



Photo: The Israel-Lebanon Border via Wikimedia Commons

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Northern Exposure: Yet Another War?

As I rewrite this article on October 6, the day before the first anniversary of Hamas's attack on Israel, the long-expected war between Israel and Hezbollah appears to be underway. Sixty thousand Israelis have now spent a year away from their homes in northern Israel due to Hezbollah rockets – and a larger number of southern Lebanese have fled northwards to presumed safety. Hezbollah, the dominant political and military power in the failed state of Lebanon, has been increasing the number of its daily salvos– as has the IDF. Every few weeks, seemingly, Israel comes up with a nifty, new, and deadly means of attack, while Hezbollah can only launch the same old missiles. Israel stunned the world and threw Hezbollah into chaos with its unprecedented pager attack, but humiliating reverses to cease its missile assaults.

This conflict is not about disputed land, nor about nationalism, nor about any of the things that nations usually fight about. Hezbollah (“Party of God”), of course, is not a nation-state, though its power is greater than that of the official Lebanese army. Sectarian militias dwarfing Lebanon’s official army have a long tradition in Lebanon; until Israel’s withdrawal from its occupied “security zone” in 2000,

Contents

INSIGHTS

- 1 President’s Message: Northern Exposure: Yet Another War?
By Paul Scham
- 4 Freedom Is Not a Zero-sum Game: Americans Must Heed the Call of Israeli-Palestinian Solidarity
By Jonathan Taubes

KOLOT: VOICES OF HOPE

- 8 Post October 7th Series -
Givat Haviva

BOOK REVIEW

- 11 Mikhael Manekin, *End of Days: Ethics, Tradition, and Power in Israel* (Academic Studies Press, 2023)
Review by Margo Hughes-Robinson
- 14 Joshua Leifer, *Tablets Shattered: The End of an American Jewish Century and the Future of Jewish Life* (Dutton, 2024)
Review by Paul Scham

Lebanon's south was controlled by the IDF-supplied, Christian-dominated South Lebanese Army.

In fact, Hezbollah's existence is only an artifact of what Israel calls the First Lebanon War in 1982. The Shi'a Muslims in the south first welcomed the IDF with flowers; but when Israel's army showed a marked reluctance to leave, they formed Hezbollah, with considerable help and encouragement from the then-new Islamic Republic of Iran. Its declared aim was the expulsion of the IDF from Lebanon – and the IDF's gift to Hezbollah was that it stayed in its security zone until 2000, thus allowing Hezbollah to retain its armaments when all other sectarian militias were disbanded with the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1989.

When Israel finally did withdraw in 2000, Hezbollah literally faced an existential crisis; what now justified its existence? Although the UN, not generally a fan of Israel's, had certified the IDF's complete withdrawal, Hezbollah seized on the patch of disputed ground called Shebaa farms to claim that Israel still occupied Lebanon. With no force willing or able to evict it, Hezbollah hung on as a relic of the Lebanese civil war and invasions of the last quarter of the 20th century. It had had plenty of time to stoke its hatred of Israel during the previous 18 years, including for the 1992 assassination of its founding leader, Sheikh Abbas Musawi, succeeded by Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah who turned out far more capable.

After Israel's withdrawal, the border generally remained quiet, with a few exceptions, until Nasrallah, taking advantage of Israel's distraction by the abduction of Corporal Gilad Shalit by Hamas in June of 2006, tried a similar caper in the north. They killed 8 Israeli soldiers and kidnapped 2, hoping, presumably, to extract a humiliating price for them. Instead they got what Israel calls its Second Lebanon War, launched impetuously by a new and unseasoned prime minister, Ehud Olmert.

While Lebanon and Hezbollah were unquestionably battered, so was the IDF. No victor was ever declared, but Nasrallah became the most popular man in the Arab world for inflicting what many considered a defeat on the hitherto seemingly invincible IDF.

The 2006 war seemingly reminded Iran of its Shi'a ally in Lebanon. While Hezbollah's mission remained unclear, its strategic location led Tehran to shower it with warfighting materiel, especially rockets to be aimed at its southern neighbor. Within a decade, it was generally known (or rumored) that 150,000 missiles of widely varying capabilities were aimed at Israel, all under Hezbollah's control, courtesy of Iran. Hezbollah repaid Iran during the Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, supplying thousands of fighters who helped keep Bashar Assad in power. They returned battle-hardened, and the arms continued to flow, with Hezbollah now a major force, whose allegiance was divided between its Lebanese nationality and its presumed subordination to Iranian policy.

Fast forward to the present, when Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, the victorious Houthi rebels in Yemen, as well as the largely destroyed state of Syria, are united in a loose "Axis of Resistance"; largely Shi'a or adjacent, fiercely anti-Israel and anti-American. No one really knows the extent of Iran's control or the degree of autonomy they have. For example, it is now beyond a doubt that Iran did not order, or even know about, Hamas's Operation Al-Aqsa Flood last October 7.

To this day, Hezbollah's *raison d'être* remains unclear, though it is undoubtedly committed to the illegitimacy of Israel (as were all Arab states from 1948 to the 1970s, and many beyond). It certainly acts as an extension of Iranian power, and presumably the balance of terror over Israel's northern border has helped deter Israel from fantasies of attacking Iran.

When Israel responded to Hamas's October 7 attacks

on Israel's southern "envelope", Hezbollah promised to keep attacking Israel until it withdrew from Gaza, likely little suspecting that Israel would still be there a year later.

Would Hezbollah stop launching Israel-bound rockets if Israel signed a cease-fire with Hamas? Certainly, but Israel has now apparently taken that off the table. However, it steadfastly refuses to pull its forces back to the Litani River, 28 kilometers from the border, as specified in 2006 by UN Security Council resolution 1701 and demanded by Israel. 1701 also foresaw the disarmament of Hezbollah and its replacement by the Lebanese Army, but that is the stuff of fantasy. As of October 6, the strategic position seems to some completely changed from that of a few weeks earlier. Nasrallah is dead, Hezbollah is decapitated and in disarray, and Iran launched 180 ballistic missiles at Israel, of which few if any hit their targets, and the only fatality, ironically, was a West Bank Palestinian killed by falling debris. Two thousand Lebanese reportedly have been killed and a million are fleeing their homes. Some are even crossing over to Syria to seek refuge. Israel has announced a fifth division is entering Lebanon for the "limited operation," which means 40,000-60,000 soldiers. Israel has also sent planes 1000 miles to respond to Houthi drones fired at Israel. While this may not yet be a "fullscale war," on the level of, say, the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, there can be no doubt that Israel is engaged in a deadly serious attempt to change the strategic situation in the Middle East, and perhaps hopes to eliminate Hezbollah as a serious military force, thus depriving Iran of its most important Arab ally and humiliating it further.

This is the second time Israel has tried to upend the geopolitics of the Middle East with a "limited" invasion of Lebanon. The first, in 1982, did not end well for Israel. It entered Lebanon in the midst of a multi-sided civil war ostensibly to evict the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and succeeded in dispatching them to Tunisia, where they remained until the Oslo Accords of 1993.

In addition, apparently unbeknownst to the rest of the Israeli government, Defense Minister Ariel Sharon had made a deal with the Maronite Christians to help control the Lebanese parliament so the Christian leader, Amin Gemayel, would be elected president-upon which he would sign a peace treaty with Israel. Israel did its part – and Gemayel was duly elected.

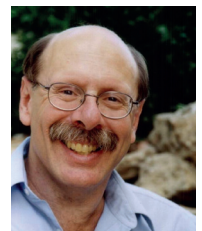
He never took office, however as he was blown up by a massive car bomb before inauguration. His bereft soldiers, bent on revenge, entered the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps in Beirut, which were under Israeli control, and massacred an estimated 2500 Palestinian women and children. This was over Rosh Hashanah in 1982, exactly 42 years ago. The peace treaty never took effect, Hezbollah became Iran's most important ally, and Lebanon changed from a nominal enemy to a real and active one. Israel remained in Lebanon until 2000, leaving bitter memories on both sides of the border.

I have no idea whether the IDF can put an end to Hezbollah this time, or how successful it may be in changing its deterrence equation with Iran. You may have a better idea by the time you read this. I do expect, sadly, that the war in Gaza will keep going, though Israel could likely put an immediate end to Hezbollah's missile attacks and free the remaining hostages by agreeing to the long-sought ceasefire with Hamas.

Nevertheless, please accept my best wishes for a sweet, happy, and, most of all, **peaceful** New Year's season, wherever you are or and whatever religion you do or don't practice. Thanks to you, dear readers, for your interest in and support of Partners for Progressive Israel.

Paul Paul

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Freedom Is Not a Zero-sum Game: Americans Must Heed the Call of Israeli- Palestinian Solidarity

INSIGHTS

By Jonathan Taubes



Photo: Merchandise from the Israeli "Smol Emuni" movement. By Nizzan Cohen via Wikimedia Commons

I shudder to think that it was almost a year ago now that I realized just how much my commitment to self-determination for both Israelis and Palestinians was quickly leaving me without a political home.

In the immediate aftermath of October 7th, I found myself, like many American Jews, craving outlets for activism around the crisis in Israel/Palestine. I'm a former day school kid and current Jewish non-profit professional with tons of close family in Israel. The truth is, of course, I feel a particularly Jewish sense of obligation to support Israelis in this moment of prolonged crisis. But it's this same obligation that compels me toward solidarity with Palestinians, which was, suffice it to say, not something that was easy to act on or even talk about while working for a Jewish non-profit in late 2023.

Further compounding the challenge was the fact that leftwing organizations I'd worked with - my entry

into politics came through Jewish labor history and unionism - seemed willing either to defend Hamas' crimes on October 7th, or else excuse them. Whereas to Israeli friends and relatives, I might have seemed like a privileged, liberal diaspora Jew, to some on the Left, I was increasingly perceived as a reactionary Zionist.

Holding the humanity of both Israelis and Palestinians in the earliest weeks of this war felt politically isolating to the point of questioning my own sanity. Even from Brooklyn, thousands of miles from the bombs and bloodshed, I was deeply shaken not just by the October 7th attacks and the Israeli response to them. I was dismayed by how many in my Jewish and progressive worlds seemed to accept the Manichean divide of Israelis versus Palestinians, a divide which extremists on both sides only seek to reinforce.

Shouldn't our job, as progressives anyway, be to build solidarity across those lines? Was our job as progressives the same as our job as Jews? What did it mean that I wasn't really able to separate those identities, but so many groups demanded that I do? Am I being narcissistic and self-absorbed in even asking these questions? Such were my thoughts in the early days of the war, as I balanced a full-time job with my academic pursuits in Judaic Studies, while doing my very best not to get sucked into hours of doomscrolling, or pointless debates with any number of friends or family who felt that, in one way or another, I'd betrayed them.

In my anger and anguish, I was able to connect with others who felt similarly alienated. I linked up with other progressive American Jews who know that Palestinian and Israeli fates are intertwined, that as American Jews we *do* have a responsibility both to our siblings and cousins on the ground, and also to ourselves - our own government, after all, has provided the weapons and diplomatic support for this war that now approaches one harrowing year.

I'm fortunate to have found outlets to help build some solidarity in the months that followed. In December, I co-wrote a Jewish Professionals for Ceasefire letter that got almost 900 signatures and more national attention than I was used to as a grassroots activist-educator. The letter emphasized a framework of Israeli-Palestinian interdependence that was lacking in so many other spaces, and it struck a chord with Jewish professionals across the country.

Around the same time, Standing Together emerged across Jewish progressive spaces as a clear, on-the-ground alternative that American Jews could support and get excited about. When Alon-Lee Green and Sally Abed from Standing Together told a packed room at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun on the Upper West Side that there is no military solution, they were met with rapturous applause. Also in the early days of the war, I got arrested doing civil disobedience at a ceasefire protest in New York. Each of these moments required strategic navigation of my own

values as they pushed up against the existing groups and coalitions that reflected them to varying degrees.

As a Jewish non-profit professional and member of more "mainstream" groups, I weighed the consequences to my career in literally every activist decision I made. I'm not sure I always made the right decision - in some instances I maybe played it too safe, in others maybe went too far. But I know that through this activist work, I've connected with many inspiring people who share my commitments as well as my constraints, and I've realized that I'm far from alone in facing them. I've grown to appreciate organizations like Partners for Progressive Israel (PPI), which have been doing this for decades, and which allow for activists like me to plug into their work.

Now, as we approach a year of this unprecedented crisis in Israel and Palestine, I believe we are also witnessing a moment of unprecedented opportunity. I sensed it most acutely when six hostages, among them Hersh Goldberg-Polin, were confirmed to have been murdered by Hamas. This crushing revelation spurred an ongoing wave of Israeli protests for a ceasefire/hostage deal, and against Netanyahu's government, which has made blatant its disregard for the hostages and their families. The protests and Histadrut general strike that followed caught the attention of the entire world; American unions like the UAW and Randi Weingarten's American Federation of Teachers expressed immediate solidarity with Israeli protests. This, I thought, could be a defining moment, given how the hostage and ceasefire protests in the U.S. had been so separate prior to the summer. Now, in the last several weeks and months, there seems to be a growing recognition, both in Israel and the United States, that solidarity with Israeli protests for a hostage deal *demands* solidarity with Palestinians suffering months of devastation in Gaza, in the form of a ceasefire. That's not a contradiction in terms - if anything, it's the bifurcation of those movements that hasn't made sense.

There is a growing recognition of the need for broad-based coalitions toward a ceasefire-hostage deal, and peace and dignity for both peoples between the River and the Sea. When Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, one of many Democrats who refused to attend Netanyahu's speech to Congress this summer, decided instead to meet with a delegation of hostage families and Palestinians, I knew that this moment could be a tipping point.

In earlier months, I was able to connect with American Jewish activists who shared my sense of alienation and my determination to support peace and dignity for both peoples. Now, it's become undeniable that this commitment entails taking cues from Palestinians and Israelis who are building shared solidarity out of their grief, in ways that too many in both the pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian worlds have thought impossible. Hostage family groups like We Are All Hostages - the families from the Begin Gate protests, who met with U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar - and many other inspiring groups, are laying groundwork for profound political shifts. Groups like PPI and New Israel Fund play crucial roles in connecting Americans like me with activists on the ground. And as activists on the ground lead the way, it seems like more and more people are waking up to the potential for the enduring transnational solidarity that this represents.

These developments leave me more hopeful than I can remember, certainly since October 7th. Of course, the situation on the ground is more dire than ever in my lifetime, maybe than ever in Israel's history. And I know the political challenges are immense. Many Jewish legacy organizations, for example, have remained silent at best when it comes to criticizing Netanyahu's far-right government, even as more Israelis than ever take to the streets against it.

But: I detect within networks of pro-Israel, pro-Palestine groups a shared single-mindedness toward ending this war. It is this single-mindedness that led ADL CEO Jonathan Greenblatt, in recent days, to

finally call for a hostage deal, under direct pressure from We Are All Hostages and other hostage families. On the Left, activists are increasingly ready to embrace difficult conversations within the framework of Palestinian-Israeli-Jewish solidarity for a ceasefire-hostage deal, an end to the occupation, and equal rights for all between the River and the Sea. The Uncommitted movement is another positive development, in my view - as some activists in their orbit, like Georgia State Representative Ruwa Romman, have formed explicit connections with hostage families.

"Where is the Palestinian J Street," some critics ask? Well, we see some of those changes unfolding right now. Precisely for that reason, we must embrace conversation and coalition with those who are willing to work with us toward shared goals. Emerging connections between hostage families and Palestinian activists signify that Palestinian freedom and Israeli security are not only compatible, they are deeply intertwined. This is the message that's been lacking in too many mainstream Jewish spaces, and in too many pro-Palestine spaces here in the U.S. But the fact that that message is gaining support among unprecedented numbers of Palestinians and Israelis, among American Jewry, and even among the Left and Labor movements here, should be a major cause for hope. For me, it's been the source of renewed enthusiasm and commitment toward ending this war. For organizations like PPI, which have devoted themselves for years to self-determination for both peoples, these developments should be vindicating.

Americans, and American Jews in particular, must heed the call from these veteran networks of shared society organizations - and from emerging ones as well. It is our duty to support the groups and movements articulating political alternatives to endless war and perpetual domination of one people over another. Could it be that the tipping point is now? As Israelis take to the streets by the hundreds of thousands against their government; as extremists on both sides make clear their disregard for their

Freedom Is Not a Zero-sum Game: Americans Must Heed the Call of Israeli-Palestinian Solidarity

own people and their support for endless war; as clear buds of Israeli-Palestinian solidarity emerge from the wreckage and destruction.

Americans have an unprecedented opportunity, and I hope our communities will seize it. Palestinians and Israelis working together for true peace and justice are opening up new potential for genuine political transformation. The war has devastated - continues to devastate - communities on the ground. But extremists on both sides in Israel and Palestine are being discredited. Though they remain formally in power, with devastating consequences for both peoples, they have already ceded the future. Netanyahu and Hama's Yahya Sinwar have demonstrated that their political survivals depend on each other. Now, on-the-ground movements and their global networks of supporters are showing that the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, not their governments, are mutually dependent as well.

Let's echo that affirmative vision, with no illusions about the difficulty of the current moment, but with a clear understanding of the strategic opportunities that it presents. In building transnational networks with activists on the ground, we will, together, be enabled to help end this war, bring the hostages home, and ultimately transform politics in Israel/Palestine. In taking part in that transformative work, we can help enact profound changes here in the United States, as well.

Jonathan Taubes is an activist-educator from Brooklyn who works at the intersections of Judaism, social justice, and the labor movement. Taubes has worked as a political organizer at the Workers Circle and a service corps manager at Repair the World. He is active as a lay-leader with New Israel Fund's NewGen community, and with a range of Jewish social justice groups.



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Every Crisis Offers an Opportunity for a Better Future: The Post-October 7 Work of the Givat Haviva Center for a Shared Society

By Mohammad Darawshe



גבעת חביבה
چفعات حبيبة
Givat Haviva

We all know what happened in Israel on October 7, 2023. In an organized operation, Hamas broke through the fence separating the Gaza Strip from Israel, surprising and paralyzing Israel's security forces. Some 1,200 people, male and female, including infants and seniors, were murdered that day. Another 252 people of all ages were taken into Gaza. The war that broke out in the wake of October 7 continues to claim Israeli and Gazan Palestinian lives. Amid all these developments, we at Givat Haviva – the largest and most veteran organization in Israel promoting Jewish-Arab shared society in Israel – knew we had to respond.

All of Israel's ethnic groups were impacted. The Jewish majority experienced indescribable fear that day. With the news channels broadcasting nonstop the trauma mixed with uncertainty, every viewer was readying for the worst. Social media was filled with those searching for relatives and friends from the Gaza-border communities, or who were attending the festivals, after contact with them had been lost.

The day also took a toll on the Arab minority community, which makes up roughly one fifth of Israel's citizenry. Distraught community members of

all political and religious stripes could barely believe the atrocities they were witnessing. Afraid that the Jewish community was about to rise up against them, they mostly chose silence and seclusion in order to avoid becoming the target of Jewish rage. The fear that Jewish Israelis would not differentiate between Arab citizens and Hamas terrorists was widespread in every Arab city, town, and village.

After the Shock: Back to Our Work

So, we arrived at the Givat Haviva office on October 8 ready to get down to work – but also, as a team made up of both Jews and Arabs, in order to air and share our emotions with one another.

As a nonprofit organization that has been working for Jewish-Arab shared society for 75 years, we knew we needed to do our share. We wanted to provide the petrified Arab community, scared to express its legitimate viewpoint and avoiding direct encounters with Jews, with a space where it could unpack the confusion and fear it had been experiencing ever since October 7. We wanted to enable both communities to reach a place emotionally where they could display empathy toward the other and primarily listen and show respect. That is the only way it will be possible to arise from this catastrophe and begin to generate a better future.

We turned our campus into a center for evacuees, with over 300 people coming to us to find refuge and staying for three months until they were able to return home, while at the same time, our teams were working together to change programs and projects set to begin the next day.

October 8 was supposed to be the opening day of our programming cycle; we had a record number of registrants. But of course, none of the programs began that day. Instead, the team looked at each one of our

programs, discussing what adjustments we would now need to make.

[A safe place at Givat Haviva for evacuated families.](#)

Jews and Arabs Continue to Meet at Givat Haviva

“Children Teaching Children” (CTC) is a program that we have been running for nearly four decades. The CTC program brings together junior high school students from the Arab community and the Jewish community, who study identity together for two years. These studies focus on examining the teenagers’ personal and group identities, breaking stigmas, and looking critically at the various narratives prevailing in Israel’s complex society.

We knew that in the post-October 7 atmosphere, it would be difficult to continue bringing these youths together. We decided to initiate conversations with those students already a year into the program, together with their parents, so that as many stakeholders as possible would be involved in our decision-making. Much to our delight, everyone felt the need to carry on, now of all times, with the identity studies, even if at first the sessions would be held in non-mixed frameworks for Jews and Arabs.

A few weeks ago, the first in-person encounter since October 7 of students from nearby Jewish schools and Arab schools took place on the Givat Haviva campus. Although there had been concerns, the students were happy to get to know one another, focus on their similarities rather than on areas of disagreement, and they departed with a taste for more. We left this session hopeful, determined to continue our work so that, in time, we will be able to hold such encounters with greater frequency and a larger number of participants.

Jewish Teachers Come to Arab Schools

Another program whose success since October 7 has been a pleasant surprise is “Shared Language”, which was designed to improve Hebrew proficiency among Arab students in Israel via the instruction of spoken Hebrew at Arab schools. Through this program, Jewish teachers come to Arab schools and are joined by an

Arab teacher who serves as their liaison and mentor, to help them navigate both the school and the cultural differences between the two peoples. The teacher provides spoken Hebrew instruction to the pupils and, as a bonus, learns about the Arab community and Arab culture with the help of their Arab mentor, who provides support and also functions as a go-between, given the different worlds from which they come.

In the current reality, with the war continuing and the security situation unsettled, a Jewish teacher coming into an Arab school in an Arab community is no trivial matter. Nonetheless, no teachers have withdrawn from the program (aside from evacuees who were forced to relocate) and no school has asked to stop its participation. When, in December, schools resumed in-person teaching, we were very worried about what might happen. We were delighted to discover, though, how much the students had missed the program and their Jewish teachers.

At one school, a Jewish Hebrew teacher was drafted into army reserve duty because of the war. Amazingly, this complex circumstance actually generated a wonderful educational moment. The students were extremely disconcerted due to the contradiction they felt: On one hand, they love, appreciate, and respect that teacher. On the other hand, he was going to fight in the Gaza Strip, where some of the students have family; and even those who have no relatives there see the residents of Gaza as members of their Palestinian nation. They raised these conflicted feelings with the Arab mentor.

The mentor and the program coordinator identified the incredible potential for fruitful conversation. They sat down with the students and tried to unpack together what they were feeling about the teacher who had been called up. Ultimately, at the end of the process, the students concluded that their teacher is the same person they appreciate, respect, and love, and they trusted him to do the right thing. When the teacher returned from many months in reserves, he went straight to the school to visit his students – who

welcomed him back with open arms. Stories of this kind not only provide Givat Haviva's staff a tailwind to continue our work, but also demonstrate that our efforts allow bridges to be built in places where others believe the chasm is too wide.

New Programs for a New Reality

After October 7, we realized that, alongside the continuity that our programs required, we also needed to build new programs. The war and the security situation brought to the surface various challenges that Israeli society has been facing for many years. Now, however, the intensity of these challenges has grown significantly, and the urgency of offering an appropriate response has risen many times over. This stands out in particular when it comes to the various gaps between Jews and Arabs, and thanks to Givat Haviva's decades of experience, we are prepared for this moment.

A number of academic institutions turned to us, for example, seeking guidance and support as they readied for a return to in-person classes. The academic world, it is important to note, is often the first official setting where Jews and Arabs cross paths on a daily basis, and in order to bridge social and cultural gaps, it is vital that this initial interaction be as positive as possible.

Almost all of Israel's higher education institutions feature a sizeable majority of Jewish staff. As a result, many Arab students feel less emotionally attached to their school and regard their path to a bachelor's degree as something to be gotten through as quickly and quietly as possible. Now, due to the wartime atmosphere, many Arab students have decided to pause their studies, or defer their admission, or transfer to an Arab university abroad, such as in the West Bank and Jordan.

Many Israeli academic universities seeking to reverse this trend have come to us for help. In response, Givat Haviva has put together a holistic academic intervention program that can be employed for the broad spectrum of challenges that the universities

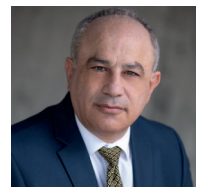
are facing – with students, faculty, administrative staff, and other workers; we are continuing to fine-tune the program so that as many schools as possible in need of our support can receive it and deliver to their academic community the most useful and high-quality student experience possible – even at a time of crisis.

The situation in Israel is super-complex, almost incomprehensible. But we realize the world is not binary: There is no black versus white, single right versus wrong; there is more than one solitary “true” narrative. Therefore, we must continue to move Israeli society forward by creating more opportunities to meet together, by urging Israel's Jewish and Arab communities toward one another. We must not allow them to entrench themselves ever deeper in their separate realities, but instead must familiarize them with the other community – to converse, understand, show respect, and stop being scared.

Givat Haviva's many years of experience have taught us that, out of every calamity, it is possible to extract points of light and hope for a better future. Even the dreadful October 7 can serve as a source of opportunity. Every crisis sharpens our understanding of the issues, teaches us where we could do better or contribute more from our knowhow and resources. That, in turn, increases our optimism as to the progress we can make in improving the Israeli reality so that the future can be a better one for every woman and man, irrespective of religion, nationality, gender, or sex.

The amount of support we have been receiving, both in Israel and abroad, shows us that we are headed in the right direction.

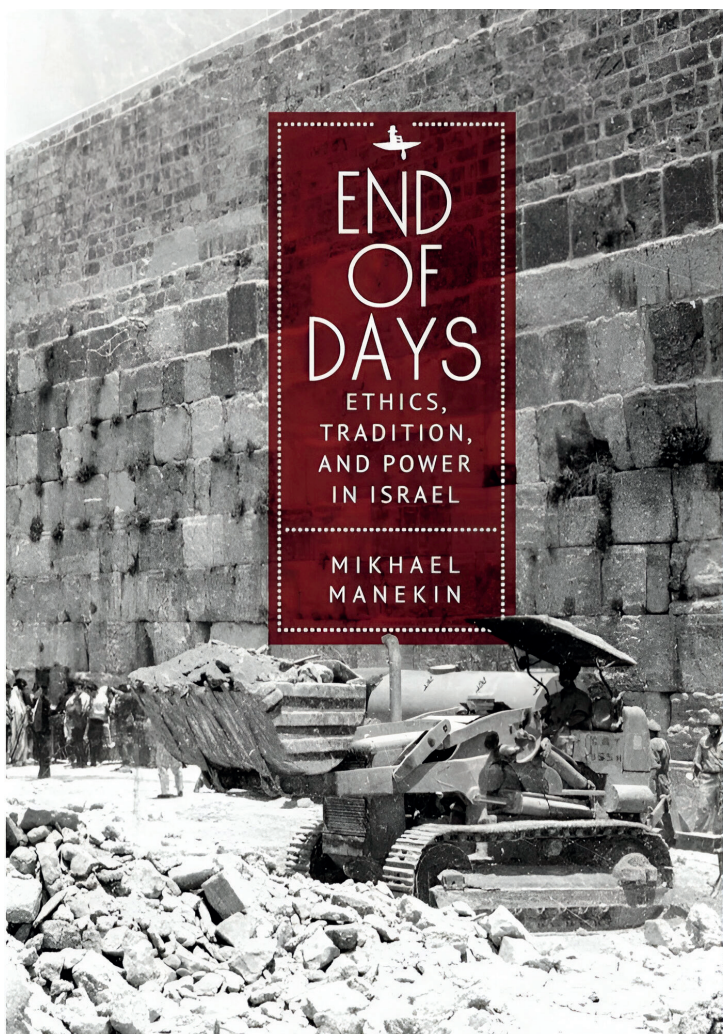
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Mikhael Manekin, *End of Days: Ethics, Tradition, and Power in Israel*
(Boston, Academic Studies Press, 2023)

BOOK REVIEW

Review by Rabbi Margo Hughes-Robinson



In a [recent interview in Haaretz](#), the rabbi and activist Avidan Friedman explored the tension that lies at the heart of the Religious-Zionist project in Israel. Rabbi Friedman lives in the West Bank settlement of Efrat, and runs an NGO called *Yanshuf*, dedicated to the sales of Israeli arms to human rights violations, including countries like South Sudan and Myanmar. (In the interest of full disclosure, I should add that Rabbi Friedman was also my teacher a number of years ago.) Through the interview, he shared his opposition to not only

arms sales to “genocidal governments,” but also his staunch support for a hostage deal, American sanctions on violent settlers in the West Bank, insisting that “the secret of our [Jewish] existence... is morality.” Yet in the same conversation, Rabbi Friedman equates Jewish sovereignty in Tel Aviv with that of the settlement on which he lives, and professes a deep commitment to the Zionist project, noting that his children will likely serve in the IDF when they reach maturity.

While Rabbi Friedman's public life and work seem dedicated to living in the unresolved paradox of his national and spiritual commitments, many have observed a widening split between the religious obligations outlined in contemporary religious Jewish practice, and the ultra-nationalist rhetoric and practices now adopted by many members of these same communities. Nowhere has this been more visible in recent weeks than in the public repudiation of Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir's repeated attempts to ascend and worship at the Temple Mount near Al Aqsa mosque. No fewer than [five prominent Israeli rabbis](#) – among them Sepharadi, *chassidish*, and *misnagdish* leaders – vocally condemned Ben Gvir's new policy to allow Jewish worship at the holy site. With the Dome of the Rock visible in publicity shots released to the Israeli media, Ben Gvir brought a contingent of worshippers and staff to the Temple Mount this past August on *Tisha B'Av*, the very holiday marking the destruction of both the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem.

Ascension of the Temple Mount has long been considered *verboten* in Jewish religious circles, and Netanyahu's office has more than once issued [public denials](#) that Ben Gvir's policy announcements reflect the actual security protocols of the Israeli government. Combined with voices leading broad segments of both the Haredi and Religious-Zionist community, a queasy back-and-forth has emerged between the stated values of both the state and the religious world. From amidst this dialectic, the Israeli ultra-nationalist community in Israel has emerged to assert its desire to incorporate both camps, espousing a new national theology which extends beyond the prescribed boundaries of either ideology.

This tension is at the heart of Mikhael Manekin's brief but incisive work, *Achalta*, published in English late last year as "End of Days: Ethics, Tradition, and Power in Israel." A longtime activist in Israel – he is the former director of both

Breaking the Silence and the progressive *Molad* think tank – Manekin takes on the theological and historical developments within his own Israeli National-Religious Jewish community, weaving scholarly analysis amidst anecdotes of his own experiences in the Israeli Defense Forces, quotidian social interactions in his community, and family memoir, to explore the growing chasm between "Jewish values" and the Israeli national "civic values" that define public life.

Among a host of political developments and issues, from the status of the West Bank settlements to ethical combat in war, Manekin tracks the evolution of the aforementioned Temple Mount fight, among many others within religious Zionist discourse. Deftly, he guides readers through the evolution of the *dati le'umi* call to ascend the Mount over the last few decades, locating the increased nationalist activism at the site within a larger phenomenon of increased religious identification with secular Zionist activity; at the cost, Manekin asserts, of redefining "redemption" as the increased control of the Land through "brute force," and replacing God with political activism to the point of a "negation of religion."

Part historical analysis, part theological manifesto, "End of Days" traces the symbiotic evolution of Israeli military and political history and the religious Zionist theology that evolved to support them. Interspersed among his arguments, Manekin includes the letters and diary entries of his Yiddish-speaking maternal grandfather, who survived the Holocaust and made *aliyah* in the early days of the State.

Manekin divides his argument into six sections, each named for a *middah*, a character trait that he views as a contradiction. While traits like "Remembrance," "Patience," "Submission," and "Devotion" are valued and celebrated as positive virtues in traditional Jewish life, they are considered negative practices, in his estimation, for "good

Israelis.” Manekin, who last year helped to found the small-but-growing *Smol Emuni* (“Faithful Left”) movement in Israel, relates in the book’s introduction that he is frequently asked about a perceived “gap” between his religiosity and his anti-Occupation politics. But, he asserts, “Jewish ethics inform my politics. If anything, the gap lies elsewhere – between the Israeli understanding of legitimate force and my Jewish upbringing.”

What is perhaps most striking about “End of Days” is Manekin’s choice to wed his analysis to form. Rather than laying down a thunderous, sermonized, condemnation of the ideological frameworks that define religious Jewish nationalism, he editorializes deftly while presenting his readers with excerpts of theological works, analysis of the historical events that inform them, and voices that are not his own: most strikingly, the greatest explicit censure of the *Dati Leumi* community in the book comes not from Manekin’s writing, but through the voice of his Druze colleague and friend Samer Swaid in the final chapter. In a work of less than a hundred and fifty pages, genres and realms of experience – the personal and the familial, the national, and even the metaphysical – are woven together in conversation. Rather than pointing his audience down a single path forward, Manekin’s voice instead functions throughout the book as a kind of Talmudic redactor traversing between the lines of his gathered texts, encouraging his readers to hold these sources in tension without directly pointing them towards an alternative theological conclusion.

Still, Manekin’s message is clear. The overwhelming spiritual posture of the Jewish sources quoted demands an ethical opposition to the Occupation, and he offers a new and thoughtful synthesis of Jewish ethics and observance to demand a deeper reckoning with the reality of Jewish political and state power. Reading the book almost a year after the devastating attacks of October 7th, and the beginning of Israel’s still-ongoing

military response, it’s painful to hear the author’s imperatives reaching out from a time only months before this cycle started. Since then, a reported two percent of Gaza’s total population has been killed; over a hundred Israeli hostages still desperately wait to be rescued; and the West Bank is embroiled in a crisis that escalates by the day.

Having analyzed the slow but purposeful marriage of Jewish theology to Israeli state power within the National-Religious community, one can only hope that Manekin’s work serves not as merely a reconsideration, but as the opening salvo of a new fight via redemptive ethical literature for the continuing Jewish soul of a Jewish and democratic state.

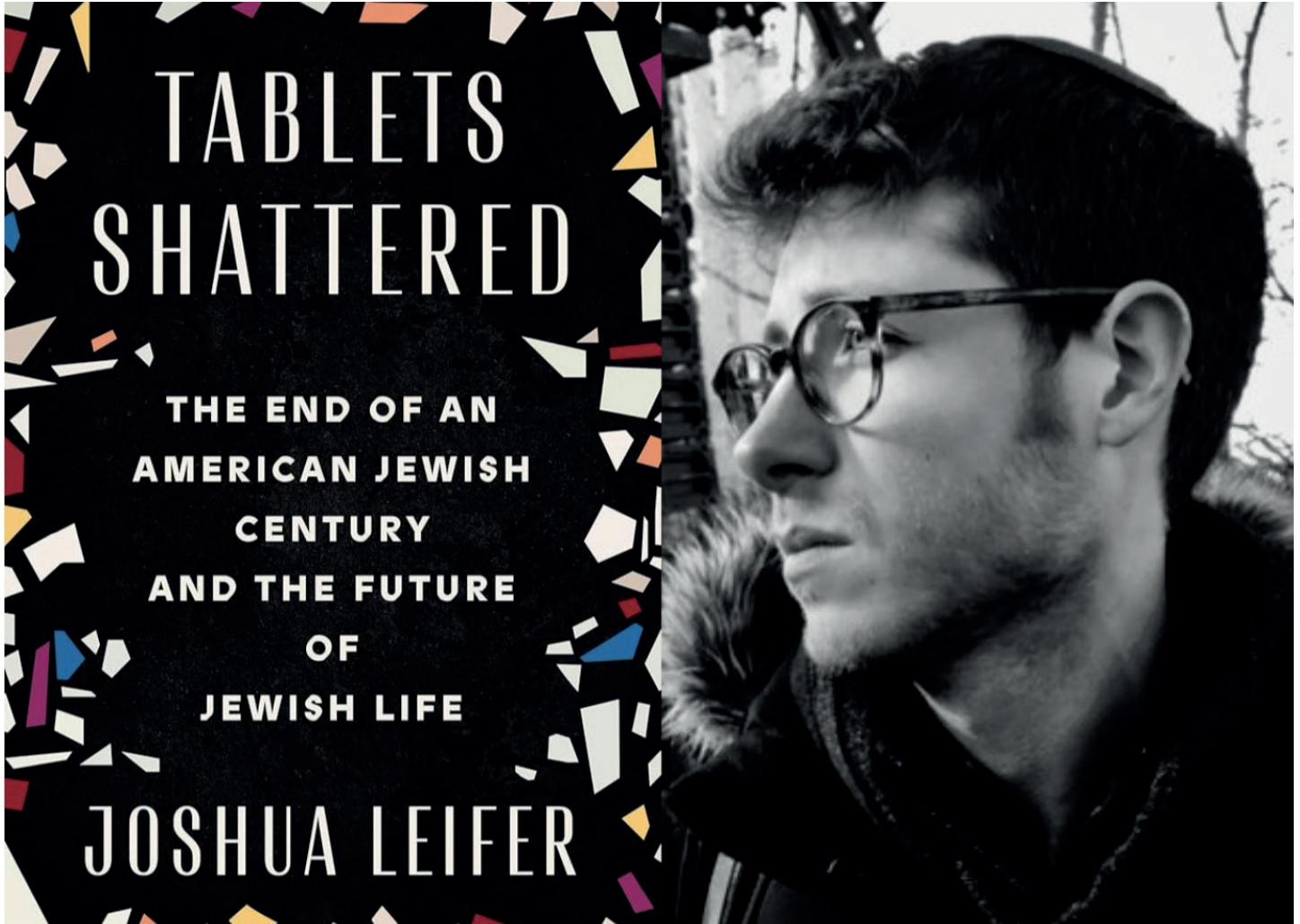
Rabbi Margo Hughes-Robinson
Executive Director, Partners for
Progressive Israel



Joshua Leifer, *Tablets Shattered: The End of An American Jewish Century and the Future of Jewish Life*
(New York, Dutton Press, 2024)

BOOK REVIEW

Review by Paul Scham



In case anyone hasn't already realized it, Joshua Leifer's *Tablets Shattered* makes absolutely clear that there is a massive generational chasm between Jewish millennials and their baby boomer parents (or grandparents). Leifer, born in 1993, is on one side while I, on the other, am tottering off into the twilight. While I thought I knew something about today's Jewish world, Leifer has persuaded me that I've been looking in all the wrong places.

Leifer is a leftwing activist and journalist, with a Conservative day school upbringing and a current tendency towards aspects of the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) lifestyle. Those are familiar enough categories, but Leifer views them in a context where the Jewish establishment is irrevocably sundered from the mass of American Jews and the traditional verities regarding Israel are revealed as *bubbemeises*. Meanwhile, both comprehensive protest against current Israeli reality (i.e. the occupation and all that flows from it) as well as

a new sprouting of traditional Jewish learning and practices are expanding among his generation, the millennials. He refers to the last 100 years, since the 1924 U.S. immigration act effectively ended the great Jewish immigration of the previous four decades, as “The Jewish Century”. While he has no doubt that the apex of American Jewish life has now passed, he is cautiously optimistic that a new version may be arising – hence the metaphor of “Tablets Shattered,” after which God provided a new set.

The book’s first few chapters read like a home movie of American Jewish life from the late ‘60s till around 9/11, which years I actually experienced and participated in (I started college in 1967). While they are portrayed a bit on the idyllic side, Leifer makes an important distinction between the more secular and political protest generation of the late ‘60s (mine) and those who led the Soviet Jewry movement of the 1970s and ‘80s, who were slightly younger, more traditional, and more Jewishly-educated. However, along with the concurrent Ba’al T’shuvah (return to traditional Judaism) movement, the real change he identifies was the “Zionification” of most American Jewish communal life in the decades after the Six Day War of 1967. This included synagogues, where the prayer for the State of Israel became ubiquitous, as did displaying the Israeli flag across from the American one; the “defense” organizations (American Jewish Congress, American Jewish Committee, and ADL), where Israel-related matters came to dominate their agendas; and the communal organizations, which either withered or became likewise Israel-centered. AIPAC, founded in 1963, stayed mostly below most American Jews’ radar till the 1980s, after which it quickly became a focal point, assumed to represent some sort of community consensus.

Indeed, my generation’s Judaism was inextricably intertwined with Israel. Even as some of us became first apprehensive about and then fiercely opposed to the occupation and the hawkish

Israeli governments after 1977, we clung to the economically egalitarian, embattled, and optimistic view of Israel we had grown up with – and tried to return to that vision. We failed.

Leifer’s generation began to come of age during the Second Intifada (2000-2005), as our failure started to become apparent and the Israeli peace movement and center-left began to disintegrate. Enforcement of the occupation was millennials’ first – and ever-increasing – lens for viewing Israel, and they saw little to admire or extol. Leifer uncannily describes the arc of my own life, from fairly Jewishly oblivious in 1967 to setting up the first office of the Israeli peace movement in Washington D.C. in 1989. Meanwhile, some of my contemporaries, including a college roommate, made defending Israeli policy an equally integral part of their worldview. Whatever our politics, those of us who chose to make Judaism a significant part of our lives had by the turn of the century, comfortably embedded ourselves in our own organizations, *shuls*, and *chavurot*. We often didn’t recognize how thoroughly these institutions were generationally-based, and that our children’s generation was forming its own groups that fit their own life choices.

Leifer calls attention to another change that I, for one, insufficiently focused on. With the rise of the billionaire class in the 21st century, a disproportionate share of which is Jewish, communal organizations, formerly dependent on contributions from their members, found they could get along with far fewer – and much wealthier – donors. That helps explain the disparity between polls that show dovish American Jewish views predominating, while “Jewish leaders” heading national organizations rarely criticize anything Israel does, their views increasingly divergent from those of their remaining “members,” especially younger ones, if they have any.

Israel’s biggest war with Hamas and Gaza – before the current one of course – was the 2014 Operation Protective Edge. By then, organizations like Jewish

Voice for Peace and IfNotNow, the latter explicitly recruiting only younger Jews, were fundamentally criticizing Zionism and Israel in terms that few of my generation could abide. Moreover, they connected Israel with issues like Black Lives Matter and, later, George Floyd's murder, as different elements of the same fight. Leifer seems to have spent most of the 2010s protesting around the country at innumerable demonstrations co-organized by Jewish groups "as Jews", few of which I was even aware of. Leifer also contends that many of these groups are dipping into Jewish learning in a serious way, something else I was oblivious to.

Up to this point, Leifer's Jewish experiences coincide with that of many – though certainly not a majority of – Jews of his generation. He sketchily describes his own partial waking to ultra-Orthodoxy – while maintaining his leftist principles and activities – apparently because of his fiancée, who came from such a family in Israel. This is the least satisfying part of the book, though it does include a fascinating inside look at the huge Lakewood, New Jersey yeshiva, which has revived traditional Lithuanian-style *Yiddishkeit* to an extent that would surprise most American Jews. Leifer finds an authenticity in their Judaism that I can respect, but his attempt to reconcile it with his leftism is incomplete and somewhat disappointing.

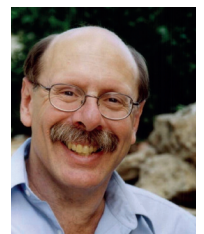
Leifer also includes more satisfying critiques of Reform and Conservative Judaism – and their inability to retain the membership and support they had a few decades ago. These are serious critiques, but he inexplicably avoids dealing with the large and still-expanding Modern Orthodox movement, which appears to provide spiritual fulfillment to perhaps 10 percent of American Jews, along with a heavy dose of pro-settler, rightwing Zionism. Modern Orthodoxy represents the epitome of the remaining "Zionification" of American Jewish life, and its absence from serious discussion in the book makes Leifer's larger critique somewhat unbalanced.

The book was completed just before the October 7, 2023 attacks, and includes a short Afterword showing how badly it jolted him, as it did so many of us. As someone who so identified with the Left, his bitterness at so much of the leftist reaction is palpable, as is his anger at the American Jewish establishment.

Since the book's publication, Leifer himself has become something of a celebrity for a) having a public discussion of his book abruptly canceled by a Brooklyn bookstore because his rabbinical interlocutor was a "Zionist." The bookstore apologized, rescheduled, and blamed a disgruntled employee; b) Planning to move to Israel, according to [Ha'aretz](#), where, Leifer explained, "the struggle over the Jewish future is happening." Needless to say, these developments have jacked up interest in the book.

I strongly recommend the book to those of my generation who may be as oblivious as I am to what is going on with his, as well as to Leifer's own contemporaries, who I think will appreciate his experiences and critiques. He brings an insider's knowledge of American Jewish life, as well as insight into the somewhat occluded one of Jewish American leftism. As a professor who reads unsteady student papers all the time, I can confirm that his prose is a pleasure to read. He writes as a seasoned journalist, participant, and observer – and the result is a book as satisfying to read as it is thoughtful and informed.

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