

"Palistrael"

Dreams - Wished Or Otherwise

The story "Palistrael" was written in the winter of 1999 in both Hebrew and English.

It has been directed to thinking and caring people, Jewish and Palestinian.

I wrote (in Hebrew only) a continuing story in 2000 and an extension on early 2001.

Both installment were compiled together under the name "Abna-L-Ard"

I will be most thankful for any comment.

I would also appreciate referring other readers to these stories.

Asher Shla'in

PALISTRAEL

A MYTH

=====

(From the Dreams of Winter 1999)

By: A Zionist Jew

I did not hear that all this ever happened, but this is what I am about to tell.

I wonder whether it has any effect on anybody.

HOW ODD!

It started as rumors; then some news appeared -- until the matter became widely known. What one realizes is, that a very curious ideological alliance is forming among the Palestinians.

This has been taking place for quite a number of months -- and according to some, even for over a year. It began among 'Israeli Arabs', and later continued increasingly also in the West Bank and even in the Gaza Strip.

It is a new Palestinian movement that is prepared to see in the Zionist idea a positive value for them. On the other hand, the same movement attaches no great value to the relations of the Palestinians with the Arab countries.

These Palestinians claim that they have been residents of Palestine since ancient times. Yet, on top of that, they contend that they are in fact mainly Israelis who remained on their land while the Roman-Christian regime was replaced by the Moslem rule. Most of them used then to be Jews; a considerable minority were Samaritans. In those days the lot of them accepted Islam.

According to this movement, that happened because the Jewish leadership had disintegrated, the economic situation deteriorated, and one could lighten the burden of taxation only by accepting the ruling creed. Other Jews accepted Christianity -- some before Islam and others during the Crusades.

Accepting Islam was helped not the least by the fact that it honored the site of the Jewish temple, and rebuilt that desolate mount.

In these ideas, the proponents rely also on the research work of I. Ben-Zvi (2nd president of Israel) and others. Various findings were mentioned, among them: preserving the ancient names of towns and villages; observing Jewish practices in various villages; and also the fact that up to the 20th century, the adherence of most Palestinians to Islamic practice was not great.

Accordingly, a few Palestinians began to wonder whether it is more conceivable to view the "return of the Jews to Zion" as a process that brings brothers together -- brethren who had been separated for ages and are destined to share again the same lot.

Such ideas became audible, started disputes in limited circles, and until recently no one dared to publicize them.

Some of these Palestinians tried to discuss this issue with Jews. Doing so, they usually encountered a cool, belittling response. It so happened -- either when that Jew belonged to the left, seeking national self-determination for Palestinians -- or when he was a rightist, reluctant to regard a Christian or a Moslem as a partner to a national Jewish brotherhood.

Lately, the Palestinians who uphold these ideas organized and presented it openly.

A letter that they circulated to various "public figures" included the following paragraphs:

The Moslem and Turkish regimes forcibly united the whole Middle East, and blurred the distinction of the various peoples. Only in the present century the Palestinians started to be aware of their uniqueness. This trend was enhanced by the Zionist Jewish immigration, and later by the demarcation of the country by the British mandate.

The encounter between the immigrating Jews and the Palestinian brethren was tragic.

On the one hand, the Jews tended to ignore the rights of the local residents. They preferred to come to terms with the conquering regimes. They purchased land from the 'effendis', and at times evacuated the 'falahin' from the lands on which they had been sitting for ages and ages -- since the days that those falahin used to be Jews. The Zionists also struggled against hiring Palestinians.

On the other hand, the Palestinian leaders failed to understand that Zionism could be a great opportunity for their national salvation. They did not encourage the Jews to develop ideas of unity after the visions of Herzl and Jabotinski.

The Intifada regained honor to the humiliated Palestinian Tribe -- in the eyes of the Jewish public as well. The Oslo agreements proved it before the whole world.

Now is the time to require, first of us, the Palestinians, to declare ourselves all as original Israelis. Then we should demand of the Jews to recognize it and let us have our place within the framework of the universal Jewry.

The "figures" that received the letter preferred to ignore it.

POLEMICS

The Israeli State radio and television in Hebrew and Arabic did not find space to cover this group. However, the same group succeeded to present itself through a television talk show on one of the cable networks.

One of the group's leaders, **Aziz Najjar**, was a guest at that show.

The man has a handsome appearance, glowing eyes, excellent Hebrew.

The host presented him as a marked graduate of the Hebrew University in Jewish History and Hebrew Literature.

After **Najar** presented the essentials of the group's thesis, another guest wearing a yarmulke who sat beside him argued that the Palestinians maintain no real relationship to the Jewish religion. **Najar's** response to that was as follows:

The People of Israel had not always been uniform concerning religious practice.

The Christianity and the Islam of the Palestinians are much nearer to present Judaism than the worship of idols, Gold Calves, various Baals and stellar bodies, which characterized the Tribes of Israel beside the worship of the One God.

Most of the Jewish public nowadays does not ascribe much importance to religion.

At this point, a female model who sat on his other side said, that anyway the language of the Israelis is Hebrew, as it used to be in ancient days. **Najar** said to her:

Losing the Hebrew language happened not to the Palestinians alone.

The Jews in this land and in Babylon shifted to Aramaic, many years before the Islam era. In the various exiles they adopted the ruling language: Greek, Spanish, Arabic, German, English -- and in all cases kept to Hebrew only as a religious practice language that most of them couldn't understand.

Palestinians, who return to Hebrew as well, are marked for a fluent clear language. For many of the Palestinian intellectuals, Hebrew is the main reading language.

Later on, a telephone call came to the show from a viewer from Ramallah. He brought up the theory of several Palestinian thinkers, contending that the Palestinians are the descendants of the Canaanites who used to live here before the Israelis.

Najar dismissed this theory as "improbable". He said:

There is no historic model that demonstrates that it was precisely the Jews who left the land, while the Canaanites -- of which nothing was heard for millennia -- remained. At most, one could contend that a lot of Canaanite blood flows in both Jewish and Palestinian veins...

The host asked **Najar** whether according to him there is not an extensive mixture of Arabs among the Palestinians, and he responded:

It is true that the Israeli Palestinians did absorb different populations -- from the Arab conquerors as well as from nearby lands. Yet, the purity of race never characterized the general Israeli people. During the days of the First Temple they absorbed the Canaanites. In the 1st century BC they absorbed the whole Edomite nation in one block, as was done also with the Arab Jeturi Tribe who used to live in this land.

The Jews in the Diaspora also absorbed large foreign populations such as Khazaris, Yemenites, Carthaginians, Ethiopians and many more.

INIQUITIES AND BLOOD

More of what **Najar** said in that show is as follows:

The elderly people remember and miss the great fondness that used to prevail between Jews and Palestinians in various places on a personal basis with good neighborliness.

The great trouble was with the political leaders of both. They demanded from each side loyalty to their own tribe, clothing the other side with a threatening and vicious image. Thus, they led to: conflicts, raids, pogroms and boycott, wars and refugees, military rule and occupation, suppression and collaborators, beating and torture, Intifada, kidnapping and murder, prison, demolition of houses, uprooting of trees, deportations and closures -- up to mass killing by suicidal religious fanatics of both sides.

Then the question was raised whether all that has not wiped out forever the prospect of true fraternity. **Najar** reacted:

We hope that it has not. There were in the past severe civil wars among the Children of Israel.

The Tribe of Benjamin was almost fully exterminated in such a war.

The Children of Manasseh massacred their close brethren the Children of Ephraim.

The Kingdom of Judah fought the Kingdom of Ephraim.

Hasmonaeans and Hellenists, Sadducees and Pharisees, national zealots and moderates -- all fought each other with extreme bitterness -- yet, the People remained the same People.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

The man was asked what should happen now in practice, and he said:

The Sharing of Destiny must be renewed between the Palestinian Children of Israel who clung to their land and their Jewish brethren, the returning expatriates, who clung to their religion.

Najar quoted from the Midrash saying: "Residing in the Land of Israel overweighs all the commandments of the Torah."

According to him, the Palestinian autonomy should serve only during a period of transition towards true unity.

The difficulties in managing the autonomy indicate the existence of a basic problem that will persist as long as the attitude in both sides does not change.

It is not in vain that the 'Israeli Palestinians' are reluctant to join a separate Palestinian state.

Different frameworks to Jews and Palestinians should be maintained as long as it is necessary. Possibly, the present Palestinian citizens of Israel could be included in such frameworks.

Eventually the differences will diminish to include mainly matters of local government, preserving ethnic cultural assets and maintenance of religious institutions.

He sees no hindrance for Palestinians to share service in the Israeli army. As a matter of fact, he recommends it warmly.

PALESTINIANS AND THE ARAB COUNTRIES

An army general in uniform, who was also a guest on the show, asked **Najar** what was his view on the prospective reaction of the Arab countries to his ideas. The answer was:

What happened to us Palestinians after '48 should convince us that those countries are no sisters -- not to the Moslems in Palestine and for sure not to the Christians.

The despise Arabs have shown towards the Palestinians, is well known.

How did they receive us when we escaped -- or were deported -- to their area? Like brothers?

They only used us politically, scorned and humiliated us.

The aid of Arab countries to the Palestinian autonomy is negligible.

We don't care much for the Arab regimes. We need not belong to the Arab league.

Yes, we do share with them language and religion -- but this cannot overweigh authentic nationalism.

It is a fact, that whenever Palestinians and Zionists operate together -- understanding and success emerge, of the kind we could never achieve with Arabs who are alien to us. Only Zionism can grant us real democracy.

Toward the end of the show, each participant was asked to sum up. **Najar**, in his turn, mentioned that the prophets of Israel had spoken about the unity that is expected to come back and prevail among hostile tribes of our one People. He quoted Isaiah:

"And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the Four Corners of the earth. The envy of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim."

COLLABORATORS OR PATRIOTS

This appearance aroused a harsh and abusive reaction in the circles of the **PLO**, while people of the **Jihad** and the **Hamas** and also the **Fatah-Hawks**, even threatened to do away with **Najar** and the rest of the activists of this new alliance.

A rumor has been spread that this is an organization of collaborators, who only try to gain shelter in Israel before the Palestinian state takes over the whole area.

A reaction on behalf of that alliance claimed that among them there are academics and also businessmen, farmers, workers and artists, residents of Israel and of the other territories. Among them there are also ex-activists of Palestinian freedom groups, who had spent no short time in Israeli prison, time which most of them used for studies.

It has been hinted that there is some latent support for this alliance also among officials of the Palestinian Authority.

It is worth mentioning that that talk-show got no reaction in the Hebrew press, apart from one television critic who reviewed the talk-show. He criticized it for inviting a bizarre guest who spoke on behalf of Arabs who uphold Zionism.

THE NEW UNITY

I have an acquaintance, a woman journalist, whom I'll call here '**Zehavith**' (giving her real name might cause her trouble with her editor). She has a Palestinian female friend who is about to graduate from university studies in political science and international relations. Let's call this student '**Amina**'. **Zehavith** had told me that **Amina** used to point out the advantages that the Palestinian woman gained as a result of the relations with the Jews.

During the recent year, **Zehavith** began to hear from **Amina** that the relative status which Palestinian women achieved in the Middle East, might be connected also to the descent of the Palestinians from the ancient residents of the land. It came out that she forms these ideas in the framework of a group which convenes in private homes with no publicity.

Some time ago, **Amina** agreed to invite **Zehavith** to such a meeting.

Part of the conversation there was in Arabic, but out of consideration towards the guest they talked in Hebrew too, and **Zehavith** could write down some of the discourse in her pocket book.

I copy here some excerpts from that pocket book. All the names are fictitious because we can't know if the participants are ready to be exposed as yet.

Suheil, a bus driver, called for the renewal of peaceful relations between the Jewish settlements and their Palestinian neighbors. An objecting voice said that this might be possible concerning Bnei-Akiva settlements, but not with the Kahanistic ones, and it seems quite hard in Hebron.

Ra'ed, a merchant, voiced the opinion that a retreat of Israel from the Golan is not in place, since Syria threatens to take over the whole land and do away with both Israeli and Palestinian entities in favor of 'Greater Syria'. Accordingly, the occupation of the Golan is required for the security of both Tribes.

Bassam, a journalist, claims that the immigration of more Jews is apt to strengthen the joint Israeli entity to be formed, against the danger to all the residents of the land from the fanatic Arab countries and from Iran.

Adnan, a police officer, adds that the self-confidence of the Jews will increase in correspondence with their growth in number, so that they may be more willing to grant real equality of rights to the Palestinians.

Sami, who deals with finances, went even further. He claimed that if the Jews are convinced in the sincere loyalty of the Palestinian Tribe to the Israeli People, it might be in order with them to apply the Law of Return also on Palestinians who were exiled in the recent fifty years or so. His discourse was encountered in the group with bitter laughter.

Ra'ed then said that there is room for a covenant between the ancient Peoples of Israel and Egypt, who have so much in common. **Amina** mentioned here the similarity between the achievements of the Egyptian and Palestinian women.

Bassam added that the connection between the united Israeli People and the Druze could be based on the ancient alliance with the Kenite Tribes who resided quite honorably among the Tribes of Israel, descending from Jethro -- alias Nebi-Shu'eib. Here a response was voiced that there are quite a few wounds to heal also between the Druze and the Palestinians.

Amina said that unity with Transjordan (she preferred this name) is conceivable, based on the historic past. She also expressed hope that the Peace with Jordan and the openness that follows, will convince everybody to that effect.

In her vision, the Jewish immigrants, and likewise the Palestinian refugees, will be encouraged to settle there too and contribute to economic and social development.

The united Israel-Palestine army will be deployed in the Arab Desert confronting the common eastern adversaries. No one can say what is the meaning of that for the status of the Hashemite dynasty.

All the participants agreed that the religious fanatics on both sides must be prevented from deranging the chance for re-uniting the People of Israel.

Ahmed, an engineer, observed from his own experience, that Jews nowadays do not know how to give proper respect to a fellow human being.

Amina commented that most Jews are also negligent in preserving their own respect. In her opinion, 'respect' is something that they should learn from Palestinians. Without real partnership this is going to be a painful lesson to both sides...

In the course of a dispute that broke out there, someone quoted a prominent Palestinian whose name they refused to give. He said that the way of true unity on a Zionist basis might be the doorway to the forsaken ideal of 'secular democratic state'.

Zehavith passed her pocket book to me, after the editor of her paper would not give any coverage to such a group.

WHAT HAPPENS AMONG THE JEWS?

Many supporters of this movement have expressed great interest in the response to their ideas.

They are alert to opinions of Palestinians both within the "green line" and in the other areas -- and no less -- to opinions of Jews.

So far, official spokesmen for the Israeli government and the Zionist movement refrained from any reaction.

So did both "Peace Now" and "Gush Emunim".

Secretaries of political parties argued that the subject is not in the agenda. Rabbis too, refused to respond.

Kahana followers said that this new misfortune is the result of the continuing disregard of their warnings.

It became known that some Jewish public figures, who have not been politically active, are preparing to meet with the activists of the new alliance.

A get-together has taken place in a well known home for the elderly in central Israel. Veterans from various circles and camps conferred there, trying to form a common attitude towards these ideas. A reporter who arrived there was not allowed to enter, but he knew the faces of many of the assembling men and women. Among them he saw: children of "Hashomer" members, veteran "mukhtars" of Jewish settlements, someone from the "Arab Platoon" of the "Palmah", those who used to be juniors of "Brith Shalom", remnants of the "Friends of the Convert Association", former activists of the "Canaanite" movement, a veteran of the Intelligence community, a famous American reformist rabbi retired in Israel, researchers of the Arab village, and certain others whom he did not know. The discussion was very intensive, and it became known that all the participants agreed to re-convene.

THIS TOO WAS IN MY DREAM

Just today someone handed to me the results of a public-opinion survey that was conducted the other day among the Palestinians, following these publications. The surveyors promised the respondents full confidentiality.

The survey shows that those called "Israeli Arabs" include 40% who oppose these ideas, 35% who are ready to examine them and 25% who refuse to answer.

In East Jerusalem those opposing are 50%, and 30% are ready to examine.

In "C areas" 55% oppose, 10% are ready to examine, and the rest refused to respond.

It was not possible to maintain the survey in the Palestinian Authority area.

My story goes that far.

Wrote with Love:

Asher Shla'in

P.O.B. 36242 Tel Aviv 61362

Voice-Mail: 03-5608150