

THE NEW JEWS

These essays by young Jews suggest that spiritual ferment and the rediscovery of religious identity are increasingly important concerns for the new generation. Youth revolution encompasses not only political action but far-reaching attempts at self-definition and the creation of communities of warmth, meaning and myth. These young writers—in story, verse and prose—portray one such attempt: an effort to recapture and respond to their Jewish roots. The richness of their discoveries and creations emerges from these intense, personal statements. The attempt of these young Jews to overcome alienation and despair is of significance beyond the Jewish pale. Theirs is the story not only of a three-thousand-year-old tradition, but of American youth as well.

Part One: RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

Along the Path to Religious Community • Out of the Melting Pot, Into the Fire • The Case for Religious Radicalism • Leaving All This Behind: Reflections on a Matured Zionist Commitment • Israeli Arabs: Israel's Peaceful Frontier? • Israel without Apology • The Jew as Conqueror: The Hearts and Minds of Soldiers in the Six-Day War • Judaism on the Campus—Why It Fails • Encountering the Jewish Radical: The Challenge for Campus Rabbis and Student Groups • Authenticity and Responsiveness in Jewish Education • Imperative and Conscience in Jewish Law.

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EDITED BY
**JAMES A. SLEEPER
 & ALAN L. MINTZ**

New voices from the Jewish community discuss political radicalism, the State of Israel, the failure of suburban and campus Judaism, and the recovery of Jewish spirituality



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apologetic about the Jewish experiment in Palestine, to ignore the fact that this is not the first but at least the third Jewish commonwealth to exist there, to dismiss as unenlightened and parochial Israel's enrichment of the notion of particularism in a world gone mad on "universalism"? Clearly, if we are talking about a critique which is severe, we must be just as hard on these stereotypes as we ought to be on American Jewry's glib celebration of Jewish statehood.

With both the traditional Hebrew school myths and the anti-Israel stereotypes in mind, I went to Israel to see for myself. It seemed to me that one acid test of the validity of the charges that Israel is exploitive and anti-Arab might be sought among the three hundred thousand Arabs who have been granted a sort of second-class citizenship there for the past twenty years. The lot of these Arabs had better be confronted before conclusions are reached about the mentality of their Jewish "oppressors." And the "oppressors" ought to be confronted, too. With this challenge, I embarked upon what admittedly could be nothing more than a microcosmic, person-to-person venture—a probing of attitudes, and not an exhaustive political analysis or an attempt to gather statistics. What do the Jews think of their "enemies"? Are both peoples willing to share their homeland?

My basic assumption was that to answer these questions ideological charges and stereotypes had to be set aside to make room for what may be really fruitful criticisms of Israel—criticisms that might justly be made by those whose concerns are for the meaning of Jewishness and for basic human rights.

But ideological charges and stereotypes die hard, even when they are held by individuals whose actual concern and information about Arabs and Jews is at best minimal. First, then, I would like to explore the anti-Israel stereotypes' meanings to some of the American students who embrace them. Then I will describe what I saw in Israel,

Israeli Arabs: Israel's Peaceful Frontier?

by JAMES A. SLEEPER

American Jews, especially those on campuses, have long been exposed to the claim that the State of Israel is at best a mixed blessing. We have had to grant a measure of truth to the argument that the creation of the state caused human suffering as well as alleviating it; that in this century a powerful Jewish myth came alive along with an equally powerful movement for Arab renaissance and liberation from colonial abuse. We have learned, in fact, that to view the state Jewishly ought to mean that we submit it to a severe critique, that we accept the crystallization of the Jewish people and the Jewish historical message into a political state as, at best, problematic.

But are we to accept as well the stereotypes which portray Israel as an "outpost of Western imperialism," as a haven for "Arab-hating aggressors"? Are we to believe the world's goodwill can replace armed force as a guarantor of the minimal physical survival of peoples? Are we to be

and, lastly, I will try to indicate what kind of American student action outside of glib pronouncements can best nurture the few small seeds of hope I found planted.

The Stereotype's Appeal— and Its Limitations

Although Arab territorial nationalism, like Zionism, is a twentieth-century phenomenon ("We both woke up at the same time," says one Jewish author), it is assumed in the popular anti-Israel position that Arabs, like the blacks of Africa, are indigenous and rightful rulers in Palestine. Personally I think this flouting of historical evidence is open to some question: the Jewish people's unusual history has scarcely been characterized by nationalism, let alone "imperialism," since the end of the last Jewish commonwealth in Palestine, which fell to the Romans in 70 A.D. Americans should know that the Palestinian Jew regards himself as a freedom fighter who owes the world precious little after years of exile and persecution; he sees himself as a member of the third, if not the "fourth" (i.e., the Jewish) world.

Nevertheless, the stereotype persists, not because it serves very well to clarify the causality and complexity of Palestinian Jewish nationhood in our own times, but because:

1) It corresponds rather neatly to the perspective of Frantz Fanon, a well-known African writer and spokesman for the liberation of colonized peoples, who is justifiably popular with many students. A link is made between his powerful portrayal of heroic freedom fighters, like the African and Asian guerillas, and the *El Fatah*. That the Jewish soldier, in lashing out against the Arabs, stepping on the toes of the great powers, and thumbing his nose at centuries of Western inquisition, also feels himself a freedom fighter in his ancestors' land is not given credibility.

2) The stereotype has something in common with

the facts of America's treatment of blacks and Indians, two agonizing problems in the face of which few of us escape a feeling of helplessness. If Arabs in Israel are second-class citizens we can indict the Israelis for some of the crimes we ourselves would like to atone for—this time, however, by "solving" a problem that seems manageable and soluble from a distance of twelve thousand miles.

3) Israel appears to be so much the creation of students' middle-class Jewish parents. It seems to be the summer haven of Portnoy's people and of the American Jewish community, a group well known to students for having subordinated whatever was good and radical in Judaism to the norms and aesthetics of middle-class culture. How such wealthy Americans are actually regarded by Israelis might be of interest to American students who think they know what sarcasm is. The situation and style of life in Israel is not the creation of those who gave money to Israel; they made possible, but did not shape—and often might not even approve of—all of the country's development.

In thus questioning the accuracy or emotional relevance of the stereotype, I am not attempting to dismiss criticisms of Israel. In fact, it was under the suspicion that the stereotype might be partly true that I went to Israel to learn about the Movement for Arab-Jewish Cooperation—a small, non-utopian group whose name belies its tiny size. I went not only with the criticisms of American students in mind, however, but also with the suspicion that ultimately Israel should not be opposed or justified by the substitution of one ideology for another, be it Fanonism for Zionism, or vice versa. We cannot really pretend to be softening the prejudices of the belligerents (assuming that is a goal) until we have determined to stop feeding our own.

The attempt to disregard these conflicting caricatures (but not historical perspective) became relatively simple after my arrival; all claims appear rather pale and con-

torted in the face of complex and fascinating reality.

A Jewish doctor who, during the Six Day War, traveled about the countryside visiting and reassuring frightened Arab friends said, "You may travel the length and breadth of our land, but you will not find hatred of Arabs." Alas, his statement was not true; when I told a class at Bar Ilan University of the doctor's wartime visits, they thought him suspect or at best demented. On the whole, however, when we speak of Israelis' feelings toward Arabs, we are *not* talking about the kind of teeth-gnashing hatred that some of us thought we saw on television reports from Cairo in June of 1967. We who criticize Israel are not trying to restrain imperialism as much as to calm a fertile paranoia and at the same time to respect a mighty determination not to become another sad episode in the history of Jewish persecution. We shall return to this paranoia and determination, for it is difficult for many who are outside the stream of Jewish history to understand the difference between fear and hate in national character. For now, suffice it to say that in attacking so-called "imperialism," some American students have failed to see what is potentially wrong with Israel, and therefore lose their opportunity to solve the problem of Israeli overreaction and indifference to Arab suffering. But perhaps solving such delicate problems is not on the agenda for ideologues and Jewish self-haters; it is hard enough for even the open-minded to calm a Jewish soldier who says, "If we were not to oppress anyone here, they would still be slaughtering us in the diaspora"—a statement which is admittedly difficult to disprove, unless one is hopelessly naive about Jewish history.

It is one thing, too, to advocate a guerilla war against a government which oppresses its people, and which is not representative of the populace it controls. It is quite another thing to oppose a nation in which the population, to a man, will rise in defense of any attack, real or imagined. The state of Israel certainly enjoys a solidarity of support

from its Jewish inhabitants; and during the Six Day War, even the three hundred thousand Israeli Arabs were quiet and often courageously loyal—which may be explained, of course, in a variety of ways. As far as the Jewish inhabitants of Israel are concerned, anyway, the fact of the state's existence—unlike that of the Thieu-Ky government—cannot be wished away, or even conquered away, unless, of course, one has in the back of his mind another attempt at genocide. As far as the Arab inhabitants are concerned, I asked them to explain for themselves their cooperation during the war.

Israeli Arabs Facing Israel's Existence

The first realization impressed upon me in my discussions with Arabs is that Israel's existence is something that many of her Arab citizens have had to come to terms with on more than an *ad hoc* basis. In fact, one Arab teacher and journalist said to me, "I could speak to you in English, but I want to have you practice your Hebrew so that you may come and live here." What was he driving at?

The answer may be found in the words of another young Arab, who works in a government tax office in Haifa. His is one of the few Arab families who failed to respond to the demands of Trans-Jordan and Syria that they leave Israel in 1948 and return on the heels of victorious Arab armies, but who chose instead to heed the pleas of Israelis that they remain and accept citizenship. He said, "When you've lived among Jews, you know that they are not monsters, that they too have a right to be here, and that we might as well learn to live together." The more Jews who agree, the better off he is; hence the encouragement from Israeli Arabs for the immigration of sympathetic American students to Israel.

When I asked another Arab teacher, who had been fired after bureaucratic harassment and reinstated through the efforts of Jewish friends, what kind of model he pre-

sents to his Arab students as a way of relating to Israelis, he said, "First, I want to correct your wording; we are Israelis, too. Our fate is inseparable from that of Israel." It is not easy for a young Arab to establish his identity as an Israeli in a nation whose heroes are Moshe Dayan and the paratroopers. Yet young Arab teachers struggle to make their students aware of their stake in Israel.

Why? I doubt that their attitude is that of a few Uncle Toms; they are hardly rewarded for such conciliatory views. An Arab who speaks up as they do for full rights as *Israeli citizens* is scrutinized by the Israeli Security Police as a possible agitator, and at the same time threatened by Arab guerillas as a "collaborator" with the Israelis.

In private, at least, the same individuals who try to be good Israelis will not hesitate to cite abuses and harassments by members of the Israel government and police, spurred on by a frightened Jewish populace. Yet despite the often arbitrary restrictions which have at times been imposed upon them, these vocal Arabs keep working for rapprochement because they realize that Israeli Arabs are 1) religiously and culturally free, 2) materially better off than elsewhere, and 3) now being provided with the educational tools to help overcome psychological and other disadvantages.*

I saw these facts myself, and I suspect that being treated as a human being goes hand in hand with cultural liberation. These Arabs claim that in the event of a conquest of Israel they would be jailed along with the Jews, if not in fact treated more harshly; at any rate, in such a situation, there would be acts of resistance and courage by these Arabs which would not be explainable in current American student ideology.

Of course one major setback to material and educational

* These are generalizations; the schools which Arabs are required to attend under compulsory, tax-supported education, emphasize Jewish over Arab culture. But a recent issue of the Hebrew University student paper sought to emphasize that the number of Arabs enrolled there is increasing significantly. It is a patchwork quilt, but the basic principles are clear.

progress came in the political reorientation in the wake of the Six Day War, which led to the incorporation of new Arab populations and the subsequent terrorism. Every Arab was suspect again. When a bomb blew up in the Tel Aviv railroad station, angered Jews attacked innocent Arab bystanders. Despite the fact that many such Jewish assailants are now in jail, and that soldiers went from house to house in the neighborhood of the station cautioning young people against a recurrence of such arbitrary retaliation, this kind of incident is immeasurably harmful in its contribution to the escalation of mistrust.

Even more serious was the bombing of the Hebrew University cafeteria. There are only five hundred Arab students at Israel's four universities but the number had been growing, and Arabs with university degrees were beginning to have great influence in changing the lot of their people in Israel. Needless to say, this kind of success is threatening to Arab guerillas who need the support of Arab populations in Israel, and the explosion in the University may have the effect of slowing educational progress for Israeli Arabs.

Israeli Jews Facing Israeli Arabs

Even without terrorist incidents, however, most of the work of rapprochement must be done among the Jews themselves, and the reasons are not surprising:

1) A large part of Israel's population is composed of refugees or the children of refugees from Hitler's Europe—refugees, as one of them put it bitterly, "for whom there were no United Nations commissions and no sympathetic American students." The concern of these people is hardly with the Arabs as much as with the reestablishment of a life without fear for themselves. Of course there are beautiful exceptions; world famous Yichiel Di-Nur, author of *House of Dolls*, who writes eloquently and works diligently on behalf of Arab-Jewish reconciliation, bears in-

deliberly upon his arm the record of other men's plans for him. It would be easy to understand indifference to Arabs in the midst of an attempt to repair a shattered existence, and, despite Mr. Di-Nur and others like them, this indifference is to be found.

2.) There are in Israel today five hundred thousand *Jewish* refugees from Arab lands—Jews who fled mob violence which erupted in those countries upon the establishment of Israel's or their own independence, and in the wake of the Six Day War. More technologically backward than their fellow European Jews, these immigrants to Israel have some reason to resent their Arab backgrounds—and Arabs who remind them of their past.

3.) There is in Israel the struggle for a convincing model of Jewish masculinity, denied the Jew for two thousand years. Liberation of the downtrodden involves, according to writers like Fanon, the kind of violent self-assertion which the young North African Jew manifests in the Israeli army, in a manner reminiscent of the deeds of valor of American blacks in the Second World War. Such soldiers are not likely to return home from the front to work in the subtle and torturous vineyard of Arab-Jewish relations; it takes a more sophisticated notion of maturity to encompass that kind of endeavor, and while Israel probably does at least as good a job as the United States of disassociating violence from masculinity, we can understand the difficulty with which this is achieved: "The world does not understand what it is to make war while being ashamed of fighting," says one soldier; "Excuse us, we've won." Is the fighting Jew being dehumanized by war? That is an unusual concern for a country battling for its existence; yet, as many articles and discussions I saw suggest, it is not far from the minds of many Israelis.

4.) The very Orthodox religious Jews in Israel constitute a segment of the population which, despite its mistrust of the secular Israeli state, holds no love for infidel Arabs. The religious impulse for justice is thus blunted by

the fact that religious perspectives are usually the monopoly of leaders who cannot reach beyond their parochial interests to embrace human need.

5.) The atmosphere of warmaking is present even if subdued and protracted. Young Americans simply do not know what it is to be totally at one with a society at war. We do not even know what it is to be at one with our country in time of peace. I am not saying that our Israeli counterparts are rabid nationalists who experience no twinges of alienation from any aspects of their society. In fact the satire and intellectual freedom in Israel make it clear that there is dissatisfaction. In a Tel Aviv cabaret I watched Israeli entertainers mock the army and proclaim, to a catchy tune, "I'm not interested in fulfilling promises that God made to Abraham"—a direct repudiation of the "full Israel" supposedly promised the patriarch by God, and which is often cited as Scriptural proof that Israelis are expansionists. All this despite the fact that daily incidents of terrorism create the kind of tension that ought to breed mob unity and silence debate. When that tension does lead to anti-Arab feeling, it's not surprising.

To be sure, if one travels the length and breadth of Israel he can find hatred of Arabs, for all the above reasons. I met that hatred in a remark on a bus, in a class at Bar Ilan University, in a conversation with a friend. But one learns to combat hatred not because it is unexplainable or even senseless, but minimally because, in the long run, it is inhuman and self-defeating.

Israeli Jews themselves deserve some credit for the good that is being done. It might be easier for a Southern American white to champion civil rights for blacks than for an Israeli Jew to lead a crusade for Arab citizens—after all, there is a war going on; our own treatment of American German and Japanese citizens during World Wars I and II may serve to clarify this point.

Yet, "amidst the rising tide of hate, blood, and misery . . . loom the nightmarish memories of the Jewish holo-

caust. With the scars of memory still fresh in their minds, Nina and Yichiel Di-Nur opened their home so that Jews and Arabs might have a place to meet and through personal contact achieve greater human understanding." So began the brief history of the Movement for Arab-Jewish Cooperation, the organization which facilitated my visit to Israel. Through several early movement projects hundreds of Jewish and Arab Israelis were in fact brought together. Keynoting the movement's efforts was the late Prime Minister Eshkol's statement on cooperation between Jews and Arabs.

This cannot be the work of government clerks. . . . The matter must be tackled on a tremendously broad front. In effect the total population has an obligation to involve itself in this effort.

In Israel I traveled with Mrs. Di-Nur to meet Arabs and to view projects now underway. Butrus Dahli, an Arab graduate of the Hebrew University who returned from Jerusalem to his native village, has sponsored exchange visits between students in Kfar Yasif and Jewish kibbutz youth, and he dreams of an exchange center as a facility dedicated to this kind of activity.

At the University of Haifa, I witnessed an exciting and fruitful meeting of Arab and Jewish students. "Why don't you open your mouths?" a Jewish student just back from reserve duty challenged the Arabs present. "We want to know what you mean when you say that your fate is inseparable from that of the Jewish state."

"We are afraid to explain what that means," responded an Arab boy.

"We musn't be," declared an Arab high school teacher, who proceeded to recount his own experiences in speaking frankly with mistrustful Jews. A small enough beginning, but the feeling in the room at the close of the meeting was indescribable.

In Nahariya, near Acre, I attended one of a series of evening meetings between Arab and Jewish adults. What

on the surface might have seemed like a weekly book club meeting in a suburban American home was actually an important exchange between members of two ancient peoples in their shared homeland. The guest was a British newspaperwoman who reported her experiences in refugee camps for Arabs in Gaza and the West Bank.

In Ashkelon, I met Shirley and Shlomo Shpira, who have been trying, despite insurmountable red tape, to open a vocational school in Gaza for Arab children. In Jerusalem, Dr. Jack Cohen of Hillel told me of painstaking and frustrating efforts to establish trust and communication among Arab and Jewish students, and of attempts to enable some of the students to work in VISTA fashion in Arab villages this summer.

I had no monopoly on information about groups and projects; most of these I found largely by word of mouth, and so it may be assumed that the efforts I discovered are representative of a larger number of undertakings and common sentiments throughout the country.

Toward a Realistic Approach

I keep remembering the words of one of the Jewish members of the Nahariya evening discussion group: "Israel is special, and therefore we are being judged severely. We are being asked to act as giants. Yes, there is hostility toward Arabs. But no other people would have done as well as we are doing." As much as this statement smacks of apologetics, and as little as it contributes to the solution of the problems that still exist, it is a difficult claim to refute, and part of a necessary corrective on ideological blindness.

There are true stories of arbitrary jailings and beatings of Arabs suspected by the government of terrorism, and there is certainly some of the same kind of prejudice and partisan law enforcement which characterizes the United States; the danger that nationalism may gather momen-

turn to the exclusion of other values exists. But moral self-consciousness exists as well, and Americans should know that that is a rare enough quality.

Things have not improved much since my visit; with each continuing month of impasse, divisions widen. But it is my impression that tender seeds of peace and accommodation have begun to grow; they must be nurtured, because both peoples have a claim to the land, and because the supposed purging, ennobling effects of violence do not exist in such a moral standoff.

While my observations have assumed as given the existence of a Jewish state, they should not be interpreted as a blanket defense of statehood. Self-denial on the chauvinistic level may be a part of what Judaism is all about. Certainly since the time of Samuel, who cautioned the people against crowning a king and becoming "like all the nations," we Jews have struggled uncomfortably with the territorial, political level of self-definition; we have learned from our history that our power to move heaven and earth has had little to do with armies and states. This is not a critique based on ignorance or self-hatred, but upon a serious reading of our history and of the paradigms in our tradition.

One does not question the fact that physical survival is a prerequisite to other considerations. In the wake of the Holocaust and the massive indifference of the rest of the world to the plight of the Jews, the struggle for liberation of 1948 was necessary and justified, as well as instinctive. But there is nothing about such a reflex response which automatically makes all its consequences morally desirable or tactically wise; the fact is that we pay an enormous price and face enormous dangers in remaining inflexible. That is sad because there is nothing inherently "reactionary" or "oppressive" about the Jewish community of Palestine; one would have to be ideologically blinded not to see its incredible soul and potential. The responsibility of American Jews who travel to Israel is to carry with them both the vision and the critique. The seductive

balm of personal wholeness and "at-homeness" in one's land must not be allowed to stifle the universalism and criticism of the prophets, who also lived in the land, at once in love with and estranged from their people.

The challenge to young Americans—and to young Arabs studying in America—is firstly to visit Israel and see for themselves. I was allowed to move freely without credentials or introductions, and was impressed not only by the degree of intellectual and political freedom, but also by the accessibility of members of the government and intelligentsia to one who was introduced simply as "an American student." But more importantly, I was impressed with the need for Americans and Israelis to keep testing and enlarging that freedom, and with the need for us to confront Israelis with the claims I have been discussing, and to bring to bear upon Israeli representatives in this country the pressure of informed, moral opinion.

On our campuses we should not be afraid of abandoning the simplistic stereotypes of some fellow students who are glibly "anti-Israel," and the stereotypes, on the other hand, of uninformed segments of the Jewish community who embrace a "cowboy and Indian" view of the Israeli-Arab conflict. We ought to read *New Outlook* and publications of the nascent Israeli new left, as well as American magazines like *Liberation*—all of which are increasingly available in university newsstands and bookstores. We ought to sponsor meetings with both Palestinians and Israeli Arabs who come to America.

A generation of Americans which manifests unparalleled moral and human sensitivity is worthy of more than button-wearing and sloganeering when it comes to the Middle East. Those who have taken glib stands on the situation there must learn to respond to undramatic calls to plant a few seeds of peace and cooperation in ambiguous and shifting soil. They might, in the process, learn to affirm something about the difficult and sensitive and moral nature of peace-building in other areas of the world as well.

Michael J. Rosenberg is the antithesis of the Jewish apologist. His article "To Uncle Tom and Other Such Jews," which was published widely in newspapers and magazines on many campuses during 1968, created something of a sensation in the Jewish radical community. His essay about Israel in this volume, addressed not to Arab claims but to American students who oppose Israel, speaks powerfully for itself. A graduate of the State University of New York at Albany, where he majored in history, Michael is currently in the Department of Contemporary Jewish Studies at Brandeis. He has written for Midstream, the Village Voice, and the Jerusalem Post.