

# **The Israeli Nation-State**

Political, Constitutional, and  
Cultural Challenges

## ISRAEL: SOCIETY, CULTURE, AND HISTORY

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Political, Constitutional, and  
Cultural Challenges

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## The Future of Nationhood in Israel

DAVID PASSIG

The last century proved that very few<sup>1</sup> succeeded in forecasting the future of Israel. Even the few whose forecasts turned out to be correct employed a process that could, at best, be called hitting the target while shooting in the dark. There was no use made of a reliable methodology—one that would be open to evaluation.

Serious methodological problems are continuously evident in the forecasts we constantly hear about Israel, because they can be considered—at least from the point of view of Futures Thinking—as the ruminations of a novelist, personal inclinations, subjective values and assumptions; some based on fact, and others not. Few of the forecasts were made on the basis of any research methods, and very few of them can be said to be based on valid and reliable methods of forecasting. At the very best, they lean on statistical methods that are linear extrapolations of processes that took place in the past. Unfortunately, few know, for example, that the reliability of forecasting based on linear extrapolation is no greater, on average, than thirty percent.

Futures' research of the last seven decades has proved that in the immediate and short range (two to five years) prediction reliability

of linear extrapolation can reach up to 30 percent. If we are trying to predict trends beyond two to five years, the reliability of the forecast descends to 20 percent, especially when the systems we study are more complex and unbalanced. Thus, failure to formulate reliable predictions, which are the result of rational, valid, and transparent methodologies, could be fatal to anyone seeking to understand the trends.

Therefore, herein I would like to suggest a different methodology, with which I would like to evaluate trends in the nationhood of the State of Israel in the long range—by mid twenty-first century.

This methodology could provide an alternative explanation for the forces that are driving delegitimization of Israel as a national entity. This methodology can help us identify Israel's future social trends. Its reliability in forecasting trends has been established to be more than sixty percent.

### **Universal Force Theory**

Future research methodologies may be divided into two categories. The first category includes methodologies that are employed in the analysis of trends that already exist. The great majority of the trends that the public is familiar with belong to this category.

The second category includes methodologies that are employed in studying trends that have yet to be born or develop. The seeds of trends of this sort must of necessity already exist, but have yet to sprout. Futurists, aided by these methods, try to identify trends, which at the time the analysis is being made, are considered dead-ends by most of the experts in their field. At the time of their formulation, they are usually seen by the public and by the experts as illogical or very unreasonable. However, it seems that their predictive reliability is no less than the average range of the first category (sixty percent).

One of the Futures' research methodologies, with the help of which futurists attempt to study trends that have yet to develop, is called "Universal Force Theory." This theory hypothesizes, in simple language, that if we want to identify trends that have yet to develop, we must not try to identify changes that are taking place in the present, as they are trends that already exist. Instead, we must identify the force behind those changes, its underlying dynamics, or the hidden, subsurface assumptions that shape

those changes. If we are successful in identifying the force that drives those changes, if we are successful in formulating it in clear way, then, with the help of the resulting diagnosis, we will be able to set forth trends with which most of the experts will not agree at the time they are presented.

### **Supposed Driving Forces of Israel**

Public discourse in Israel, from the days of the first Zionist Congress of more than one hundred years ago up to today, has revolved around the issue of the source of the dispute between the People dwelling in Zion and the Arabs of the region. It sometimes seems that the Israeli community, reflecting notions in world Jewry at large, has yet to finish debating the question of the driving forces behind this blood-drenched conflict. It would appear that there has yet to be a methodical approach to the understanding of the conflict.

This does not mean that there have not been renewed efforts to deal with this issue, and it does not mean that there are not people who have reached conclusions regarding the driving forces behind this conflict. However, to the best of my knowledge, there has yet to be performed a study of this issue using a Futures' methodology. Those who concern themselves with the driving forces of the conflict, and who have done so in the past, have reached their conclusions as the result of evaluations whose sources and reliability are difficult to measure. Beyond that, people with the same sources and evaluations arrive at different, and sometimes opposing, conclusions. Many of those who have dealt with the conflict and who do so today base their conclusions on beliefs that are hard to evaluate, or that are based on wishful thinking (with which it is hard to argue), or that are hard to verify.

A number of conclusions regarding this issue can be found, both in the past and in the present, in Israeli and international public discourse. There are different variations of those conclusions. In essence, they are as follows:

- The driving force behind the conflict is *economic*: In other words, control over the land and other natural resources is what motivates the parties to clash.

- *Cultural*: Middle Eastern cultures (Druze, Bedouin, Circassian, Muslim, Christian, and others) are not ready to accept a Western entity into their midst; one that has a rhythm of life, values, and aspirations that are opposed to what is acceptable in this region.
- *National*: two new national entities are struggling to define their identities. Unfortunately, these definitions careen into one another at many junctures—economic, cultural, and religious.
- *Humanitarian*: one side's right to self-definition is so aggressive, as a result of thousands of years of suffering and repression, that it leaves no humanitarian space for the right to self-definition of the neighboring entity.
- *Ethnic*: two ethnic groups are struggling over the ownership of a particular piece of territory. The Jews claim that the land was promised to them 3200 years ago, in a transcendental promise, while the peoples of the region—without relating to the question of whether this is historically true or not—claim that they are the descendants of the Philistines and Canaanites who lived in this territory well before anyone promised anything, without asking their opinion on the matter.
- *Religious*: Islam and Judaism have been struggling for the authenticity of their religious narratives for centuries—beginning with the issue of who was bound up as a sacrifice by Abraham, and ending with the past, present, and future religious significance of the Temple Mount.

I do not intend to maintain here that one of the above is more authentic than any of the others, or that it is the most basic driving force behind the dispute. It is clear that everyone who believes in one driving force or another has a number of sources on which that belief is based. On the contrary, I want to suggest an alternative version, which will attempt to answer the question why many have failed, for more than one hundred years, to agree on a prime diagnosis of the driving force that has been keeping this blood-drenched conflict going. I would like to suggest here that it is possible to overcome this lack of agreement in order to identify another driving force that lies in the deepest stratum of this dispute, and holds us back from bringing it to a discussion sufficiently thorough to

lead to a solution. Without solving the dilemma that dwells at that deep stratum, it will be difficult to solve the disagreement regarding the diagnosis, and to begin to work toward its solution.

### **Meta-Analysis of the Driving Forces**

From the perspective of the Universal Force Theory method, it seems that the parties who believe in each one of these forces haven't noticed that they have been trying to explain the hidden assumptions of the conflict through their behavioral expressions. Practically speaking, it could be that their discourse has erred in defining those reasons as the driving forces behind the conflict. It could be that they identify only a deeper aspect of already existent trends that are expressed as a political, social, cultural, economic, religious, or ethnic dispute.

It could be that the above are not the driving forces behind the dispute, but related phenomena and byproducts of another invisible force that we still need to identify. If we are able to identify that force, we will be more easily able to reach an agreement as to how it affects and shapes the future of our region. I hope that we will then be able to derive from it a more effective policy approach that will benefit the Israelis and the other peoples in the region. The fact that there is no agreement regarding the driving forces we have described above is an indication that we are occupying ourselves only with the explanations of phenomena that have existed for a long time, and that express themselves in security, economic, and other manifestations. We are dealing solely with the examination of the situation. It appears that we are not dealing with the roots and dynamics that are the driving force behind it.

When we take a serious look at the Universal Force Theory method, we see that the deeper one looks beneath the surface, and tries to map out the center of the seismic pressure that expresses itself in some point above the surface, only then do we have a chance (and still, humbly, with only a 60 percent degree of probability) of succeeding to identify its nature, degree of power, direction, and the time at which the earth will quake.

After thorough examination of the above-mentioned list, I am forced, in all humility, to entertain the doubt that it is nothing but a list

of temblors and above-surface phenomena that are almost certainly not the driving force itself.

If this hypothesis is correct, we will evidently witness other eruptions in various places, and the list of causes mentioned above will grow longer. The new wave of antisemitism can serve as an example: for instance, the delegitimization of the State of Israel's rights to self-defense, and to the management of its internal politics without external interference.

### **A Matrix of Interactions**

One of the techniques that may assist us identifying the original driving force is to arrange the phenomena that are visible above the surface in a matrix, and to attempt to identify the interactions between the different parts of the matrix. As seismologists try to identify the center of a seismic activity, analysis of interactions, by drawing lines between phenomena charted on the matrix, can lead us to the center of what is going on. The point at which these lines cross could be the source of the above-surface phenomena.

Meta-analysis of the development directions of the interaction lines leads the vector to a point that is very deep indeed, beneath the surface of the dispute, at the height of which we find ourselves today.<sup>2</sup>

### **A Possible Driving Force**

The more above-surface points we have available, and the more we are able to draw certain lines of interaction between them, creating a more reliable matrix. As strange as it may sound, we have yet to locate sufficient above-surface points to enable us to identify the driving source with a high degree of reliability. Above all, it is difficult for us to connect clear lines of interaction between points so that we can reliably say that, at this stage, we are able to identify the deepest source with a high degree of certainty. Having said that, the list of reasons or phenomena available to us today can provide sufficient indication for us to begin to identify the area from which a more primal driving force of the Arab–Israeli dispute radiates.

The goal of Table 1 is to provide the reader with a sample of the phenomena as they find expression on the surface, and are driven by

**Table 1.** A three-dimensional rendering of the matrix. It is possible to extend the matrix further into the third dimension, and to add breaking points and points of tension that indicate a deeper driving force.

	<b>Ethnic</b>	<b>Cultural</b>	<b>National</b>	<b>Economic</b>	<b>Humanitarian</b>	<b>Religious</b>
	Bring the Falashmoura to Israel	Renounce sovereignty over the Temple Mount	Jerusalem forever united	Laws of Shmita and modern economics	Disengagement or transfer of populations	Judaism as the official state religion
	<b>Economic</b>	<b>Religious</b>	<b>Ethnic</b>	<b>Humanitarian</b>	<b>National</b>	<b>Cultural</b>
Cultural	Shabbat as a regular business day	Definition of "Who is a Jew?"	Knesset debates in Arabic as well as Hebrew	The right of non-Jews to purchase homes in Jewish towns or on lands of the Jewish National Fund	National service for those who don't serve in the IDF	The performing of Wagner's music at public cultural events
National	Privatization of defense industries	The Law of Return	A state for all its citizens	The Separation Fence	National Service for minority members	Permission for minority members to sing an alternative national anthem
Humanitarian	Increased support for one-parent families	Increased old-age pensions	Citizenship for the children of foreign workers	Social security benefits for the families of those involved in terror	"Focused assassination of terrorists" is execution without trial	Mixed communities (Jews and Muslims)

	<b>Economic</b>	<b>Religious</b>	<b>Ethnic</b>	<b>Humanitarian</b>	<b>National</b>	<b>Cultural</b>
Ethnic	Equal opportunity for members of minorities	Citizenship for non-Jewish soldiers	The status and rights of olim from Ethiopia	The use of unnecessary force in demonstrations by minority groups	A differential core educational program for members of minority groups, the ultra-Orthodox, and others	Strengthening minority women's rights for those who work outside the home
Religious	Daylight saving time until after the Fall holidays	Certificates of kashrut from the State Rabbinate or from the ultra-Orthodox	Ashkenazi versus Sephardic Jews	Citizenship for the non-Jewish parents of IDF soldiers	Equal status in providing religious services for Reform rabbis	Equal rights for social benefits for homosexuals
Economic	A capitalistic or social-democratic state	A Shmita year in a modern economy	Equal rights for those who don't serve in the IDF	Increased children's allowances for large families	Equal opportunities	Equal opportunities for working women

the clash between elements of the Israeli nationhood of today (as if they were the driving forces). The table suggests that there must be a deeper driving force that propels these above-surface phenomena.

### **Jewish-Israeli Identity as a Driving Force**

It looks as if the lines in our matrix lead to an interesting point beneath the surface. It seems that the lines lead in the direction of the Jewish identity of the Israeli people. To be more precise, in the direction of the area of the future images of Israel as a Jewish state. It regards the issue of how the Jews in general, and the Jews residing in the Land of Israel in particular, individually and collectively, see the significance of the State of Israel, past and present, and especially how they perceive the *raison d'être* of its existence as a modern nation in the future.

There is no denying that the State of Israel is an illogical national phenomenon. To the best of my knowledge, there is no example in modern history of a new national entity that penetrated a distant land, and defined its national identity on the “religious characteristics” of individuals who came from every corner of the globe—without a common spoken language, without a common national culture, without a common religious tradition (only about ten percent of world Jewry in the last century defined themselves as Orthodox, and forty percent as Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Neolog, and others. The remaining fifty percent defined themselves as traditional, secular, and even atheists), with no common ethnicity (there are, thank God, black, white, and yellow Jews, as well as from every other color of humanity). In brief, even if they did not have a clear, common religious identity, they gathered and committed to the establishment of a new national state; something that they had heretofore never had.

The only force that united this group of people was its bitter fate and common religious narrative, which was and is still a matter of great controversy. Over the years, this controversy gave birth to another religion, and to serious side effects—such as messianic movements, which changed their faith, or various movements that betrayed individuals to the regime in power.

## Three Strata

It appears that there are three strata to this driving force. Of late, the Jews have carried out a satisfactory clarification of only one of them. Until the Jewish people in the Diaspora, and the Jewish people resident in the Land of Israel will clarify for themselves all three strata of their Jewish national identity, it will be exceedingly difficult to make an authentic beginning of a solution to the conflict between them and their surroundings. The three strata, which make up the driving force of the conflict, are three paradigms of the *raison d'être* for an Israeli nationhood: *a land of refuge, a land of choice, and a land of mission.*

### A Land of Refuge

The first stratum is the definition of a covenant of fate, which unites the Jews who reside in Israel. At the outset of the twentieth century, most of the Jews in the world maintained that there was nothing sufficiently real to their covenant of fate to unite the various Jews of all corners of the world, so that a historic adventure, such as the establishment of a national state, would succeed. Despite many efforts during the first half of the twentieth century, a tiny minority of world's Jews responded to the call to "make Aliya to Palestine." Only the cataclysmic Holocaust convinced some of the remnants of the Jewish people, and the nations of the world, to support the establishment of a state for the Jews (the majority of the Jews moved to other places on the globe). The mission of the state, or so they imagined, would be to gather those spared from the conflagration, and other persecuted communities, in order to build something like a wildlife reserve in which an endangered species of persecuted humans might be preserved. Support of this idea was meant, of course, to salve the conscience of the enlightened nations, whose moral bankruptcy had been exposed for all to see.

There are still those who refer to the national entity that arose based on this stratum "the land of our affliction."<sup>3</sup> Very few believed that the covenant of fate would be able to attract enough people to establish a new national state for part of the Jewish people.

Defining this covenant of fate has taken about sixty years since the establishment of the state of Israel. By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the State of Israel reached that important point. For the first time in the history of the Jewish people, since the biblical conquest of the land, the world's largest Jewish community was resident in Zion. According to all the estimates, the largest Jewish community in the world since World War II—the Jewish community in the United States—declined in size to less than 5.2 million people, while the Jewish community in Israel rose to 5.8 million. If we add to that number approximately 290,000 immigrants whose Jewish identity is in doubt, then Israel in 2011 has more than 6 million Jews. The size of the world's Jewish population is estimated at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century at around 13 million people. By way of comparison, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, there were only about 3 million Jews worldwide.<sup>4</sup> Before World War II, the Jews numbered approximately 18 million. After the war, there remained only 12 million. It is sad to say, but were it not for the Holocaust, European Jewry would number about 30 million people at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and perhaps more. Most important of all is that, without the State of Israel, it is possible that there would be only from 7 million to 9 million Jews in the world.

This stratum has been highlighted and made clear enough so that 45 percent of the Jews of the world adhere to it. We may sum it up in the phrase “a land of refuge.” Most of those forty-five percent came to the young State of Israel because they had no place on earth where they could build a better life for themselves. Most of those who had alternatives, and who took the chance, did not choose to join the small gathering of Jews in Zion. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, not many Jews outside Israel remain, for whom this stratum is their driving force. If, however, there should occur a disaster in some part of the globe, this disaster could become the fount of more human resources motivated by their status as refugees. An eventuality of this sort cannot be ruled out, as it is possible that we are not making a proper reading of the earthquakes on the surface of events.

## **A Land of Choice**

The second stratum of Israeli national identity is only beginning to become clear at the outset of the twenty-first century. There are two reference points, which reflect this stratum, that are expected to be realized in the near and far future. The first is expected in 2015, or 2020 at the latest. In those years, we expect that more than fifty-one percent of the Jews of the world will live in Israel (taking into account the fertility and immigration rates that have characterized the State of Israel in the first fifty years of its existence, minus the attitude of the Jews who remained in countries defined as “states of refuge”). The second reference point is expected between 2030 and 2035, or 2040 at the latest. In the fourth decade of the twenty-first century, we estimate that seventy percent of the Jewish population of the world will live in the land of Israel.

There is a seventy percent likelihood that those trends will take place, for two main reasons. First, only two Jewish communities are on an upward growth trend at the start of the twenty-first century. All the other Jewish communities in the world are in the process of numerical decline. The Jewish community resident in Israel at the beginning of the twenty-first century is the Jewish community with the greatest fertility rate and natural growth in the world. The other Jewish community with an upward population trend is that resident in Germany, as a result of immigration from the formerly Soviet countries and Israel. The average fertility rate of communities in the Diaspora is around 1.2 to 1.4 children per woman, while the fertility rate in the Jewish community of Israel has been stable, at 2.8 children per couple, for some time, with a constant tendency to increase in times of war. Thus, since the outbreak of suicide bombing in the years 2000–2004, the average number of births increased each year. In 2000 it was 2.5 and by 2010 it was 2.9.

The second reason is the issue of assimilation in the Diaspora. The average rate of intermarriage in the Diaspora has run at about 55 percent in the last decade, and the trend seems to be growing at a constant rate.

The significance of these two reference points is that, on one hand, the number of Jews in the Diaspora is decreasing steadily. On the other hand,

the number of Jews resident in Israel is steadily increasing (because of natural growth, and as a result of *aliyah*—although the latter will dwindle in proportion to the rate to which we were accustomed in the first fifty years since the establishment of the State of Israel).

In a situation in which the force of refuge works itself out, it remains to be seen if the stratum underneath it will begin to bring about above-the-surface changes. This stratum, so it seems, will be defined in terms such as “*the land of choice*.” Since most of the residents in Israel define their presence in Israel as being the result of having no alternative, it is hard for all of us to see how that mindset could change.

One may therefore assume that the driving force of Jewish identity will make itself felt politically, economically, socially, and culturally during the next thirty years. The behavioral terms of this stratum of driving force will express themselves in interesting and surprising ways in the Israeli public forum. It appears that one of those expressions might be, for example, the nullification of the Law of Return within the next twenty years. Public discourse will be occupied with the fact that a law that permits any Jew arriving on Israeli soil to be accepted as a refugee will no longer be necessary. Moreover, it will become germane to examine the individual applicant’s seriousness of choice, and his or her ability to contribute to the Jewish community in Israel.

A more sensitive calibration of this approach will enable the analyst to distinguish between the Jew and the non-Jew’s seriousness of choice and ability to contribute to the Jewish community. A non-Jew may also join those who are dwelling in Zion, although with a status that the Israeli legislator will have to formulate and define very carefully indeed.

### **A Land of Mission**

The third level that evidently will drive the changes and shape the surface phenomena of the future is the deepest driving force of the conflict between the nationality of Israel and the nationality of its neighbors. We can label this stratum “covenantal mission.”

In order for a people to exist, it needs a covenantal mission under which all its energy and *raison d'être* can be rallied. A people without a covenantal mission leaves no mark on history. Eventually that people slips

away into the creases of time. Peoples who shaped the fate of humanity over time had clear missions. They survived the trials of history for hundreds and thousands of years. A mission needs a clear, succinct formulation for it to be an authentic, powerful driving force. It should be able to be expressed in a very short phrase—two or three words. Two examples support this statement.

The American people have a short, clear covenantal mission. That is part of what evidently turned the United States into the most active world power of our generation. That mission is sealed in two words: “individual freedom.” The Constitution and the laws of the United States derive from that covenant. It is the driving force of the institutions they have established, the force behind their foreign policy, and is that which supports the wars they wage.

Most people do not understand how a president could stand up before the world and declare that he would see to the liberation of the Iraqi or the Egyptian citizen from the yoke of tyranny. Especially puzzling is that he was prepared to spend a huge amount of the American taxpayers’ money to build free institutions for the failed countries, even if the price of all this included the lives of hundreds of American soldiers. There are those, for example, who think that the driving force of the war on Iraq is oil. That is plainly not the case. It is true that there are interests of that kind, but they are not the driving force.

The second example is the covenantal mission of the European Community. In its emergence, this community understood that it needed a covenantal mission. It needed something that would unite its different parts, and contain the strength that drives its institutions in a way that would place its stamp on the future of humankind. The European Community understood that in order to write a constitution, to conduct a foreign policy, to sign trade agreements, and to wage wars, it had to formulate a covenantal mission that could be expressed in two words, as short and simple as is possible. In fact, late in 2004, they succeeded in formulating a phrase that will evidently be the central axis of the future of the European Community. The Europeans have proposed the following as their covenantal mission: “unity in diversity.” There will be those who claim that such a covenant is too ambitious for a continent that, over

the last two thousand years, has known so many clashes over precisely the issue of difference. Nevertheless, we shall see.

After the Israeli people clarifies sufficiently for itself all the strata of its covenantal mission—“land of refuge” and “land of choice”—it will reach the crucial point in shaping the deepest stratum of its driving force. It will need, if it wants to survive, to formulate its covenantal mission.

The State of Israel was established to base its existence on a partial covenant of fate. Systems Theory teaches us that there is no reasonable likelihood that this will be sufficient for continuing as a people in a modern state. Beyond that, it teaches us that a covenant of fate is like time-limited glue. It can hold many individuals together as a people for a while—one or two generations at best. Glue of this sort dries up and ceases to hold, eventually. When its power to hold ceases to exist, what remain are scattered shards. Based on those fragments, the people must formulate a covenant of mission, as the new European Community has done.

We have also learned that a minority of a people cannot take on the weighty task of formulating a covenant of mission. A majority of a people must be present in the country at the time of the covenant's formulation in order for it to be drafted and accepted. It is likely that most of the Jewish people, according to the rhythm of present population trends, will be resident in Israel within the next forty years. Only then, in my estimation, will the Jewish people be able to undertake the task of formulating the Covenantal Mission for the State of Israel, most of whose citizens will be Jews. Until that time, we will be witness to the further weakening of the covenant of fate.

No challenge such as this one has been presented to the Jews in their long history, so we cannot provide the next generation with an allegory from the past to which they can refer in their deliberations. The challenge is of the order of magnitude characterized by the rebirth of a people. The people bases itself on its past, but breaks new paths to the future. It draws sustenance from the collective memories and traditions of the past, but ignores them in order to undergo its renaissance. The challenge of preparing a generation for its time in history is a weightily responsible assignment. We must not take this challenge lightly. Many of us today

do not understand our task. There are those who ask only to preserve the past, and others who ask only to ignore it. Today's educators have to define their task in light of the challenge that will be placed before our children in the future.

## **THE COVENANTAL MISSION FOR ISRAEL AS A NATION-STATE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE**

Today, probably no one in Israel or in the Diaspora could imagine a relevant covenantal mission for Israel as a nation-state of the Jewish people, and how it will finally be formulated in another fifty years. It is immensely difficult to imagine what could be a covenantal mission of a Jewish, Middle Eastern, democratic, and modern state, with a twenty-five percent non-Jewish minority. There never has been an entity such as this one in 3200 years of Jewish history. There are many who even believe that an entity of this sort cannot exist and function.

The Jews' consciousness, as it developed over thousands of years in the Diaspora, is communal at most, but decidedly not national. Communal considerations alone were etched into the Jewish way of thinking. The Jewish people resident in Israel will need an approach to thinking different from that which exists today, in order to formulate a covenantal mission valid and authentic enough to carry the nation far into the third millennium. The organizational, social, religious, and cultural considerations must become national ones.

The Jewish people lost this mindset in the course of a hundred generations of living in the Diaspora; it is entirely possible that such a mindset never existed. It is conceivable that the Jewish people had a monarchical mind-set in the days of the kings, or a tribal one. There was, however, no national mind-set, because the Jewish people never had an organizational framework in the form of a national, democratic state. I believe that only a majority of the Jewish people concentrated in the land of Israel will have the power to invent the national mind-set with which the Jews will be able to begin to formulate their covenantal mission.

This way of thinking could radiate new insights to the whole people in Israel and to those remaining in the Diaspora. It is my hope that

these insights will assist the coming generation to formulate an accepted mission-related task for a modern, democratic Jewish state in the Middle East that includes a large minority population.

Unfortunately, I find it difficult at this particular point in time to imagine a covenantal mission that draws its rationale from other contexts. Like the rest of this generation, we have difficulty in escaping the mind-set and contexts imprinted on us over thousands of years.

### **HINTS OF A NATIONAL, CIVIL COVENANTAL MISSION**

If one makes the effort, it is possible to identify the distant edges of a national, civil covenantal mission. It is important to stress that we might err here. On one side, the lower edge can be a mission similar to that of the Maccabi Tel Aviv sports club, and the spirit it symbolizes when it wins championships. On the other side, on the upper edge, there could be a mission like that of “Light unto the nations,” with all that would entail—social, economic, scientific, ethical, religious, and legal (in the sense of religious law) aspects.

For curiosity’s sake, and not because I think that this will be what develops, I will explore one possible mission that provides us with a hint of a new thought context. The next mission could be formulated as follows: “a synergy of cultures.”

The mission of Israel could be the building of a junction of cultural nodes that would make cultural, cognitive, and political integration possible for cultures of the West and of the East. A behavioral expression of a mission of this sort could occur on different scientific and social levels; for example, developing new scientific theories based on Systems Theory, which would be compatible with the modern, technological, global, complex, and multifaceted world.

By dint of painstaking work over thousands of years, the Jews developed a systemic tradition of complex integration between the concepts of the individual and society. Interesting insights were developed regarding holistic systems and the tasks of their component parts. The people also took on the task of establishing organizational, economic, community,

and legal systems, which were managed with considerable efficiency and which proved their worth over a period of millennia.

It is possible that young Israel's subcultures—those that came from Western and Eastern communities—are the epistemological foundations of a mission of this sort. If the Jews in Israel succeed in taking the bull by the horns, and jumping onto his back, they will be able to gallop forward in creative directions, to new levels of achievement, with the cultural mission of a nation in renaissance. A mission of this sort could take an important place among those of modern, advancing nations, and could provide us with a respite from our dispute with them.

My intention is not in the direction of a religious mission for the Jewish people. I am talking about a national mission. The Jewish religion had, and remains with, a clear religious mission. It can be summed up in two words: “worshiping God.” At the same time, Judaism as a religion, so far as I am familiar with it, needs to add another facet to its identity: a national covenantal mission for a modern state.

## **THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE ARAB–ISRAELI DISPUTE**

How is everything detailed above connected with the bloody conflict between the State of Israel and the peoples of the Middle East? Beyond that, how is this dispute tied to the phenomena such as the new antisemitism, and to the feeling that “the whole world is against us” that accompanies it?

It appears that the driving force behind the dispute between Israel and the peoples of the region is possibly nothing more than an *identity crisis*. It is a drama that has been going on for about 3,700 years—from the time of Abraham—and has reached its climax with the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948. In order for the conflict between Israel and the other peoples of the region to be settled, a new aspect of Jewish identity must emerge—a distinct and viable national mission. This national mission must draw from past traditions, present insights, and future ideas.

The Jewish nation of the Jewish people will have its right to exist recognized by the community of nations only when it has clarified its

future mission for itself. Only when the Jews resident in Israel have a clear, razor-sharp mission will the peoples of the region be ready to genuinely start the process of accepting the Jews as one of them. It will be possible to begin to negotiate its right to exist as a nation in the region, not merely as a religion, only when most of the Israelis have a clear idea of what is unique to them as a nation. This is not to say that it will be easy, only that it will be clear to all just what the nation of Israel is, and what its historic mission for the future will be. The surrounding nations as well as many other world nations will continue to argue with Israel and challenge its legitimacy to exist, but the arguments will be on an equal footing.

## **TRENDS**

In the meantime, underneath the surface, the Earth will continue to rumble, because the Jews in Israel have yet to begin the process of clarifying the matter of their mission-related identity as a modern and democratic nation. Many forces will continue to pull this identity in different, conflicting directions. There will be those who will want to see the mission of the State of Israel as a state for all its citizens, as every other modern state defines itself. There will be those who will want to see its mission as a religious entity, as per the dream of thousands of years. There will be those who will wish to see Israel's mission as that of a megalopolis, and as a technology hub, as per the dream of many business leaders, and according to the spirit of globalization that pervades the very air they breathe. There will be yet others whose desire will be to pull the mission in directions that will only emerge in the years to come.

It is difficult to tell, from the point in time that these words are being written, what will finally take shape. One thing, however, is clear to this writer: the result must be unique to the Jews, their past, and to the degree to which they understand the future of the human race. Any other compromise will not last, and will not provide a fitting response to the pressures of the peoples of the region, or to those of the peoples of the world.

Those pressures will mainly find expression in a demand for the geographical definition of the Jewish-Israeli people. So long as these people are not clear regarding the matter of their identity and mission, they will

not be able to stand up to the pressures for geographical definition, and will always have to provide a logical response not available to them, on the subject of their needs, and of their rights to this, or some other territory.

So long as those pressures exist, there will be no peace in the land. This will not be because the Jews resident in Israel do not want peace, or because they have not made efforts to achieve peace, but because the Jews will not have the right to live in peace because they have not yet institutionalized their rights by making a clear definition of their mission. There is a bumpy road ahead. As sad as it is to say the following, civil war remains, as it happened in many other nations that went through similar processes, one of the eventualities that could slow the process considerably, and send the nation into years of panic, terrible loss of life and of national direction.

Despite this, in the final analysis, the Jews have arrived in the twenty-first century at a historical landmark dreamed of by generations and generations of the downtrodden and rejected. They have arrived at this point with immeasurable resources of experience and history, and of collective wisdom acquired with much trial and labor. The Jews arrive here with the wet-behind-the-ears *chutzpah* of a young, dynamic, and optimistic young man, together with the thick skin of an old man, rich in experience and in troubles overcome.

The Jews have never been better prepared for the task set before them. After 3,200 years since Joshua's conquest of ups and downs, of challenges and obstacles, they have reached a situation better than they have ever known. With the exception of short periods in their history, the Jews have never been so well organized. They have never had political institutions—local and international—in such a vital and robust condition. Never before have the majority of the Jews in the world possessed so many rights and freedoms in their places of residence, in the Diaspora or in Israel. It has been thousands of years since the Jews were able to bear arms and defend themselves. It is the first time in thousands of years that the Jews have an international strategic status; a status that has been growing and becoming stronger with the years. It is true that there are many threats to their existence, of the most frightening sort, but it is also true that Israel's ally is the most important superpower of the age.<sup>5</sup>

By any criteria, the Jewish people dwelling in Zion, and the Jewish people residing in the Diaspora are currently experiencing the most important golden age in the history of the Jews. The spiritual and scientific creation, the physical building, and the social, geopolitical, and geo-economic involvement are of the highest quality the Jews have known in hundreds of years.

To the best of my understanding, there has yet to be a generation so well prepared to take on the task of formulating the Jews' covenantal mission as is this generation. What is lacking is the mandate that requires the consensus of the majority of the Jews. The broad consensual support, which only a majority of the Jews can provide, will grant ethical sanction to the covenantal mission. Such sanction is necessary if the mission is to be of binding significance for the generations to come. It is necessary in order to provide the spiritual power needed to redefine Judaism and the components of its identity in a different national platform, as well as Judaism's cognitive ability, and the imagination needed to stand up to the task. It is an honorable task dreamed of from the Jews' days as the nomadic followers of Abraham in Haran, of ancient Babylon.

It looks as if all the signs point to a situation in which the Jews are ready for the last stage before their final renaissance. Afterwards, their lives will begin to become normal; with reasonable difficulties, such as passions, disappointments, struggles, and many successes, just like all the nations of the world.

## **EPILOGUE**

It is true that futurists attempt to study various ways in which different trends can lead, in order to better conceptualize the future. However, in all sincerity, futurists do not believe that there actually exists a "place" known as "the future." All theories—beginning with Einstein's Theory of Relativity, and continuing to the most recently formulated ideas, such as the physicist Gell Mann's theory of Information Gathering and Utilizing Systems (IGUS), and the work of robotics theoretician James Harrie—maintain that the feeling of "time passing" is only a cognitive fiction. Past,

present, and future are nothing but an individual's and a group's processing of information. The way in which they process a bit of information is what dictates their relationship to their environment, which acts or reacts to the frameworks they have created.

From this point of view, the superficialities mentioned in this chapter are merely an attempt to construct a framework with the help of which we could build an environment that would meet the nationhood needs of the Jewish people in Israel. In other words, we are merely trying to point in the direction of the solution to our dispute with ourselves and with other frameworks of the peoples around us, in the Middle East and beyond.

## NOTES

- 1 At the time of the Biluim—the 1880s—there were 34,000 Jews and 330,000 Arabs in the land of Israel. The Jews made up ten percent of the population. The great historian Dubnow was negatively impressed by the flow of immigrants of the first *aliyah*, and predicted that by the year 2000 there would be only 500,000 Jews in the land. In not many years' time it looked as if he had been right. At the end of World War I, the population included 55,000 Jews and 500,000 Arabs. The 1:10 ratio was maintained. On the day Independence was declared, May 15, 1948, there were 600,000 Jews and 980,000 Arabs; approximately forty percent were Jews living west of the Jordan River. The chief statistician at the time, Roberto Bacchi, recommended postponing the declaration of the state, out of fear that the demographic problem would end the state's existence. To our great good fortune, Ben-Gurion ignored him. About twenty years later, Levi Eshkol chose to ignore the later-to-be-debunked warning after the Six-Day War that by 1987 there would be an Arab majority west of the Jordan.
- 2 This analysis, we must confess, is only one of several possibilities. The nature of matters of this kind of analysis is that they are affected by a great degree of subjectivity, the source of which it is difficult to get. As a result, it affects the analyst's point of view. Below, I will try to relate to the source of my subjectivity.
- 3 A. B. Yehoshua generally refers thus to the connection of the Jews to his country.
- 4 Jewish community in Israel: press announcement by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, December 30, 2010. Eighteenth-century figures.  
T. Bisk and M. Dror, *Futurizing the Jews: Alternative Futures for Meaningful Jewish Existence in the 21st Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003).
- 5 There are those who will maintain, on one hand, that this promises nothing for Israel in the future, and on the other, that this alliance works against Israel's best interests. In any case, the alliance is widely considered the most important strategic asset that the State of Israel has had to date.