

## C O N T E N T S



*Branch Rickey, right, known for helping break baseball's color line by signing Jackie Robinson, left, to play for the Dodgers*

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## Compassionate listening with- out judgement

Gene Knudsen Hoffman

*From Where I Sit***We're Moving***Stefan Merken**JPF will continue to be the voice for peace in the American Jewish community.*

**A**fter more than fifty years of being housed in the Fellowship of Reconciliation's building (Shadowcliff) in Nyack, NY, on the banks of the Hudson River, the JPF is moving because the FOR, which owns the old and beautiful house, has decided to sell.

Where we're moving remains a question. But

for now, boxes are being packed, furniture and furnishings offered for sale.

The JPF will, however, continue receiving mail at our email address [jpf@forusa.org](mailto:jpf@forusa.org) and our P.O. Box 271, Nyack, NY, 10960, or through the FOR. And our office staff will continue handling the work of the JPF.

But what does this mean for the peace movement in 2018 and beyond? Like most similar groups, we've lost many of our active members in recent years. Men and women who found meaning in battling war and social injustice are disappearing as age and death take their toll and not enough younger

people have replaced them, often concentrating on other causes and issues rather than seventeen years of war and constant threats of more wars and injustice.

Today, everything is done online. Who needs an office (even a department store?) when the computer in a bedroom at home or a smart phone carried in one's pocket has all the information we think we may need? Why stand in the street when you can



sign a petition online or send a few bucks to existing peace groups asking for donations online?

What we all need to recognize is that life is changing. And that includes the new (and old too) ways we have to resist war lovers and the carnage they create. Where it's going is anyone's guess. But this I know: The Jewish Peace Fellowship, its current members and those who will surely follow us will continue to be the voice for peace in the American Jewish community for years to come.

Thank you for your continued support. ✧

STEFAN MERKEN is chair of the Jewish Peace Fellowship.

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Branch Rickey, right, known for helping break baseball's color line by signing Jackie Robinson, left, to play for the Dodgers

## Community

# Baseball, the Brooklyn Dodgers, and Me

Murray Polner

**S**urely God must have been with me when I picked Jackie," Branch Rickey said after he looked back at his unprecedented signing of Jackie Robinson to a baseball contract in 1947.

When Robinson died in 1972 of diabetes and hypertension, some white sports columnists wrote that his coming was no big thing and would have happened sooner or later. Others, more cynical, described Rickey's motive as greed. But the fact is that before Rickey no one had done it or even seriously proposed doing it. That's his legacy.

And I guess it's mine too since when I received a publisher's contract to write a biography of Rickey (*Branch Rickey: A Biography*\*). I knew I had to find out why so believing and trusting a Christian conservative and Republican supporter of Cold War policies would dare to change the game he revered forever. Very quickly I understood the central role his religious faith played. And for most of his post-Jackie life he peppered his speeches with references to the absence of fairness and justice for Black people and other minorities.

"Why is there an epidemic of racism in the world today?," he began a talk on one steamy summer day in the late fifties in Buffalo to stomping, cheering NAACP delegates. When visited by Rutgers University philosophy professor Houston Peterson in his suburban Pittsburgh home, he called out "Let's go to church." They then drove to a black church and when the 76-year-old Rickey entered, cane in hand, congregants stood and shouted, "God Bless you, Mr. Rickey," while Peterson told me the minister shouted "Amen."

I was born in Brooklyn. When I entered my early teenage years little mattered but baseball, the Brooklyn Dodgers, and Ebbets Field, which opened in 1913 and drew scores of unique and unusual fans like Hilda Chester ringing her cowbell (immortalized in SABR by Rob Edelman's first-rate portrait of her), a harebrained and annoying fan constantly yelling "Cooookie" for third baseman Lavagetto, and the atonal, amateurish Dodger Symphony, which paraded around the lower stands between innings. A few priests occasionally blessed the team, even though their prayers went unheeded for years and the Catholic Church pressured baseball in 1947 to ban

**I was born in Brooklyn. When I entered my early teenage years little mattered but baseball, the Brooklyn Dodgers, and Ebbets Field.**



Hilda Chester became the Brooklyn Dodgers most famous fan.



Fred Frankhouse and Babe Ruth

Durocher for a year for his supposed immoral behavior.

Actually, we lived a myth, namely that Brooklyn was an ethnic paradise of mutually tolerant Irish, Jews, Italians, Scandinavians, and Blacks. In reality, we lived separate lives but still it was a community of Dodger-obsessed fans who happily accepted Robinson's arrival if not their sons' infatuation with baseball. In Peter Levine's *Ellis Island to Ebbets Field* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), he quotes Abraham Cahan, a Jewish immigrant from Russia and editor of the Yiddish language *Jewish Daily Forward* newspaper, answering a question from a father complaining about his son playing ball.

"I want my boy to grow up to be a mensch, not a wild American runner," the father wrote. To which Cahan, an assimilationist and dedicated American patriot, replied: "Let us not raise the children that they should grow up foreigners in their own place."

Until then, Ebbets Field was my cathedral and passion for the Dodgers my faith. One thing about Rickey was that he understood the extraordinary hold the team had on its fans. When he was forced out by Walter O'Malley—he who kidnapped the team and fled to LA (Old joke: An armed Brooklyn man enters a bar and sees Hitler, Stalin and O'Malley: Who does he shoot?)—he wrote about his years in Brooklyn.

"They were wonderful years. A community of over three million people, proud, hurt, jealous, seeking geographical, social, emotional status as a city apart and alone and sufficient. One could not live for eight years in Brooklyn and not catch its spirit of devotion to its baseball club, such as no other city equaled. Call it loyalty and it was."

He was referring to a tradition where speed and technology could never quite supplant his ingrained nineteenth-century deep-seated belief that baseball, and the profound city-loyalties it fostered, symbolized continuity in a world fractured by irreparable disruption and unforgivable high crimes. How, he once asked in a speech, can anyone explain the murders of one and a half million Jewish children by the Nazis and their allies?

In 1936, I saw my first Brooklyn Dodger game with my Hebrew school class, shepherded by our rabbi's brother, sadly a Yankee fan. Bucky Walters, a Philly

*Continued next page*

*Baseball, and the city-loyalties it fostered, symbolized continuity in a world fractured by irreparable disruption and high crimes*



Branch Rickey visits with Jackie Robinson



Gene Hermanski, Jackie Robinson and Gil Hodges after turning a triple play on April 26, 1949.

**MURRAY POLNER** is co-editor of *SHALOM*.



*Continued from page 3*

third baseman converted into a pitcher with a windmill motion, faced my favorite, Fred Frankhouse, the idol of Port Royal, Pennsylvania. After the game I broke loose from my classmates and planted myself near the door to the Dodger clubhouse and cornered Frankhouse for his autograph. He signed my scorecard and told me I was a nice boy. In 1989, when I read he had died I sent his family a sympathy card and audaciously signed it, “a loyal Brooklyn and Frankhouse fan since 1936.”

By the next year or so, with money I had earned as a delivery boy for a delicatessen and a Garment Center company, and regularly fortified with a sandwich and banana provided by my mother who had somehow begun to understand what baseball meant to me, I took the subway to Ebbets Field and sat alone in the bleachers.

I’ve never forgotten certain special players, now ancient history, like:

Gene Hermanski, the first Dodger to welcome Robinson and whose photo appears with Rickey on the cover of my hard-cover book and who tried unsuccessfully to get all the players to wear Robinson’s number 42 because of threats against his life;

slugger and Hall of Famer Joe Medwick who came from the Cardinals in a trade pushed by cheapskate Cardinal owner Sam Breadon and executed by cheapskate Cardinal GM Branch Rickey, and who was promptly accidentally beamed by Cardinal pitcher Bob Bowman;

third baseman Joe Stripp, dubbed without imagination by a sportswriter “Jersey Joe” because he came from New Jersey and whose major contribution was being traded for four players for Durocher;

catcher Babe Phelps who was afraid to fly and preferred trains and buses;

Luis Olmo, the team’s first Puerto Rican position player;

Ralph Branca, who surrendered the infamous home run to the Giant’s Bobby Thomson in 1951 (the Giants stole the Dodger catcher’s signal by telescope, as the *Wall Street Journal* reported a half century later), and was an early supporter of Jackie Robinson;

Canadian outfielder Goody Rosen and Brooklyn-born pitcher Harry Eisenstat, my favorite Jewish players (there weren’t many

but Branca later revealed he had a Jewish mother) and Chris Hartje, an obscure backup catcher in 1939, who hit a double before leaving baseball forever, drafted into the Army preparing for WWII.

To keep up on all their doings I was a voracious reader of two gossip, scandal-drenched and loud-mouthed tabloids, the *NY Daily News* owned by the New Deal- and FDR-hating Joseph Medill Patterson, and the other Hearst’s *Daily Mirror*, sketchy and shallow, which- featured Walter Winchell, whom I admired until he became Joe McCarthy’s ugly echo. Both papers, though, were blessed with opinionated columnists, as was the *Brooklyn Eagle*, which to its everlasting credit hired Walt Whitman for a two-year stint as its editor in 1846.

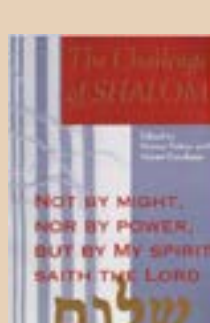
When the Dodgers won the pennant for the first time in 20 years in 1941, the *Eagle* spread a 12 pt. “WE WIN” across Page One. and Pee-wee Rosen and I played hooky to cheer on the players as they were driven by in open cars in downtown Brooklyn.

And then there was the *Daily Worker*, perpetually blind to Stalin’s monstrous crimes while falsely claiming that its Party and sports writers had played an important role in persuading Rickey to sign Robinson. That Rickey, an inveterate anti-Communist and Cold Warrior, paid any attention to Communists is not believable and there is no evidence that he ever listened to them. Then, too, he would never have accepted what a non-Communist writer, Jules Tygiel, erroneously wrote, namely that the Party and especially the *Daily Worker* “had played a major role in elevating the issue of baseball’s racial policies to the level of public consciousness,” a deeply flawed conclusion with little or no supporting confirmation.

In my opinion, the best article on the subject disputing Tygiel’s inaccurate judgment remains Henry D. Fetter’s definitive study, “The Party Line and the Color Line: The American Communist Party and the *Daily Worker* and Jackie Robinson,” which puts the alleged contribution of the Communists to rest. In truth, as I also found long before, Rickey’s faith-driven dream and Robinson’s great courage led the way to the historic end of racial segregation in baseball.

My baseball. A bucolic game, endless and timeless. Slow, unchangeable and reactionary even as it struggles nowadays to absorb the challenge of analytics and sabermetrics. I know: It’s excessively commercial, subservient to corporate control, silent about pointless American wars, and gravely harmed by an inexcusable imbalance between the haves and have-nots. I know, I know. But it’s still baseball, my baseball. And now, it’s my Mets too. ☆

\* Murray Polner. *Branch Rickey. A Biography* (Atheneum, 1982 and NAL 1983; updated, MacFarland, 2007).



### *The Challenge of Shalom: The Jewish Tradition of Peace and Justice*

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## Mirror Images

# Memory and Morality

Rabbi  
Arik Ascherson

*“We didn’t choose to be persecuted. But, you can choose to protect us.”*

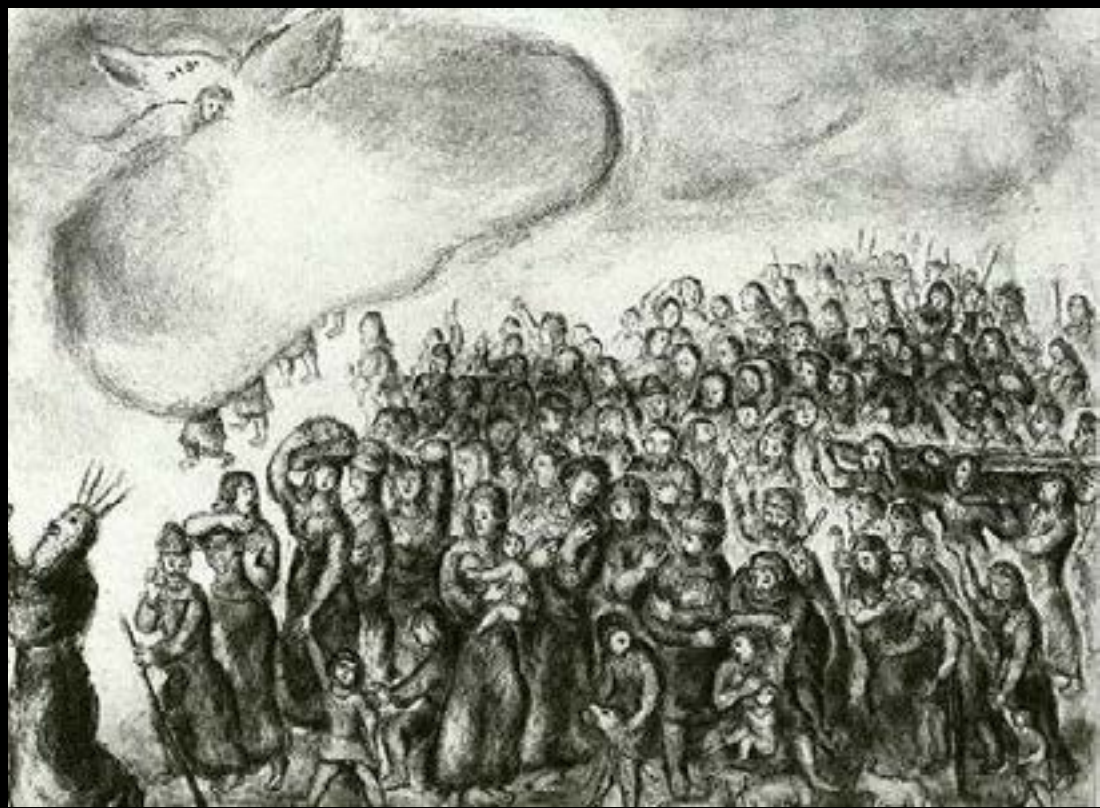
In the Torah portion *Bo* (Exodus 10:1-13:16, read on January 20, 2018 in the diaspora), we are finally free of Egyptian slavery, but the road ahead will be filled with peril. The Torah, prophets and rabbis heap scorn upon those who showed us no sympathy, and even added to our suffering. “No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of Adonai, none of their descendants, even in the tenth generation, shall ever be admitted into the congregation of Adonai, because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey after you left Egypt” (Deuteronomy 23.4).

Chapters 12 and 13 of Exodus (in *Bo*) command us to remember for all time our degradation in Egypt, and our redemption. We reread 12:1-20 when we enter the month of Nisan and are preparing to celebrate Passover. However, we are to remember more than just the fact that God redeemed us. Time after time we are commanded to recall the experience of being a stranger in a strange land, and to treat the strangers among us differently. We are taught to remember those who refused us aid when we fled Egypt because God expects us to be different.

From a moment as long as I can remember I have seen the striking dichotomy between those Jews whose reaction to the oppression of Jews is that looking after what they perceive to be Jewish interests outweighs all other considerations, and those for whom the command emerging from Jewish history is the obligation to ensure that no human being ever again be forced to suffer as we did. I have never felt that I had the right to judge those who personally suffered oppression and survived with scarred souls. However, we must live up to God’s expectations of us.

Five years ago, almost to the day, I wrote an open letter to then Education Minister Gideon Saar\* saying that we must change the way we teach Jewish history because of the way we are treating asylum seekers and those Israelis who seek to help them. We can no longer judge those who closed their doors to us during the many times in our history that we fled for our lives. We can no longer judge those who remained silent, if we remain silent. When the asylum seekers from the very same countries are given refugee status at rates of over 90 percent in other countries, we can no longer refuse to properly apply the international tests to determine who is truly a refugee, grant that status to less

*“We can no longer judge those who remained silent, if we remain silent.”*



Artwork by Marc Chagall

than a handful of applicants, and then tell ourselves that these never examined applicants are actually infiltrators looking for jobs. With all the evidence about what really happens to those sent to Rwanda and Uganda, we can no longer continue to tell ourselves the lie that they will be OK in those places. We can’t decry those who said that the Jews would be a cancer threatening their cultures, when we repeat those very same words.

I am inspired by the current outcry by Israelis and Jews around the world, particularly by those who have devoted their lives to combating slander of Israel. People are preparing safe houses and calling upon pilots not to fly planes potentially taking asylum seekers to their deaths.

I am also deeply saddened that it has come to this. I am hopeful that history will look back at this as the moment we finally looked in the mirror, didn’t see what we wanted to see, and changed the way we treat all those living among us who are weak and oppressed because they are different.

I am haunted by the charge I heard this week from Mounis Harun. After telling of how his mother was killed and his village razed in Darfur, and of his many friends who were killed after leaving Israel, and of what it feels like to be called a cancer, he concluded by saying,

“We didn’t choose to be persecuted. But, you can choose to protect us.”

As we are commanded to remember in *Bo*, let us remember to choose morally, and not as so many chose to treat us.

*Shabbat Shalom.* ☆

\* The open letter, which appears in Hebrew, can be found at <http://www.mako.co.il/video-blogs-specials/Article-0502d0c713dc431006.htm>

*Let us remember to choose morally, and not as so many chose to treat us.*

**RABBI ARIK ASCHERSON** is the former director of Rabbis for Human Rights in Israel. He now blogs for the *Times of Israel*, where this article originally appeared.



*Politics and Peace***The Implications of President Trump's Jerusalem Ploy**

Henry Siegman

**T**he question whether “liberal Zionism” can survive the far right trends that now dominate Israel’s political life was raised forcefully in *The New York Times* by its columnist Michelle Goldberg. It was prompted by Donald Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, which Goldberg described correctly as “another nail in the coffin of ‘liberal Zionism.’”

While the reactions to Trump’s initiative have not yet fully played out, much is already evident. To begin with, they have exposed the stunning level of ignorance and misinformation that exists on this subject. Trump tried to soften the destructive impact of his declaration by insisting it would not affect any of the final-status issues that are to be the subjects of the peace talks he is trying to restart. He is obviously unaware that Jerusalem is exactly that—a final-status issue. Indeed, it is the most sensitive of the final-status issues. Unlike the others, it led Mah-

moud Abbas, the most moderate of Palestinian leaders, to break off relations with the Trump administration.

Trump’s statement and much of the favorable commentary it elicited emphasized the history of Jerusalem and the attachment of the Jewish people to the city from Biblical times. Trump and his supporters also argued it is high time to recognize the “reality” that Jerusalem serves

as Israel’s capital, implying that no matter how egregiously the reality created by Israel violates acceptable norms and international law, it creates its own legitimacy. Trump also stressed that every country has the right to determine the location of its own capital.

Opponents of Trump’s declaration cited the attachment of over a billion Muslims to Jerusalem, and questioned why that attachment weighs so much less than the Jewish one, especially since Muslims actually lived in Jerusalem and worshipped at the Noble Sanctuary for over a millennium. Most Jews did not make their lives in Jerusalem during these past two millennia, even in times when they were able to do so. Instead they ascribed the yearned-for return to Jerusalem to eschatological time.

In fact, the Jewish attachment to Jerusalem related not to its status as a capital city but to the location of the *Batei Hamikdash*, the two ancient Temples; Jerusalem was not known as *Yerushalayim Habira* (Jerusalem the Capital). When the second Temple was destroyed and the sages deferred its rebuilding and the resumption of its rituals to messianic times, there was no longer a compelling reason to live in Jerusalem. The small Orthodox community that continued to exist in Jerusalem considers Zionism a heresy and to this day does not recognize the religious or political legitimacy of the State of Israel.

The founders of the Zionist movement had little regard for the Messiah, and even less for Jerusalem. The notion of a rebuilt Temple in which the cult of animal sacrifices of the ancient Israelites would be renewed, the priesthood reestablished and the royal House of David restored (goals prayed for in Orthodox synagogues all over the world and today fanatically championed by the religious nationalist Temple Faithful followers who are funded by Israel’s government) was seen by them as an embarrassing anachronism. Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, granted the small ultra-Orthodox community in Israel certain privileges, like exemption from the military, because he was convinced that religious Jewry would not survive the new secular Zionist state.


But the exact reverse happened. Not only are the ultra-Orthodox groups thriving, and it is difficult for any coalition government to be formed without them, but the most reactionary political, cultural and religious forces have come to dominate the country’s life. While the overwhelming majority of the world’s Orthodox Jewry considered Zionism a heresy until World War II, after the Six Day War mainline Orthodox Jewry ascribed messianic meaning to the State of Israel, much as Evangelical Christianity does.

Ironically, the deepest hostility to Zionism is to be found today not in Arab countries, some of which now see Israel as an ally in their conflict with Iran, or even among certain anti-Semitic groups that now see Israel’s Zionism and its privileging of its Jewish citizens as a model for their white and Christian supremacy, but among some of the ultra-Orthodox groups in Israel and in the United States that recognize neither the religious nor the political legitimacy of the State of Israel, and therefore do not see Jerusalem as a capital of anything. They are still awaiting the Messiah.

Critics of Trump’s declaration warned that it will put an end to what prospect there may still have been for a resumption of the peace process. Apparently word that the peace process is dead and buried never reached them. The fiction of its existence served no purpose other than to provide Netanyahu cover for his lie that the reason Israel is not already an apartheid state is that he is waiting for the resumption of the peace process with a more accommodating Palestinian leadership.

The leaders of Western democracies have yet to end their shameful collaboration with this Israeli scam.

Not that they ever believed it, but they needed to pretend that they do, for otherwise they would have had to explain why they urged the security council to impose sanctions on Russia for its land grab in the Ukraine but refused to impose sanctions on Israel for its land grabs in the West Bank and Jerusalem. This pretense was also what led President Obama to say in one of his speeches to the UN Annual Meeting of the General Assembly something that is outrageously untrue—that the UN is not the place to which Palestinians can bring their quest for self-determination and statehood because that can only be resolved in direct negotiations with Netanyahu. No one knew better than Obama that the UN was established exactly for that reason—to help populations under former colonial control achieve self-determination.

*Continued next page*


*Trump’s move on Jerusalem achieved what years of Israel’s settlements failed to do—shatter the illusion of a two-state outcome.*

*The American public, government officials and academics are woefully uninformed about the realities on the ground.*

Continued from page 6

And he surely also knew that the very last person Palestinians could receive a fair hearing from is Netanyahu.

It is true, as Trump's defenders claim, that Israel has every right to determine the location of its capital without any outsider's intervention—provided that location is within its own internationally recognized borders. No country has a right to grab territory outside its own borders, whether for its capital or a parking lot. So the issue is not the status of Jerusalem as a capital, but whether Jerusalem is within Israel's borders. It is not. That is so because both the UN Security Council and the International Court of Justice (in its Wall Decision of 2004) ruled unanimously that territory beyond the pre-1967 Armistice line—which is where East Jerusalem is located—does not belong to Israel, and that changes in the pre-1967 Armistice line can only be made by agreement between the two contending parties.

There is an additional problem. While West Jerusalem is within Israel's pre-1967 Armistice line, the UN's Partition Plan of 1947 (which was cited by Israel's Declaration of Independence as the source of Israel's legitimacy) explicitly excludes Jerusalem from the territory assigned to these two states, declaring it to be a *corpus separatum*, a separate entity to be placed under international jurisdiction.

This provision was never implemented, but it served to deny both Israelis and Palestinians the right to claim sovereignty over the city. However, in the bilateral agreement known as the Roadmap for an Israel Palestine Peace Agreement of 2003, Israel and the Palestinians committed themselves to reach agreement on the future status of Jerusalem in the context of their negotiations for a two-state peace accord. The Road Map, endorsed by the Security Council and signed onto by the United States and the European Union, forbids unilateral changes in the pre-1967 line. In its Resolution 2334 of 2016, the Security Council condemned Israel's "flagrant violations" of this agreement.

The real issue raised by Trump's declaration—the status of Israel's borders, and not the location of Israel's

capital—is determined by international law, not by Trump's whims nor by Israel's unilateral actions. Clearly, East Jerusalem is on the Palestinian side of the pre-1967 Armistice line, and therefore not within Israel's internationally recognized borders. What Trump was therefore saying to the world is that, like Netanyahu, he gives not a fig for international law.

It is that disdain, and not anything else, that has utterly destroyed any possible basis for renewed peace talks. It would be madness for Abbas to resume negotiations that both Israel and the self-appointed mediator have publicly declared allow Israel to grab Palestinian territory. For what do the powerless Palestinians have going for

them in these negotiations other than international law?

Israel's contempt for international law is matched by its indifference to the deeply democratic ethos of its own founders. This was inevitable, perhaps, given the inherent contradiction between that democratic ethos and Israel's dispossession of Palestinians even from that part of Palestine recognized by the UN Partition Plan as their legitimate patrimony. Yes, I know, Palestinians and Arab countries went to war to prevent the implementation of the Partition Plan. They did so not because Palestinians uniquely dislike partition plans, but because, like most people, including Jews, they dislike homelessness and disenfranchisement. Arguably, the expulsion of Palestinians from the areas assigned to the Jewish state would have happened even without the war started by Arab countries, for otherwise it would only have been a question of a short time before Israel's Jewish population would have found itself a minority in its new state.

For all of all its embarrassingly self-serving pretensions to be "a light to the nations," Israel has been moving ever closer to the authoritarianism of certain central European countries whose leaders have alt-right and anti-Semitic proclivities. Tom Segev, the prominent Israeli historian, described the situation in his country to Roger Cohen, *The New York Times* columnist, as follows: "Our government is more and more right wing, racist, anti-Arab. If they were members of a government in Austria, we'd recall our ambassador in protest." It is to these authoritarian leaders that Netanyahu feels a special kinship, as does Trump. Both men went out of their way last year to express that kinship demonstrably by meeting with them while shunning the European leaders who speak up in defense of democracy.

And there is more—sadly, much more. Netanyahu felt no need to disown his son's attack on a liberal Israeli NGO in a tweet in which his son included anti-Semitic and Nazi iconography. (The son is reportedly being groomed to enter Israeli politics.) Nor did Netanyahu utter a word of criticism of Trump's scandalous moral equation of the neo-Nazis, racists and anti-Semites in Charlottesville and those who turned out

to condemn their hatred and violence.

I happened to be in Israel during a launch of a new book by an author and historian, Raphael Israeli, a professor emeritus at the Hebrew University. The event, which drew a large Likud crowd, including government ministers and Knesset mem-

bers, reminded me—like nothing else ever did in my over sixty years of professional engagement with the Israel-Palestine conflict—of how woefully uninformed not only the American public but our government officials and academics are about the realities on the ground in Israel and in the Palestinian occupied territories.

The central thesis of this new book, titled *The Arab Minority in Israel* (published only in Hebrew), is that Israeli Arabs are a fifth column "who suck from the state's teats" and cannot be integrated into Israeli society. Expressing admiration for the Americans' internment of its Japanese citizens during World War II, the author advocates the confinement of Israeli Arabs in concentration camps. The author sees Israel's failure to have taken such measures as a sign of "an enfeebled Israel that has lost its will to exist." For "although the Arabs openly identify with our enemy . . . [n]ot only are they not incarcerated in camps, we allow them to stand on our platforms."

These are not Palestinian residents of the West Bank, but Palestinian citizens of the State of Israel that he is describing. And these are views that are shared not only by the Likud members in attendance at this book launch. As far back as 2006, a Pew Research Center study found that half of Israel's Jewish population believes that Israel's Arab citizens should be expelled from the country. If this is how many Israelis view their own fellow citizens, then imagine how they will treat the millions of Palestinians in the West Bank who they now intend to keep under permanent military occupation.

The theoretical possibility that a two-state accord has not yet been decisively eliminated by the irreversibility of Israel's settlements will certainly be taken care

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The logo for the human rights organization Ir Amim

*Even after spending three impressionable years in the military, some young Israelis join human-rights organizations like BT'selem, Breaking the Silence, and Ir Amim.*

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of by Trump's peace envoys, the wrecking crew headed by his son-in-law Jared Kushner and his ambassador to Israel David Friedman. Both are longtime promoters and funders of the settlements, and they will surely manage to firmly close the door to Palestinian statehood in the three or seven years left in Trump's presidency.

Israel's dominant political culture is today far more reflective of Trumpian and similar mid-European authoritarian values. It is the predictable by-product of a culture shaped by the unrelenting repression and total disenfranchisement of millions of people under Israel's military rule that is now in its fiftieth year. Virtually every young Israeli Jewish citizen spends three impressionable years of his young life looking at Palestinians through his rifle's

sights as potential targets to be eliminated. What is amazing is that some of them still emerge from this dehumanizing experience with enough of a conscience to support human-rights organizations like BT'selem, Breaking the Silence, and Ir Amim, organizations that Netanyahu and his government are doing their very best to discredit, demonize and destroy.

The above notwithstanding, Trump's ill-conceived Jerusalem initiative may yet have a positive consequence, however unintended. Nothing has been as harmful to the Palestinian struggle to end Israel's occupation and unrelenting theft of territory intended for its state as Abbas' insistence on the preservation of the Palestinian Authority and the myth that it serves as "a state in formation," when it so clearly allowed Israel to solidify its occupation. Trump's move on Jerusalem achieved what years of Israel's settlements failed to do—shatter the illusion of a two-state outcome, and allow the Palestinian national movement to turn into a struggle for rights, which is to say a struggle to end Israel's de facto apartheid regime, a course I have advocated for over a decade, and now increasingly embraced by younger

Palestinians. What is particularly significant is that this younger generation is opting for a struggle for equal rights in a single state not because they despair of achieving a state of their own, but because it is their preferred solution. It is the right choice, for their struggle for a state of their own is one Palestinians cannot win, while a struggle to maintain an apartheid regime is one Israel cannot win.

If after what undoubtedly would be a long and bitter anti-apartheid struggle Palestinians prevail, they will be in the clear majority. Having established the principle that the majority can impose on the minority the religious and cultural identity of the State, Israel will not be in a strong position to deny Palestinians that same right. That will lead in time to a significant exodus of Israel's Jews.

If Palestinians do not prevail, then the undeniable apartheid character of the state and the cost of the ongoing struggle will lead to the same result—an exodus of Israel's Jews over time, creating an even greater demographic imbalance between the country's Jewish and Arab populations. Palestinians will not leave because they will have nowhere to go.

The outcome is therefore likely to be the end of Israel as a Jewish state. If so, it will be an outcome brought about not by BDS movements but by Israelis themselves, not only because of their rejection of the two-state solution, but because of their insistence on defining Israel's national identity and territorial claims in religious terms. A state that fast-tracks citizenship through government-sponsored religious conversion to Judaism, as Israel's government now does, cannot for long hide that it privileges its Jewish citizens—just as the United States could not have claimed to be a democracy if conversion to Christianity were a path to U.S. citizenship. New legislation endorsed by Netanyahu and the ruling Likud that explicitly allows democratic principles to be overridden by Israel's legislature if they clash with certain Jewish religious principles demonstrates that the notion of a Jewish and democratic state may have been an oxymoron from the outset. ☆

Photo from *The Jewish Chronicle*.



"Israel is not an exception: Only rarely do peoples learn from their own history and we too have not learned anything."

—Renowned Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer calls on Israel to act to prevent the deportation of African asylum seekers.

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## Conversation


## Compassionate listening without judgement

Philip J. Bentley

One of my favorite retirement activities is conversation. I love talking with people, but not so much small talk as big talk. I like to discuss things that really matter. For decades I have sought out people not likely to agree with me for such discussions. I do a lot of this online as emails, but my favorite way is in person.

A few years ago, I started an email conversation with Tony, a political conservative. We had both had letters-to-the-editor published locally and we got in touch by email to discuss our very different views. A little later a local psychologist got a letter published suggesting civil discussion across ideological and party lines. Tony and I got in touch with him and the three of us met every few weeks in Larry's office. Over time each of us told friends about our little group and it grew. Eventually it grew to an email list of about twenty people who range from the left all the way to the Tea Party. We now call our group The Curmudgeons.

The email correspondence is overwhelming but I try to engage in it as best as I can. The in-person meetings are now monthly and these follow a format that allows



*Benjamin Franklin led conversation groups of people with conflicting views.*

everyone to be heard. There is a main speaker and then everyone in the room gets an opportunity to ask questions or express an opinion. We try to find speakers among ourselves but have started bringing in people. Our most recent meeting, at which there were 16 people in attendance, had a professional commercial lobbyist as speaker.

I came to this idea of conversations among different kinds of people from my own life experience. At age fourteen I was part of a group which probably consisted entirely of what we would now call nerds. We met once a month and brought in a speaker or film for discussion. On TV in Chicago we had a truly remarkable talk show, At Random with Irv Kupcinet. This unrehearsed one-camera program started after the late movie on Saturday night and lasted for about two hours. I wish I could find a

recording of one of these programs but I think none exist. I did find a brief clip on YouTube with just the introduction of the guests which included Walter Winchell, Walter Cronkite, and Edward R. Murrow. I guess the subject was going to be news media: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NP\\_bJJYuP9U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NP_bJJYuP9U)

There are also historical models for this group. Benjamin Franklin presided over such a group for about forty years, until he got too busy with the Revolution. He called his group Junto and its members included people of various opinions. Mark Twain also had such a group who met over cigars and scotch for decades. Before then, there were the coffee houses of Europe where men

(I think it was mostly men) would discuss the affairs of the day over cups of joe. Madame de Staël held salons in Paris and other places where the great men of her day met to discuss and argue. Then, of course, there was the salon of Gertrude Stein early in the twentieth century.

The Curmudgeons seeks to keep alive a wonderful and venerable tradition of polite conversation of hot issues.

How do we do this? We are not allowed to attack each other personally and we are encouraged to argue our own opinions and beliefs while respecting those of others. I have a favorite teaching about dialogue from Hasidic tradition. It says that in order to dialogue we must be true to ourselves. I learned this from my teacher Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi who quotes it in the name of Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (sources are important). Here goes (you ought to read this out loud and probably more than once in order to understand it):

*If I am I because you are you  
And  
You are you because I am I  
Then  
I am not I and You are not you.  
But  
If I am I because I am I  
And  
You are you because you are you  
Then  
I am I  
And  
You are you.  
[And we can talk]*

Since posting this on my blog back in January 2013, the need for civil discussion between and among people with different opinions and beliefs has become a national concern, as it should be. There is a deepening alienation between people. Even what is true is often in question.

In less than two weeks I will be co-chairing an interfaith peace conference at nearby Lake Junaluska (a big United Methodist conference center). This is the ninth in a series of at least ten and I have been on the planning committee for seven of them. My passion for peace and for interfaith dialogue has found a wonderful outlet at these conferences. Anyone reading this who likes the idea should check out the YouTube Junaluska peace conference channel.

This year we chose "Meeting The Other: Can We Talk?" as our theme. We have three speakers representing the three Abrahamic faiths. Each of them is experienced in interfaith dialogue. Our featured musical group is Abraham Jam, a trio consisting of a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim, each a noted performer in his own right. <Go to <https://abrahamjam.com/about/>>. In addition we have workshops which emphasize how to meet and talk with other kinds of people. <Go to [https://www.lakejunaluska.com/events/spiritual\\_enrichment/peace/peace\\_workshops/](https://www.lakejunaluska.com/events/spiritual_enrichment/peace/peace_workshops/)>.

One of these is a workshop on Compassionate Listening. It seems I have had a role in this from the outset. This organization is founded to use the Compassionate Listening method of dialogue. Back in 1978 I was in my first year at a Long Island congregation. I invited Gene Knudsen Hoffman, a Quaker member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (I have been a member since 1966 and JPF has been part of it since the 1940s). Her subject was "Pockets of Peace in The Middle-east." She had been in Israel meet-

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*Compassionate Listening says the starting point is listening to people involved in conflict without making a judgment but instead asking questions.*

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Photo from The Santa Barbara Independent



**Gene Knudsen Hoffman 1919-2010, founder of Compassionate Listening**

point out exactly what she said that upset my congregants (and me too). Gene acknowledged that she had a lot to learn about addressing an audience.

I saw her one more time at an FOR national conference. By that time, she had published *No Royal Road to Reconciliation* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1995). In it she laid out an approach to peace-making that is still controversial among peace activists. Many of us say, “first justice, then peace.” My approach has always been, first reconciliation and peace and then you can do justice. Compassionate Listening says the starting point is listening to people involved in conflict. Make no judgment, especially to their faces, but ask questions to draw out more about the feelings and opinions of the person being listened to. This way they know they are being listened to.

*“An enemy is one whose story you have not heard.”*

In January 1998 I was sponsored to participate in a Compassionate Listening Project visit to Israel and Palestine. It was the most intense and difficult, but also inspiring, trip there I have ever taken. We spent two days at the convent hostel in the Old City getting training before we went out to actually meet people. Then we visited Palestinian homes awaiting demolition, Israeli settlers, Israeli peace activists, the founder of Hamas (in Gaza), and many others. The only kind of person we did not meet was any representative of the Israeli government because we had both Yasir Arafat (held up by traffic so he did not get to our meeting) and Hamas’ Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. I later wrote to Netanyahu, who was in his first term as PM, rebuking him for not meeting with a group that met with everyone else on both sides. I was told that the next mission there included a lengthy meeting with someone representing the PM. For those who are interested, the documentary made during my mission is available for free online at <https://vimeo.com/199513428>. For those interested in learning more about the Compassionate Listening Project go to <http://www.compassionatelistening.org/>. There is a mission going (their 31st) this coming November.

Several months ago, I discovered that there are Compassionate Listening trainers in my little town in western North Carolina. I was stunned and delighted. Charles and Pam Rogers have run many trainings at local churches and organizations. It turns out they have been involved for a very long time. They will lead one of the workshops at Lake Junaluska.

I believe that listening is the beginning of peace-making. As Gene used to say, “An enemy is one whose story you have not heard.”

Consider the teaching in Pirkei Avot 1:12: “... Hillel says: Be among the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people and bringing them close to Torah.” What did Aaron do to be honored in this saying? He would take the initiative to act as a mediator between people who had become enemies until their feelings of hostility were so reduced that reconciliation was possible.

Conversation has been a path towards peace since the beginning. It still is. ☆

—RABBI PHILIP J. BENTLEY is JPF’s Honorary President