The intrigue, the military activity, and the intervention in Lebanon in the wake of Israel's capture of Sheik Obeid may temporarily distract attention from the fate of the Palestinian people, the central drama of the Middle East. But attention will inevitably return to that arena: one and a half million people living under occupation and struggling for their freedom and national self-determination.

We deplore the endless spiral of violence. We cannot accept as legitimate the senseless murder of Israeli civilians riding in a bus from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Whatever the motivation, this was a callous and destructive act. Nor can we accept the murder of other Israelis. There is no "moral equivalence" here: the actions by Palestinians, whatever their motives, are just plain wrong, barbarous, unacceptable.

Neither can we accept the pain, beatings, shootings, and killings inflicted by Israelis on Palestinians. These activities go far beyond self-defense. Right-wing settlers have begun to attack West Bank Palestinians, further destabilizing the situation. Angry crowds respond to individual acts of terrorism by attacking random Palestinians, creating an atmosphere that brings to mind the pogroms of Eastern Europe. Many Israelis worry that the West Bank settlers may soon escalate their level of violence and precipitate a civil war as a way to prevent any negotiations and subsequent settlement.

In this section we present an update on some aspects of the current political situation in Israel and the West Bank as well as some reflections on a strategy for how to create the psychological preconditions for the possibility of peace.

Psychological Dimensions of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

Michael Lerner

All the "objective conditions" seem ripe for peace in the Middle East. The superpowers have no interest in perpetuating the conflict and are willing to lean on their respective client states to make concessions; Iran's fanaticism appears to be less of a regional factor after the defeat of its war efforts against Iraq and the death of the Ayatollah Khomeini; the PLO, abandoning its previous rejectionist platform, has accepted the Shamir election proposal in the version originally developed by Rabin and Labor party hard-liners; most Israelis realize that they must eventually deal with the PLO; and even hard-line American Jewish organizations have decided that they won't be able to block the American–PLO dialogue.

Is peace around the corner? Not a chance.

The problem is that the focus on "objective conditions" overlooks the complexities of feeling and perception that have made this one of the most intractable international conflicts of the past forty years. The actors continually choose paths that are self-destructive and counterproductive to their alleged rational aims. Israelis claim to seek a partner for negotiations, yet they simply ignore every overture made by the PLO to open talks; and, while claiming to seek a moderate Palestinian voice on the West Bank, they have done everything possible to discourage the development of independent Palestinian leadership. The Palestinians, in turn, recognize that their immediate political task is to convince Israelis that they are willing to live in peace alongside Israel—but they have been unable to figure out that launching military attacks over the Lebanese border, or seeming to justify attacks by Palestinians against Israeli civilians within the pre-1967 borders, only enrages Israelis and strengthens the position of the Israeli right wing.

These are not simple mistakes that can be straightened out by rational argument; if face-to-face negotiations ever do begin between Israelis and Palestinians, these negotiations will not be governed primarily by the dynamics of enlightened self-interest. Yet the irrationalities that govern the situation are not mysterious or impossible to deal with. They are, rather, psychodynamically rooted in the histories and experiences of these two very different peoples.

Several years ago I spent half a year at Tel Aviv University doing research on the psychological dynamics that shape the self-perception of Israelis and Palestinians.

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My work began with a focus on stress at work. In the course of interviewing hundreds of Israelis and Palestinians, I found that the interviewees inevitably drew me into the larger national conflict and the ways in which they interpreted their possibilities. On each subsequent visit to Israel, including one completed in the summer of 1989, I held follow-up interviews and discussed my conclusions with the interviewees and with psychotherapists, journalists, labor leaders, leaders of the Israeli Sephardic community, political activists from all parts of the Israeli political spectrum, and Palestinian activists and intellectuals.

My central finding was this: although emerging from very different historical experiences, Israelis and Palestinians suffer from a set of historically generated psychological scars that prevent them from acting in accordance with their own rational self-interest. In some respects this is a classic case of surplus powerlessness. Both sides have experienced *real* powerlessness, but they have developed psychological frames of self-understanding that make them more powerless than the current reality requires. As a result, neither side is able to take the risks necessary to reassure the other side that peace is in fact obtainable. Instead, each side carefully nourishes the memory of its wounds and uses each current development to further confirm for itself the impossibility of transcending the current dynamic.

When we discuss surplus powerlessness as a factor in the collective experience of an entire people, we are directed toward understanding the historical experiences—mediated through family and cultural history—that contribute to the shaping of that people's current perceptions of its possibilities. Those dynamics are typically rooted in a historic experience of trauma generated by the frustration of our fundamental human desire for recognition and confirmation. To the extent that some set of traumatic events convinces a people that its frustrated need for recognition and confirmation will inevitably lead to a repetition of the original traumatic denial, that people will begin to feel frightened whenever the possibility of achieving such recognition arises. Many people would choose to die rather than to reexperience the humiliation and degradation associated with the memory of the original traumatic denial of their needs. So people and peoples develop a multiplicity of strategies to avoid ever reexperiencing that initial trauma. Nationalism, for example, may protect us from having to experience the vulnerability we would be subjected to if we were open to the possibility that we might find deep connectedness and confirmation in the "other." Conversely, we can organize a community around our anger at all the "others" who we are sure would act in a hurtful way toward us should we ever open ourselves to them and risk trusting connections.

Those who have been oppressed and traumatized typically find themselves subject to a "repetition compulsion"—the process by which we pass on to others (neighbors, co-workers, the next generation) the very traumatic experiences that were acted out on us. To the extent that the repetition compulsion dominates our unconscious lives, present events will be cast in ways that make it seem appropriate for us to do unto others what was once done to us. These dynamics of surplus powerlessness, played out in part through a repetition compulsion, are shared by all the major parties to the current struggle in the Middle East.

In order to be viable, any strategies for peace in the Middle East must explicitly address the deep psychic wounds that have so crippled all the parties involved. To do that, we need to understand in greater detail how the dynamics of surplus powerlessness are specifically rooted in the historical experiences of the major actors in the conflict: the dominant Ashkenazi political elite of Israel, the Sephardic majority of Israel, and the Palestinian national movement.

The Ashkenazim

It is foolish and naive to attempt to understand the Israeli response to the Palestinians without understanding the massive impact of two thousand years of oppression on the Israeli Ashkenazim (those whose families came from Europe and who today dominate the major economic, military, and political institutions of Israel).

American liberals make all sorts of excuses for the intense level of violence that is a daily reality in the American ghettos—violence that is, for the most part, directed by Blacks against other Blacks. The liberals refer to the cumulative impact of slavery and of the subsequent oppression and racism on the collective psyches of the Black community. Yet we are often less aware of the inevitably distorting impact of violence on the Jewish people. Jews did not respond with violence to the violence done to them—they couldn't. Jews had to moderate their response for fear that if they spoke their anger in any clear terms they would simply call down upon themselves greater oppression and slaughter. As a result, Jews often learned to internalize the violence, directing it against themselves in the form of an extremely punishing superego (manifested most dramatically in their attempt to explain their own exile as a punishment for their sins rather than as the result of their failure to win a righteous but futile national liberation struggle against the world's largest imperialist power), in the form of intense internal intellectual rivalries and struggles, and in the form of self-mockery and Jewish humor.

Underlying all of these responses was the incredible

pathos and pain of a people that had been rejected by its neighbors. The Jewish people earned the enmity of ruling classes in the ancient and medieval world by building their national identity and religious practice around the weekly retelling of the revolutionary story of the Exodus. Throughout history ruling classes have always explained to their subjects that class domination is necessary, built into the structure of society. The message of the Jewish people, its very existence as a people, seemed to indicate the opposite, that the world can be fundamentally altered. No wonder, then, that ruling elites found the Jews troublesome—and felt it necessary to try to set their own people against the Jews. The fiercely independent spirit of the Jews, their inability, for instance, to accommodate themselves to Roman imperialism, frequently led them to rebel, even against militarily superior powers, and eventually left them as homeless wanderers among the nations of a world whose peoples had been warned not to trust them.

The pain and humiliation of being a nation without a homeland, and of being rejected and treated with derision by many who surrounded them, was more than the Jews could bear. Traumatized by the way the world thwarted their quite normal needs for recognition and communion with others, Jews developed a theological system for dealing with their pain. On the one hand, the Exile was the punishment for their own sins of having abandoned God's ways. On the other hand, they reinterpreted the older notions of their special responsibilities to fulfill God's commandments by now seeing themselves as specially chosen to bring God's word to the world—a compensatory move that both provided an explanation for the moral inferiority of those who oppressed them and simultaneously helped regenerate that oppression by further infuriating the peoples whose ruling classes had already predisposed them to distrust the Jews. Thus psychologically armed against the onslaught of hostility from surrounding Christian and Islamic cultures, no longer willing to reexperience the hope and yearning for connection with others that had so often been frustrated, the Jewish people survived the growing hostilities of the past two thousand years.

The continual instability of daily life, the expulsions from countries where Jews had lived for hundreds of years, the propensity of anti-Jewish racism to reappear even in societies that no longer espoused the Christianity within which that anti-Semitism had originally been fostered, led most Jews to believe that racism against Jews was part of the psychic structure of almost all non-Jewish societies. When the liberatory promise of the French Revolution and the revolutionary upsurges of the nineteenth century failed to eliminate the deeply entrenched anti-Semitism of European societies, Jews responded in four different ways:

1. *Religious Jews* tended to be passive and to believe that the suffering of the Jewish people could not be overcome until the Messiah was sent by God. This approach led to the "marching like lambs to the slaughter" phenomenon of some sectors of European Jewry.

2. *Assimilationists* thought that anti-Semitism could be overcome by losing one's identity in larger Christian societies (a strategy that failed in Europe when the Nazis simply went back through birth records and sent to the death camps even those whose families had converted two or three generations earlier) or by courting ruling groups in the hope that they would come to our aid when necessary (a strategy that failed dismally when the American ruling class refused either to bomb the railroads to the concentration camps or to open the immigration gates and allow Jews to escape from Europe).

The cries of the Jewish victim can be heard not too far below the surface of arrogant self-assertion.

3. *Internationalists* thought that one could reject one's Jewish identity and count on international working-class solidarity to overcome anti-Semitism. Most of these internationalists perished—not only at the hands of the Nazis, but also at the hands of the European proletariat whose anti-Semitism led many to refuse to help the Jews, and others to join in the massacre.

4. *Zionists* believed that the only solution was for the Jews to recognize that in a historical period in which most peoples were responding to nationalism, the Jews would need to have their own Jewish state for self-defense.

None of these responses was based on the assumption that it might actually be possible for the Jewish people to live in peace inside Europe with their non-Jewish neighbors and to find in that relationship the recognition and mutual confirmation that they had for centuries been denied. Subsequent experience in a Europe that responded so enthusiastically to anti-Semitism showed that Jewish fears on this score were well founded. It is the Zionist response to which I shall address myself here, since it proved the most congruent with the historical realities of the twentieth century and since it shaped the State of Israel. Moreover, it was the Zionist response that seemed to embody the greatest degree of healthy self-affirmation in its attempt to recover psychological health for the Jews by insisting on the Jewish people's right to be recognized as a nation amongst all other nations.

Yet, as though to protect themselves from whatever remained attractive in the Jewish past and to justify the personal sacrifices of going to Palestine when they might have sought their personal fortunes by emigrating to the U.S., Zionists adopted an ethos that negated anything that reminded them of the self-limiting dynamics of Jewish accommodation to the Diaspora. Instead of acknowledging the painful life experiences of the Jewish people that had led to many self-limiting choices (not to mention the positive value—derived from our Diaspora experience—of Jews' learning to compromise and live with others), the Zionists saw the entirety of the Diaspora experience as generating a Jewish pathology that could be cured only by living as a strong and independent people in our own land, a people that could no longer be kicked around and that would no longer have to spend its psychic energy "pleasing the goyim."

Underlying all the bravado was the same melancholic resignation at the impossibility of achieving real reciprocity with others, which had pushed an earlier generation of Jews to escape into the world of Talmud and fantasies of the coming of the Messiah. Zionist activists shared with the more passive religious fundamentalists the conviction that genuine human reciprocity with non-Jews would always be impossible, but simply adopted a different strategy to effectively deny themselves any memory of the desire for connection or of the pain associated with its denial.

The most problematic consequence of the Zionist response was its call for an Israel that would be a nation like all other nations. The idea of a special moral responsibility of the Jewish people, embedded in the concept of the "chosen people," was bitterly rejected by Zionists. Instead, many Zionists argued, Israel should be judged by the same standards as all other peoples. If the rule of the jungle governed the twentieth century, as seemed obvious to many of these Zionists, then Jews had to get sharp teeth and claws like the other beasts that had been devouring them. If the world was governed by militarism, the logic went on, then Jews had to become militarists. When others responded that in so doing the Zionists would be rejecting the long history and culture of the Jewish people that did self-consciously judge itself by different criteria from those prevailing in other societies, the Zionists responded that this argument reflected a ghetto mentality—that the attempt to apply moral standards was a ridiculous religious fantasy that had nothing to do with the reality of the twentieth century.

In short, playing out the repetition compulsion described above, and having been shaped by a brutal history, a section of the brutalized people adopts the behavior of the oppressors and identifies with those oppressors' moral standards. Barely had this worldview begun to express itself in the Zionist movement of the twentieth century than the fury of European anti-Semitism reasserted itself, seeming to confirm that Jews could never trust anyone.

The trauma of the Holocaust re-evoked the feelings of shame and disgust that many Zionists felt about their own history. Faced with this new trauma, many Jews found it too painful to continue nurturing the hope that they could obtain the recognition and validation we all seek from each other. Rather than lament the tragedy of a world that makes such connectedness impossible, some Ashkenazim had already begun to foster in Israel a culture that rejected the very need for connection with others as a Diaspora pathology. And those who had trusted non-Jews, and hence not prepared themselves for what afterward appeared to many Zionists to be a betrayal, were berated for being naive and scorned for allegedly having walked as sheep to the slaughter.

The Holocaust finally and massively traumatized the Jewish people. Any talk of rational solutions today must be tempered by an understanding that we are dealing with a traumatized people, a people that is only *now* beginning to acknowledge to itself what it has gone through.

The greatest distortions of the present situation are in part a product of this trauma. The Palestinians have only made matters worse: by talking about pushing the Jews into the sea, by even now having a charter that calls for the elimination of the Jewish state (despite Arafat's personal disclaimers), and by failing to repudiate those people in the Palestinian movement and the Arab world who overtly identify with anti-Jewish racism.

Palestinian bluster and racism would, however, be considerably less important if Israelis could approach the situation with a realistic assessment of their own power. The inability of many Israelis to tell the difference between Nazis and Palestinians, and their inability to recognize their own military superiority so that they could understand that they are no longer a powerless people trembling at the threshold of the extermination camps of Europe, is not willed stupidity. It is, rather, a pathological distortion based on the trauma of victimization not yet overcome.

Yet the cries of the Jewish victim can be heard not too far below the surface of arrogant self-assertion. The deep doubts that the PLO has "really" recognized the State of Israel with its latest moves are not simply about a piece of paper or the content of a particular declaration by the Palestine National Council; rather, they mask a cry of pain at a history in which the peoples of the world have never given us the recognition and mutual confirmation to which human beings are entitled. No wonder, then, that Israelis are often unable to hear a similar cry of pain coming from the Palestinian people—our own cries are so loud they drown out those of the

other. This pain impedes realistic political judgment and ensures that Israel will misjudge its possibilities.

The Sephardim

The Sephardim (Jews whose families emigrated from Islamic lands) are the majority group in Israel, and their votes for the right wing have provided Likud with its margin of victory in recent elections. The Sephardim shared with the Jews who settled in Europe a common experience of oppression, victimization, and traumatization through the expulsion from their land in the ancient world. For more than a thousand years Sephardim were degraded second-class citizens. They were subject to periodic outbursts of mass murder, and faced daily economic, political, and social discrimination in Islamic countries. The Koran contains many denunciations of Jews and Judaism which set the tone for the relationship that developed. The *dhimmi,* or non-Muslim, was tolerated under strictly regulated conditions. A special *dhimmi* tax was often levied in a systematic attempt to expropriate Jewish property, so that Jews often lived in poverty or near-poverty. Though there were periods in which some Islamic rulers were particularly friendly toward the Jews, and in which individual Jews managed to play important roles as court physicians, moneylenders, and political advisers, Jewish life in Islamic states often entailed a careful balancing act whose precariousness created deep tension in daily life. In many Islamic societies Jews were required to wear distinctive pieces of clothing so they could be easily identified; they were not allowed to own horses, not permitted to drink wine in public, and not permitted to perform their religious rituals in public. The cumulative impact of these measures, coupled with periodic outbursts of more severe violence, was to ensure that they would never feel fully secure. Once again, Jews were unable to achieve a sense of confirmation and mutual recognition from their neighbors. The pain and humiliation of this constant rejection at the hands of the Islamic majority, the powerlessness and need to internalize the resulting rage, left deep scars on the Sephardim. These Sephardic Jews feel about the Arabs the way many refugees from the Soviet Union feel about communism—and they find it hard to understand why others who have had no direct experience with the Arab regimes don't take the Sephardic experience more seriously. In the interviews I conducted in Israel I heard many Sephardim argue that their anger at Arabs was not (as in the case of the Ashkenazim) a displacement of an earlier anger (toward Germans or Poles or East Europeans): "We lived in an Islamic society, and we became refugees from *that kind of society.* So our anger is appropriately directed." It is an anger that derives much of its energy from the denial of recognition that Sephardim experienced for a thousand years at the hands of their Arab neighbors.

There is, however, a second and perhaps even more complicated element in the story of the Sephardim. When many Sephardim came to Israel in the 1950s, their entire history and culture was demeaned by the dominant Ashkenazic culture—Sephardim were made to feel as though they were inferior in every way. Moreover, because they had not been subjected to the Holocaust, their own tales of suffering at the hands of the Arabs were construed by the Ashkenazim as being whiny and self-indulgent. Their culture was denigrated and their self-respect assaulted. This created massive resentment that is today a central factor in the political culture of Sephardic life. After a long history of invalidation by their surrounding Arab neighbors, Sephardim returned to the land of their ancestors with the anticipation that they were, at last, coming home. Instead, they were greeted with derision, which was often painful and embarrassing. The humiliation of this experience led to a deep anger that has been displaced onto the most immediately available recipient—the Palestinian people. It is in relationship to the Palestinians that some Sephardim have been able to act out the frustrations they have suffered.

The Palestinians

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European nations colluded to carve out a series of national entities in the Middle East in order to divide up the area among the colonizers. The Arab peoples who lived there were seen as primitives whose fate and fortune could be decided elsewhere, whose long cultural and religious tradition could be demeaned, and whose own wishes for recognition and validation could be ignored. Palestinian nationalism, then, emerged first as a variant of a larger Arab nationalism—a reaction to the experience of oppression and invalidation. Like so many other similar anticolonial phenomena, the demand to be recognized as fully human was as much a part of the impulse toward national self-determination as was any intrinsic political, economic, or cultural program.

No wonder, then, that Palestinian national self-determination was from the start marked by strong opposition to those Jews who had begun to return to their ancient land. That early Zionists could describe the land of Palestine as "a land without a people for a people without a land" was an indication to Palestinians who lived there how deeply ingrained was a colonial mentality in the consciousness of these Jewish settlers. The exclusion of Palestinians from Jewish labor unions and communal settlements seemed a further indication that the Zionists had no room in their conceptual scheme

for the Palestinian people. In these ways, painful and humiliating experience as a victim of colonialism was identified in Palestinian consciousness with the emergence of a Zionist presence in Palestine—a presence symbolized most thoroughly by the Balfour Declaration, which promised the Jewish people a homeland in Palestine without bothering to consult the desires of those who formed a majority in that land.

I do not mean here to exonerate the Palestinians for their obvious racism, which also played an important role in shaping their response to the Zionists. The racist attitudes toward Jews that were dominant in Islamic societies certainly played a role in preventing Palestinians from being able to see how Jews might be potential allies in undermining British imperialism. The Jews who came as settlers, after all, were not primarily British or enthusiastic subjects of other colonial regimes. Rather, they were for the most part escapees from the oppression of Eastern Europe, and they arrived with internationalist ideas that might have provided a potential basis for alliance and for the cultivation of mutual interests. It was precisely this possibility that frightened many of the feudal leaders of the Palestinian people, and it was through its leaders' eyes that the largely illiterate Palestinian peasantry received its information about the nature and intentions of the Jewish settlers. Playing on the preexisting anti-Jewish attitudes of Islamic culture, the feudal leaders developed a national consciousness that gave the early Palestinian movement a distinctly anti-Semitic reality. Palestinian nationalism gave no recognition to the fact that in the first half of the twentieth century the Jews were landless, homeless, and desperate refugees, while the Palestinians refused to share what land they had. In fact, the Palestinian national movement became increasingly involved with Nazi propaganda and anti-Semitism, and some of its most important leaders openly championed a Nazi victory to deal with the Jewish problem.

But it makes little sense to condemn all Palestinians living at that time; most had little information, and many who did were expressing a legitimate anger at Western imperialism—anger incorrectly but understandably directed against Jewish Zionists. It's more reasonable to understand the situation as one in which two peoples, both victims of international imperialism, were manipulated into opposing each other so as to strengthen the hold of the larger imperialist order. We don't need pathological categories to understand the circumstance that led to the collisions of 1945 to 1948.

Yet, when all is said and done, the collision of these two nationalisms led directly to the creation of the Arab refugee problem. Here I think it critical to acknowledge that many of the subsequent self-destructive activities of the Palestinian people in dealing with their situation were a result of the trauma of dispossession and then of life in the camps. I use "self-destructive" here in the same way that I apply it to the current activities of the Israeli government: self-destructive because the PLO fostered a spirit of armed struggle that was then and remains today utterly and tragically futile—and this they substituted for the kinds of political initiatives that might have worked. I believe today that a Gandhian-style Palestinian movement, with total Gandhian discipline and Gandhian clarity about accepting a nonviolent solution and a demilitarized state—a strategy that firmly renounces any intention of using a Palestinian state as a launching pad for a second stage of struggle, a strategy that unequivocally denounces acts of terrorism against Israelis inside the pre-1967 borders—would produce a Palestinian state within five years; and I believe that every other strategy will take more time, cost more lives, and involve more pain.

Meanwhile, the psychological trauma of past pain caused by the dislocation of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in 1948, the devastating impact of forty years of life in the refugee camps, the shame at being mistreated and manipulated and sometimes even murdered by Arab regimes' use of the Palestinians to advance the sectarian needs of Arab power politics, and the daily humiliations that are part of life under Israeli occupation—all combine to traumatize the Palestinians in ways that make them unable to act effectively in their own self-interest.

The ultimate triumph of irrationality might come if the Palestinian people, unable to achieve any serious this-worldly gains through their support of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, were to turn toward Islamic fundamentalism and its otherworldly solutions.

Healing the Wounds

The primary task for those who wish to bring peace to the Middle East is to develop a set of confidence-building measures that can help reassure each side that there is a basis for trust. If, for example, the Palestinians were willing to take a dramatic set of steps like those taken by Sadat, the political atmosphere would change instantaneously in a massive way.

A Sadat-like move would entail the following: (1) amending the PNC charter to eliminate references to the destruction of Israel and substituting in their places references to living in peace with Israel; (2) the PLO's accepting and articulating in detail how demilitarization of a Palestinian state would work and describing in detail the measures it would take against those Palestinian factions that seek to continue terrorist attacks; (3) the PLO's renouncing all forms of violence and insisting that the Palestinian movement model itself on Gandhian re-

sistance; and (4) the PLO's committing itself now to signing, as part of the same agreement that would create a Palestinian state, a public declaration renouncing—in the name of the Palestinian people—all claims to the parts of Palestine within the pre-1967 boundaries of Israel.

If the Palestinians were to implement such changes in one dramatic step, not piecemeal and not quietly, the peace forces in Israel would be dramatically empowered and would virtually be assured of victory in future electoral struggles in Israel.

It's fashionable today to be skeptical of all psychological approaches, to see them as reductive or flaky attempts to avoid "real politics."

Similarly, if an Israeli leader were to accept the right of the Palestinian people to national self-determination and to a fully demilitarized state, he or she would quickly help consolidate and strengthen the forces within the Palestinian camp that would be able to lead the Palestinian movement toward a path of mutual acceptance and peaceful coexistence.

Yet before such developments can take place, the relevant players will have to believe that their own willingness to take such risks is likely to produce a change on the other side. Much of my analysis here is designed to show why most of the actors are unlikely to draw such conclusions.

Similarly, the various well-intended plans calling for "education for democracy," "education against racism," and even face-to-face parlor meetings or encounter sessions between Israelis and Palestinians have so far had minimal impact on the larger political realities of the society. No matter how many good ideas are taught, no matter how good one feels after meeting face to face with real human beings on the other side, the abiding psychological legacy ultimately reasserts itself. Even those who have felt absolutely convinced that they could trust people on the other side feel unable to say this in a loud and clear way to their fellow Israelis or Palestinians, aware that they will only discredit themselves among those whom they hope to influence. Given the powerful impact of this psychological legacy, every partial move toward accommodation is interpreted as meaningless by the other side. So, when Arafat says he will come to Jerusalem to talk peace, Shamir says he will arrest Arafat should he arrive at Ben-Gurion—because he is convinced that it is not peace but trickery that ultimately underlies Arafat's moves and that will always necessarily underlie the moves of the other, because the other cannot be trusted.

Effective strategy would, instead, integrate a focus on the pains of the past and provide a way for people to confront and transcend those pains. We can learn here from the remarkable impact of the women's movement and its array of methods for transforming the self-understanding of women in the past twenty-five years. Through group consciousness raising, articles, speeches, rituals, fiction, poetry, and a host of legislative and political struggles, women were able to challenge the long history of sexist conditioning and create a new self-understanding that has begun to succeed in making women feel less like victims while simultaneously challenging the objective sexist social and economic structures that helped shape that consciousness.

In lieu of a Sadat on either side, we need to develop political approaches to mass psychology similar to those of the women's movement but shaped to take into account the specific needs of the realities of the situation in the Middle East.

Let's start by considering one aspect of the problem: how to deal with the trauma of two thousand years of oppression that culminated in the Holocaust.

There are those today, including some who write for *Tikkun,* who think that the solution is to forget the past. For example, they claim that the Jewish people have focused too much on the Holocaust and for that reason have become obsessed. The Jews would be better off, they say, if they could forget their past.

I think they are deeply mistaken. A trauma can be dealt with only by being brought up again and then worked through under conditions in which we have greater mastery.

Hasn't that been done? No—quite the contrary. The first twenty years of Israel were marked by massive denial and shame about the Holocaust—and the people who went through it were told to keep their stories to themselves, because they represented precisely what Israel had been set up to negate and overcome. David Grossman's recent novel *See Under: Love* and Gila Almagor's film *Summer of Aviya* give moving accounts of this period in Israeli life.

After the Six Day War, the Holocaust was put on the front burner—but in a method that was designed to integrate the past into a Zionist historiography that emphasized Jewish power and reviled Jewish impotence. Yom Hashoah, National Holocaust Memorial Day, was titled also "leegvurah"—to emphasize our strength, not our weakness and vulnerability. Museums were built, institutions erected, commemorations instituted—all in the service of avoidance of the actual emotional experiences, and with little focus on the detailed stories of the experiences that people had gone through.

Israel needs a massive retelling of that history through

the experience of the survivors—in thousands of small groups, with sympathetic listeners who can tell the survivors that they are secure now, that they are less vulnerable, that they do not need to see Nazis all around them. Training Israelis in how to be good listeners in such a group may be central to this process. It is not just the survivors and their children who need this therapy; most Israelis of European descent have shaped their identity in reaction to the pain and humiliation of this historical victimization, and they would benefit by being able to acknowledge the personal feelings of shame and pain and rage that get displaced onto Israeli political life.

Zalman Schachter has suggested one mass psychology intervention that goes some distance in the direction that we must travel. Rabbi Schachter suggests that the peace movement should create a *mikva* ceremony for Israelis who are returning to civilian life after a period of serving in the Israeli reserves. The ceremonial immersion in water, a traditional purification act, is meant to convey our notion that the current service in the Israeli army in the West Bank necessarily leads Israelis to perform actions that pollute the soul. At the very least, the *mikva* is meant as an affirmation that we do not wish to bring the destructive psychodynamics generated by being part of an army of occupation into the rest of Israeli life. While such a process may not go far enough in asserting our opposition to the occupation, and while it presents the potential danger of being misused as a symbolic washing of our hands of the moral dirtiness of the occupation, it has the value, in the hands of a psychologically sophisticated peace movement, of affirming Jewish tradition and using that tradition as a mechanism of critique of current Israeli policy. Similar and more dramatic techniques are necessary to develop a political practice that is sensitive to the psychological realities of the Israeli population, and that incorporates a sensitivity and compassion for the people whose views we hope to change.

A similar kind of thinking will be necessary to deal with the legacy of pain among the Sephardim and Palestinians. For example, if the Ashkenazi-dominated peace forces were to begin their public campaigns with an honest and public recounting of the actual ways that Ashkenazi Israel has demeaned Sephardim in the past, it might then be possible to generate an audience for ideas about how to move beyond the current political impasse. Since the intifada began, Israeli activists have organized gatherings in which Israelis and Palestinians meet in each other's homes for small dialogue groups. It would be an important advance if the peace movement were to arrange similar groups so that they could meet and listen to Israeli Sephardim, listen to their anger and pain, and then move beyond this pain with them. The very act of providing this kind of listening environment, either in small groups or in larger communal settings, would provide a validation to many who still burn with rage at the way they or their parents were treated by the Labor-party-led government of Israel decades ago.

I do not know the Palestinian community well enough to know the specific forms that mass psychological strategy might take. But the analysis presented here suggests that those in the Palestinian world who are serious about changing the current reality must address this question with the greatest of seriousness and urgency.

There are, of course, dangers with any attempt to deal with the psychological dynamics of the current situation. For one thing, there is a temptation to use psychological categories as a club with which to covertly assert our own moral superiority over those whom we wish to help—in effect, covertly blaming the victims for their own oppression. The current tragic situation in the Middle East was created not by the moral turpitude of either the Jewish or the Palestinian people, but by a configuration of world historical forces over which neither people had much influence. The Jewish people do not need to be told how bad and irrational they are—this will only increase the self-blaming. The core of the problem is that both people have internalized a sense of inadequacy and self-blame—based on the denial of their fundamental human needs for recognition and mutual confirmation—and have compensated for these feelings with massive denial, massive chauvinism, and massive attempts to make themselves emotionally and militarily invulnerable. Nothing will be helpful that reinforces the notion that Israelis and Palestinians are *right* to feel bad about themselves, that they really *are* inadequate, that they are worse than other peoples. What both sides need is a massive dose of self-worth that would replace the pseudo-forms of self-worth they get through posturing and denying the legitimacy of each other's pains.

A psychological orientation should also not prevent us from simultaneously articulating moral outrage at Israeli policies that deny the humanity of the Palestinian people, or outrage at callous and inhumane Palestinian acts (like the bus massacre on the Tel Aviv–Jerusalem highway) that have been justified in the name of fighting oppression.

It's fashionable today to be skeptical of all psychological approaches, to see them as reductive or flaky attempts to avoid "real politics." There are many who believe that dealing with the underlying pains discussed here would take too long, and that solutions are obtainable through diplomatic breakthroughs. I would not be surprised in fact if we see some such breakthroughs in the period ahead. But just reaching the table will not

necessarily lead to a resolution of the conflict. Once the U.S. sat down with the Vietnamese in 1968 there were years of meaningless chatter that led nowhere until a series of changes in domestic politics forced the U.S. to change its position. Though U.S. diplomats believe that the very fact of negotiations would generate a new psychological dynamic, it might actually generate a new pessimism and despair if negotiations become merely another vehicle to perpetuate the status quo. It may yet prove true that dealing with the underlying psychological dynamics is the most effective approach to bringing peace to the Middle East. □

THE PATHOLOGY OF THE OCCUPATION

Just Legal: Human Rights in the Territories

Dedi Zucker

For the first time since 1967, the topic of human rights has become a major theme in Israeli public debate. Israelis can no longer ignore the fact that human rights in the territories are being violated daily on a scale unprecedented in the country's brief history. Abuse of these rights, in an effort to put down the intifada, has served only to fuel Palestinian resentment and to strengthen worldwide support for the Palestinian cause. A vicious circle of abuse, rebellion, and further abuse has increased the death toll on both sides and is now threatening the moral foundations of Israeli society. And yet no end to the abuse is in sight. A sober examination of the human rights issue in the territories might bring us a step or two closer to the axis on which this vicious circle turns.

Realistic discussion of the human rights issue in the territories can, however, be carried on only in a broader context. We should remember, for example, that while a great deal of media attention has been paid to the issue, rights are being violated as a result of *national* conflict. A satisfactory answer to the political question is an essential prerequisite for any real progress on the human rights front.

We should also remember that debate over the issue of human rights takes place within the framework of overwhelmingly concrete security considerations. The number of participants, the high level of friction, and the intensity of the clashes between the Palestinians and the IDF define the events of the past eighteen months as a battle, not a series of disturbances, demonstrations, or even riots. Police terminology is no longer appropriate for what is happening in the occupied territories. Often what appears to be a violation of human rights actually involves a confrontation characteristic of armed national struggle.

I should note at the outset that even the harshest violations of the Palestinians' elementary rights are permitted under the law, as it has stood in the territories since 1967. The validity of that law (which is based on the British Emergency Defense Regulations of 1945) is another matter. What needs to be stressed here is that the IDF's tactics are not rooted in the "private" policies of individual commanders or their units. The majority of the actions originate in decisions taken on the political level and executed by either civilian or military agents. Brutality constitutes a relatively minor element in the overall picture.

By shutting down the entire West Bank educational system for eighteen months, greater long-term damage was done than that inflicted by individual, insubordinate soldiers in hundreds of incidents at roadblocks. Shutting down the schools, colleges, and universities infringed upon the well-being of some 250,000 people daily for 540 days. This operation was essentially administrative; it involved no violence, required hardly any action on the IDF's part, and—the absurd truth be told—met the test of Israeli law.

Likewise, tens of thousands of Palestinians spend entire days waiting in lengthy, bothersome lines for driver's licenses or departure permits. The prohibition against working in Israel, leveled at the residents of Gaza in May of 1989, is clearly one of the harshest measures this population has faced since the uprising began. Again, it was a political decision, implemented in an administrative and relatively simple manner. In one stroke, the Israeli government temporarily deprived tens of thousands of Gazan breadwinners of their livelihood. Forty percent of Gaza's workers found themselves unable

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