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Making Peace with Contradictions: Reflections of Territory and Identity in Israel/Palestine

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Prologue
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Eleven years have passed since I submitted this thesis in completion of my Masters in Humanities degree. During that time little appears to have changed—at least as reported in the news—in the tenuous and fraught relations between "Palestinians" and "Israelis." (I put these monikers in quotes because, as the following work seeks to disclose, these identities are hardly fixed or monolithic.) In the intervening years, however, what have changed are my academic training, life experience, and self-understanding. With this maturity has come an even greater desire to eschew judgment in favor of compassionate understanding.

When I received the request to make this work available to the public as a sample of my creative scholarship, I read it again with fresh, more academically mature eyes. I see now that in subtle ways I was not as impartial as I had hoped. Instead, the work reflects a slight bias in sympathy with the Palestinians, in the narrative I tell and the examples I use. Much as I tried to avoid any bias, I see now an assumption framing the work of an oppressed, colonized people striving to preserve their history, heritage and land against an oppressive, colonizing *State*. While we cannot deny that this narrative has significant validity and veracity, we must also acknowledge that it is only a partial truth. The citizens of the nation of Israel are tremendously varied ideologically, ethnically and temperamentally, as are the people who lived on the land before Israel formed—Jews, Muslims, Christians, and Bedouins alike. There are many personalities and political forces at play. This is not a simple story. I strove to make its complexity evident and to be respectful to all, but I was not quite as successful as I had hoped.

I therefore beg patience and understanding from you, dear reader, and ask you to accept this as a well-intended effort. If I have achieved nothing else, I hope I have at least achieved my sincere wish of honoring the Middle Eastern women I met those many years ago in the Noble Peace Institute, the brave women who came together to find new methods for building peaceful relations and to reinforce those that already existed, each of whom, in the process, shared her unique identity while solidifying our shared humanity. This is the real story, a beautifully complex story, and one I wish to preserve.

MAKING PEACE WITH CONTRADICTIONS

Reflections of Territory and Identity
in Israel/ Palestine

A culminating project submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Masters of Arts in Humanities

by

Chase Clow
San Rafael, California
May 5, 2004

CULMINATING PROJECT CERTIFICATION

CULMINATING PROJECT: MAKING PEACE WITH CONTRADICTIONS

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abstract [< L *abstractus*, to draw from, separate.]

Both historical and personal essay, this culminating project is a creative non-fiction work exploring the modern historical roots of the Israel/Palestine conflict. Part I surveys the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Palestine, centering on two key figures: Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion (1886-1973), and Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Muslim Leader Hajj Amin al-Husayni (1897-1974). Interweaving historical fact, myth, personal story, and biography, with Israeli and Palestinian poetry and poems by the author, themes such as relationship to land, attachment to home, and the displacement created by industrialization upon a traditional, rural lifestyle are explored. Part II relates the personal experience of the author at a women's Middle East peace conference in Oslo, while comparing the contradictions of Alfred Nobel (1833-1896), inventor of war munitions and progenitor of the Nobel Peace Prize, with the contradictions found within Israeli and Palestinian societies.

For Susan Merwin

with love and gratitude unbounded

introduction: [L. *introductionem*, "a leading in."]

As you read this work, think of it less as essay and more as collage. Interweaving metaphor and myth, personal story, biography and poetry with historical fact, I present a kaleidoscope of images I discovered while researching the modern historical roots of the Israel/Palestine conflict. I present not only images of Israel and Palestine, but images from my own life that reflect something of how the stories of these others have coalesced in my psyche with my own experiences. Like a collage, the ideas and images are grouped around central themes. However, like a work of visual art or a poem, it is left to you, as reader, to make of these images what you will. I am reluctant to draw one specific conclusion, a reluctance which grows proportionately with my research. The more I unearth, the more stories and historical facts I read, the more convinced I become of how far short of the truth the understanding of any one person falls. I offer these pages fully aware that they point and suggest, but do not resolve or conclude.

This work is sprinkled with poems from some of the finest Middle Eastern poets, as well as one by California poet, David St. John, and a few verse offerings of my own. I include poetry not simply for its beauty, but most specifically for its power. Something amazing happens in the distillation process through which a poet puts his/her subject—the heat of refinement condenses, the pressure of brevity purifies; only the essence of the matter remains. A truly skilled poet can capture the tensions and paradoxes of life in a few well-crafted lines, creating a depth of irony and insight an essayist requires many pages to convey. I also include the poets because I believe that by navigating so beautifully between artifice and reality, they tell our story, the human story, best. If we are honest with ourselves, we recognize that throughout the course of history, and within our own self, artifice and reality

are so intricately linked that it is impossible at times to tell where one ends and the other begins. We are all simultaneously real and imagined creatures, and it takes all of us to tell our human story and all of us to invent it.

The issues of identity based on conflict over homelands affect everything that is happening in Israel/Palestine, and I hope I have explored them meaningfully in this work. But, although I focus on these intangibles, I do not mean to minimize in any way the suffering human beings are experiencing there. It is very real, very visceral. Trying to understand the motivations and behavior of the individuals who are enmeshed in this drama in no way diminishes the fact that many people have died and many families are grieving.

What is clear to me is the extreme complexity of the situation and I hope I have communicated this complexity in my written collage. I loathe the thought of coming across as an opinionated American who thinks she has all the answers even though she has never even visited the area. I certainly do not want to be like that stereotypical Hollywood cowboy who brandishes his gun and tells everyone where to go and what to do. I would like to be, instead, like the real cowboys I knew as a child growing up on a Wyoming ranch: men and women who had a healthy regard for the land and everything on it, who could sense the rain coming before a cloud appeared in the sky, and who knew that the best way to understand a situation is to be quiet, listen and watch carefully before making a move.

In my readings I came across Israeli Jewish writers who feel a tremendous weight of responsibility and a deep desire to right the wrongs they see being done to the Palestinian people. They are horrified by how their people's own experience of victimization has led to the victimization of others. Israeli poet Dan Pagis cynically explores this theme:

In the Laboratory

The data in the glass beaker: a dozen scorpions
of various species – a swarming, compromising

society of egalitarians. Trampling and trampled upon.
Now the experiment: an inquisitive creator blows
the poison gas inside
and immediately
each one is alone in the world,
raised on its tail, stiff, begging the glass wall
for one more moment.
The sting is already superfluous,
the pincers do not understand,
the straw body waits for the final shudder.
Far away, in the dust, the sinister angels
are afraid.
It's only an experiment. An experiment. Not a judgment
of poison for poison.

(Fourteen Israeli Poets 45)

I also came across Israeli Jewish writers who believe that Israel is perfectly justified in building illegal settlements in Palestinian territory, believing as they do that Jews have a divine right to The Land. I found every shade of opinion across the spectrum between these two extremes. Among Palestinian writers, I encountered those who are willing to work peacefully with the Israelis and some who would accept a one-state solution as long as everyone has equal rights. But I must say that there are far more Palestinians who are too angry over what they experience as occupation and oppression to consider such an idea. The fact is that the vast majority of people on both sides do not trust the Other. And they each have perfectly legitimate reasons for not trusting.

One thing is certain. The Israel/Palestine conflict has less to do with religion than our media portrays. At its heart, the conflict is about who has rights to the land. And, for this reason more than any other, I offer in Part One images reflecting such themes as love of land, attachment to home, and territorialism. Part Two, structured around a Middle East peace conference I attended, reflects upon human interconnectedness, cultural intersections, and the contradictory nature of humanity.

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The seed for this culminating project was planted in June of 2003 when a colleague and fellow music ensemble member, Salima Ginny Matchette, and I were invited by the Global Peace Initiative of Women Religious and Spiritual Leaders to sing daily to a group of Israeli and Palestinian women attending a five day peace conference. The conference, entitled, Women's Partnership for Peace in the Middle East, was held in Oslo, Norway. It commenced in the Nobel Peace Institute and from there moved into the luxurious halls of the historic Grand Hotel.

My journey to Oslo, my role in this conference, and my connection with these women was a very moving experience for me. So many of my preconceived notions about Israelis and Palestinians, based as they were solely on information I'd absorbed from the news, quickly vaporized, imaginings and illusions that they were, and were supplanted by experiences of the real—the weight of women's hands held in my own; the pitch of voices high and low, full and thin, sweet and pained, echoing in the rooms; the sight of sagging or grimaced or smiling tired faces grouped around a roundtable; the smell of someone's leftover coffee in a cup. I watched women struggle to listen to one another and to find a common ground upon which to build. I heard and saw and experienced emotional pain, frustration, despair, and to a limited degree, hope, as well as laughter.

Once the conference was over and I came home I found myself not only longing to return to Norway (a land in which I have genetic roots) but eager to try to understand more about the conflict in Israel/Palestine. Eager, from the Latin *acer* (gen. *acris*) meaning "keen, sharp," because I needed clarity and some kind of insight into the burden of the conflict these women are living under. I was no longer content with the images provided by our media. I wanted a fuller, historical context in which to place these women with whom I had dined and danced, sung to and cried with, and whose personal stories I found so moving.

Shell to Gentleman

by T. Carmi

It's very difficult for two shells to speak

Freely together. Each listens to its own sea call.

It remains for the pearl-diver or the peddler of the antique

To say with firmness: 'Same sea, after all.'

PART I

The Etymology of Conflict

enter [L *intrare* < *intra* within, inside]

Entrance
begins with an exit
and a letting go
followed by
a passing through
into
an embrace
[and]
a being embraced by.

Not a clasping of arms,
although clasping may occur,
rather a taking up of
[and]
an acceptance.

We enter a room,
it now contains us.
It has taken us up.
When the room
becomes stifling—when
we feel we can no
longer remain there—
perhaps it too has decided
to let us go.

Land is like a room. Sometimes it seems to take us up. Sometimes it seems to let us go. And sometimes we leave it, but its embrace remains. Its clasp is firm. We not only have entered it, it has entered us. From then on, it comes with us wherever we go.

While the passage from one land into another can take less than a minute or several hours or may even take days, the entrance itself, the final embrace, can take years. Perhaps it may never occur. The enterer or the entered has not completed the embrace.

❖

I know what it means to love a land—to feel its weight and pull—having spent much of my childhood on a cattle ranch in Northern Wyoming, and now, after twenty years living in the suburbs of a city, still longing for return. I understand sweat and vision. I've tasted sweet alfalfa-laden air, listened to the fiddle of a stream, inhaled the exhalation of the mountains while digging fencepost holes and moving cattle. I understand, too, how land, like a greedy lover, can pull you in hard and not let you go.

My father, as a young man living in a city, felt the call to a rancher's life and he ran to embrace it. The embrace was deep, full and passionate; but like jealous lovers, he and the land also quarreled, and perhaps this quarrel is what killed him at such a young age.

What makes land holy?

❖

enter: *1. to come or go in or into.*

In 1906, David Ben Gurion, who was to become Israel's first Prime Minister, entered the land that has over the millennia been variously named by various peoples. A land upon which many peoples have conquered one another and banished one another, to be conquered and banished by someone else. A land of many songs. And visions.

Ben Gurion left his birthplace, Plonsk, Poland and entered the port city, Jaffa, of the Ottoman Empire, which today has been supplanted by neighboring Tel Aviv, of Israel. Simultaneously, while Ben Gurion was letting go of the land of Poland, passing through other lands, and embracing what he, and many others, call Israel, he was letting go of his

birthplace to embrace what he, and many others, affectionately refer to as the Homeland. In Ben Gurion resided a deep longing for embrace with this land. Perhaps the land, having entered into and clasped hold of his ancestors thousands of years before, had been longing for him as well.

Upon entering the land, he writes:

> My soul was in tumult, one emotion drowned my very being: 'Lo, I am in the Land of Israel!' And the Land of Israel was here, wherever I turned or trod . . . I trod its earth, above my head were its skies and stars I had never before seen . . . All night long I sat and communed with my new heaven (7).

As I read his book, *Rebirth and Destiny of Israel*, in the basement of the U.C. Berkeley Main Library, I reflect upon all the entries taking place within this passage: he entered the land. He entered the Land. He entered his dreams:

> That night, my first night on Homeland soil, is engraved forever on my heart with its exultation of achievement. I lay awake—who could sleep through his first night in the Land? The spirit of my childhood and my dreams had triumphed and was joyous! I was in the Land of Israel... (7).

Israel: Hebrew *yisra'el*, from *sara*, "he fought, contended" + *El*, "God." A name given to Jacob after he fought with either an angel or his brother Esau's messenger upon his return to the homeland. Wily Jacob, who had deceived his father and stolen his brother's blessing. And, as the story goes, stolen from Esau blessings of *El*, too.

Israel: struggles and blessings; blessings and struggles. A man, a people, a homeland. When we speak of Israel, of what do we speak?

When Jacob returned to his home he was welcomed, surprisingly, by Esau. Esau, during Jacob's absence, had married a number of women, one of whom was his first cousin, Basemoth, daughter of Ishmael, the Muslim bloodline to the Holy Land. Esau forgave Jacob

for his deceit and their families lived together for awhile, but eventually Esau decided to move away.

> Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, all the members of his household, his livestock animals, and all the possessions that he had acquired in the land of Canaan, and he moved to another area, away from his brother Jacob. This was because they had too much property to be able to live together. Because of all their livestock, the land where they were staying could not support them. Esau therefore settled in the hill country of Seir. There Esau became [the nation of] Edom.
>
> (Genesis 36:6-8)

An entry and an exit. Fluctuation. Flow. Shift.

A shifting of people on the land's surface. A shifting in the contours of the Land.

Shift, from the Old English *sciftan* "arrange, divide."

Not the first bit of arranging and dividing. And not the last.

Love of the Land
by Yehuda Amichai (German-born Israeli 1924-2000)

And the land is divided into districts of memory and provinces of hope,
And its inhabitants blend with each other
As people returning from a wedding merge with those returning from a funeral.

And the land is not divided into zones of war and zones of peace.
And a man digging a foxhole against shells
Will return and lie there with his girl,
If he lives to see peace.

And the land is beautiful.
Even enemies all around adorn it
With their weapons shining in the sun
Like beads on a neck.

And the land is a package land:
She is neatly wrapped, everything inside, well tied
And the strings sometimes hurt.

And the land is very small,
I can encompass it inside me.

The erosion of the ground erodes my rest, too,
And the level of Lake Kineret is always on my mind.
Hence, I can feel all of it
With my eyes closed: sea-valley-mountain.
Hence, I can remember all that happened in her
All at once, like a person remembering
His whole life in the moment of dying.

* Lake Kineret, the Sea of Galilee, is 696 feet below sea level. A natural, freshwater lake, it is the site where Jesus often preached. More recently, Lake Kineret served as the border between Israel and Syria. However, it became the site of increasing military tension between the two, resulting in the 1967 Six-Day War and Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights. It is thus now an inland lake of Israel.

History is a washing machine stuck on the rinse cycle: many soggy things all jumbled together spinning round and round in endless repetition. (For further information, see the Bible, Book of Genesis. For yet more information, see the Bible, Book of Ezra. For more in depth study, see the Bible, Book of (fill in the blank)).

Ben Gurion's entrance into the land was not the same as his entrance into The Land. For Ben Gurion, the land—the air, the water, the soil, the wide open spaces, the malaria-infested marshes—was to be transformed by hard work. The land was what Ben Gurion called a "wasteland" to be upturned and tilled, planted and pampered, until it bloomed and nourished the whole of Israel. Yet it was also a land where days were "flushed with light and

full of luster, rich in vistas of sea and hill..." and where nights were "infinitely more splendid...deep with secrets and wrapped in mystery" (Ben Gurion 7-8).

The Land, too, was wrapped in mystery, in misty dreams and redemption. Ben Gurion writes, "we were all still fresh; the dew of dreams was moist yet in our hearts; the blows of reality had still to sober our exalted spirits...We had come from exile to redemption—our own...And we were not just working—we were conquering, conquering a land" (8).

Conquering a land, at least at the beginning, meant for the early Zionists wielding a hoe, working the soil and digging wells. It meant harnessing the power of nature and bending it to the human will, transforming tracts of desert into arable land, and growing on existing farmland crops that had not been grown before. It meant creating a nation, realizing an ideology, rebirthing Israel upon and within the land. It meant sweat, resistance, sweat, exhilaration, sweat, malaria-induced fever, sweat, dancing, sweat, perfumed air, sweat, sowing seeds, sweat, and yes, in the ferocity of ideology, initiating a few fights against the locals, those who were living there before the second *Aliyah*—fights against the Jewish farm owners for employing Arabs, and fights against the Arabs themselves when the old-time farmers, bound in tradition, refused to stop employing them.

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Aliyah, "ascent" in Hebrew. I imagine the early Zionists coming to *Eretz* Israel, land of Israel, eager to rise up and create a new life, not unlike some Americans in the nineteenth century who founded utopian communities which they hoped would raise consciousness and

bring harmony and peace on earth. I imagine the innocence of this hope and how easily such innocence can be corrupted:

Aliyah

Place your foot squarely down
push off hard and lift up
all the while praying, hoping, trusting,
that what you've chosen to stand upon
will bear you.

Carefully at first,
but assured with each step,
begin to bound up,
growing giddy and careless
with lack
of oxygen.

❖

Perhaps Ben Gurion was familiar with *Ode to Zion,* written by Jehudah HaLevi in Toledo, Spain in 1086 C.E., during Islamic rule. A physician and a philosopher, HaLevi wrote verse in both Arabic and Hebrew. He dreamed his whole life of "returning" to Zion. *Ode to Zion*, a long, rather romantic poem, extols the virtues of the Holy Land, laments its loss to the Crusaders, and fans the flames of longing for a Jewish homeland, as exemplified by a few of its verses:

> ...
> Zion! O perfect in thy beauty! Found
> With love bound up, with grace encompassing,
> With thy soul thy companions' souls are bound:
>
> That they rejoice at thy tranquility,
> And mourn the wasteness of thine overthrow,
> And weep at thy destruction bitterly;

They from the captive's pit, each one that waits
Panting towards thee; all they bending low
Each one from his own place, towards thy gates (Davis, 37)
...

On May 14, 1141 HaLevi set sail from Alexandria, Egypt (where he recently had been traveling and composing poems for various residents) to the land which at that point in history was the Kingdom of Jerusalem, a Crusader State, part of a Latin kingdom hostile to Jews (Wikipedia 2). Soon after HaLevi arrived at his destination, fulfilling his dream of a "panting" return to the gates of Zion, he was killed, just forty-six years prior to Saladin's invasion of the Kingdom. Saladin defeated the Romans and invited the Jews, some of whom had narrowly escaped massacre at the hands of the Crusaders in 1099, to dwell once again in Jerusalem.

Barta'a, a village currently located within the borders of Israel, gets its name from the particular behavior of a scout in Saladin's army, Sheikh Muhammad, a man who participated in the wars against the Crusaders. When he returned home from a victorious battle, the Sheikh would jump with happiness, and the villagers would say of him: "*bart'a ash-Sheikh,*" or "the Sheikh jumped with joy," and thus the town where he lived became known as Barta'a (Grossman 114). A small village of little repute, with a ravine running through its center, Barta'a was severed in half in 1949 when Jordanian and Israeli representatives met in Rhodes to flesh out the Israel-Jordan Armistice Agreement, which determined the new border between them (Aisenberg 1).

Like Greek gods, far away and above the land, delegates huddle together, arguing about who gets to rule what, squinting at a map riddled with the misshapen lines of rivers and streams, lakes and ravines, and spattered with dots of towns and cities that look like seeds spilled haphazardly on a table top. Barta'a, if it appears at all on such a map, is just a

tiny, insignificant dot, a mustard seed compared to the fava bean of Jerusalem. Who can tell, from such a reeling, heady perspective, that the village straddles both sides of the ravine? Who at this furrowed-brow jostle of negotiation realizes that his decision will force a husband to have to choose between two wives because each lives on a different side of the ravine? Who realizes in this power-peace-war struggle over sacred sites and water-land resources that a grandmother will now live in Israel, while her grandchildren will be in Jordan, that cousins will be separated, or that two young lovers, who have yet to be married, will be unable to see one another once the fences are erected and guards stand at the gates harassing the "enemy?" Which of the representatives signing the agreement knows that there is a well on only one side of the ravine? (Grossman, 114).

In verse:

And a chasm yawned open
swallowing the people
and all the goats.

The delegates put down
their pens, wiped their brows,
shook hands and sighed,
lamenting the sacrifice
yet too hungry to care.

That night
they feasted together
on leg of lamb
and olives.

❖

enter: *2. to force a way into; penetrate; pierce*

If Ben Gurion was not familiar with HaLevi's *Ode to Zion*, he shared the sentiment: a longing for "return" to Zion, the holy mount upon which the first temple was built and at whose base Jerusalem lies; a desire to feel connected to and be nourished by the very land in whose womb the Jewish faith was conceived. Like many other religious Jews, he was inculcated with the Diaspora mythos, still held by many today—a belief that if all the Jews remain scattered about the world the Messiah will not come. Once all Jews gather together in Jerusalem the messiah will finally arrive to free them all.

Ben Gurion's father had strong Zionist ideals which he obviously impressed upon his son. Ben Gurion led a Zionist youth group in Poland called *Ezra*, where members spoke only Hebrew amongst themselves. On the scale of Zionist zeal, Ben Gurion comfortably falls somewhere in the fat middle of the bell curve. He was in some instances a moderate, and in others extreme. Many of his writings in *Rebirth and Destiny of Israel* suggest that he agreed with the first part of the Jewish Virtual Library's definition of Zionism, which defines Zionism as "[a] national movement for the return of the Jewish people to their homeland." But as to the second half of the definition, "the resumption of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel...," his stance is somewhat ambivalent. He worked tirelessly to help found the new nation of Israel and to ensure that as many Jews as possible could immigrate to a Jewish-governed homeland. He realized that the founding of such a state meant choosing to fight with Arabs, and yet, in many of his essays and addresses, he speaks respectfully of Arabs and recognizes their ties and rights to the land.

Do his essays and addresses, collected together, suggest that he believed in Jewish "sovereignty" and all that the word denotes: supremacy, superiority, condescension? Let us have him speak for himself.

From "Earning a Homeland," 1915:

There are various ways in which a country may be had. It can be seized by force of arms or possessed by political devices and diplomatic pacts; it can be bought for cash. All such measures have but a single aim: rule to enslave and exploit...Not so we. We do not ask for the Land of Israel for the sake of ruling over Arabs, nor seek a market to sell Jewish goods produced in the Diaspora. It is a Homeland that we seek, where we may cast off the curse of exile, attach ourselves to the soil—that source of quickening, creativeness and health—and renew our native life. A Homeland is not given or got as a gift; it is not acquired by privilege or political contracts...it is made with the sweat of the brow. It is the historic creation and the collective enterprise of a people, the fruit of its labor, bodily, spiritual and moral, over a span of generations (4).

From "In Judea and Galilee," 1917:

But even here the purity of our aspirations was clouded. The fields were worked, it was true, by Jewish hands, but their watchmen were hired Arabs...Was it conceivable that here too we should be deep in Galuth, hiring strangers to guard our property and protect our lives? ... We became convinced that we could not, by a single assault, storm this citadel of non-Jewish watch and ward—we would have to prepare for a long war, to fight our way step by step and guard-post by guard-post. We decided to start hostilities at once (15-16).

From "Zionism—the Hard Way and the Easy," 1931:

We are not blind, withal, to the fact that Palestine is no void. Some million Arabs inhabit both sides of the Jordan, and not since yesterday. Their right to live in Palestine, develop it and win national autonomy is as incontrovertible as is ours to return and, by our own means and merit, uplift ourselves to independence. The two can be realized. We must, in our work in Palestine, respect Arab rights, and if our first contract was unhappy, we were not in the wrong. Nor, perhaps, were the Arabs, for there are historic imponderables. We knew we lived at the edge of the desert, that our neighbors still kept largely to its ways; so we quickly raised a posse for self-protection, and many of our finest men paid the price of insecurity with their lives. Before the World War, and after,

we declared roundly that we should always be unsafe, till we were so numerous that we could defend ourselves (35).

The moral content of Zionism and its necessary practical objects demand a policy of rapprochement and mutual understanding towards the Palestinian Arabs, in economics, enlightenment and politics (37).

But we shall never let ourselves become 'protected Jews' in Palestine, and never a ruling race (38).

Announcing:

A Parade Upon the Land

Partial list of participants in order of appearance

Homo Erectus
Neanderthals
Amorites
Canaanites
Phoenicians
Hebrews
Hittites
Philistines
Babylonians
Persians
Macedonians
Romans
Byzantines
Arabs
Seljuk Turks
French
British

territory < L. *territorium* "land around a town, domain, district"

< L *terra* "earth, land"

< IE *ters*, "thirst."

History is narrative unfurling within, and extending out from, each and every one of us. Our histories collide when we come to occupy the same space. Suddenly we are now faced with having to share our history. When this happens, some of us become very busy marking territories and defining boundaries, sometimes because we are forced to by the others' agression, but sometimes because we only want to share with those we choose.

In 1831, nearly a century before David Ben Gurion entered the Jaffa port, Muhammad Ali, ruler of Egypt, sent an army commanded by his son, Ibrahim Pasha, northward into Palestine, which was, at that time, a somewhat lawless outpost of the massive Ottoman Empire (Kimmerling 6). Ibrahim Pasha conquered the area of present-day Palestine and Syria and was duly appointed by his father as governor of the land, including the people upon it, all of whom were accustomed to being forgotten about, more or less, and left alone, to a degree. Muhammad Ali, eager both to modernize and to win the favor of the European powers, had Ibrahim Pasha institute two sweeping measures. The first measure granted all non-Muslim residents full legal rights, and in some cases non-Muslims were given privileges not granted to Muslims. Secondly, Europeans were invited "to open consulates and to expand and institutionalize religious missionary activities" in the Holy Land (Schölch 49). And so began the Holy Land rush.

However, before missionary activities really began heating up and Europeans, as well as others, started flooding into the Holy Land, the people of Palestine revolted against Ibrahim Pasha. As Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal write in The Palestinian People: in 1834 "the important families and sheikhs from Nablus, Jerusalem, and Hebron informed

Ibrahim's civil and military governors they could not supply the quotas of conscripts for military service demanded of them..." (8). Later, other notables refused to pay taxes. Finding this unacceptable, Ibrahim sent Egyptian troops into these area, and as so often seems to be the case in Middle East, the villagers and, in this case, *fallaheen* (agricultural peasants), fiercely united, causing significant damage to Ibrahim's forces. However, not before the Egyptian army "reduced 16 villages to ash" and took overe Nablus where they leveled the city, killed the men or conscripted them into the army, raped the women, and had their way with 120 adolescents (11).

Kimmerling and Migdal explain that the revolt took hold and spread so easily because "Ibrahim refused to respect the autonomy of the local notables" and "his radical measures of direct governance and taxation made people, especially among the powerful ayan, feel that the social, religious, and economic fabric of the society was at risk" (10). This concern was not simply that of those in power. The villagers were eager to repel the Egyptian forces because Ibrahim's reforms were radically changing the way they farmed, specifically, "the crops they grew and the markets they were grown for, their legal relationship to the land, and their ties to the powerful social forces above them" (12).

Kimmerling and Migdal make the case that much of the conflict in Palestine today is the direct result of the displacement the fallaheen experienced in light of the agricultural reforms, the institution of new land ownership laws and the increasing industrialization of the area. These were brought about by several Pashas of Egypt, Ibrahim included, but were later wholeheartedly furthered by Europeans with economic interests in mind.

What happens to a people when they lose their connection to the land?

An 'Ataba, a Palestinian song, usually sung by farmers, workers and shepherds, though also sung at weddings.

The breeze of our homeland revives the body
And surely we cannot live without our homeland
The bird cries when it is thrown out of it's nest
So what of the homeland that has lost its own people?
(Palestinian Folklore)

❖

Ibrahim Pasha's reforms not only changed the way the inhabitants were able to relate to their land, but also helped forge a sense of a common identity (if only as a people rising in revolt against an overlord) which they had previous lacked. Kimmerling and Migdal write, "this revolt brought together such diverse groups as the Bedouins, rural sheikhs, urban notables, mountain fellaheen, and Jerusalem religious leaders, the unification of which, the authors point out, "would later constitute the Palestinian people" (7).

❖

History is a crazy spattering of individual decisions, of people acting in concert or alone with limited awareness and varying degrees of understanding, simultaneously in all locations all over the world in every moment. There is ample room for misunderstanding and lack of communication. Ample room for unexpected behavior.

In order to understand the continuing conflict in Israel/Palestine today, it is essential to know what happened in the century between Muhammad Ali's opening of the Holy Land in 1831 and the end of World War I in 1918. What had been a sleepy corner of the world

with scattered diverse communities was suddenly reawakened and transformed into a cosmopolitan center of religious tourism and capitalistic opportunism. It seems that everyone's imagination was suddenly filled with visions of opportunity in the Holy Land, everyone wanted a piece of the action taking place there. Two major forces were at play—religious zeal and capitalism/industrialization. At times the two worked in concert; at times they worked separately. But their combined effect set the stage for a major tragedy.

But first, a very brief history:

1831— The opening of the Holy Land. Beginning of the Holy Land Rush.

1838—British Consulate established in Jerusalem.

1839—Frederick Wilhelm IV, King of Prussia, responds to a petition which proposes the establishment of an independent Christian state of Jerusalem under the protection of the Great Powers: "I certainly share the wish that is expressed in your petition, that is...to elevate Jerusalem to the status of a Christian imperial state" (Schölch 53).

1840—British and Austrian troops help the Ottoman Sultan drive Ibrahim Pasha and his army back into Egypt.

—England's "Gentile Zionists," with the help of journalists, clerics, politicians and officers, petition the Sultan for Jewish colonies in Palestine to be erected under British protection with the idea that not only would "a great number of wealthy capitalists" flood into the country but that the "restoration of the Jews" would somehow "form a barrier against any future ambitions of Muhammad Ali" (Schölch 54).

1843—French Consulate opens in Jerusalem with the specific mission of reinforcing the Catholic presence in Palestine.

1849—Christ Church is erected in Palestine. A Protestant church with backing by the British and the Prussians, its Bishop is a converted Jew whose main task is conversion of other Jews (Schölch 51).

1854—Russian Orthodox monks and French Catholics begin to kill one another over who has precedence in the holy places of Nazareth and Jerusalem. Tsar Nicholas I of Russia demands the right to protect the Christian shrines in the Holy Land and moves troops into the Balkans, the northern part of the Ottoman Empire. The British, joined by the army of Louis Napoleon III, who has decided he must protect the interest of his monks, attack the Russians, resulting in the Crimean war.

1858—Russian consul/shipping agent enters Jerusalem.

1860's—Cotton exports from Palestine at all time high due to U.S. Civil War.

1877—Some of the businessmen in Jerusalem:

Grocers: 41 Muslims and 48 Native Christians
Vegetable dealers: 5 Sephardim, 39 Muslims and 11 Native Christians
Medicinal herb dealers: 49 Sephardim and 47 Ashkenazim
Spice dealers: 35 Muslims
Clothing dealers: 54 Muslims
Booksellers: 3 Sephardim, 4 Ashkenazim and 1 Native Christian
Wholesalers: 2 Native Christians and 5 European Christians
Blacksmiths: 6 Ashkenazim, 6 Native Christians and 2 European Christians
Printers: 10 Ashkenazim
Hotel Proprietors: 3 European Christians
Bag menders: 4 Muslims
Broom makers: 1 Sephardi

Population in Jerusalem:

	In 1840	In 1870	
Muslims	4,650	6,500	
Christians	3,350	4,500	
Jews	5,000	11,000	(Schölch 123-128).

1879—French consul sends report to Paris about Jaffa's commercial activity. Plans abound for capitalizing on imports and exports with the installation of a new harbor in direct competition with British interests.

1881-2—First *Aliyah*. 35,000 Russian Jews immigrate to Palestine to escape the pogroms, their expressed goal is "the political, national, and spiritual resurrection of the Jewish people in Palestine." Within a couple of years, half of the immigrants move out of Palestine while the remaining 15,000 establish new rural communities or move into towns (Jewish Virtual Library, "The First Aliyah").

1886—David Ben Gurion born in Poland.

1895—Alfred Nobel signs his will stipulating that his fortune is to be used to grant prizes, one of which is the Peace Prize, to individuals of great merit. Nearly a century later, Yasser Arafat, Shimon Peres, and Yitzhak Rabin jointly win the prize.

—Hajj Amin born. Future *Mufti* of Jerusalem and major organizer in the opposition against the formation of Israel.

1897—First Zionist Congress held with goal to establish World Zionist Organization.

1899—Large Jewish land purchase in Tiberius region creates tension with Arabs.

1904-14—Second Aliyah to escape Russian pogroms. 40,000 Jews arrive in the Holy Land.

1907—Yitzhak Epstein, a Hebrew teacher in Galilee, warns Zionist settlers that uprooting Arab tenants from the land will cause hatred (Kimmerling 422).

1908—Oil discovered in Iran.

1914-17—World War I.

— British High Commissioner in Egypt makes agreement with the Sharif of Mecca to establish an Arab kingdom in Middle East if Arabs help push Ottomans out; Arabs believe the kingdom will include present day Palestine/Israel.

—British and French agree to divide Ottoman provinces between them.

—British Foreign Secretary, Lord Balfour, responds to a letter from Lord Rothschild, head of the Zionist Federation in Great Britain, expressing British support for the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine. This becomes known as the Balfour Declaration:

> *Foreign Office*
> *November 2nd, 1917*
>
> *Dear Lord Rothschild:*
>
> *I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet:*
>
> *His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.*
>
> *I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.*
>
> *Yours,*
> *Arthur James Balfour* (www.wsu)

1918—End of World War I.

—All of Palestine occupied by British forces.

—General Arab Congress rejects Balfour declaration, says Palestine area was promised as part of Syria.

—Faysal b. al-Husayn b. Ali proclaims independence of Syria after revolt against British and declares himself King. Celebratory festival leads to riots in Jerusalem and Jaffa against the British and the Zionist Jews, inspired to a great degree by Hajj Amin and

friends shouting, 'Long live King Faysal.' Hajj Amin is arrested by British and sentenced to 10 years in prison, but he flees to Jordan and soon thereafter is elected director of 'The Arab Club,' a group of Arab nationalists from Palestine. Later, Herbert Samuel is appointed High Commissioner in Palestine and grants a pardon for all political prisoners. Hajj Amin returns safely to Palestine (Jbara 33-35).

On March 10, 1921, Herbet Samuel appointed Hajj Amin Al-Husayni, a descendent of the Prophet Mohammad whose family members had ruled in Jerusalem for many generations, as *Mufti* of Jerusalem. (The *Mufti* occupies the prestigious post of supreme judge in the Muslim court whose task it is it interpret religious law and to resolve disputes amongst the people). Taysir Jbara explains in Palestinian Leader Hajj Amin Al-Husayni that as the High Commissioner of Palestine, Samuel, a Jew from England now residing in Jerusalem, was required by British-adopted Ottoman law to appoint the new *Mufti.* Because of Hajj Amin's outspoken and radical stance against the Zionist desire to establish a nation in the homeland, Samuel did everything in his power to avoid appointing him. Samuel followed the Ottoman rule requiring a vote from the community selecting their top three choices, any of whom could then be appointed to the position. Hajj Amin came in last of six candidates. The first choice was a long-standing rival of the al-Husayni family, but before Samuel could appoint the *Mufti*, supporters of Hajj Amin posted signs claiming that Hajj Amin not only had a right to the position due to his family history but, more importantly, that Jews were interfering in the election. Anger flared, petitions were written, protests were held and eventually, against the advice of several British government officials, Samuel appointed Hajj

Amin. Perhaps in an effort to bribe him into acting in line with the British government, Hajj Amin was given the highest salary of any *Mufti* in all the towns, "thus giving temporary recognition to him as generally recognized head of the Muslim community" (41-45). Loyalty, however, cannot be bought. Fifteen years later Hajj Amin led the resistance movement against the British (46).

Hajj Amin was born into a wealthy Muslim family tracing its high position in Jerusalem to Muhammad ibn Badr (1380 C.E.) of Jerusalem, believed by the family to be the great grandfather of the al-Husayni's (Jbara 6). Over the generations, family relations with the Sephardi Jews, who comprised about 10% of the population before World War I, had been very cooperative. In fact, according to Taggar in The Mufti, "the commercial business of the Husaynis in Jaffa was directed for thirty years by the Jew named Y. Rockah, who was very much liked by Salim al-Husayni" (11).

Regardless of this relationship with the Sephardi Jews, the Husaynis and other local Arab families tried to block British-encouraged immigration of the Ashkenazi Jews in the 1890s. This really is not so surprising. For sixty years they had seen their homeland changing radically with the influx of religious missionaries and foreign capitalists into the area. What long established politically and religiously empowered group of individuals would willingly concede to the influx of huge numbers of people who specifically expressed the desire to create a nation on the land in which their family had resided for generations? Who, enjoying wealth and prestige, would willingly agree to the threat that the land, and the people upon it, over which they had such great influence, would fall out of their realm? That is to say, quite likely theirs was not simply a religiously inspired Muslim response to the threat of religiously inspired Jews, but a territorial response of a wealthy, politically savvy people to the potential loss of power.

Hajj Amin, born into this family struggling to retain its power, was ready and eager to fight against the Zionist enterprise and the establishment of a homeland for the Jews. He spent much of his time developing relations with other leaders of the Arab world, gaining their support and enflaming their passion for the cause. He worked tirelessly to build a coalition of Muslim Arabs eager to oppose the Jews. Yet I wonder if he knew that, one year before he shouted, "Long live King Faysal!" in the streets of Jerusalem, Faysal himself had sent a letter to the post World War I Peace Conference in Paris stating:

> We Arabs, especially the educated among us, look with the deepest sympathy on the Zionist movement. Our deputation here in Paris is fully acquainted with the proposals submitted yesterday by the Zionist Organization to the Peace Conference, and we regard them as moderate and proper. We will do our best, in so far as we are concerned, to help them through; we will wish the Jews a hearty welcome home. . . . The Jewish movement is national and not imperialist. Our movement is national and not imperialist, and there is room in Syria for us both (Ben Gurion 124).

Regardless of whether Faysal really meant what he said or was merely playing the politician, to offer the Jews a "hearty welcome home" was easy enough for someone like himself who didn't directly reside in the "home" to which they were being welcomed. Enter the difference between a Palestinian Arab and the generic term "Arab." For the greater Arab community, Palestine was and still is a "cause." For the people who were physically displaced by the Israelis, Palestine is a land they lost and a home to which they wish to return.

root
noun: the part of the plant, usually below ground, that holds the plant in position, draws water and nourishment from the soil, and stores food.

verb: to search about

The Olive Grove
by David St. John (1949-)

Never lost in its false, dense weather
The man in the olive grove sits

Dreaming as the fog drifts
And smokes through the lattices of the branches.

There is nothing about his life
He does not know. He knows that even the split

Parings of his bones will at last gleam
In the wet earth. He knows the buckle

Of muscle will fasten his heart, as the coronas
Blaze out of the their saints. But where, he thinks,

Is that blessing pale as summer?
Where is the reaper beneath his shoulders of wheat?

The bark of the trees flakes in long curls.
The man in the olive grove crouches a moment

Beside the turned roots, their shoots
Like the hair pulled from the moon's harvest shag.

He shakes out his pockets—
Photos torn from a newspaper, a letter from

A friend blaming him, lint, a ring of keys
To a chain of rooms, phone numbers smudged into

Names, a tan cigar, matches turned to clay, clay.
What is visible at last in the dark

Leaves gutted in the road's throat? Or
Does the wind remember the last room of the valley?

He thinks he must remember the business
Of a man in the olive grove, though he has never

Before lied. He told what he saw.
He was milk to everyone; the certain pale modicum

Of desire. But the heart of the window breaks—
Now the peacocks sweep the grove.

Someone steps out onto the path
Bowing, as if beginning a dance he does not know.

Everything is over. Once more. The worst is past.

Like Los Angeles poet St. John, I am not the only Californian trying to somehow capture the essence of the grove, of what it means to be surrounded by and wrapped in the life-giving properties of trees, while aware of death, perhaps even embracing death, and contemplating the value of what we humans make and acquire. What, of all we create and carry with us, will be "visible at last in the dark leaves gutted by the road's throat?" What is man's business in the olive grove?

My daughters and I recently drove through the Central Valley of California, where the roads slice through mile after mile of agribusiness farmland—through giant fields of lettuce and artichokes, radishes and beets, and acres and acres of fruit-bearing trees. It was springtime and the sun, while still winter thin, was growing richer and fuller. Delighted by the retreat of winter, we were happily singing nonsensical songs, playing with harmony and rhythm, being silly, having fun. Suddenly we came across a huge orchard that had recently been uprooted. Row after row of trees had been pulled from the earth and laid out upon the ground, one next to another, their branches crushed to the ground, their tangled roots jetting up into the air. This sight extended for miles in all directions. We grew very quiet, each haunted by what we saw. My younger daughter said, "I don't like this, it gives me the creeps," and my older daughter and I knew exactly how she felt. It was as though we had

stumbled upon the aftermath of a crime scene, a rape, a pillage and plunder, a tragedy to which we must bear witness. I couldn't help but wonder if this whole orchard had been destroyed to make room for a more fashionable crop, some genetically altered species that would resist root rot, or for a gated community of over-sized houses scrunched tight on miniscule lawns.

This crushing feeling came merely from viewing trees on land I was speeding over at 60 miles an hour with the windows rolled up. It was neither "my" land nor my family's land. I was a stranger, with no specific emotional or financial attachment to the trees and their abundance. I could not smell the freshly exposed loam. I could not taste the released minerals now swirling in the air. I couldn't feel the rough edge of the bark in those dying trees. And yet, I was overcome with sadness.

It was not a far stretch, then, for me to imagine what it is like for those villagers in Palestine who have awakened to the sound of Israeli Defense Forces bulldozers mowing their olive orchards into the ground. It is hard enough seeing trees that have been carefully plucked up whole from the ground and laid out neatly to rest. (One shudders to think of the size of the machine that was capable of pulling 14-16 foot trees whole from the ground.) What must it be like to walk in the ruinous rubble of bulldozed orchards? We've all seen the photographs in the paper. A huge bulldozer looms menacingly while a bescarfed woman is weeping amidst a mess of broken branches, ripped and shredded trunks, and snarled, exposed roots. She and her family are lamenting the loss not only of their livelihood but of something deeper and more organic (from the Greek *organikos* "of or pertaining to an organ"), lamenting as one would the loss of some essential part of one's own body.

There is something harrowing about the deliberate destruction of anything that has given us life, and most especially the destruction of something we have sweated for,

pampered, climbed upon, carefully snipped at, shaped, and pleaded with. Trees seem a bit like our children in that regard. There is a reciprocal relationship in which we fret and sweat and hope for the best and they, with luck, bloom and bear fruit that helps sustain us. In the case of olives, not only is the fruit edible and its oil a healthy supplement as well as an ingredient for soap, but its leaves are known for their curative powers and its oil was used for centuries to light lamps. It is an amazingly resilient and generous tree; growing a new tree from a mother olive is almost as easy as sticking one of her branches into the ground and waiting for new life to sprout.

While it is true that death is a part of life and there is a time for all things to die, we wish for things to die of their own accord, for old age to stake its claim. We do not like the thought of a violent death.

Olive trees can live a thousand years. How many generations have tended these trees? How many different peoples in the parade of conquest might have been nourished and sustained by them? Who planted them and how many people are buried near them?

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Tenakh/Old Testament
Nehemiah 5:11

Please, give back to them this very day their
fields, their vineyards, their olive groves and
their houses, also the hundredth of the
money and of the grain, the new wine and
the oil that you are exacting from them.

Holy Qur'an 24:35

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth.
The parable of His light is as if there were a niche

And within it a lamp
The lamp enclosed in glass
The glass as it were a brilliant star
Lit from a blessed tree, an olive,
Neither of the east nor of the west
Whose oil is well nigh luminous
Though fire scarce touches it...

root: *the source or origin of a thing*

David Ben Gurion writes:

> If a people has a right to say 'This is my own, my native land,' it can only be because it has *created* it [author's italics]. The soil is nature's guerdon and man cannot make matter out of nothing. Whatever serves for man's enjoyment is nature-made. All that man does is to work with hand and brain to adapt for his own use and benefit the materials which nature provides. Fitting the land by labor to a nation's needs: tilth and enrichment of the soil, paving of roads, setting up a means of communication, unearthing of hidden treasures and natural resources, building up of industry—these are the making of a Homeland (4).

How quickly the vision changes in this paragraph from a man with a shovel diverting water from a stream, listening to the gurgle and rush of water and feeling the sting of sweat in the eye, to a man encased in an air-conditioned behemoth machine ripping trees from the ground.

This is not just a story of Israeli Jews versus Palestinian Arabs or of a simple "us versus them." This is the story of all of us—Ben Gurion, St. John, my daughters and me—being witness to and being participants in the advance of industrialization upon a traditional, rural way of life. We are all, all of us living on this earth, tangled together in the exposed

roots of our earth-given heritage. Some of us are weeping, some are celebrating. Some of us do not know what to think. Those who are weeping walk every corner of this earth as do those who are celebrating. The dividing line is not ethnic, religious, or national. Even still it is not that simple. Even still it is not only a matter of those who celebrate advancement vs. those who mourn the loss of our past. No. Do not most of us celebrate the new freeway as we mourn the uprooted trees on the side of the road?

Victim Number 18
Mahmoud Darwish

Once the olive grove was green.
It was, and the sky
A grove of blue. It was, my love.
What changed it that evening?

At the bend in the track they stopped the lorry of workers.
So calm they were.
They turned us round towards the east. So calm they were.

Once my heart was a blue bird, O nest of my beloved.
The handkerchiefs I had of yours were all white. They were, my love.
What stained them that evening?
I do not understand at all, my love.

At the bend in the track they stopped the lorry of workers.
So calm they were.
They turned us round towards the east. So calm they were.

From me you'll have everything,
Yours the shade and yours the light,
A wedding-ring and all you want,
And an orchard of trees, olive and fig.
And as on every night I'll come to you.
In the dream I'll enter by the window and throw you jasmine.
Blame me not if I'm a little late:
They stopped me.

The olive grove was always green.

It was, my love.
    Fifty victims
Turned it at sunset into
A crimson pond. Fifty victims.
Beloved, do not blame me.
    They killed me. They killed me.
        They killed me.

It is interesting that Mahmoud Darwish, in *Victim Number 18*, writes in the last stanza "Fifty victims." Interesting, because historically, factually, there were only forty-nine victims in the Kafr Qasim massacre of 1956, the event around which this poem centers. Although Darwish might be suggesting that he is the fiftieth victim, or that all Palestinians, collectively, are the fiftieth victim, I believe we are, all of us around the world, collectively, the fiftieth victim. We all suffer the consequences of this unfolding tragedy, in varying degrees. Maybe we have not suffered directly from this particular event, maybe we do not suffer directly at all from the whole bloody mess of Palestine, but we certainly all share the reality that at any given moment one group of humans will cruelly slay another out of anger, fear, mistrust, or illusions of superiority. Perhaps Darwish is even suggesting that the very Israeli soldiers who slew the villagers were, collectively, the fiftieth victim. Certainly, at least in the dark depths of dreams, anyone with a conscience must be haunted by the horror of his or her own savagery.

The Kafr Qasim massacre is the local tragedy of a small village embedded within a world-wide power struggle upon the land and for the land or, shall we say, a struggle with much of humankind's unrelenting desire to control the land and everything upon it. On the eve of the 1956 Suez war, Israeli troops were stationed along the Jordanian border presumably for fear that Jordan might join forces with Egypt and attack Israel. (This was not an irrational fear. They had joined forces in the 1948 war against nascent Israel.)

But let us back up a bit and find a place to begin a story that has beginning. In order to understand why the Israeli troops were revved up for action in the fist place, we must at least begin with Abdel Nasser, President of Egypt. Nasser, wishing to control the dangerous and unruly Nile, asked Britain and the United States for money to help build the Aswan Dam. The Western powers refused due to Egypt's cozy relations with Russia. Not surprisingly, it was Russia who then came to Egypt's monetary aid. Perhaps Nasser developed a grudge against the British for this refusal, but soon thereafter he decided to wrest control of the Suez canal from the British and French companies who "owned" the area. At the same time, because of continued hostile relations with Israel, whom Britain and the U.S. supported, Egyptian forces blocked the Straits of Tiran, a narrow waterway that is Israel's only outlet to the Red Sea. In response, France and Britain, in conjunction with Israel, decided to invade and occupy the Suez region.

On the evening before their troops invaded Egypt's Sinai peninsula, the Israeli military ordered all Arab-inhabited villages along the Jordanian border to be locked down tight in a 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. curfew. This order was not entirely unwarranted. Arab Palestinian fighters had been launching small attacks against Israel from Egypt and, to the dismay of King Husayn of Jordan, from Syria by way of Jordan. Were these particular villagers involved with the freedom fighters? At approximately 4:30 p.m. the *mukhtar* (mayor) of Kafr Qasim, a tiny village, was informed of the new curfew time. He told the soldiers that many people were outside the village working either in the fields or in the nearby city, Tel Aviv, and that they would not know of the new curfew time and would therefore arrive after the deadline. The Israeli soldiers said they'd take care of them. And that they did. The soldiers stationed themselves at the entrance to the village and as villagers came up the road toward home they were ordered out of their vehicles or, in some cases, off their bicycles, and

were shot. In all, forty-nine people were killed, including thirteen women and girls in the back of a farm truck who were returning home after picking olives all day. In some cases, the villagers were not only shot by the Israeli soldiers, but their bodies were bashed and bludgeoned or their abdomens were ripped open. That same evening, an entire family was killed when first a young boy ran out of his house to bring in his goats and was shot by the soldiers. The father came out to investigate and was also shot. The mother ran out and was shot as she was dragging his body toward the house. The young daughter, hearing her parents' cries, came out of the house only to be shot herself. The grandfather, enclosed in the house, died of a heart attack upon learning that all his family members were killed.

As it turned out, Jordan never entered the short-lived war. As soon as Britain and France invaded Egypt, Russia threatened to come to Egypt's defense, prompting President Eisenhower to urge all sides to agree to an immediate cease-fire.

The degrees of complexity in this story, the layers of cause and effect, of action and reaction, of fear and terror and crime, of culpability and innocence, are astoundingly difficult to tease apart. On one level, this is just another story in the saga of Jews versus Arabs in which each side, acting out its own rage, maims and kills individuals on the other side. On a deeper level it is a story of individual people swept up in, and sometimes victimized by, national interests, a nationalistic cause or some kind of "freedom" enterprise. This story has been, and is being, written over and over again all over the world. David and Goliath dress up in different costumes, assume various ethnic identities, and even switch roles from time to time. In the Biblical story, you may recall, David is the Hebrew and Goliath is the Philistine or Palestinian. But that doesn't matter so much any more.

The real story is that we are all, each and every one of us, both David *and* Goliath.

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root: *something resembling or suggesting the root of a plant in position or function, i.e., something capable of providing nourishment, energy, new growth*

Rabbis for Human Rights, an Israeli rabbinic association that includes Observant, Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative rabbis, have recently begun purchasing new olive trees for those Palestinian villagers whose groves have been destroyed by the Israeli Defense Forces. Together with the Arab villagers the rabbis and their friends plant the trees. Motivated by a strong desire for peace and justice and a willingness to serve, they are trying, against great odds, to build good relations with Palestinians, one person, one village, at a time. Appalled that fellow Jews would destroy olive groves, they write on their website:

> *Eytz chayyim hi, l'makhazikim bah —*
> *Eytz chayyim hi, l'shalom.*
> *A Tree of Life she is, for those who hold her close;*
> *A Tree of Life, for shalom.*
>
> As Torah teaches, 'Seek peace and pursue it.' — Go forth from your house and your habits to pursue peace. And if even this should fail, 'Even if you are at war with a city . . . you must not destroy its trees' (Deut 20: 19-20)"

Not all Rabbis, however, are willing to participate in the tree planting peace endeavor. There are those who not only would not work with Palestinians, but are equally unwillingly to associate with the Reformists and the Reconstructionists with their women rabbis and "modern" interpretations of Judaism. Nor will they associate with secular Jews. These traditionalists prefer to remain "pure" and therefore associate only with those who share their exact interpretation of Judaism. They strongly believe theirs is the "right" way

and as such they foster exclusivity and isolation in their communities; an isolation that breeds fear of the Other—a fear which complicates relations between Jews, making the already diverse socio-political groups in Israel yet more difficult to unify. Haim Gordon relates the following story in his book, Make Room for Dreams: Spiritual Challenges to Zionism:

> A student group from the Gur Yeshiva with its rabbi-teachers went on a summer trip to the Galilee and Golan Heights. One evening they reached a pool in the Jordan river, and since they were alone, the boys asked permission to enter the pool with their black suits and shoes to enjoy the water. They knew nothing about the pool and did not know how to swim. As it turned out this was a dangerous pool for nonswimmers, with deep sucking muck at the bottom; within moments of their plunging into the water fifteen of the yeshiva boys were drowning. Their heavy clothes filled with water pulled them under, as did the muck. The rabbis in charge, who also did not know how to swim, stood on the shore and screamed or recited Psalms. Luckily five or six secular Jews arrived at the moment for a picnic, and quickly jumped into the water to save the yeshiva boys. Eleven were saved, some only after respiratory first aid. Four drowned.
>
> One of those saved by the respiratory aid arose when he felt better, and approached a policeman who had arrived after the incident to file a report, and who wore a skull cap. "Thanks for saving my life," he said.
>
> "I didn't save your life, go thank those men over there. They saved you," the policeman answered.
>
> "We don't speak to those kind of people. They don't wear skullcaps. They're Goyim," responded the yeshiva boy.
>
> Perhaps I should add that neither at the funeral, nor in their response in the media, did the heads of Gur Yeshiva ever thank the secular Jews who saved eleven of their students. Nor did they personally accept blame for encouraging their students to live a life so alienated from the land of Israel, that entering into a pool can result in disaster (109).

Gordon points out in his book a contradiction with far reaching consequences. On the one hand these traditionalists, "black hats," as he calls them, believe in a "covenant

between a people, a specific land, and God" (3). Yet, unlike many of the early Zionists who farmed the land and thus had a physical relationship with it, this group sees the earth as a symbol and their relationship to it as metaphorical. The Land is a means to a spiritual end; the land means little to them, for they are almost completely out of touch with it. Ironically, then, while these individuals are opposed to secular commercialism, they in fact contribute to the divide between a rural way of life based upon a deep knowledge of nature's cycles and an interdependent relationship with the earth, and a commercialized way of life in which the earth is simply a commodity, be it religious or secular. Shulamith Haraven, in The Vocabulary of Peace, relates a story that illustrates this point:

> Not long ago, an Orthodox rabbi in Jerusalem, who had apparently carried out all the commandments of the Torah, bar one that had not come his way, decided to carry out the remaining one: the mitzvah of letting the mother bird go. The Torah places a clear restriction on hunting birds, saying that if a hunter happens to find a nest with a mother bird sitting on its young, he is permitted to take the young, but 'thou shalt...let the mother bird go' (Deuteronomy 22:6). The intention of this commandment should be clear to anyone with any sense: it is a limitation of cruelty, and obviously not a deliberate invitation to it. What did the rabbi do? He went out with the deliberate intention of finding a nest with a mother bird sitting on its young, took the fledglings, and let the mother bird go. His pupils saw this and followed suit, and a frantic hunt began for nests containing birds sitting on their young, with a complete disregard for the suffering caused to the birds, until the Society for the Protection of Nature intervened for fear that certain species of birds might be exterminated....Fortunately, said the man from the Society who dealt with the matter, the yeshiva students were not particularly skillful at climbing trees or rooftops, or else the survival of some species might really have been endangered (71).

root: *an offshoot or scion*

There are so many little streams flowing off in every direction, following the downward slope, seeping through crevices and pooling in both shadow and light, and roots creeping below the surface seeking outlets and tributaries.

Shall I speak again of David Ben Gurion who lost the innocence of his first heady years on the Land? Of how he grew further and further from the experience of actually tending the land as he became more and more involved in politics, and how he came to recognize that a simple life in the Holy Land was an impossible dream? Or how he discovered that his own brand of zealotry was mild compared to that of others in his "tribe"? In 1944, he spoke out against the terrorist acts being committed by Jews against fellow Jews and against the British. He wrote: "Two problems face us, or, more accurately, two inescapable alternatives. The first is between terrorism and political, Zionist, resistance, for in no circumstances can these co-exist. The second is between terrorist organizations and an organized Yeshuv, an organized people, an organized movement of workers. One or the other we must choose; both we cannot have" (142). He called the Israeli terrorist organizations "gangsters" who "are simple maniacs, persuaded that this or that assassination will bring redemption to Israel. They murder Englishmen and Jews with the same fanatic zeal" (145). Do I speak of how Menahem Begin, the commander of the terrorist organization, Irgun, became Prime Minister just thirty-three years after Ben Gurion announced a "hunting season" to route these gangsters out of the Land before their activities led to civil war?

Shall I speak more of Irgun, which was formed by dissenting militants fed up with the moderate stance of the Haganah, the Israeli underground military organization which

had been established in 1920? Irgun was founded by Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky, a Russian immigrant who had been imprisoned for possessing arms and helping to incite a riot, the very same riot where Hajj Amin shouted, "Long live King Faysal"? (Jabotinsky, like Hajj Amin, was granted a pardon by Herbert Samuel.) Do I mention how Jabotinsky, after his release from prison, called for a Zionist reform and, when he was unable to achieve the transformation or the unity he sought, started the Revisionist party whose main goals were a Jewish homeland on both sides of the Jordan river and the expulsion of the British from Israel?

Should I also note how the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) sprouted from the seed of Irgun?

Or shall I speak instead of Hajj Amin al-Husayni and his increasingly desperate hostility toward the British and the Zionists? Of how, after organizing the second World Islamic Conference, held in Jerusalem, in which many Islamic leaders (except those who opposed Hajj Amin) joined together to discuss how to ensure the continuation of Muslim dominance in Palestine, he persuaded many non-Palestinian Muslim authorities to contribute funds to a growing resistance movement which included refusing to sell Arab land? in 1935, when *jihad* was publicly announced by Sheikh 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam against the British, Hajj Amin refused to join the cause, stating that a political effort was in progress to solve the problem. Yet shortly thereafter, when Qassam died, it was Hajj Amin who declared that a Palestinian strike, if not all-out war, was unavoidable. In exile after 1937, first in Lebanon and later in Iran, he continued his efforts to thwart the Zionists. Shall I speak, too, of how Hajj Amin traveled to Italy to meet with Mussolini, and then to Germany, where, face to face with Hitler, he announced Arab support against the British, in the hope that Hitler in turn would support the Arab Palestinian cause? (Jbara 199-192). Or shall I mention how he,

like the Spanish Jew HaLevi of 1141, made a "panting" return to Jerusalem just before he died?

identity [L. *identidem* "over and over."] *See "history."*

Golda Meir, Israel's third Prime Minister, appointed in 1948 by David Ben Gurion to the Israeli provisional government as Ambassador to the Soviet Union, is quoted in June 15, 1969:

> It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist (Chapman 192).

The land existed. The people living on the land existed. However, technically speaking, "Palestine" never really existed. (Palestine or *Philistia,* land of the Philistines, those ancient enemies of the Israelites, was the name given to this part of Syria by the Romans after they banned Jews from Jerusalem in the second century C.E. By renaming Judea, the Romans attempted to erase Hebrew identity and to break their allegiance to the Holy Land.) Although the name, *Philistia*, was used by the Romans, an actual country named Palestine defined by specific borders around a specific plot of land and governed as a sovereign state has never appeared on a map.

Thus, marginally, and unjustly, Golda Meir's statement about the non-existence of a place called Palestine is historically correct. However, no one but a master rhetorician with political aims would so callously wipe away the identity of hundreds of thousands of people, and no one but an individual willfully choosing to ignore the humanity and the rights of the Palestinian people would allow her to get away with it. Many Israelis did not. Perhaps those who did not were some of the same people who years later, in 1982, joined a PEACE NOW demonstration held in response to the massacres at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon. The massacres took place during Israel's invasion of Lebanon, a war conceived

and orchestrated by current Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon, who was at that time Minister of Defense.

Shulamith Haraven, who marched in the demonstration, writes:

> In the autumn of 1982, during the war in Lebanon, Christian Phalangists burst into two Palestinian refugee camps near Beirut, Sabra and Shatila, killing several hundred people. No Israeli participated in the deed; but since the area was under Israeli army rule, public opinion in Israel was outraged. A PEACE NOW demonstration of 400,000 people in Tel Aviv demanded a legal investigation into the question of responsibility for letting the slaughter happen (157).

What happened during this protest exemplifies the deep divide in Israel between those who recognize the humanity and the rights of the Palestinians and those who do not. Haraven writes that while she and other peaceful protesters marched through the streets of Tel Aviv, "organized groups of violent hooligans" shouted "You won't succeed you PLO supporters, you're trash, trash, trash, your commission is trash, you set up a commission against Arik (Ariel Sharon)...we will kill you all, we will do a Sabra and Shatila on you, we will make a holocaust on you, you trash, trash, trash. Arik is the king, Arik" (158).

A side note: PEACE NOW was founded in 1978 by 348 reserve officers and soldiers of the IDF. I quote from their website: "PEACE NOW adheres to the Zionist values upon which the State of Israel was founded, believing that a democratic, Jewish state can and must be secured without subjecting another people. In recognition of the simple fact that there are two peoples in this land, Palestinians and Jews, each with a history, claims and rights, PEACE NOW has called for the recognition of the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination in their own state, alongside Israel" (1).

The name Palestine was revived in 1919 at the Paris peace conference, but its definition proved troublesome. Not only was the definition of what constituted the Palestinian people a problem, for at first both Sephardi and Ashkanazi Jews in this area were

considered Palestinians, but, even more troublesome, was the fact that the borders of the land kept shifting.

Palestine, the shape shifter:

1920 – "Palestine," under British mandate, refers to the whole of the land that today includes the state of Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jordan.

1922—Palestine is divided by the British into two sections. West of the Jordan river (much of present-day Israel) is referred to as Palestine territory, and Jews are 'permitted' to build there. The area east of the Jordan River is called TransJordan territory. However, Jews and Arabs in both the Palestine and TransJordan territories carry Palestine Mandate passports.

1946—TransJordan, known today simply as Jordan, attains independence.

1947—The UN votes to partition what remains of Palestine, the area west of the Jordan river, into sections, part of which will comprise the Jewish homeland and be called Israel. Jews accept the agreement, although much of the land they are "granted" is desert. Arabs, at least those in a position to do so, reject the UN Partition Plan, rejecting on principle the formation of a Jewish state on any portion of the land, regardless of whether the Arab people currently occupy that specific area of the land or not.

identity: *the condition or fact of being:*

1) the same or exactly alike

2) a specific person or thing

3) the same as a person or thing being described or claimed

In order to be in the condition of any of the above, one must in fact exist.

According to Munir Akash in the introduction to Adam of Two Edens, the legal status of Mahmoud Darwish, born in 1941 in the then-Palestinian village of Birwe in upper Galilee, is 'present-absent alien.' This status was assigned to all non-Jewish residents living in the part of Palestine that became Israel who were absent during the 1948 war. The Darwish family, like many others, had fled into Lebanon just before the Israeli army destroyed their village. The following year, they returned to their country illegally, too late to be included in the census of those Palestinian Arabs who had survived the Israeli attack and had remained in the area, and were thus granted Israeli citizenship. They were assigned this status because Israel had no record of their existence. The status of 'absentee' is inherited; children of 'absentees,' whether born inside or outside the state of Israel, are similarly classified as 'absentees.'

After many years of living in Israel and being thrown into jail for his poetry and released again only to be brought to court yet again, Darwish eventually moved to Beirut where he joined the PLO, and where he also earned the title of 'official poet of the Palestinian people.' In some sense his adoption by the Palestinian people as poetic spokesman for their cause is ironic, for, as Akash writes, "he still remains one of the strongest supporters of Arab-Jewish coexistence in the land of his birth" (45). His desire for coexistence itself seems ironic given that Darwish suffered so much difficulty while living in

Israel. But Darwish does not blame the Jewish people for these difficulties. He blames it on politics. In the same introduction mentioned earlier, Akash quotes an interview in which Darwish says:

> The military judge who punished me for my poetry was Jewish; the woman teacher who taught me Hebrew and inspired my love for literature was Jewish; my English teacher, a stern man, was Jewish; the woman judge who presided over my first trial was Jewish; my first lover was Jewish, my next door neighbor was Jewish, and my political comrades were Jewish. I did not look on Jews as a separate entity. From the beginning, for me, coexistence has seemed possible both psychologically and culturally. The main problem is political (45).

Even though Darwish personally does not blame the Jews for his exile, when we consider the following poem by him, it is not difficult to see why he has developed such a following in the Arab world and why he is considered a champion of the Palestinian right of return. Darwish understands displacement, he has lived it. He understands inhumanity, he has experienced it. He knows what it is like to feel invisible, he has had his rights ignored.

Identity Card
Mahmoud Darwish (1942-)

Record!
I am an Arab
And my identity card is number fifty thousand
I have eight children
And the ninth is coming after a summer
Will you be angry?

Record!
I am an Arab
Employed with fellow workers at a quarry
I have eight children
I get them bread
Garments and books
from the rocks.
I do not supplicate charity at your doors
Nor do I belittle myself at the footsteps of your chamber
So will you be angry?

Record!
I am an Arab
I have a name without a title
Patient in a country
Where people are enraged
My roots
Were entrenched before the birth of time
And before the opening of the eras
Before the pines, and the olive trees
And before the grass grew

My father...descends from the family of the plow
Not from a privileged class
And my grandfather...was a farmer
Neither well-bred, nor well-born!
Teaches me the pride of the sun
Before teaching me how to read
And my house is like a watchman's hut
Made of branches and cane
Are you satisfied with my status?
I have a name without a title!

Record!
I am an Arab
You have stolen the orchards of my ancestors
And the land which I cultivated
Along with my children
And you left nothing for us
Except for these rocks..
So will the State take them
As it has been said?!

Therefore!
Record on the top of the first page:
I do not hate people
Nor do I encroach
But if I become hungry
The usurper's flesh will be my food
Beware..
Beware..
Of my hunger
And my anger!

The identification card to which Darwish alludes is a source of frustration for many. Shulamit Aloni writes in the introduction to Haim Gordon's, Make Room for Dreams: Spiritual Challenges to Zionism:

> In the identification card that each Israeli must carry, his religious-ethnic affiliation is inscribed, not his citizenship; we are thus identified as Jews, not Israelis. This card is a basis for segregation between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority; it often nurtures the traumatic hatred of the Goyim that many Jews brought with them from Diaspora life (x).

Not only can the card be used as a basis for segregation between Jews and Arabs, but it likely creates difficulties of conscience for secular Jews. Consider someone like Yehuda Amichai, whose poems I have included throughout this piece. Although his parents, who immigrated to *Eretz* Israel in 1935, were Observant Jews, Amichai himself became an atheist, a secular Jew whose poetry expresses his lifelong struggle with human conceptions of God. Did his identity card, with religion dovetailed to ethnicity, bother him? Where does Jewish ethnicity end and religion begin? This question continuously haunts the Jews. Karl Shapiro writes in the introduction to his Poems of a Jew:

> No one has been able to define Jew, and in essence this defiance of definition is the central meaning of Jewish consciousness. For to be a Jew is to be in a certain state of consciousness which is inescapable. As everyone knows, a Jew who becomes an atheist remains a Jew. A Jew who becomes a Catholic remains a Jew. Being a Jew is the consciousness of being a Jew, and the Jewish identity, with or without religion, with or without history, is the significant fact (Cohen 10).

I quote Shapiro not simply to point out the complexity of Jewish identity and the ways in which Jews struggle with what it means to be Jewish, but also because I want to contrast the struggle for and about Jewish group identity with what I understand to be the struggle for and about Palestinian group identity. I know it is not as simple as what I am about to say, but while Jews grapple with what it means to be Jewish and how it is that any

one Jew fits within the whole schema of Jewish-ness, still Jews are held together by a common ethnicity, a shared sense of history, a shared mythology, and, in some cases, a common religion. Palestinians, on the other hand, have had, to a very great degree, a group identity thrust upon them due to their shared circumstance. Ethnically and religiously diverse, they have had to forge a group identity simply because of their common struggle to return home.

I want to be very clear, however, that not all Palestinians, i.e., not everyone living in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, were displaced by Israel. Some people have immigrated to these areas because of the economic opportunities such close approximation to Israel provides. And some have come just to join in the fight—whether they are anti-Semitic and wish to "push all the Jews into the sea" (a phrase commonly used by Israeli writers), or they imagine this as a religious struggle of Muslims versus Jews. Whatever their reason for immigrating and thus potentially identifying with the Palestinian cause, theirs is not a struggle to return to the specific house on the specific plot of land upon which their great-grandfather planted fig trees, persimmons and an olive grove. Theirs is not a desire to walk through the house they remember from their childhood, or of which they have heard their mother speak, and of which she dreams from time to time, but in her dreams the rooms keep changing sizes and her father transforms into someone else.

❖

A Zajal, type of song, from Palestine

May God protect my mother; she gives generously
She throws the seeds, and we harvest flowers
* * *
The farmer slept under the olive tree

What a wonderful sleep and rest
The grape vines, the lemon trees, and the apples
Made me plant my land and give
* * *
The young lady brings water from the spring
The *kufiyya* is the best fashion
The popular evenings in the middle of the neighborhood
While everybody is drinking Arabic coffee
(Palestinian Folklore)

Oh, but how we humans love to categorize, to name, to define, to describe, to lump together, to sort by shape or size or color, to examine and explain and solve. If only everything were as straightforward as our logic wishes it could be. If only everything were as clear cut as two separate groups of individuals grappling with their group identity. But as far as identity goes, the boundaries are even more nebulous and artificial than the arbitrary borders of nations. Inclusion and exclusion, I and Other, is universally felt and ultimately colorblind.

A case in point: Barta'a, the village split asunder in 1949. As it turns out, the village was reunited in 1967 when the border was lifted due to the war with the surrounding Arab countries. Suddenly, the villagers, who had seen each other only once during this eighteen year separation, began sharing a village once again. Unfortunately, this proved rather difficult. Those villagers who had been on the Jordanian side of the ravine had maintained their rather simple, somewhat impoverished, lifestyle. And, like Darwish, since they were not in Israel when Israel was formed, they were not granted Israeli citizenship. Those on the Israeli side were citizens and had become more cosmopolitan; they were reasonably well educated, they commuted to the city for work, and they had grown accustomed to the individuality that democracy nurtures. The two sides of the village suddenly discovered

which the divide that separated them was not the ravine. Those on the Israeli side have more in common with, and therefore identify better with, the Israeli Jews than with their relatives. They look down on the people on the other side of the ravine and refer to them as *dafawim*, or 'West Bank people.' One of the *dafawi* villagers relates the following:

> They have Israeli identity cards, so they can go to Tel Aviv and hang out all night and no one does anything to them. I have to return to the village at night, or hide if I want to sleep there. My car has the blue license plate of the *dafawi*, and they have yellow Israeli plates. They feel like kings because of that, because the police will stop me at a roadblock and let them pass, like Israelis. Once I was driving along the road and the car behind me honked the whole time so that I would get off the road and let him pass. I looked in the mirror and saw an Israeli Arab. It didn't help me any—he almost threw me off the road, and as he passed he even shouted, 'Move aside, move aside, you dirty *dafawi*, go back to Nablus where you came from!' (Grossman 122).

❖

home: [<ON *haims* "village"; akin to haunt] **haunt**: [<ON *heimta* "to lead home"]

To recur persistently to the consciousness of; remain with.
Deep, to the heart of.
Inextricably linked to place.

> All things have become subject to uncertainty, memory of place is uncertain, endurance of place is uncertain, even the meaning of place is uncertain. (Munir Akash 43)

In The Yellow Wind, David Grossman describes his visits to a variety of Palestinian Arabs within Israel, in Palestinian territories, and in refugee camps. All of these visits are undertaken in his effort to understand the conflict from the Palestinian perspective. He also has conversations with Jewish settlers in the West Bank who have illegally built homes on Palestinian territory. Grossman describes what he sees, relates stories, and interviews a number of individuals. These conversations are particularly telling of why any resolution of this land dispute has been so difficult and remains so elusive; and why the tribal code of "you killed one of us so we will kill one of you" has spun out of control. Many of the stories Grossman relates are not as clear cut and black and white as stories of Israeli soldiers killing villagers and Israelis being killed by suicide bombers. They are stories of ambivalence and vacillation, reflecting a wavering image not unlike what we glimpse of ourselves in a moving stream.

In one of his conversations, Grossman speaks with Palestinians who were uprooted from their village in 1948 and moved into a refugee camp called "Deheisha." In 1972 they were allowed to return to the village from which they were exiled. Only those with money to rebuild a home were able to return. The others remained behind. Although the women

Grossman converses with are pleased to have returned, their emotions are conflicted. Return was not such an easy matter after all. Yet the complexity comes less from becoming accustomed to second class citizenship in a homeland that is now a "foreign" country, than with feelings of attachment, the mirage of memory, and our so very human certainty that the grass is greener elsewhere. One of the women originally had to remain behind in the refugee camp when the others returned. She says: "We were angry that they were returning here to a real life, and we remained there, in prison. They cried with happiness, and we cried out of jealousy and pain" (66). She describes how when those who returned to the village would bring homegrown vegetables to those still in the camp they would kiss the vegetables at least a hundred times before eating them. Yet later in the conversation she says of the camp: "I miss it. I get goose bumps when I think of it....And I miss the people who were there. I miss my house." Grossman reflects:

> Apparently she is right, I think. A person can miss even a hard, bad place, if there were beautiful moments there, and if he has a memory of a single instance of grace, and maybe loved someone there or was loved. I thought of the army bases in the Sinai where I once served, jumbles of iron and cement thrown at random on a mountain, and how we made our lives there full, and how these neutral, dead places become dear to us (68-69).

I am reminded of stories I have heard of Holocaust survivors remembering their time in the concentration camps; how there were moments in their terrible circumstance; flashes of connection and insight; tangled relationships which germinated and ripened; small, quiet corners where the sun struck the wall just so; or a certain sound that they, with a confused degree of guilt and confusion, miss. I am also reminded of stories I have heard of Jews in the first and second Aliyah who fled to Israel to escape persecution at home, only to feel displaced and homeless there and pass their days in longing reminiscence about their homes, their jobs, their loves, their life in Russia or Poland or whatever country from which

they came. Of the original 35,000 who arrived in *Eretz* Isreal in the first Aliyah, 20,000 left. Many of these individuals were not a part of the Aliyah in the religious sense. Many of them were secular Jews. They were not looking for spiritual redemption, they were instead refugees looking for a safe haven. Ironically for them the "Homeland" was not home, but felt like exile, and they decided to build a new life elsewhere.

In the introduction to one of Mahmoud Darwish's books of poetry, Pslams, Ben Bennani translates a passage in which Darwish describes his return home after the 1948 war:

> One evening I was told: tonight we return to Palestine. We walked in the dark for many kilometers of rough and steep mountain paths... In the morning I came face to face with a steel wall of lost hope. I was finally inside promised Palestine. But where was it? No, this could not have been Palestine—that land of magic, the end of terror and torment! It did not embrace me, as I had anticipated. And upon my return, after two years of waiting, I found myself a prisoner to the same fate of exile. The land was no longer mine. No longer mine!...I did not return to my home and village. It was painful for me to accept the fact that both were destroyed and burned. How could entire villages be destroyed? And why? And how are they built again? (Bennani 5).

Mahmoud Darwish's experience is not unlike that of other Palestinian Arabs as well as that of European Jews after World War II. The Online United States Holocaust Memorial Museum includes video taped interviews with Jews who survived the Holocaust describing their attempt to return home after the war. Blanca Rothschild from Lodz, Poland describes her return to Lodz after release from a concentration camp:

> [After an] indescribable journey, we finally reached Warsaw. Warsaw was reduced to rubble. It was unrecognizable, and I had to go to Lodz from Warsaw. I had no money, I had no clothes, I had no luggage, I had nothing. I was just...and there was a man with a semi truck, sort of. And I found out that this man standing there, he said, "Hop on, you can go with me." And I hopped on, and we traveled to Lodz... And when I went to the house that we lived in before, the Polish superintendent who took care of the building reacted with tremendous surprise—not elation, but surprise that I survived and came back. And what for? He said, "You don't even have to go to your place because the Germans emptied it. They took the carpets and everything. There is nothing left and other people live there." I said, "Maybe something is left. I want to go up." And I went up, and they wouldn't let me in (CFHS).

Where and What is Home?

Finally, a conversation I had recently with an Israeli gentleman who works at the deli down the street from me: the deli, as he likes to point out, is owned by Jordanians. We who have immigrated to the U.S. have no issue with one another, he proudly claims. We work together just fine and have not carried this conflict with us. In fact, he tells me, when it comes to the people living over there, everyone just wants be left alone and live in peace, all except for the few fanatics and extremists on both sides of the divide. And yet, when I ask him to tell me where he was born and why he left Israel, his body language changes. He becomes animated and edgy and begins averting his eyes. He tells me that he was born in an

area near the Red Sea on the Sinai Peninsula (land Israel forcefully acquired during the 1948 war with Egypt). He speaks of how his family built their home there. He says that before the Jews arrived in this area the land was desert, just plain dried up desert; useless land with nothing growing on it. They arrived, and with hard work, turned the desert into fertile land. But, he says, once the Arabs, the Egyptians in particular, saw what could be done with the land, they became greedy and wanted it for themselves. Thus in 1981, several years after the signing of the Camp David Peace Accord between Israel and Egypt, he and his family were given just two weeks notice to pack up everything and evacuate their home. The land upon which they resided and upon which they had built a life was being returned to Egypt as part of the agreement. He sighs. The real pity, he tells me, is that the land is now falling into ruin; returning to its native desert state. Such a waste, he says. And the coral reefs in the Red Sea, he laments, they were so beautiful, so beautiful. The water was so clear you could see down hundreds of feet. Now the water is cloudy and the coral reefs have all been destroyed by the Arabs who fish with dynamite and nets.

His manner and his story exemplify the complex nature of identity relations in Israel/Palestine. On the one hand, this Israeli gentleman believes he is not prejudiced toward people of Arab descent—witness how well he feels he relates to his Jordanian boss—and yet his body language and attitude reveal a prejudice. Echoing the sentiments of Ben Gurion, he feels the Jewish presence in Palestine is justified (though not for him for religious reasons), because he believes Jews are more civilized, they know what is best for the land. The Arabs, he implies, do not deserve the land because they do not know how to take care of it—witness the destruction of the Red Sea. For him, it seems, this is black and white. The Red Sea is as it is today because of the Arabs. Period. Never mind that people, irrespective of

ethnicity or national origin, are destroying natural habitats with dynamite (or something equivalent to its destructive power) all over the world.

The Palestinian Arabs are equally likely to blame the Israelis for the destruction of the land and, more importantly, the disintegration of a humanitarian culture. One of the *dafawin* of Barta'a, says, as reported by David Gordon:

> ...after all, the whole world knows that the Palestinians have great potential, knowledge, and experience of life. Israeli Arabs have already lost that gift, that 'spark.' They have become spoiled and rotten. Their thinking is already lazy. So they have color televisions and I have only black-and-white, and he eats meat every day and I have meat only once a week. He thinks that's culture, but he is wrong. Israel improved their standard of living a great deal, but their minds have gone to sleep...And another thing, we are better than them when it comes to human relations. Israel was a bad influence on them in that area as well. Friends and relatives aren't as close. They've become like the European Jews among you... (121).

Blaming the other, criticizing the other, imagining the ill-intent of the other—these are such natural human traits. We all are guilty of prejudice and divisiveness of one kind or another, and we all are victims of it. Why do we allow this feeling of victimization, validly felt or no, to bring out these very same qualities in ourselves? Why do victims become oppressors?

Shulamith Haraven writes:

> If my only identity is that of the victim, the world's deterministic and doomed victim, I may (or so it seems) commit any atrocity, including exiling Arabs from their homes (excuse me, dear hawks, 'relocating them') and taking possession of their land, because I am the victim and they are not; because this is the only way I define myself and my identity—forever. But if I also define myself as the son, or daughter, of a people with a splendid four-thousand year history of responsibility, of conscience, of repairing and improving, of appealing for social order and justice, of a legal system nearly unparalleled in the world, and the protection of these traditions; if I have indeed learned and internalized all these, so that they define my identity; then even if often in history I have been the victim of others, I will never

> oppress those weaker than myself and never abuse my power to exile them (excuse me, dear hawks, 'bus them out') (153).

Haraven reminds us of how important perception and perspective are. She urges us to recognize that embracing what is beautiful and honorable in us as human beings is more important than clinging to the fear, negativity, and feelings of victimization that become excuses for morally depraved actions (let us be sure to include Palestinian suicide bombings here). She reminds us (and we Americans especially need to be reminded as we attack Afghanistan and Iraq in the wake of the tragedy of September 11, 2001) our true humanity is grounded in conscience, respect for self and other, social order, justice and ethically-based law. To follow the tribal code, to victimize others because we have been victimized, leads to never-ending bloodshed the world over.

PART II

Making Peace with Contradictions

peace: [<L. *pax, pacisci* "to confirm an agreement," *pangere* "to fasten."]

[IE. *pak*, "fang."]

Perhaps peace is not as peaceful as we imagine, given the bite hidden within it.

My Child Smells of Peace
Yehuda Amichai

My child smells of peace.
When I lean over him,
It is not merely the scent of soap.

All men were once children who smelled of peace.
(And in all the land was heard no more
The sound of the mill.)

Oh, land torn like clothing
That cannot be mended.
Harsh and lonely ancestors in the caves of Machpelah.

My child smells of peace.
His mother's womb promised him
What God cannot
Promise us.

I know the smell of which Amichai speaks. I remember an amazing, heavenly fragrance emanating from my daughters just after each was born. There is nothing like the smell rising from a newborn's head. It is intoxicating. After my second daughter's birth, I wrote a poem comparing her fragrance to that of a freshly printed book. I saw her life as an one edition, ready to be opened for the first time and read, by her. We have such bittersweet hope when our children our born. We want their lives to be safe and their paths to be straight. We wish for them love and joy and all good things, all the while knowing that they will encounter such ugly human traits as hatred, malice, spite and prejudice. Worse yet, we

realize they may encounter these very traits within themselves. We arm them with love to protect them against fear, knowing that fear is a human condition. We pray that somehow, by some miracle, they have taken the best of the womb from which they sprang, and left the rest, the ugly bits, to be tossed away with the afterbirth. I wish I could agree with Amichai that the womb promises peace. It may be a safe and relatively peaceful place in which to form (although even that is sometimes not the case), but the womb gives even fewer promises than God.

We are human, after all. We are a mixture of the best and worst qualities.

I wish to tell a story of a man who initiated a peace prize upon his death after spending his life developing dangerous technology used in weapons manufacture and warfare. This is also a story about an Israeli woman who no longer takes food, clothing and other supplies to her Palestinian friends because the guilt of inequity in crossing the checkpoint is too great for her to bear. And it is the story of me flying across the world to sing healing melodies to women entangled in a conflict thousands of years old, who had gathered, many for the first time, to discuss ways of building peace. It is a story ripe with contradictions, complexities, connections and fractured identities—an unfolding human drama within the self and within the world community. It is also a story of people choosing to save a drowning scorpion even though the scorpion will sting.

Alfred Nobel encapsulated the contradictions of his era within his own personality. He took refuge in the nature-inspired thoughts of such Romantic poets as Shelly and Byron while he simultaneously suffered the pain of laboring and helping birth the Industrial Age.

His father, who had to leave his Swedish homeland to find work, created munitions for the Russian army, and when Alfred was a young man he assisted in this effort. Thus, at a young age, Alfred Nobel was set on a life long path in which he developed munitions. He spent years perfecting the use of nitroglycerin as an explosive and finally developed dynamite. He envisioned its use in road building and construction and was dismayed to see it used in weapons manufacture and warfare, despite the fact that the initial impetus for his research was grounded in his and his father's own weapons research. Even at the age of eighteen he seems aware of such contradictions. He writes:

> You say I am a riddle --- could be
> Because we all are riddles incomprehensible
> Pain as the starter, the trial in the end deepens
> Lumps of dirt continuously reproduced
> What on earth are we here for?
> Bashful ideas bond us with the hell
> Lofty ideas lift us to the heaven
> (Erlandsson 2)

Early one summer morning in 2003, my friend, singer Salima Ginny Matchette, and I arrive in the Oslo airport. The first thing I am struck with is silence. We walk down a long hallway built of wooden floors and glass walls. Out one window a beautiful deep green forest lies just across the tarmac. Through the other window lie the innards of the airport, polished and clean but not antiseptic, with a natural and practical beauty. There are no televisions. There is no piped-in music. I hear only the soft susurration of hundreds of tired passengers shuffling down the hall toward customs and baggage claim. I feel embraced by the natural quiet and simple beauty of this land of the trolls, the hidden ones.

We have come to Oslo, city of the Nobel Peace Prize, for a Middle East peace conference sponsored by and specifically created for women. We stand in the building where the Peace Accord between Israel and Palestine was signed in 1993, a sham of an accord that was destined to fail. Why? Because it appears, given what happened after the accord was signed, that neither Rabin nor Arafat were really committed to peace. Their hearts lay elsewhere. Rabin was a long-time military commander with specific objectives for Israeli expansion who had a knack for doublespeak and an excellent PR team. Rabin's attitude toward the Palestinians is summed up pretty well in his infamous dictate to the Israeli army that they "break the bones" of the stone-throwing protestors. After the peace accord was signed, he allowed the continued expansion of settlements in Palestinian territory. Worse yet, he poured valuable resources into the building of a by-pass highway between the Israeli settlements which crossed through and broke apart Palestinian agricultural land, placing yet greater burdens on the Palestinian people and fueling greater resentment. The highways were for Israeli use only; Palestinians needn't bother to get in their car. The term by-pass highways says it all... pass over, pass through... leave behind, ignore, exclude, diminish.

Arafat, as a representative of the Palestinian people, was not much better. A member of the PLO, he had been exiled in North Africa for years. He was out of touch with the Palestinian people, stuck in the past, and eager to reinstate himself as a leader. To put it bluntly, personal gain and vindication had a lot to do with his desire to "negotiate" a peace agreement for the Palestinian people. He continues to support efforts to regain lost land through violent methods.

❖

In another of Alfred Nobel's fascinating and tangled contradictions, he specified Norway in his will as the site for awarding the Peace Prize, even though the other prizes—physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, and literature—were to be awarded in his homeland, Sweden. Nobel chose the Norwegian *Storting* (Parliament) for this honor in 1896, just as debates over whether to fight for independence from Sweden roiled within its walls. Either the *Storting* had purchased vast amounts of Nobel products and so he felt beholden to them or he had an incredible sense of irony. Or perhaps, Romantic idealist that he was, he imagined this might somehow forestall a confrontation between the opposing governments, which nonetheless took place, with Norway gaining independence in 1905, the same year Nobel's dearest friend, peace activist Baroness Bertha von Suttner, was granted the Nobel Peace Prize; the same year the second Aliyah began.

Despite his love of peace, Nobel continued to research, invent, invest and manufacture explosive-related products throughout his life. He was, it seems, addicted to his research. Like an addict he couldn't stop even when he saw how destructive it was, preferring instead to insulate and comfort himself with the belief that the horror of the technology alone would be enough to stop men from abusing it. To Baroness von Suttner he once wrote:

> The dynamite itself will make the war impossible as long as its power is developed to a maximum technically. Because only if we realize its terrible power of mass destruction, will we not use it headlong in the war. Now that it will not be used recklessly in the war, it will eventually be used for the purpose of peace (NSTM).

What Nobel, like so many before and so many since, apparently didn't grasp or chose not to grasp or grasped but couldn't accept, is that once something is created all bets are off. No

matter how honorable your initial vision, people will use your creation in whatever way they choose. Even God had to learn this the hard way.

Yet in some sense Nobel was right, for we measure our nuclear warheads by their equivalency to the amount of TNT it would take to produce an equal effect. A 5-megaton blast, for example, is a blast that five million tons of TNT would be required to produce. Although certain political leaders seem to get a rise out of brandishing their nukes like stereotypical cowboys in a B-rated Western, no one has been crazy enough to use one since Fat Boy and Little Man were dropped on Japanese citizens and we saw with horror, as Nobel warned, "its terrible power of mass destruction."

In an articled called, "What is Nobel Prize," The National Science and Technology Museum sums up Alfred Nobel's contradictions this way: "He invented war devices, but committed himself toward peace. He received only two years of formal school education but was a self-made scientist and entrepreneur with a good command of five languages.... He was the inventor of the nitroglycerine blasting cap, but later he relied on nitroglycerine for his heart condition. The way that he built his fortune was despised, but the Nobel Prizes funded by the fortune have stood for the world's highest honor" (2). We can reasonably surmise that Alfred Nobel had multiple, conflicting identities struggling within him.

The inner workings of Nobel are like Israel and Palestine and every other human collective. Nations, states, religious organizations, affiliations of every sort are *human* in nature, made up as they are of human beings, and are as complex as an individual human psyche itself, full of contradictions, opposed desires, conflicting needs.

ignorance: *lack of knowledge, learning, information. From ignore: to disregard.*

Ignorance is a choice. Sometimes it is to our benefit, a form of protection. Perhaps it is a blessing that as I enter the Nobel Peace Institute and prepare to sing a song I have written especially for the opening of the conference, I am unaware of the internal differences of opinion within the Israeli and Palestinian societies. I am blessedly ignorant of the real complexity of the problem. I believe most Palestinians and Israelis want peaceful relations between two independent, equally viable states, while those who disagree with this deceptively simple solution are a few radical extremists on each side who are somehow crazy enough to view bulldozing homes and orchards, targeting individuals with air strikes, or strapping explosives to one's chest and bombing buses and cafes, as reasonable behavior. I have not yet witnessed, although I will within an hour, a beautiful, glowing Israeli woman Rabbi sweeping angrily from the room because she is offended when an angry and frustrated Palestinian woman demands an end to the Israeli occupation that made it impossible for her colleague to attend the conference and speak as scheduled because she could not get a visa. The speaker herself barely made it to the conference, after many weeks of negotiations with the Israeli government for permission to leave Palestine and after being turned back at several checkpoints.

The Rabbi who left the room does not see Israel's control of Palestinians and its continued expansion into Palestinian territory as occupation. For her, the existence of Israel and its aggressive "defensive" strategy is a necessity. Israel is a safe haven, one tiny corner in the world where she believes she can live without fear of persecution. She does not find it ironic that this fear of repeated persecution based on past experience has turned the victims

into perpetrators themselves. It is not ironic for her because her pain is very real, not an abstract concept. Relatives died in the Holocaust. Friends were killed in suicide bombings.

When I stand before the eighty or so women and the handful of men who have gathered for this conference and begin to sing to them, I have not yet heard, although I will within a day, that some of the Palestinian women at the conference—beautiful, confident seekers of peace—believe that suicide bombings are a justifiable means of defense. Not because they condone violence, but because they feel trapped and helpless against the Israeli military machine. They may have been granted the right to govern themselves with the Oslo Peace Accord, but without resources and a means of livelihood their government is little more than a facade.

My ignorant perception of the Other and my over-simplification of the conflict– *those* Palestinians, *those* Israelis, *that* Middle East crisis—is natural, for as yet these women are still the other to me, despite my desire to embrace them with my liberal, leftist, empathic leanings. I have not yet witnessed the proceedings of the conference, where angry and hurt women feel compelled to relate their pain before they can even begin to listen to one another, and I have not yet done my research on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. I have not been reminded yet again that nothing involving human relationships is as clean-cut and elegant as the sleek black leather on blonde wood chairs of the Oslo airport. Our simple, functional objects belie our internal, and correspondingly external, turmoil. We make objects of one another. Perhaps because we perceive the Other as outside of ourselves, like our bed, our car, or our toothbrush, we easily imagine the Other as a simple, functional whole, not a complex, miraculous mess of conflicting thought and emotion so much like ourselves. No, as I contemplate the beautiful artwork on the Peace Prize plaques of Yasser Arafat, Yitzhak

Rabin and Shimon Perez (whose Prizes only later feel dirty and cheap to me), I have not yet perceived the obvious: unity is an illusion we always assume of the other.

As I stand before the delegates and sing about the suffering of our mothers, I feel I am singing to my cousins who have an overlapping heritage and a shared ancestry, family members who have been perpetually arguing for ownership and control of a piece of our Earth, which scientists suggest is at least four billion years old, and in truth cannot be "owned" by anyone. These members of our Family are fighting over land that existed long before our mythical first mother and father are believed by some to have walked away in shame and sorrow from the garden we have since drained and littered with oil wells. They struggle for rights to bit of land that will exist long after our species has perished, most likely through self-destruction. In my meaner-spirited moments I have regarded the Israeli/Palestinian conflict as one of fleas arguing over the ear of a dog. Less mean-spiritedly I have perceived the situation as siblings fighting over the family inheritance, with Jerusalem, treasure to all, the coveted jewel to be gained at all costs and by any means, the prize of fratricide among them.

I sing the song I wrote for them, these women who have traveled so far to make peace. I sing in sympathy with all mothers who have suffered because of their children, not only those in the ancient religious stories of drama and sacrifice (which vary within religious traditions), but those caught in today's conflict, as well. As it turns out, I not only sing to the Middle Eastern delegates, but I sing to a woman who has traveled from New York to attend

this conference. She lost her son in the World Trade Center bombings. She wants to help bring about peace.

Although I recognize that Jews, Christians and Muslims have different beliefs, for example, about which son Abraham led to sacrifice, my intention is to view these stories from a mother's perspective. I leave it for others to argue over whose version is the "correct" story. The real truth of the matter is that everyone has suffered, and too often the woman's perspective is ignored, her story forgotten. (As further evidenced by the fact that the conference received negligible attention from the media even though highly ranked government officials from Israel, Palestine and the United States were in attendance.) It is time to remember the mothers. Invite them into the dialogue. Ask for their help to heal our family:

> Oh Eve our mother, we call upon you,
> You know how it feels to be cast from your home.
> And Abraham's mother, whose name is forgotten,
> Like so many mothers who've come and gone.
> We love you, our mothers,
> We remember you.
>
> And we call Sarah, clinging to Isaac
> as he's torn from your arms toward his sacrifice.
> And we call Hagar, thirsting with Ishmael,
> Lost in the desert of your banishment.
> We love you, our mothers,
> And share in your suffering.
>
> And we call Mary, sobbing for Jesus
> As he's dragged through the streets bleeding from thorns.
> And we called Ameneh, aching with sorrow,
> Dying before Mohammad is grown.
> We love you, our mothers,
> And ask for your healing.
>
> Mothers, mothers, can you hear us calling?
> It's time to help us heal our family.
> We call our fathers, our sisters and brothers,
> to help us bring peace to our family.
> Forgive one another and end this suffering.

Join with the mothers and heal our family.
Bring peace to our family.
We are one family.

My feeling that we are all a family is easy for me as an American living a cushy life half a world away. I can afford to think philosophically, critically, and at first a bit condescendingly, about the situation because I am not caught in the crossfire. I am not waking up with a pounding heart every time I hear a helicopter fly overhead in the night. I am not eyeing everyone suspiciously when I sit in a cafe or on a bus. I, a white middle-class, middle-aged woman of Northern European descent, with a college education and an American ancestry dating back to the early 1600s, can afford to be tranquil. I've been insulated my whole life, safely tucked under the wings of successful oppressors.

Yet again, it is not so simple. While I recognize my inclusion in a dominate and oppressive group, I must also honor my own particular family. Although there are some who may have taken advantage of their privileged circumstance, others in my family have worked very hard for social justice and human rights. Generations ago, some joined the Underground Railroad and provided shelter to freedom-seeking slaves. And my maternal great-grandmother lobbied extensively in Sacramento, California for the release of Japanese-Americans being held in internment camps during World War II.

religion: [<L. *re* + *ligare* "to bind, tie," *ligio* "link," cf. ligament.]

An Arab Shepherd Seeks a Kid on Mount Zion
by Yehuda Amichai

An Arab shepherd seeks a kid goat on Mount Zion
And on the mountain across, I seek my little son.
An Arab shepherd and a Jewish father
In their temporary failure.
Our voices meet above
The Sultan's Pool in the valley between us.
We both want to prevent
Our son and our kid from falling into the process
Of the terrible machine of Had Gadya.

Later, we found them in the bushes,
And our voices returned to us
And cried and laughed inside us.

The search for a kid or a son
Was always
The beginning of a new religion in these mountains.

Had Gadya (Aramaic), "An Only Kid," is often sung at the conclusion of the Passover Seder in an effort to amuse children. Composed of ten stanzas the verse runs as follows:

A father bought a kid for two *zuzim*;
a cat came and ate the kid;
a dog then bit the cat;
the dog was beaten by a stick;
the stick was burned by fire;
water quenched the fire;
an ox drank the water;
a *shohet* (ritual slaughterer) slaughtered the ox;
the *shohet* was killed by the Angel of Death who
in punishment was destroyed by God.

❖

I plan to dress up for the evening dinner in the ballroom, but I never have a chance to return to my room to change. After the day's meeting comes to a close I approach two of the four orthodox Muslim Palestinian women attending the conference and ask them if they'd like me to find a place to pray together tomorrow, Friday, the holy day of Islam. Assuming that I am one of the conference organizers, they are surprised and pleased I have considered their needs. What they don't understand, in fact it takes almost an hour of discussion to convey, is that I am asking to pray with them. Their confusion is not surprising, first because their English is far from perfect, but second and more importantly because I hardly look the part. How can I possibly know Muslim prayer? I am a Caucasian American woman dressed in Western garb without *hijab*. They are polite. Yes, yes, that would be nice. But we never resolve the issue; it just hangs there in mid air for awhile and then casually fades away. When we are finally alone in the room one of the women sings a short *Surah* from the Qur'an in a voice sweet and strong enough to enflame a longing heart.

We enter the ballroom and sit together at a table . The man who is traveling with them joins us. Are these Orthodox Muslim women required to travel with a man, I wonder? Two other Palestinian women join us, both atheists. Another Palestinian woman sits down. I learn that she is Christian. I have come to hate these labels—Muslim, Atheist, Christian, Jew, Secularist, etc. They are too often a cause for division. We are all human beings, aren't we? During dessert one of the conveners of the conference randomly picks women out of the crowd and invites each to sing in turn. Wonderful, courageous women move to the middle of the ballroom floor and sing, regardless of their talent. They sing Palestinian or Israeli ballads and folk songs as well as American love songs. I encourage the woman who sang the Qur'an earlier to go forward and share a song with us—her voice is so pure and simple. No,

she replies, I cannot. I try again. No, she says, I shouldn't sing before men, it is against my culture. She didn't say it is against her religion. This pleases me.

This pleases me because in this very simple statement she shatters a long held assumption of mine. Up until this moment I have imagined that all Middle Eastern Muslim women, similar to me in method of prayer but other to me in custom and culture, view the rules of dress and conduct by which they live as religious duty and not as cultural convention. Although she does not directly say it, she lets me know that my choice not to wear *hijab* and my willingness to sing before men is symptomatic of my culture and has little if anything to do with the degree of my faith. This is refreshing to say the least.

The next day, during a coffee break from the intense negotiations—which up to this point have been really been nothing more than negotiations for personal space and personal story—I stand by an Israeli woman with sad eyes. She tells me that she has worked for many years trying to build bridges between Israelis and Palestinians but she has just about given up. In her efforts she has met many wonderful Palestinian families for whom she has developed a deep and abiding love. But during this last year she had stopped taking food and other supplies to these friends. Going through the checkpoint is more than she can bear. It is not so difficult for her personally. She is ushered through without a problem. No, the difficulty, the pain, comes in that moment of being ushered through while Palestinian mothers with sick children, students, and men with perishable goods must wait for hours in line, often to be turned away. The crack in the heart widens as she sees the way they are treated by the Israeli soldiers, who don't see human beings waiting in line but rather the Other they have been instructed to shoot if there is a hint of resistance or disorderly conduct.

Not long ago, I saw a photo of Palestinian children walking through a checkpoint on their way to school. Recent settlement activity and the building of a new barrier to protect those settlements has meant that their school, which used to be in Palestinian territory, is now on the Israeli side of the wall. In the photo, an Israeli soldier, rifle in hand, mans the gate while the children, obviously intimidated, walk through. When I saw this photo I thought of how on the ranch we would usher cattle through gates from one field to the next. Sometimes it was my job, as directed by my father, to allow only certain cows to pass and to shoo others away and keep them from getting through. I would shout and wave a big stick to try to scare them away, yet now and then a cow, either unafraid of me or filled with too much longing for the cows who had passed through, would ignore my waves and shouts and would try to run past me. That is when I would use my stick.

When the Israeli woman tells me of her anger at the checkpoints I wonder how Israeli soldiers of the IDF can reconcile within themselves the teachings of Judaism with their military requirements. Or, for that matter, how Palestinian Muslim extremists can justify killing unsuspecting people who are simply going about the business of their lives. Both sides are killing children and grandparents, doctors and students. I have tossed and turned a thousand times in the middle of the night, wondering how it is that "religious" people, no matter the religion, can be so violent in their piety. Violence in the nonreligious, although unacceptable, seems more fathomable somehow. But violence from those of us

who claim to follow the great teachers of humanity surprises me, for these teachers have provided ample instruction about how to respectfully treat one another.

And yet, I understand the need to believe God is on one's side. I also see how this belief, if perverted into a feeling of superiority, can be used as a basis for exclusion and a justification for violent righteousness.

I only later learn that the IDF is hardly a religious enterprise. It is mandatory for all (except certain observant rabbinical students) and is comprised of men and women from many different social, economic, political, and religious backgrounds. It also occurred to me only later that while the Palestinian suicide bombers may (or may not) reconcile their actions with a belief in religious martyrdom, they use themselves as weapons not for religious purposes but for the purposes of war, because they do not have the means to acquire such sophisticated weaponry as helicopter warships and Scud missiles.

As I have stated before, religious identities, ethnic identities, political identities: they are all mixed up in Israel/Palestine. And the fact is, some soldiers in the IDF, both religious and secular, become conscientious objectors because they disagree with the aggressive offensive strategy against Palestinians which Israel conducts in the name of "defense." In The Other Israel: Voices of Refusal and Dissent, a collection of essays by various authors, Sergio Yahni writes:

> *An Open Letter to Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, Minster of Defense*
>
> It is clear to me you have risked all our lives only in order to continue building illegal and immoral settlements.... The Israeli state has sowed despair and death both for the Palestinians and Israelis. Therefore I will not serve in your army. Your army, which calls itself the "Israeli Defense Forces," is nothing more than the armed wing of the settlement movement. This army does not exist to bring security to the citizens of Israel, it exists to guarantee the continuation of the theft of Palestinian land. As a Jew, I am repelled by the crimes this militia commits against the Palestinian people. It is both my Jewish and my human duty to resolutely refuse to take any part in this army.

> As the son of a people victim to pogroms and destruction, I cannot be a part of your insane policies. As a human being, it is my duty to refuse to participate in an institution which commits crimes against humanity (137).

❖

Shall we visit Alfred Nobel once again, this time at the age of eighteen during his educational travels abroad, before he joins his father in Russia? The year is 1851. The British Embassy is established in the Holy Land and the Protestants have erected *Christ Church* there. The Crimean War will begin in three years. Within a decade, cotton exports from Palestine to the United States will be at an all-time high due to the American Civil War. Nobel has recently studied chemistry in France and is now in the U.S. working in the research lab of a fellow Swede, John Ericsson, inventor of the screw propeller and designer and producer of the USS Monitor, a revolutionary armored ship used by the North in the Civil War. Nobel is reading and writing poetry. I wonder, is he contemplating Shelley as he works in the lab? Does he suddenly lift his head up from his work, reach for a pencil and scribble down poetic thoughts before returning to the problem of how the guns should be fastened to the ship? Or is he fully absorbed in his research during the day and only in the still, dark point of night when sleep evades him does he contemplate the call to peace and try his hand at a poem? He writes:

> In a heart like this
> With such affections and passions
> It seems that the bond between people
> Is the religion that shines
> (NSTM)

What kind of bond does he imagine when he writes these lines? The bindings and fastenings of affection, the genetics and shared histories that hold people together through

time? Or does he contemplate, after his recent chemistry studies, the attraction between atoms in a molecule, how the lack of electrons in one atom and the abundance in another cannot help but bring them together? Does he intuit how the breaking of these bonds—those of affection and history, and those on the atomic level—have the potential to end life on earth?

Not all bonds are the same even when they spring from the heart as affections and passions. In fact bonds made of affections and passions can be more explosive and destructive than dynamite and more exclusive than embracing lovers. They can also be the source of compassion seeking to heal the inequities of the world in spite of the odds.

This brings me to the story of the scorpion told by one of the women during the conference. It must be a very old story for when I research its origins later I find a Buddhist version, a Hindu version, and a Sufi version. No doubt there are others; good stories always make their way around the world and are willingly thrown into the cultural cauldron. The woman who shares this story tells it in response to another woman who has just wondered why we bother to build bridges to peace when others always want to tear them down.

Before I repeat the tale of the scorpion's rescue from the waters, it is interesting to contemplate the female scorpion. She is a cannibal. Most likely she ate the male after the mating ritual; if she had not, he would have eaten her instead. Just after her "babies" are born, after gestating for a year and a half, they climb upon her back and are tended to and carried by her until they are big enough to survive on their own. She is a cannibal, yet she does not eat them. She cannot see well, but she does not sting them when they find their

way off her back and venture out into the world. Is her willingness to nurture and protect them a sign of affection? Or is she just hard-wired by nature to perform this "motherly" task?

In one variation of the story we find a scorpion clinging to a branch just above the floodwaters, ready at any moment to fall into the water and drown. A mystic sees the scorpion there and reaches out his hand to save it. It climbs upon his hand and then as he places it safely upon the ground, it stings him. A companion of the mystic asks why he has saved the scorpion, knowing as he does that it is its nature to sting. The mystic replies that his nature is to save. To reach out in compassion toward others is in our human nature, the storyteller implies. Those who work for peace can't help it, even when the risk of being stung is high. In the Buddhist version of the story, the monk saves the scorpion many times over. Every time he does so the scorpion stings him, yet he never hesitates to extend his hand.

Compassion does not ask that things be fair or reasonable or logical. It only demands, and demand it does, that we act on the pain wrenching our heart when we recognize that the one clinging to the branch, about to drown, is not just out there, but is a part of us. We too are drowning even though right now we stand safely on the shore. The scorpion story is not one of us versus them, a nature to save versus a nature to sting. The scorpion herself is multidimensional, like us. Wrapped within us all is the capacity to nurture and the ability to sting. If we resist the impulse to sting, it is because we have made a choice to resist. I cannot explain why some people are more attracted to this choice, to the path of nonviolence and compassion, than are other people.

solution [L pp. of *solvere*, to loosen]

A breaking up or coming to an end; dissolution, break, breach

and/or

The act or process of dispersing one substance into another...so as to form a homogeneous mixture

Salima and I sing to the women every morning before they begin their talks. We sing to help them enter a tranquil, still place within themselves where peace is not simply an ideal or a potentiality but becomes instead an embodied reality. Music has a liquid quality. When made with deep intention, it meanders across cultural borders, carves through religious boundaries, breaks down the barriers of trauma. It trickles into the listener and settles into the wellspring of the heart. It pulls us back to the center, washes away fear and for a moment releases us from logic, reasoning and justifications. This is a good place in which to begin negotiations between eighty unique, complex, multi-dimensional women.

Although peace efforts may feel hopeless because they are so often repealed, rejected, scorned or resisted, they start a process of increased awareness, and sometimes of transformation. The woman who would not sing before men on the first evening, who would not get up and join hands in a line dance that night because of her culture, hugged a male Rabbi and joined in a circle dance on the last day. She had grown beyond her cultural boundaries in just a few days.

Of course, this is what worries many who resist such efforts. People are afraid, justifiably so, that their culture will be subsumed and homogenized, especially into Western liberalism. They worry that the very rules and restrictions which have held their societies together for hundreds, if not thousands, of years will be forgotten and lost in the process of blending with other cultures. They do not want to be dictated to by someone else nor do

they want their culture to become irrelevant. These are, of course, valid concerns. So often the dominate culture, the one with more money and better access to media, and thus with the ways and means to do so, will decide what is right and what is wrong, which stories are told and which hushed, who is a hero and who will be marginalized, vilified or forgotten. They will also decide who has access to what resources. At least this has been the pattern so far in human history. Can we break this pattern? Can two cultures live peacefully together without either one extinguishing the other? How do we share land if we do not agree how to live upon it, and who gets to decide what is right?

Such questions are central and primary, they reach down into the very core of our individuality and our group identity. And because of their primacy, they are incredibly difficult to resolve. Yet we face these same difficulties within any one society. We all grapple, to one degree or another, with how to strike a balance between the safety of tradition with the need for cultural transformation and growth which not only allows for, but respects and encourages, differences of opinion and variations of practice. And we must do this all while we share land and resources. Is this possible without each of us bending just a little?

I do not know if it is possible to ever fully resolve these issues to everyone's satisfaction, but what I do know is that we must try. I also know that when we meet and greet the Other she transforms, for us, from something imagined and prejudged into flesh, blood, bone, breath, thought and emotion. She becomes human to us. And like the belly of a pregnant woman, we grow in this meeting. Our cultural, religious, social, and personal identities expand. As the life stories of the people we meet enter into us and are integrated into our own psyches, the Other becomes a part of us. She is no longer a stranger. We are now more likely to care about her and listen to her. We recognize and value her voice.

Perhaps the women at the Oslo meeting accomplished nothing concrete during the talks, for the big issues of land rights and cultural and religious prerogatives remain untouched, for the moment. However, they gained connections, relationships, increased perspectives, and awareness. No doubt they will act upon their awareness. Here are some of their suggestions for how to foster peaceful relations with, and mutual respect for, one another:

- Rewrite the school text books in both Israel and Palestine so they no longer portray each other as villains and so that the next generation can see with a more balanced perspective. Include each other's voices in school curricula. (Efforts have already been made toward this end, although not always with success. In 2000, then Israeli Education Minister, Yossi Sarid, announced that Mahmoud Darwish's poetry would be included in the new curriculum for high school students. Then Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, quashed the idea claiming that Israel "was not yet ready for Mr. Darwish's poetry to be taught in the schools" (Akash 14).)
- Adopt towns across borders, with regular meetings and cultural events, including story telling and sharing of goods.
- Include the men—a movement of only women will not change things because it is often the men who cling more rigidly to traditional, patriarchal cultural roles.
- Invite Palestinian musicians to tour Israel and Israeli musicians to tour Palestine or, better yet, have them tour together throughout both lands.
- Hand out food and drink to Palestinians in line at the checkpoints in front of the soldiers, and encourage the soldiers to recognize the humanity of the Palestinians.

These projects, small in scope but huge in potential long-term impact, focus upon one-on-one interaction between people; they give a face and a story to the Other. They

soften cultural borders and expand individual boundaries without destroying them. They allow for respect of self and others, while nourishing a mutual exchange of ideas. They concentrate on sharing the best and most beautiful aspect of each culture. If this form of sharing grows in scope and dimension, the possibility exists that people will more willingly share land and resources with one another.

Perhaps.

Who knows? It is possible that if this were to spread throughout our entire Family over generations, then a parceled earth—a divided land with divided peoples—might eventually become merely an ancient story, one so old and so distant that people no longer know with certainty whether it is history or myth.

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