

President's Message

First, I want to wish everyone connected to Partners for Progressive Israel, as well as the whole House of Israel, a *shannah tovah u'metukah* – a sweet and happy year (despite everything!). I am also proud to reinaugurate Israel Horizons, a magazine/newsletter with a long and honorable history on the American Jewish Left which we are continuing. Israel Horizons was published continuously (more or less) from 1952 until 2011, first under the auspices of Americans for Progressive Israel and then of Meretz USA, when it was edited by Ralph Seliger. PPI's Board and supporters stand in that tradition of support for both the State of Israel and for progressive parties and causes in both Israel and the Diaspora that seek to change Israel's dangerous current trajectory.

Of course, I am also writing to urge you and your friends to support PPI in the coming year. Trying to fill the shoes worn for so many years by our late, beloved Harold Shapiro z"l is a big, not to say impossible, job, especially in the age of Trump and Netanyahu.

But why support PPI? What are we up to?

As you know, there are a number of Israel-oriented liberal Jewish organizations whose aims we largely share, including J Street, Americans for Peace Now, the New Israel Fund, Ameinu, and others. To borrow a theme from another holiday: Why are we different from these other groups? What niche do we fill that the others do not?

The answer is that we have a particularly ambitious aim, but one that we believe is essential to ending the Occupation, which marked its bitter 50th anniversary last June, as well as to reshaping Israeli priorities. We want to re-empower the Israeli moderate Left, to change the dangerous and self-destructive path Israel has been on for almost two decades, and to recreate a proudly progressive, democratic, and Jewish Israel that strives wholeheartedly to fulfill the goals stated in its Declaration of Independence: "The State of Israel ... will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex."

We fully recognize the magnitude of this task – and the chutzpah of the idea that we, a group of American Jews, can help change Israel's path. But our strategy is to work with the many Israeli organizations that share our views and whose efforts are far too little known in the United States: political parties such as Meretz; effective labor organizations, which are experiencing a reinvigoration; civil society organizations; new, progressive think tanks such as Molad and Mitvim; Jewish-Arab coalitions; women's and youth organizations; and especially our new partner, the Alliance for Israel's Future, with which we are working to identify, encourage, and train tomorrow's progressive Israeli leaders.

This issue of our new newsletter, Israel Horizons, gives some idea of our views and activities. We ask for your support, financial and otherwise, for the programs and activities we will be launching in the coming months. "You need not complete the work, but you are not at liberty to avoid it" Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 2:21.



PAUL SCHAM
President

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Why doesn't the English-language media report on the workings of Israeli political power?

By Maya Haber



Progressive English-language media tends to portray the Israeli electorate as somehow floating above all the social, economic, and cultural crises that grip other nations. Israeli voters—Jewish and Arab—remain immune to globalization, de-industrialization, privatization, or austerity. Paying little attention to Israeli domestic politics, it defines the electorate vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with an occasional nod towards ethno-religious divisions. Social and economic inequality don't communicate as political issues, and the Israeli public appears unaffected by either conservative populist movements à la Trump or Le Pen, or social democratic movements inspired by Bernie Sanders. By English-language media accounts, it appears that building progressive political power has no bearing at all in Israel. All Israelis have to do is just give peace a chance and everything will be all right.

This, of course, is entirely untrue, and ironically, feeds directly into the myth that Netanyahu uses to divide the country and dazzle the Israeli poor and working class. While dismantling social services in the Israel and introducing a harsh neo-liberal agenda, Netanyahu tells his public, "It's the security, stupid!"

Failing to recognize and understand the complexities of political power, Progressive Americans overlook potential shifts, alliances and opportunities for solidarity. It's no wonder, then, that some factions are calling for international pressure and boycott of Israel. Because not recognizing the workings of power, they assume that Israelis can't save themselves and must be saved or coerced from without.

It is unfortunate that these international progressive forces are largely unaware of the fact that since 2012, eight percent of the Israeli labor force, some 180,000 people, joined unions, or that

these unions successfully fought to raise the minimum wage; or the fact that the Israeli public organized and won an expansion of public education to include pre-K. These are victories that directly impact hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Jews and Arabs in Israel.

Israeli Leftists often express concern that American liberals and progressives seem oblivious to the fact that Israel is a normal country, facing political challenges similar to our own. Israelis, they stress, build political power just like the rest of the world does: by forging coalitions, advocating, organizing, and educating.

Recent news from Israel offer a great example of this kind of political myopia. A few weeks ago the Progressive Israeli camp scored an important victory. Following years of advocacy led by Meretz Member of Knesset Ilan Gilon, the government approved doubling the disability stipend, and connecting it to minimum wage payments. Details of the bill are currently being discussed in the Knesset. MK Gilon's victory will improve the lives of 250,000 Israelis, who have been living on less than half the minimum wage. He won by orchestrating a media campaign entitled, "A disabled individual isn't half a person," pressuring Knesset members, and connecting with grassroots activism. Like the ways in which American progressives are attempting to counter the Republican healthcare bill, MK Gilon exposed the heartlessness of Netanyahu's government, and managed to pass a plan with support from every party in the Knesset.

Yet this remarkable progressive political victory was barely mentioned in the English language media. And this is no coincidence. Those who follow both Hebrew and English news know that the building of political power on the Israeli Left is largely ignored, even by Ha'aretz.

Why is MK Gilon's win important?

More importantly, the disability stipend reveals the direct connection between the military Occupation of the West Bank and the dismantling of the Israeli welfare state. In 2003, Benjamin Netanyahu, then serving as Minister of Finance in Ariel Sharon's government, used the cloak of the Second Intifada to slash Israel's safety net. The disability stipend, which until then enabled disabled people to live with some economic dignity, was first on the chopping block. It would have been difficult for Netanyahu to dismantle the welfare state without cover of suicide bombs. But social dissent is silenced when buses explode and the "security question" takes center stage. By the end of the Second intifada, Netanyahu had leaped forward in dismantling the Israeli social safety net.

Because every time the Israeli progressive camp wins, it takes another step towards increasing its power and ending the Occupation.

Today, while the US spends 19.3 percent of its GDP on social spending (such as disability, unemployment, food stamps, public housing etc.), Israel spends only 16.1 percent. Netanyahu has since become a master at using fear, racism, and "security" to ram through his neoliberal agenda—to the detriment of working class Israeli Jews and Arabs, to say nothing of the Palestinians under military occupation.

Traditionally, the liberal and progressive media have played a critical role in uncovering the relationships between politics, economics, and war. These analyses have resulted in solidarity, support, and increased political power. Yet this tradition appears to be left out of all reporting about Israel. Most progressives view the fight against the Occupation as entirely divorced from a common struggle for political power in Israel. Yet, unless the Israeli Left wins political power, the Occupation will never end. And so long as the English language media continues to ignore the challenges and achievements of Israeli domestic politics, we will never attain the progressive power needed to make a change. ■

Maya Haber is Director of Programming and Strategy at Partners for Progressive Israel.



Commentary



Why I failed the test of Zionism

Usually we are not great fans of MK Benny Begin (Likud Party). He rejects a two-state solution and argues that Israel is destined to live by its sword. But in September Begin came out in opposition to the Jewish nation-state bill. His reasons remind us of the values

Israelis, regardless of their political positions, used to share.

In 1992 Begin voted for the Basic Law Human Dignity and Liberty.

"This law promoted human rights in our country. But this morning, coalition members have cast a shadow over our ability to uphold human rights. During the discussion, government representatives challenged members of the Zionist opposition arguing that by not supporting the Jewish Nation State law they are failing the Zionist test. I usually refrain from grading people's Zionism. But in this context, I will grade my own Zionism. Well, in the Zionist test the government representatives set today, I failed. I do not and will not support the "Jewish Nation State Bill" in its proposed format.

In 2011, I proposed a bill according to which: "Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people, founded on freedom, justice and peace, as envisioned by the prophets of Israel, and maintains equal rights for all its citizens." To dispel the exaggerated fears of some, lest the law turn Israel into a "state of all its citizens," the bill can also be phrased as follows: "Equal rights for each of its citizens." This formula can win the support of 90 Knesset members. But for the past 18 months the government has refused to allow me to bring the bill to a vote in the Knesset plenum.

The reason for this refusal is obvious. The Likud leadership maintains that we must not include equal rights in the "nation state law." They explicitly intend to undermine Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty. Indeed, it is necessary to state in the Basic Law that Israel is the state of the Jewish people. But when a fifth of its citizens are of other nationalities, the law must explicitly include a promise of equality. This is essential, and rejecting this principle the government and the coalition are erasing equality from the "nation state law."

1947 years ago (in 70 C.E) our Temple was destroyed, and Jewish sovereignty in our land ceased. It's a great privilege to be part of the majority in the sovereign state of the Jews. But this right imposes the obligation to act fairly and equitably to other nations, as the Torah says: "One law and one ordinance shall be for you, and for the stranger who lives as a foreigner with you."

The Palestinians won the 2017 battle for Temple Mount. That's good for Israel

By Paul Scham

Palestinians – and many Israelis – regard their victory in Jerusalem as Israel's capitulation. This is why that's a rare win for peace, and for Israel



Photo Credit: AHMAD GHARABLI/AFP

My day job is as a Professor of Israel Studies at the University of Maryland; every fall I teach a large course entitled “Fundamental Questions of the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict.” A few years ago I was lecturing about the 1973 Yom Kippur War and explained that, as I see it, the war was essentially a draw, in which Egypt and Israel both lost and won.

After class, an Egyptian student came up to me and, very respectfully and politely, informed me that I was wrong, that Egypt unquestionably won that war.

I use that incident (which didn't surprise me; I also know that many Israelis are equally convinced Israel won that war) as a template for understanding Israel's retreat (or capitulation) with regard to the metal detectors it was installing at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif compound in response to the brutal killing of two Israeli policemen in July.

Israelis largely regarded it as an appropriate technical response to the incident and most were taken aback at the widespread fury

among Palestinians and Muslims worldwide. They regarded the anger as purely political and even hypocritical (apparently mosques in Mecca and Medina already have metal detectors and security cameras). Doubtless, the eventual announcement that they were removed was seen by many Israeli Jews as a humiliating defeat, a capitulation to threats and violence for which Israel will have to pay heavily.

On the contrary. It may be a humiliation for the Prime Minister, but it is a clear (if rare) victory for peace, which is a victory for Israel.

Unfortunately, it is unlikely that Netanyahu's government will follow it up with anything constructive. Rather, as we see in the ostentatiously public welcome for the security guard at the Israeli embassy in Jordan who killed an attacker and which deeply angered Jordan's King Abdullah, Bibi feels he must make up ground “lost” to Israel's foes and, also, at least as important, placate Israel's right wing. Otherwise, Israel will be seen as “weak.”

What this really shows (once again) is that Israelis have not yet absorbed the lesson of its two successful peace processes, with Egypt and Jordan, nor of its much longer list of unsuccessful ones.

It is common wisdom that it was the perception of the Yom Kippur War as a victory by Anwar Sadat that allowed him the political leeway to make peace with Israel in 1977. Similarly, though much less dramatically and not at all surprisingly, Israel's beginning the Oslo Process and recognizing the PLO in 1993 allowed Jordan's King Hussein (although initially blindsided) to sign a peace treaty with Israel the next year.

Israelis have not yet absorbed the lesson of its two successful peace processes, with Egypt and Jordan, nor of its much longer list of unsuccessful ones.

Israel has always assumed that driving its adversaries faces into the dirt, i.e., humiliating them, is an essential part of convincing them they could not win, and that Israel is here to stay.

This strategy has never worked; to the extent peace has been maintained it has been in spite of the humiliation rather than because of it.

Currently, the two most important examples of this sort of thinking are the demand that Palestinians recognize Israel as the "Jewish state," and the pointless attempts to bypass the Palestinians and make peace with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, both of which would require Palestinians, in the first instance, and major Arab leaders in the second, to swallow humiliation, as they perceive it, that might seriously jeopardize their rule. They would be despised by their people, whether Israelis understand it or not.

This has everything to do with the recent situation on the Temple Mount.

Israel's strategy of humiliating its adversaries has never worked.

Let's assume for the moment that although the Shin Bet warned the government that metal detectors were a very bad idea, the actual decision-makers could genuinely not understand why they might create riots and potential jihad.

It goes to show that after a hundred plus years of fighting, Israelis have still not learned to see things from the adversary's point of view. Anyone who has even a passing familiarity with the incidents of the past three years should recognize that that would be seen as a deliberate statement of ownership by Israel, whether that was intentional or not.

However, the fact that the Palestinians won this one, for a change, is good in itself.

For Israel as well, which, at least since 1967, has had no need to prove itself anymore. It's there – and by now many Arab leaders even appreciate it as a status quo power and a bulwark against Iran. But for that to be openly recognized, Palestinians need to retain some pride, along with the 22% minus of Palestine that is the most they would get in any future peace deal. There are no doubt Palestinians who will trumpet this as the first step in a successful war of liberation but that is empty rhetoric, not reality.

The fact is that if Israel's leaders really want peace, as they proclaim, then they must allow Palestinians dignity instead of dishonor. That should be obvious. It is very hard to believe protestations of peaceful intent when accompanied by continual humiliation. Thus, this Israeli "defeat" is actually a victory that shouldn't, but probably will, be squandered. ■

Paul Scham is President of Partners for Progressive Israel and a Research Associate Professor of Israel Studies at the University of Maryland.



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Fighting inclusion of women in the IDF

By Michal Margalio



Recently Haredi–Zionist rabbis have been pressing the IDF to separate female and male soldiers serving in the same units. They argue that the current Joint Service order, which regulates the inclusion of women in gender–mixed units, hampers the modesty requirements of religious soldiers. In response, a coalition of Israeli organizations fighting for women’s rights and religious pluralism appealed to the IDF chief of Staff saying that “Segregation based on gender is a violation the principle of equality and is against the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty.”

The changes expected in the Joint Service Order will segregate female soldiers and push them aside.

The IDF is considering changes to the Joint Service Order, because of Haredi–Zionist rabbinical pressure. The pressuring rabbis are the same rabbis who argue that women shouldn’t serve in the IDF at all and that female soldiers hamper the IDF’s ability to win.

Three comments on the expected changes to the Joint Service Order:

First, the new order states that the IDF should plan events which “make all the soldiers feel comfortable from the outset.” But we already know that the demand to be considerate is always one–sided: we must consider the feelings of religious soldiers but they don’t need to consider ours. The number of females on stage in IDF events has already shrunk, and sometimes female soldiers are even forbidden to sing in public. Making “all soldiers feel comfortable from the outset” means that from now on women in the IDF will neither perform on stage nor appear in official ceremonies.

Second, [the new order determines that] an IDF officer will be permitted to refuse commanding females in joint units. This means that without official declarations, fewer jobs and assignments will be opened to women, because opening positions to women would invite religious officers and soldiers to refuse and make special requests. The new order gives the impression that the IDF cares more about the new sensibilities of religious soldiers than the actual contribution of female soldiers.

Third, [by surrendering to rabbinical demands] the IDF gives credence to the hallucinatory theories of the extremist rabbis, according to which female soldiers hamper the IDF’s ability to win. The new order creates new segregated service units and from now on when a soldier says he is uncomfortable serving with a woman – the IDF will move her aside.

But, women make up about a third of all IDF soldiers, and their number in combat and combat support positions has risen in recent years. The extreme leadership of the national–religious public is the one distracting the IDF and hampering its ability to win.

The truth is that the IDF cannot exist without the women’s service. But the struggle against pushing the women out of the army should not be a women’s fight alone. The IDF is leading a change that is expected to create gender segregated units. But there is another option. Secular soldiers and officers, choose to serve with your sisters, the women. If religious soldiers don’t want to serve with women, let them serve not only in gender homogenous units, but also in religious units. If religious soldiers want to serve without women, they can also serve without secular men.

The rabbis demand annulment of the Joint Service Order. We agree: there is no need for an order regulating gender inclusion in the IDF. We live together all our lives and we will serve together. Religious soldiers are welcome to take part in the people’s army, which includes women. Religious soldiers who don’t want to serve in accordance with the values of the IDF and the State of Israel will have to find segregated units that will push them aside, instead of pushing female soldiers into a corner. ■

Michal Margalio is the Managing Director of Israel Women’s Network and a fellow at the Alliance for Israel’s Future



This text was published in Saloona on July 27, 2017.

Operation Economic Defensive Shield



We had a wonderful conversation with Barbara Swirski, the co-founder of the Adva Center, Israel's leading independent policy analysis and advocacy organization for social justice and equality, about Adva's new report: *The Occupation: Who pays the Price?*



Barbara Swirski
Co-founder, Adva Center

In March 2002, two days after the terrorist attack on a Seder dinner in Netanya's Park Hotel killed 30 and injured 160 people, the IDF unleashed 'Operation Defensive Shield.' The largest military operation in the West Bank since 1967, the operation sought to retake Palestinian cities in area A and shield the Israeli public from terror. For the first time Israelis in Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem felt the consequences of Occupation on a daily basis.

Restaurants, buses and clubs were exploding all around. Suicide bombers killed 21 teens in the Dolphinarium discotheque in Tel Aviv, 16 in the Matza restaurant in Haifa, and 11 in Jerusalem's Café Moment. Everyone feared a loved one could be next. And the Israeli public was willing to pay any price to end this nightmare.

At that very moment Ariel Sharon's government also declared 'Operation Economic Defensive Shield.' This economic Operation, which Sharon's government named after the military one, exemplifies how wedded Israel's Occupation of the West Bank is to its devastating economic policies toward its own citizens. The plan sought to support the growing defense budget to combat terrorism (not only for the IDF and security services, but also the police), while reducing the national deficit.

How? Austerity: a series of drastic cuts to the National Insurance Institute, eroding the social safety net, education, health, welfare, and housing services. Within a year, the poverty level among families increased from 18% to 20%. But why reduce the national deficit exactly when defense spending grew? Because they could. As Churchill said, "never let a serious crisis go to waste." Had it not been for the crisis atmosphere, it's hard to imagine such drastic, far-reaching changes would have been brought to the Knesset, let alone approved. (Adva Report, pp. 30–31).

The proof is in the pudding, says Barbara Swirski. If the government wanted to balance the budget, it could have increased taxes on the rich. But it didn't.

Instead, Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made the absurd decision to lower taxes in unprecedented cuts. These reductions were particularly favorable to high-income earners – especially those in the top socioeconomic one percent: Taxpayers who were earning NIS 25,000 or more a month would be able to take home an additional NIS 2,000–5,000 monthly. (Adva Report, p. 26).

This was not a fluke. It was the policy. Behind 'Operation Economic Defensive Shield' stood a strong neoliberal ideology. Finance Minister Netanyahu religiously believed (and still does) in the miracle of voodoo economics: lowering taxes for the rich creates more investment in the economy which ignites economic growth to create new jobs and more disposable income for working people to generate more private consumption. Since Israel's Gross Domestic (GDP) was declining during the Second Intifada, as it always does during conflict, Netanyahu heeded the economic witchdoctors and delivered burnt offerings to the free market daemons by way of tax cuts.

As always, the formula was simple: austerity for the many poor, and benefits for the few rich. And the result? Surprise. Surprise. The poor got poorer and the rich got richer. ■

This is an excerpt from our regular feature "Conversations with Israel and Palestine." This and other conversations are on our website.

Partners' outreach in Rochester, NY



In June, Maya Haber, Partners for Progressive Israel's Programming and Strategy Director, was invited to Rochester, NY for three days of dynamic programming to diverse audiences and gatherings.

Rochester activists hoped Partners' new educational strategy would allow them to open a liberal conversation about Israel. In Rochester, as in many other American cities, people with right-wing positions on Israel have anointed themselves as the only legitimate voice to speak for and about Israel, and particularly against a two-state solution in the name of Israel's "security." But these self-appointed defenders of Israel never mention the costs of the endless state of war and the expansion of settlements on the Israeli population.

Rochester activists invited Maya to broaden the discussion as a way to break the stalemate and open up new space to speak about Israel in different terms.

Partners' programming in Rochester was wildly successful. Connecting Israel's social and economic situation with the Occupation clicked with many progressives in Rochester, especially in the current political climate, when progressives are united in advancing social justice and protecting civil liberties in the United States.

Maya spoke at seven public events. Here are a few examples:

- At Temple Beth Am Maya spoke at a *pre-tefila* dinner. In her talk, she outlined the educational, economic, and
- religious differences between Israeli and American Jews. She argued that if we want to steer Israelis' voting toward peace and an end to the occupation, we must develop empathy for their daily reality. We must understand that the majority of Israelis live lives substantially different from than the average American Jew.
- At Rochester's Islamic Center, Maya addressed an interfaith crowd of 150 Jews, Muslims and Christians during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. In her talk, "Resisting the Occupation & Islamophobia," she detailed how socio-economic conditions in Israel and the United States brought Israelis to support the Occupation and Americans to fear Muslims. Maya emphatically argued that economic despair heightens people's susceptibility to fearmongering and diminishes their compassion for others.
- The responses to Maya's presentations were highly moving. People emotionally thanked her for openly discussing these issues. Some Muslim attendees were surprised to discover that many Jews in their community reject Israel's occupation of the West Bank. Perhaps most important, Maya's talk created a space for neighbors to speak openly with each other about politically charged issues. Though the Rochester Jewish and Muslim communities engage in interfaith dialogue, for example, they consciously avoid talking about Israel-Palestine and the Occupation.
- Maya was also invited to address a group of modern Orthodox at their weekly summer Learning on the Lawn

meeting. There Maya drew on the responsibility of the Zealots for the fall of the Second Temple and compared them to modern day Israeli zealots. She emphasized that Jewish Home Party leaders like Bezalel Smotrich and Naftali Bennet, who publicly promote Jewish prayers on the Temple Mount, are willing to risk religious war with the Muslim world, just to assert Israel's sovereignty over the Temple Mount. Attendees approached Maya after the talk offering connections to other rabbis and congregations that would be open to this message.

- Maya's public talk, co-sponsored by J Street Rochester, was entitled "Fifty Years On: The Cost of Occupation from an Israeli Perspective." In it, she placed the Occupation within a comprehensive social-economic perspective, explaining how erosion of the social safety net fed the sense of existential threat, lack of empathy for the other (whether Palestinians, post-soviet immigrants or ultraorthodox) and contributed to strengthening the settlement project. She used research by progressive Israeli think tanks showing that while Israel dismantled the welfare state, it built a welfare state in the Occupied territories for settlers.

"Failing to recognize and understand the complexities of political power, progressive Americans overlook potential shifts, alliances and opportunities for solidarity."

The responses were overwhelmingly positive. Maya's experience in Rochester proved once again that Partners' Bridging the Gap educational approach reaches far and wide and resonates not only with the 'usual suspects' who agree wholeheartedly with our political positions, but also with many of the skeptical and the unconvinced.

We want to thank Ayala Emmett, Michael Argaman, and Rabbi Drorah Setel for organizing and coordinating the trip. Partners has the best volunteers!

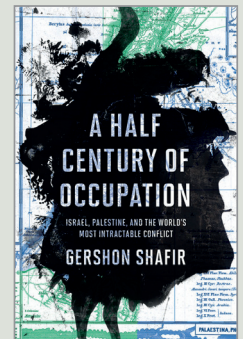
If you are interested in bringing our educational programs to your community, please contact us at info@progressiveisrael.org ■

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

The Theodore Bikel Peace and Justice Internship Program



In loving memory of our Chairman of the Board (2005-2015), Theodore Bikel z”l, Partners for Progressive Israel established the Theodore Bikel Fund for Peace and Social Justice in 2015.

Theo was a constant inspiration for peace and human rights in the Middle

East. He represented an alternative voice to mainstream American Jewish attitudes toward Israel. Theo was a consummate supporter; he once said “Partners for Progressive Israel is an important voice for sanity and levelheadedness in a world that has short supply of both.”

The fund honors and promotes his many creative talents as well as the values that he struggled for throughout his life: human rights and social justice, dignity and peace for Israel, its neighbors and the world. It grants scholarships to young activists who volunteer in Israel using their creative talents to advance these values. While there they generate materials that can be used in Israel and the US to further promote these causes.

Last September, Partners, along with Theo’s widow, Aimee Ginsburg Bikel, successfully produced the memorial “Remembering Theo, an Evening of Music, Laughter and Love” at the Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College in New

York City. With the support of Musical Directors Matthew Lazar and Hankus Netsky, performers/speakers including David Broza, Peter Yarrow, Frank London, Daniel Kahn, Lorin Sklamberg, Zalmen Mlotek, Deborah Strauss & Jeff Warschauer, Hazzan Mike Stein, Sheldon Harnick, Rabbi Amichai Lau Lavie, Sam Norich, Nick Wyman and the “Fiddler on the Roof” Alumni Ensemble entertained and spoke their memories of Theo to the enthusiastic audience. Proceeds from the benefit went to the Fund.

Last January, the first recipient of the Internship, Matthew Echlelman, joined the group on the Partner’s Israel Symposium. In his application Matthew stated “I want to explore an issue that has so often been distorted by the media and presented as a binary of good and evil. I want to expose the danger of this thinking by showing the humanity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the eyes of the people who live it—on both sides. I want to create empathy for the “other” to motivate us to question what we’re hearing and seeing in the world around us.” Soon the results of Matthew’s time in Israel will be seen in several videos that will be posted to the Partners’ website.

Contributions to the Fund can be made by going to www.progressiveisrael.org/Bikel_Fund.

Grant applications for the Internship Program in 2018 have not yet opened. If you’d like updates on our application process, please contact us at info@progressiveisrael.org.

“My trip of a lifetime with Harold Shapiro”

By Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben



For the three decades that I knew him, Harold Shapiro was my mentor and my inspiration. His indefatigable commitment to peace between Israelis and Palestinians was legendary, and his warm laugh and loving embrace of nearly everyone he met was infectious. Throughout the ups and downs of Israeli political life, the tensions and challenges between the progressive voices in American Jewry of which he was a towering presence and the American Jewish establishment that so often seemed bent on delegitimizing any dissenting voices, Harold was the voice of reason in my ear, the voice of hope and faith and trust in a future of peace and reconciliation whose vision was always so clearly in front of him, just out of reach. Though I had lived in Israel for two years and visited since then many times, it was with great anticipation that I joined him and a remarkably diverse group of Americans and Israelis in November of 2014 for the eight-day PPI Israel Symposium which turned out to be the most powerful Israel experience I have ever had.

Over the eight days of our symposium, we met with a wide cross-section of Israeli and Palestinian society from Members of Knesset of various political persuasions, to directors of numerous non-profit organizations dedicated to nurturing peace and equality, fighting for civil and human rights for all, soldiers who defied orders they found contrary to their ethics and values, religious progressives working to bring religious pluralism to Israeli society, grieving Israeli and Palestinian parents whose children had been murdered in the conflict who joined together in the solidarity of loss to speak out for the common humanity of all, and more.

What I learned on this jam packed non-stop itinerary was that on both sides of the conflict the majority believes that the answer is clearly the creation of a two-state solution, and on both sides the majority also believes that it's not possible to achieve. It often felt like Israel itself was increasingly a schizophrenic society like a patient with multiple personality disorder and every day I alternated between awe and faith in the future from my interactions with one amazing and remarkable man or woman who was leading the fight for justice, peace, and creating a society that respected the

dignity and humanity of all, to despair at encountering others who live in an alternate reality of denial and rejection. Depending on who we spoke with each day, this alternate reality was dramatically on display from the Meretz party MKs who consistently spoke of hope and faith, to the Palestinians in and out of government who spoke of despair, to those Jews living in the settlements and East Jerusalem who spoke with messianic passion and certainty, to the ministers of government who seemed bent on turning every political issue into a religious conflict, to an inspiring meeting with Israel's President Reuven Rivlin to the Iranian cab driver who said with absolute certainty, “They are taught from childhood to kill Jews,” and my wife's 90-year-old aunt living in Jerusalem who in all sincerity asked me, “Why is it so easy for Arabs to kill Jews?” When Ahmed Tibi, the Palestinian Deputy Speaker of the Knesset angrily told us, “There is a clear double standard in Israel with Arab citizens now increasingly treated as if we are the enemy,” the very next day the Prime Minister publicly declared, “Any Israeli Arab demonstrating against the government should leave for Palestine,” proving Tibi's point dramatically.

Yet being on this trip was eye-opening in so many different ways and we met with so many diverse people from all walks of Israeli life who continue to create peace on the ground every single day in their work and lives that this trip can only be best described as at one and the same time, deeply depressing and tremendously inspiring. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see Israel as I had never seen it before, to meet the best that Israeli society has to offer, and to wrestle with how each and every one of us might make our own contribution to the legacy of peace, justice and human rights which we all believe is Israel's ultimate destiny. ■

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Announcement



The Harold M. Shapiro Memorial Fund

The Board of Directors of Partners for Progressive Israel has established The Harold M. Shapiro Memorial Fund to honor our founding chairman Harold Shapiro (1927–2017) and to promote his vision of a just and peaceful Israel. Through his leadership, scholarship, and philanthropy, he dedicated his life, working for peace, justice, equality, and human rights in Israel and advocating for a two–state solution.

The Memorial Fund is established as a division/program of Partners for Progressive Israel and is governed by the Board Fund Committee. The Fund’s immediate focus is to encourage, facilitate, and sponsor Rabbis and young people to participate in PPI’s annual Israel Symposium, a program that was particularly dear to Harold. The Fund scholarship will provide free registration, travel, lodging, and the eye–opening experience of a lifetime to selected rabbis and young people. This will enable them not only to understand both perspectives – the Israeli and the Palestinian, first–hand, but also to help them build a seamless connection between the progressive forces of Israel and the American Jews.

This Fund will also serve as a valuable reminder of the importance of Harold’s vision and our obligation to fulfil his mission. This is, indeed, a great opportunity for the PPI family, its donors, and other supporters to continue Harold Shapiro’s noble dream with even greater zeal.

The next Israel Symposium will be June 14-21, 2018.

In March, 2018 Partners for Progressive Israel will celebrate Harold with an evening of music, poetry and 90 years of memories in New York City. Proceeds from this event will go to the Harold M. Shapiro Memorial Fund.

Contributions to the Fund can be made by going to
www.progressiveisrael.org/support.

Israel *Horizons*

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