share far more values, was never able to accomplish.

It was Biden who articulated the bases for a cease-fire in May 2024, but he was never able to get Bibi to agree, succeeding only in attracting ire from groups across the political spectrum who vehemently disagreed on everything else. Meanwhile, Hamas’s demands have remained largely the same since nearly the beginning of the war (begun by the Oct. 7 massacre, lest we forget). These aims are, and have been, basically:

- A permanent cease fire
- The IDF stationed on the border (and perhaps the Netzarim corridor)
- Release of several thousand Palestinian prisoners

In return for

- Release of all hostages, including the dead,
- Hamas relinquishes a political role in Gaza

There are many additional details but the central conditions are that Israel must withdraw from Gaza and agree to a permanent cease fire to get back the remaining hostages. [Sixty-nine percent of Israelis agree with that.](#)

The dominant forces in the government do not, however, for several different reasons. The unifying theme for them is that the current government must be kept together until the scheduled elections in late 2026, a year and a half from now. That means that Bibi remains as Prime Minister and no State Commission will investigate what happened prior to and on October 7, 2023, including the culpability and accountability of

the prime minister, his aides, and other officials. Thus the war will continue until then, as demanded by the far right parties led by Ben-Gvir and Smotrich. By the same token, Haredim have made it clear that [they expect a new draft exemption law](#) to be enacted by the end of the Knesset’s summer session in July.

The coalition now controls 68 of 120 votes in the Knesset. If a permanent cease fire were to be agreed to, the far right (14 seats) would drop out. If the widely unpopular Haredi draft exemption is not passed, 18 votes are lost. You do the math. The pipers must be paid.

The last roadblock on a free and clear path for the government to continue until late 2026 disappeared on [March 25 when the state budget was passed](#). Failure to approve it by March 31 would have automatically meant immediate elections. Thus, weirdly, the resumption of the war on March 18 was unquestionably triggered by the need to approve the state budget.

Demonstrators have reappeared in large numbers calling for release of the hostages (and now explicitly demanding an immediate end to the war), but many Israelis are too tired and traumatized by the events of the last two and a half years to go out in the streets again, at least so far. Moreover, the coalition is now used to and hardened against popular demonstrations. Bibi has clawed his way back to a respectable place in the polls, though [he probably would not be able to form a government](#) if the election were held today.

Despite the increased pace of demonstrations, the coalition is taking full advantage of its majority to consolidate power and continue its project, interrupted by the attacks of October 7, 2023, to eviscerate the already meager guardrails protecting Israeli democracy. Despite legal constraints, Bibi has now fired the head of the Shin Bet (General Security Services), which was investigating a major security scandal in the PM’s office, and is about to do the same with the Attorney General, who has opposed him on key issues. A new A.G. might well dismiss the criminal trial against Bibi, which has been going on for the

last four years. In addition, the Knesset on March 28 finally [changed the rules for appointing judges](#) to make the process far more politicized, the issue which had originally brought out the mass protests in 2023. Now, with the coalition more firmly seated than at any time since its inception, its members are introducing [a flood of bills on communications, higher education, and minority rights](#). It is not at all coincidental that these are similar issues to those being targeted by the Trump administration in the US, as well as a number of other would-be authoritarians around the world (think Orban in Hungary, Erdogan in Turkey, Putin in Russia, and Modi in India, to name a few).

What Bibi and Trump have in common is unprecedented control over their respective parties and a yearning to ‘streamline’ their respective governments in order to increase their (and their eventual ideological successors’) power. For Bibi, the main obstacle is the courts, especially the Israeli Supreme Court, so politicizing the appointments process is an immediate goal. Trump, for his part, already has a plausible (though not entirely reliable) super-majority on the US Supreme Court, but, nevertheless, of this writing, appears to be precipitating a constitutional crisis by mocking and belittling judges, so far only at the trial and appellate levels. Among his chosen enemies is also the allegedly “woke” bureaucracy, especially in the “liberal” agencies, such as USAID and the Department of Education, increasingly throughout the entire Federal civil service, though including some high-ranking military officers.

Having spent years inveighing against the alleged “Deep State” and caring nothing about the process of governing, Trump is happy to allow Elon Musk to shred whatever he wishes. Bibi, by contrast, is an experienced politician who only needs to remove selected top officials and appoint pliable successors. Unlike Trump, he has a reliable, sufficient majority in the legislature, so he does not need to rule by decree like Trump. But both are intent on cutting down the scope for civil society; Bibi by going after NGO’s, while Trump has been attacking major Democratic-oriented law firms, elite universities, and even businesses like Costco.

Unsurprisingly, Bibi’s rhetoric has now started to reflect Trump’s, with new talk of an Israeli “Deep State.” However, after years of attacks on Israel’s democratic institutions, his Knesset majority, and Israel’s lack of a constitution and other safeguards, Bibi is ahead of Trump in his wrecking job.

Ahead except for one factor: the Israeli people. Israel’s civil society is out in front of all other democratically backsliding countries in the strength of its response to incipient authoritarianism. For nine months, from January to October 6, 2023, Israelis demonstrated daily and weekly in their tens and hundreds of thousands, slowing and nearly stopping the government’s wrecking “judicial reform.” Then came the October 7 attacks – and the country immediately switched to war mode, which very many now perceive has been hijacked for Bibi’s personal agenda.

Americans need to learn from Israeli civil society. Perhaps massive demonstrations aren’t the key tactic here, since the US is so much larger. But Israelis rallied immediately to save their democracy, displaying determination, discipline, unity, leadership, strategy, persistence, and nonviolence. I hope we can do the same.

*Paul*

Paul

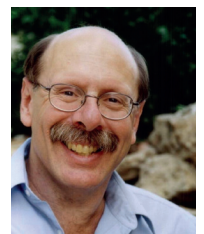
---

#### ADDENDUM

Since the above was written, we have seen universities like Harvard and law firms like Perkins, Coie (among many others) stepping forward to defy the ongoing power grab, providing models of resistance. Nonetheless It is far too early to judge the effects in either society, as each deals with its own existential crisis.

---

*Paul Scham is President of [Partners for Progressive Israel](#) and Director of the Gildehorn Institute for Israel Studies at the University of Maryland, where he is a Professor of Israel Studies. The views expressed here are his own.*



By Rabbi Ariel Naveh

### HATIKVAH PROGRESSIVE ISRAEL

#### *A Mother Walks Around*

*A mother walks around with a child dead in her belly.  
This child hasn't been born yet.  
When his time is up the dead child will be born  
head first, then trunk and buttocks  
and he won't wave his arms about or cry  
his first cry and they won't slap his bottom  
won't put drops in his eyes  
won't swaddle him  
after washing the body.  
He will not resemble a living child.  
His mother will not be calm and proud after giving birth  
and she won't be troubled about his future,  
won't worry how in the world to support him  
and does she have enough milk  
and does she have enough clothing  
and how will she ever fit one more cradle into the room.  
The child is a perfect izadil« already,  
unmade ere he was ever made.  
And he'll have his own little grave at the edge of the cemetery  
and a little memorial day  
and there won't be much to remember him by.  
These are the chronicles of the child  
who was killed in his mother's belly  
in the month of January, in the year 1988,  
"under circumstances relating to state security."*

Just about a decade ago, I wrote my thesis for rabbinic ordination from the Hebrew Union College on modern Israeli poetry after the 1973 Yom Kippur war. What intrigues me so much about poetry written in Hebrew is how, solely by its usage of the language, it reflects how history so often repeats itself, and in doing so, it even more frequently rhymes. Israeli poets can use the language to nod to stories from the Tanakh, rabbinic debate, medieval piyyutim, and even other poems from an earlier era. Looking at the above poem by Dahlia Ravikovitch in 2025, you could easily be forgiven for assuming it was written after 7 October 2023, as once again history repeats itself. As the Israeli government hurtles towards an increasingly authoritarian stance, clamping down hard on pro-democracy and anti-war protests, watching from afar in the diaspora can render you feeling powerless in the wake of so much loss. However, as Jews living in the diaspora, the World Zionist Congress is our body to get our voices heard, and demand a return to democracy and a society that recognizes the rights and humanity of all of its residents. That is what the Hatikvah slate advocates for, and that is why your vote is so vital in this election.

Ravikovich penned the poem above in 1992, which translators Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfield state is from the perspective of a pregnant Palestinian woman who loses her baby as a result of a severe beating she receives from Israeli soldiers. Ravikovich stems from a long line of modern Israeli poets who focused their writing on the ravages of war and the deep and omnipresent sickness that it inflicts upon Israeli society. These poets sought to hold a mirror up to the ideological but still hopeful dreams of Israel's forefathers – including poets of earlier generations like Chaim Nahman Bialik and Natan Alterman – in order to reflect back a more mournful, more cynical reality.

I joined the Hatikvah slate after returning home to New York from Pennsylvania, where I had spent

most of the summer and fall of 2024 working for the Democratic party. As a regional organizer, my primary responsibilities were to find and train volunteer leaders to run our many get-out-the-vote efforts. It may sound naïve, but working in a swing state like Pennsylvania during a presidential election demonstrates fully that democracy is not a spectator sport. While completely exhausted from the barrage of advertisements they saw on the regular medis, our volunteers knew that their voices were indispensable in making sure that our country lives up to its highest ideals, and acted accordingly. After that particularly stinging loss, I would be lying if I said that I was immediately ready to join up with yet another campaign where the stakes are so high and the consequences so visible. Frankly, I still hurt. But I know that the only way that fascism thrives, domestically or internationally, is when the population chooses to opt out. We as progressive Zionists know we do not have the luxury of opting out, so we press on.

There is a reason why our name is Hatikvah: ours is a movement and a slate built on hope. This isn't some pie-in-the-sky hope, or some "can't we all just get along" hope built on platitudes. Ours is the hope of heroes like Yair Golan who ran *into* the chaos of the massacre of 7 October to save lives. Ours is the hope of every single protester who has been out in the streets fighting for democracy, judicial independence, and Palestinian agency for years. Ours is the hope of LGBTQ communities all over Israel standing proud and firm for their rights as citizens. This is a hard-won hope, one that mandates action and advocacy. There is a time to argue about the continued relevance and utility of words like "Zionism" and "statehood," and there is a time to put these debates aside and use your voice to insist that enough is enough. Such a time is right now, and the Hatikvah slate is making those demands. Change is not effected through hope alone, but by action inspired by that hard-won hope. To me, that's what our name represents.

Of course, Hatikvah is also a nod to the Israeli national anthem of the same name, written by Naphtali Herz

Imber in 1886. Almost 140 years later, we as Jews still yearn to live as free people in Israel, the embers of Imber's hope not yet extinguished. We also know that our freedom is inextricably bound up with the freedom of the Palestinian people, whose hope has been dimmed but cannot and will not be put out. It is for this hope that we on the Hatikvah slate do this work. We stand on the shoulders of the giants and *g'dolim* who came before us; the prophets and the poets who worked with the language of our people to envision a stronger, more equitable and fairer nation by speaking their words to power. It's now up to us to fulfill their hope. Join me in voting Hatikvah in this year's WZC election.

---

*Rabbi Ariel Naveh is an educator, activist, and community organizer, who was ordained from HUC in 2015. Since moving back to New York in 2021, he has been working with the Long Island chapter of Bend the Arc on statewide criminal justice reform and Jewish community safety. He is a proud member of the [Hatikvah Slate](#), and serves as the Hatikvah Campaign Outreach Coordinator.*



**Partners for Progressive Israel** is proud to be a leader of the Hatikvah Slate, the only explicitly anti-occupation slate in this year's elections for the World Zionist Congress.

Turn your progressive Jewish values into tangible policies that have real and substantive effect on Israeli Society and World Jewry.

**The World Zionist Congress elections directly impact the flow of more than \$1,000,000,000 of the Jewish people's money annually. Every vote determines how these funds are spent.**

Voting is open through **May 4th, 2025.**

To learn more about the elections and to vote, go to <https://www.hatikvahslate.net/>



## *A Conversation with Yael Noy, CEO of The Road to Recovery*

This interview, which took place prior to the recent Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal, has been edited for length and clarity.

### **Partners for Progressive Israel (PPI): Thanks for chatting with us, Ya'el. Could you tell us about The Road to Recovery?**

**Yael Noy (YN):** We're an Israeli association of volunteers who drive Palestinian patients from checkpoints in the West Bank to hospitals in Israel, and back again. In the past, we also did this with Gaza.

Most of the patients are children, and the patients in general need to meet a few criteria to enter Israel: Usually they require life-saving treatment that isn't provided in the Palestinian Authority. That includes a lot of kids with oncological or nephrological issues because there's no pediatric dialysis in the Palestinian Authority. And kids who need organ transplants or suffer from chronic, genetic illnesses that can't be treated in the Palestinian Authority. Officially we've been operating as a nonprofit since 2010. But the first request came 19 years ago.

### **PPI: How did that come about?**

**YN:** The Road to Recovery was initiated by Yuval

Roth. Yuval's brother, Udi, was abducted and killed by Hamas in 1993 while returning home from reserve duty in Gaza; it was a month after the signing of the first Oslo Accord. Yuval subsequently joined the Israeli-Palestinian "Parents Circle – Bereaved Families Forum".

One day in 2005, Yuval got a call from a Palestinian friend, Muhammed Kabeh, also a member of the Parents Circle group. Muhammed had a request: His brother was ill and had to be taken to the hospital. Of course, Yuval took Muhammed's brother. After that, word spread through word of mouth, to family and neighbors, and more and more requests came in. That's how it got started.

### **PPI: So, what happened in 2010?**

**YN:** Leonard Cohen, the late singer-songwriter, heard about the work we were doing and wanted to make a donation. That spurred the creation of an official registered nonprofit.

I should mention that The Road to Recovery isn't connected organizationally to the Parents Circle. Our founder is a member of the Forum, but the organizations are completely separate entities.

### **PPI: How many drivers are involved in The Road to Recovery?**

**YN:** We actually don't call them "drivers". We refer to "volunteers" who do the driving. We don't see ourselves as a transport operation. If that's what we were about, we'd rent a minibus and send it to the Israel-West Bank crossing point every morning and that'd be that. But for us, the main thing is the motivation of the volunteers to help and the encounters that these rides can create between Israelis and Palestinians.

### **PPI: Could you tell us about these encounters?**

**YN:** Israelis and Palestinians don't have much of an opportunity to meet. Palestinians aren't acquainted with Israelis, except soldiers, through the sites of a rifle, or interactions with settlers moving about in the territories. So, Palestinians perceive Israelis generally as enemies. And so we're reaching out to become acquainted and not asking for anything in return. It doesn't cost the patients a thing.

Beyond the humanitarian aspect of transporting patients, our story is about Israeli volunteers inviting Palestinians into their private vehicles. They then have about an hour's ride to be together.

We provide about 50 to 60 such rides a day, by the way. And the patient is always accompanied by an escort, who's a family member.

We provide the platform; we plant these seeds. We want Israelis and Palestinians to meet and perhaps for something to grow from that. Of course, sometimes nothing comes of it. Occasionally the patient and escort don't even say thanks, and the volunteer can feel a bit miffed, as if they were just a cab driver. But don't forget that the Palestinian passengers are preoccupied with their own illness, or the illness of their loved-one, and aren't available emotionally.

But other times amazing things happen, miracles really, and friendships get formed. After October 7, for example, there were volunteers who wanted to take a break from this activity. But they've made an exception for someone they've formed a friendship with and continue driving them. These people now have a name, a face, and that's where it all begins.

**PPI: How do the two sides communicate? In English?**

**YN:** There can be a language barrier. And significant cultural gaps, too. Sometimes they can communicate in English, or if the Palestinian passengers know a bit of Hebrew, or the Israeli volunteer has some broken Arabic. But sometimes this can be overcome with a smile, or a gesture, or someone offering the other water or some fruit. What we might call "the

language of the heart"!

**PPI: How does the operation work in practice?**

**YN:** Patients still hear about us via word of mouth, especially at the Israelis hospitals. There are three Palestinian coordinators who take in requests – one in the Hebron area, one in the Qalqilya-Nablus area, and one in the Jenin area. The coordinators are responsible for contact with the patients. And each day they send us a list of the patients who need to be driven the next day. They communicate with the Israeli coordination center, which sends out the volunteers.

The volunteers drop them off at the hospital entrance, but they don't wait there for them. So, when patients are done with their appointment or treatment, they notify the Palestinian coordinators and then we look for another volunteer to take them back to the checkpoint.

On paper we have 1,300 volunteers. Each year, about 600-700 will volunteer in practice.

We use a computerized system with the details of the patients and the volunteers. And there's an app where volunteers can sign themselves up in advance, and that lets us know who's available to drive. If that's not enough, we have a WhatsApp group for communication. We also sometimes need to respond to nighttime emergencies. And, sadly, there are terminal cases, and we bring the family members to part from the patient.

Our work is all from home, by the way – decentralized. We don't have a central office.

**PPI: Is The Road to Recovery involved in getting entry permits to Israel for the Palestinians?**

**YN:** We don't deal with that. We simply take them from the Israeli side of the crossing point after they've obtained the necessary humanitarian permits. These permits continue to be given out. All the permits are arranged in communication with

the Israeli hospitals, and the hospitals arrange the permits once the Palestinian Authority approves the treatment and commits to coverage. Israeli hospitals, in fact, want the Palestinians to come. When they're treated in Israel, it's under the heading of "medical tourism" and it's very expensive – the Palestinian Authority is charged at the highest rate, more than the rate for Israeli patients, so it pays for Israeli hospitals to accept them. For the same reason, the Palestinian Authority prefers to provide treatment in the territories, where it's less expensive. And not every Palestinian that wants such care gets it. It has to be approved by a committee in Ramallah.

**PPI: Is taking rides from The Road to Recovery ever considered collaboration with the Occupation? Is it ever opposed by those who view it as "normalization"?**

**YN:** To the best of my understanding, I think what we do is make an exception, since it involves ailing people who are going to a hospital, to receive medical care.

**PPI: Certainly, October 7 impacted your organization's work. Could you tell us how?**

**YN:** Since October 7, the volume of our activity has gone down because thirty percent of our patients were from Gaza and they can't currently enter Israel. But from the West Bank, the work continues.

The Road to Recovery, in fact, is the only organization engaged in Israel-Palestine that didn't stop its activity even for a moment due to October 7. On October 8, we were transporting patients. All the other Israeli-Palestinian coexistence organizations had to suspend joint activity due to Palestinians being barred entry into Israel. But we carried on.

For the first few weeks after October 7, our activity was more limited: Israel's hospitals were full with the Israeli war wounded; plus, the Palestinians were more scared to enter Israel. But since then, we've returned to the regular numbers.

We did have some volunteers who asked to stop after

October 7. And others who wanted to continue, but their family members asked them to stop – because they're scared. And we had volunteers who decided to focus instead on the work that needs to be done inside Israeli society. But there have also been new volunteers joining, people looking for a way to help. Still, right now is not an easy time for any of the volunteers.

Sadly, we lost a lot of volunteers from the communities on the border with Gaza, the kibbutzim there. Some were murdered, or were kidnapped or their homes were destroyed and they were displaced. We have one hostage still in Gaza.

October 7 was a harsh blow, and to continue doing this work now in Israeli society is not something to be taken for granted.

**PPI: Could you explain what you mean by that?**

**YN:** Israeli society has become more extreme, and what we do isn't representative of our society. I've been part of this NGO since 2016. I've always been very proud of what we do and talked about it and gotten good feedback. But today I'm much more cautious when I'm asked what I do – I think twice what to say and how to say it. Mostly I don't want to cause anyone pain. Just lending a hand to Palestinians is painful to many Israelis. There are people who were hurt on October 7, or whose kids are serving in Gaza or who've been hurt or killed there. Or people evacuated from Israel's North. We're in a painful war. So, I need to be careful how I say things. But I won't stop my activity. I don't feel like I'm "aiding the enemy", but that's how it's perceived by many.

**PPI: Does The Road to Recovery advocate for a "solution" or use a broader human rights framing?**

**YN:** We try to keep it simple. Our volunteers come from all parts of Israeli society, including Arab citizens of Israel, leftists from kibbutz communities, but also settlers from what are considered extreme settlements in the territories. We want to remain a home in which all the volunteers can feel comfortable, so we avoid



issuing political statements. And we don't go rallies and raise banners there. But I feel the work we do is itself a kind of political statement.

**PPI: Where do you get your support from? From Israelis? From the international community?**

**YN:** Before October 7, most of the donations we received came from within Israel – including from private entities and from kibbutzim. Kibbutz Be'eri, near Gaza, which was invaded and attacked on October 7, was once a big donor; now we need to help them. After October 7, though, all the donations from within Israel dried up at once, almost completely.

During the month after October 7, we experienced a huge amount of interest from international media – CNN, BBC, EU newspapers, Christiane Amanpour – and that helped generate lots of donations from around the world. We need that now because we're still receiving almost nothing from Israel – and that includes from individuals who'd contributed to us for years, but now feel the priorities and needs are different.

It's important to say to Americans: One day the war will be over and both sides will remain, and it's vital to have these bridges if we want neighborly relations – even if not yet peace. So right now, we need the support of the world. Before the war started, we were about to do mass fundraising in Israel, but right now we can't ask Israeli society since there are so many needs, and it's difficult for many to help Palestinian citizens when so many Israelis are hurting. So, we're appealing to the Jewish Diaspora and whoever wants us to do well.

**PPI: Is there anything else you'd like to share with our readers?**

**YN:** My passion is to get as many Israelis as possible involved. I'm doing what I do in order to rescue us, the Israeli side, so that we can remain humane, within the violent, racist society we live in.

I also believe that when we do something positive, it

reaches people on the other side and has an impact, even if we don't always know where or when. Occasionally, though, we do get feedback from Palestinians. A man named Haled, for example, wrote us that we'd saved him twice – once from his cancer, and once from his brainwashing. "I was raised to hate Jews," he said, "and suddenly I met something different".

**From a Patient:**

*"Hey Yuval, I've never had a good chance to talk to you openly. I think you're doing the most amazing thing ever in regards of the conflict in this area. Personally speaking, you, all your friends, and all the beautiful people in Rambam [Hospital] saved my life twice. First from cancer. The second time is from [a] being a close-minded fanatic... I think I was brainwashed to hate everyone. Especially Jews. What you are doing is one of the reasons why I now hope for peace, and do whatever I can from my place as an English teacher to make more people hope and seek peace too. Thank you so much."*

— Haled Zeyud, Silat a Hartia

And there was a Palestinian Authority police officer about a decade ago who saved an Israeli soldier who'd entered Ramallah, in the Occupied Territories, by mistake. The policeman contacted our founder, Yuval, and said, "I did this for you, because last year you took my brother to the hospital". These things do happen. I believe what we do creates a little light.

To learn more about *The Road to Recovery*, visit their website, or follow them on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) (X), or [YouTube](#).

---

Yael Noy is the CEO of The Road to Recovery



# *Dati*, but not “*Leumi*.” Reflections from *Smol Emuni* USA

INSIGHTS

By Margo Hughes-Robinson



Photo: The opening plenary of this spring's Smol Emuni US convening.  
Photo courtesy of the author.

On Rosh Hodesh Nissan of this year, several hundred traditionally observant Jews gathered on New York's Upper West Side for the first-ever “*Smol Emuni*” US convening, a conference for the “faithful Left,” as the phrase is often translated. As the day went on, it was clear that while a conversation like this had yet to occur on the scale that marked the convening, these questions had been explored for months at Shabbat tables, kiddush corners, and small pockets of the Internet. But like the inaugural gathering of *Smol Emuni* two years ago in Israel, the Orthodox and observant Jewish communities of the United States were ready for an opportunity to recognize themselves as a distinct movement within their larger community, folks who are “*Dati*” in the traditional sense, but who eschew the nationalism and rightwing political orientation that often characterize their Orthodox *dati leumi* (national religious) counterparts in Israel and in the United States.

It was profound for me particularly to celebrate the places of not just ideological but practical overlap in

*frum* and praxis-oriented leftist spaces – the shared commitments to living out one's values every day, the attention to dietary needs, and even the welcoming of the next generation. (“Oh my goodness, look! A child! I never see children in public in New York!” was the reaction of Dr. Leah Shakdiel to seeing my son running around between conference sessions). And yet, the moments of greatest meaning often arose from conversations that many would never expect in a room full of Jews wearing kippot and *kisui rosh*, such as the communal response to a question raised by featured speaker Michael Manekin (whose book “*End of Days: Ethics, Tradition and Power in Israel*” I reviewed in a recent past edition of this e-magazine). At a session that featured a screening of the Oscar-winning documentary “No Other Land,” Manekin opened the discussion by asking, “just by show of hands, how many people here have done protected presence in the West Bank?” I was shocked to look around and see that fully a third of the room had their hands in the air, and had joined the conversation not to discover the crisis of expulsions and intimidation of Palestinians in the West Bank, but to engage deeply in a dynamic that they had lived.

An urgency permeated this conversation. While participants seemed relieved to find themselves members of a small tribe-within-the-tribe, not alone in their halachic practice or ethical commitments, there was a heightened concern not only over the ongoing devastation and war crimes in Gaza and the state of the hostages, but the intensifying tightening of the window of discourse around Israel in participants' own religious communities.

Particularly, deep concerns were expressed around the political culture in Jewish day schools. Parents of young people enrolled in these institutions shared that they were taken aback by what they perceive as a growing embrace of far right and even ultranationalist discourse surrounding Israel, especially among teenage male students. This turn to the right existed both on a social level and within the Israel education curriculum offered in these schools, according to parents and alumni, with many noting that even history and social studies teachers whose personal views may differ feel a great deal of pressure to hide their political affiliations and values in the classroom. “Why can’t we just teach about the Nakba as a historical fact?” expressed one frustrated parent of day school alumni. “We teach the kids about the ethnic cleansing and extermination – some even call it genocide – of Native Americans in history class. Why can’t we discuss the Nakba?”

As someone who navigates both the broader Jewish political left and the observant world, many aspects of the day felt to me like a breath of fresh air. Here were the Orthodox rabbinical students talking about their desire to articulate a theological and practical response to Israeli ultranationalism within frameworks that were meaningful to the communities they seek to serve, and religious Jews eager to listen to the words of the Palestinian plenary speaker, clear that the messianic and violent vision proposed by Israel’s far right did not represent them.

But at the same time, I worried that the same dynamics that often hobble the Left in Israel were also at play in these convening conversations. Overwhelmingly, the room and the speakers were white and Ashkenazi Jews, associated in the past several generations in Israel and in the American Jewish community with a certain mid-century cultural elitism and successful navigation of racial privilege – the success of American Jewish day schools in the 1960s and 1970s was [directly tied](#) to

the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954 that desegregated American public schools – that neither represents the multicultural reality of New York nor Israel’s observant Jewish community. The absence of Jews of color and Sepharadi and Mizrahi Jews, as well as the lack of the explicit class analysis that one finds in abundance in leftist Jewish spaces, has profound impact on the Israeli left’s ability to mobilize a significant enough percentage of the communal population and build effective power to make change, and leaves it without the critical insight to articulate policy changes that are actually likely to resonate within the broader Jewish community as a whole. In Israel, these dynamics led directly to the consolidation of power on the right that characterized the “[Revolution of 1977](#),” the effects of which still deeply affect everything from party affiliation to Israeli foreign policy today.

In an explicitly religious Jewish space such as *Smol Emuni*, the consequences extend even further. I found myself sitting in near disbelief as one deeply learned plenary speaker after the other referenced Rav Soleveitchik’s influence on their considerations about how traditional Jewish thought and practice might meet this moment of emergency in Israel and the broader Jewish world, but it was not until Member of Knesset Naama Lazimi credited the Rambam, the Beit Yosef, and Rabbi Ovadia Yosef on her own understanding of the importance of *pidyon shvuyim* (the commandment to redeem captives) that the halachic giants of the Sepharadi world were referenced as foundational to this ongoing conversation.

This dynamic may say more about an understandable American Orthodox investment in its own *gedolei hador* and halachic cultural context, which would support the continued existence of “*Smol Emuni USA*” as a specific subgroup, having a conversation that is both connected to and yet distinct from the religious and political context of religious Jewish leftists in

the Land. At the same time, however, a conversation that remains grounded in an American, white, and Ashkenazi theological vocabulary will not equip organizers seeking to create the necessary narrative change in Jewish religious communities in Israel and beyond, and engender a *dati* worldview that is less wed to an ultranational project. A powerful religious left in either country will have to answer back convincingly to a complex reality and reckon with several factors: that of the racism and classism of the traditional Ashkenazi secular left in Israel, the cultural and religious impact of Sepharadi and Mizrahi *hachamim* in the Jewish world broadly and on Israeli Jewish life and politics in particular, and the phenomenon of American Jewish orthodox radicalism actually exported to Israel from Brooklyn and beyond – we cannot ignore the fact that both Meir Kahane and Baruch Goldstein were products of American extremism as they formulated a Jewish theology of violent hate.

These dynamics, of course, are endemic to the larger Jewish left, and are not the sole responsibility of a nascent organization. As a rabbi, a progressive, and an observant Jew, I could not be more grateful for the space that groups like *Smol Emuni US* and Halachic Left are building, and the rapid growth of these groups is proof that I am far from the only Jew with traditional practice who needs this community. But as these organizations move from creating islands of solace for like minded frum and *masorti* Jews towards a larger project of solidarity and building power for real change in our communities and beyond, we cannot succeed without a serious reckoning about which parts of our already small community we seek to bring along with us.

*Rabbi Margo Hughes-Robinson is the Executive Director of Partners for Progressive Israel.*



## Help Partners to promote partnership between progressive Americans and Israelis

### Donate!

Please select your tax-deductible Donor Circle

- |                                  |           |                                |           |
|----------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$3,600 | VISIONARY | <input type="checkbox"/> \$360 | PARTNER   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,800 | LEADER    | <input type="checkbox"/> \$180 | FRIEND    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$720   | PATRON    | <input type="checkbox"/> \$54  | SUSTAINER |

Enclosed is my check payable to Partners for Progressive Israel

106 W 32ND ST NEW YORK, NY 10001

Donate online at [www.progressiveisrael.org/support](http://www.progressiveisrael.org/support)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Ph: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

I'd like to make monthly, recurring credit card gift of  \$18  \$36 or \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please charge my credit card



Card #	
Card holder name:	Exp. date:
Signature:	Security Code:

My gift is in the memory/honor of \_\_\_\_\_

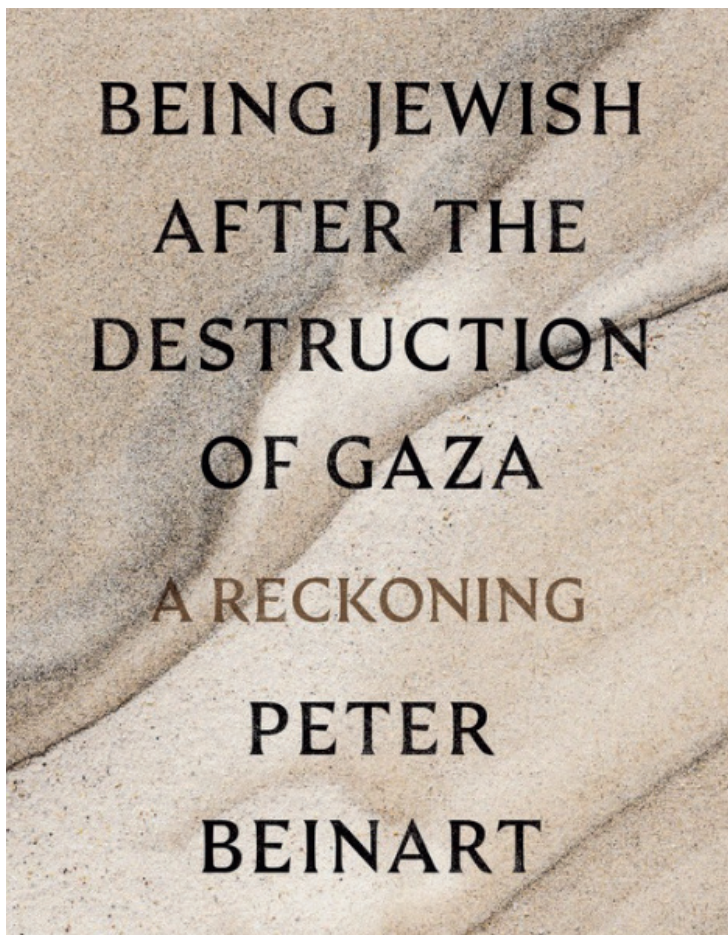
Partners for Progressive Israel is a 501(3)(c) nonprofit organization. Contributions are tax deductible to the extent provided by law.

# Peter Beinart, *Being Jewish After the Destruction of Gaza*:

A Reckoning (New York: Knopf, 2025)

MEDITATION

By Peter Eisenstadt



Jews celebrate the holiday of Purim with merrymaking, cosplaying and grogger rattling. But at the end of the *Book of Esther* we read: “And the Jews struck down their enemies with a blow of the sword, and with killing and destruction, they did to their enemies as they willed,” 75,000 enemies in all. This is, Peter Beinart tells us at the beginning of *Being Jewish After the Destruction of Gaza*, a gruesome coda to a happy, boozy holiday, but it is typical of what he calls the “they tried to kill us, we survived, let’s eat” theme of many Jewish holidays, in which the celebration of Jewish survival has the subtext of revenge against Jewish enemies, the bloody death of Haman’s minions, the Haggadah’s calling on God to “pour out thy wrath...let your

blazing anger overtake them, pursue them in your fury and destroy them,” or Hanukkah’s army of Maccabees striking down the Jewish traitors.

For most of Jewish history, Beinart notes, revenge fantasies were relatively harmless; Jews might dream of oppressing their oppressors, of living out a counter-factual history, but were not in a position to do anything about it. No doubt the reason Israeli and Jewish audiences so liked Quentin Tarrantino’s film *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), was because its ending was gloriously unhistorical, a WWII film in which Jews murdered Hitler and Goebbels and lots of other top Nazis and their families, somehow giving the Holocaust a somewhat happier ending. George Orwell in the spring of 1945 wrote “properly

speaking, there is no such thing as revenge. Revenge is an act that you want to commit when you are powerless and because you are powerless. As soon as the sense of impotence is removed, the desire evaporates also.”

I don't think that is correct. Revenge fantasies have never been confined to the powerless. And the revenge fantasies of the powerful are often directed against supposed enemies who are weak and, all too frequently, posed no threat at all, be it Hitler against Jews, Stalin against kulaks, Mao against capitalist roaders, or the current head of the regime in power in the United States, who daily pours out his wrath against an ever-expanding list of enemies that he tries to destroy. If anything, Orwell needs to be reversed. The revenge fantasies of the powerless, as they experience them, only highlight and dramatize their impotence, but give no lasting relief. The powerful, on the other hand, can see and sense how their talk and actions creates terror among their victims, and the perpetrators get to enjoy the perverse pleasures of sadism. But for powerful and powerless alike, intense hatred and revenge fantasies are a drug, giving the hater an intense high, making them feel intensely alive. But like all drugs, the high doesn't last long, and addiction to revenge reduces one's emotional capacity to mush and one's soul to ash.

The existence of Israel has created a new set of revenge fantasies for both those in power and those without it. Revenge fantasies are backgrounded in the early history of Zionism but come to the fore after the rise of Nazism, and there were some, like Abba Kovner, a Vilna ghetto partisan leader and later a prominent Mapamnik, who entertained murky plans of murdering millions of Germans by poisoning German water systems. But far more common among Holocaust survivors in the new Israel was transferring their revenge fantasies to Arabs and Palestinians, as the latest in the long list of Jewish persecutors and haters. And the Nakba has likewise fueled Palestinian revenge fantasies,

acted out by a changing set of perpetrators, from the fedayeen through the Second Intifada to Hamas. And this brings us October 7th and the Gaza War, which for all the very real bloodshed and devastation on both sides is also a psychodrama of sorts, where both peoples, as never before, have acted out their revenge fantasies on the largest possible stage. Beinart writes well of the vertigo that so many of us felt after October 7th, first the horror of the pitiless Hamas attacks followed by the pitiless Israeli revenge. As he writes, “by seeing a Jewish state as forever abused, never abusing, we deny its capacity for evil. Before October 7, I thought I understood the dangers of this way of thinking. Turns out I had no idea.”

Some military response to the attacks of October 7th was appropriate. But Beinart is appropriately skeptical of the “work” that the phrase “Israel has the right to defend itself” does. “Defense” in this context is a weaselly word, a euphemism. In 1947, the United States, embarking on its mission of global hegemony, changed the name of the Department of War to the Department of Defense, waging defensive wars in Korea, Vietnam and many other places. I would argue that what Israel has, what any sovereign nation has, is the right to wage a just war, with an emphasis on the *just* part, a war with rules and limits, to the extent that is possible.

And though self-defense sounds less aggressive than making war, it really isn't since it implies that you either have already been or are about to be attacked, that your life is threatened, and therefore, in the struggle for survival, for existence against an enemy that would destroy you, all is permitted. In other words, a “right to defend oneself” is often taken as the right to exact revenge on your enemies, and revenge easily spirals out of all proportion. It has been all too easy for Netanyahu and the plug-uglies in his coalition to make this war into one more episode in the eternal war against the Jews, with interchangeable perpetrators, from Amalek to Haman to Hitler to Yahya Sinwar, placing antisemitism somehow

outside of history, outside of Jewish history, as if it doesn't matter what Jews actually do, because Jews are, by definition, innocent, perhaps sinned against, but never sinning. And a key to understanding the wars of October 7th is that they did not begin on October 7th. By some accounts, the current war in Gaza is the 15th armed conflict Israel has waged in Gaza since 1948.

This September will mark the 20th anniversary of the Gaza “disengagement,” and the beginning of the partial, and then nearly total blockade of Gaza. This was one of the strangest blockades in history, a blockade intended not to topple but to strengthen the regime being blockaded. The main reason Israel allowed Hamas to rule in Gaza was precisely because Hamas was committed to armed struggle against it, and as long as Hamas controlled Gaza, the Palestinian Authority didn't and couldn't, so Israel could plausibly claim that there was no one to negotiate with. But engendering hatred against yourself as a means of trying to enhance your own security is a perverse and risky strategy, and it's not surprising that it required the “little” Gaza wars of 2008–09, 2012, 2014, and 2021, with a combined death toll of about 4000 Gazans and 100 Israelis to maintain control. And I think that almost everyone expected, Netanyahu perhaps excepted, that some day that Israel's jerry-rigged “virtual occupation” of Gaza would all come tumbling down. But not like this. No, never like this.

Let us be frank. The Israeli war against Gaza is a still-unfolding atrocity, conducted with a near depraved indifference to Palestinian deaths or mutilation, a war in which journalists and aid workers have been targeted and killed, a war in which almost all of Gaza has been displaced, with many living in hovels or tents, a war in which Israel's refusal to allow the entrance of food, medicine, and other essentials is employed as a weapon of control and war. It has been a war against the civilian population of Gaza, loosely disguised as a war against Hamas. You can call it genocide—I would—or not, but however you

taxonomize it, it has been a stomach-turning atrocity. And if a genocide of a very different kind and on a smaller scale than the Holocaust. As anyone making this claim needs to acknowledge, this is in no way an exculpation for Israeli actions.

There have been protests, but within Israel the protesters were far outnumbered by those who wanted the war to continue, and internationally the protests have amounted to little more than bleats against the war machine. This is in large part because of the support from the Biden administration, sometimes with a few reservations that counted for very little. Despite a brief truce, Israel has been egged on by his successor with an unholy glee, whose only complaint about the Israeli war machine is that it has been insufficiently ruthless, and who has called for mass expulsions from Gaza and, incoherently, for some sort of American control.

How did this become possible? The obvious answer is the occupation, which over its almost six decades has progressively deadened Israelis' moral sensibilities and those of much of the Jewish people as a whole. It has inured too many Israelis to treating the inequality between Jews and Palestinians, between Israeli citizens and non-citizens under Israel's sovereign control, as something normal, unavoidable, and necessary. But it has been a slippery slope to this slough of despond, from which there is apparently no exit.

All I can say is that the two days I spent in Hebron in 2016 chilled me to the bone like no other experience in my life; seeing a street divider that ordered Jews to one side and Palestinians to the other, and when I also witnessed the IDF tear gassing grade schoolers on their way to school. Is it surprising that we have gone from Hebron in 2016 to Gaza in 2025? Not really, perhaps, but nothing in this moral slide has been inevitable.

Let me suggest that the most useful way to think about the Gaza War is as the latest and most brutal phase of a Jewish-Palestinian civil war that dates

back to at least 1936, when the first Palestinian revolt began. And if this civil war has made both sides hate each other with the sort of murderous and vengeful intensity that civil wars typically engenders, it has also made the two peoples, though neither would have wanted this to happen, to be conjoined, like inseparable twins, with a link that cannot be sundered without damaging both peoples. As for the two peoples, including Jews in the diaspora, not only are they fated to be entwined forever; they must learn how to live together as full and real equals. Beinart suggests that it is imperative for all Jews to become a little bit Palestinian, to talk to Palestinians and read Palestinian authors, and to do so with an open mind, without subverting dialogue through our old warmed-over rebuttals.

The current phase of this civil war, driven by both the atrocities of Hamas and the atrocities of the Israeli response, has been an attempt to deny and forestall the reality of Jewish and Palestinian linkedness. Beinart quotes Heschel: “To act in the spirit of religion is to unite what lies apart, to remember that humanity as a whole is God’s beloved child. To act in the spirit of race [or Beinart adds, tribal supremacy of any kind] is to sunder, to slash, to dismember the flesh of living humanity.” Amen.

I don’t see any realistic political solution that might permanently alleviate the suffering in Gaza. I hope I am wrong, and that the situation changes very soon. But even if there is no political way forward, there is a moral way for us to travel. And this begins by starting to come to terms with Gaza. Should, Beinart asks, should Jews feel guilty? Guilt is a crippling emotion, often destroying our capacity for clear thinking, and is usually quite unproductive. Perhaps part of the traditional wisdom of the Jewish people is that a little guilt can be useful as a lubricant, if mixed with other emotions, such as a sense of responsibility, what Beinart calls a reckoning, and some humility. Add some legitimate anger at evil brutalities like Hamas, both for what they did to us and shame that they brought out the worst in us.

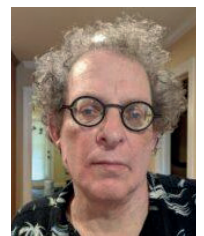
and some *hesed* or lovingkindness for all, perhaps finding new meanings in Ruth’s pledge to Naomi, “your people will be my people.”

And perhaps the next time we celebrate Purim, we might also think, “we tried to destroy them, they survived; if they will have us, let’s eat together.” Not out of a new appreciation for Haman, but a newfound sense that every people has its Hamans and its Mordecais, their Pharaohs with their hardened hearts, and their Moses’s who harken to the holy, and that whether we become one or the other is never preordained, but our free choice. In a recent issue of the *New York Review of Books*, the historian Omer Bartov has suggested that because of the Gaza War, though too late for its victims, perhaps “the sons and daughters of the next generation [of Israeli Jews] will be able to rethink their own lives and future, beyond the memory of the Holocaust; they will also have to pay for the sins of their parents.”

Moral catastrophes can perhaps be liberating in that way, but the memory of the Gaza War should not, and I am pretty sure will not, replace the memory of the Holocaust. Instead, I hope they will ponder how and why a people so steeped in the horrible lessons of the Holocaust could, just a few generations after, perpetrate the atrocities in Gaza, and how, all too easily, the victims became the victimizers, and the goal is to be neither, for all peoples. I hope they will try to hold both together as encompassing the brutal and humbling contradictions of Jewish history. And perhaps Jews, joined by the Palestinians, can rehabilitate a good sentiment that was put to a wayward purpose: “Never again, never, ever, again.”

---

*Peter Eisenstadt is a member of the board of Partners for Progressive Israel and the author of *Against the Hounds of Hell: A Biography of Howard Thurman* (University of Virginia, 2021).*





# Israel *Horizons*

Published by Partners for Progressive Israel

DONATE



106 W 32ND ST, FL 2  
New York, NY, 10001

Tel: (212) 242 4500 / Fax: (212) 242 5718

[info@progressiveisrael.org](mailto:info@progressiveisrael.org)  
[www.progressiveisrael.org](http://www.progressiveisrael.org)