

# Building Peace

Thank you very much for the Institute for Social Thought's premiere issue of *AZURE: IDEAS FOR THE JEWISH NATION*. I expect this journal will be highly valued in the years ahead as Israel seeks to build peace both with its neighbors and among Israel's own Jewish population. The new and fresh ideas your journal offers are a welcome addition to the discussions surrounding the future of Israel.

I look forward to reading more issues of this new journal.

**Martin Indyk**  
U.S. Ambassador  
Tel Aviv

## *Sufficient Grief*

I would like to offer a number of comments regarding Yoram Hazony's article, "The End of Zionism?" (*AZURE* 1, Summer 1996) In 1948, the year of Israel's War of Independence, Israel enjoyed a nearly wall-to-wall consensus, across all ideological camps in the country, in favor of establishment of

the state. Everyone (each perhaps from his own vantage point) pushed for this eventuality and identified with the agonizing war that had to be fought. Those signing the declaration of independence were politicians from the left and from the right; secular, religious and centrist. There was not a single writer or intellectual, to the best of my knowledge, who did not identify with the war.

The phenomenon of a left wing dragging the country in the direction of anti-Zionism started only after the Six Day War. Even Uri Avneri in his *Fields of Philistia* describes the war and himself as a loyal fighter.

S. Yizhar, in his *Days of Ziklag*, *The Ruins of Hiz'ah* and *The Prisoner of War*, does not come out against the war or the occupation, but rather against displays of stupidity, immorality and depraved brutality during the war—but all the while identifying with its goal. This is exactly like Natan Alterman writing one of his rousing "columns" about the events at Kfar Kasem, while at the same time believing in the Greater Land of Israel to the end of his days.

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Amos Oz is another story. His generation is fairly removed from the 1948 war. In *My Michael*, which was cited in the article, one may discern the seeds of identification with the Palestinians (in a nostalgic way), but in most of Oz's writings and stories there is no mention of these issues. Even in the novel *Black Box*, which is among his later works, there is no identification with the Palestinians (though there is a grotesque portrayal of activists from the Greater Land of Israel movement). In any event, the trend towards identification with the Palestinians, which gathered momentum and culminated in the Oslo agreement, began fairly late—in my opinion not before the Yom Kippur War.

I merely wish to say that the grief we are now facing is sufficient in itself, and there is no need to hasten its arrival, as was done in the article. It should be emphasized that the phenomenon of anti-Zionism is much more of a "journalistic" phenomenon than a literary one. It appears in heavy doses in newspapers, articles, op-eds, poetry, syndicated columns and theater. Serious authors know how to distinguish between their literary creations and any political articles they write, or speeches they deliver in the public square. Even Meir Shalev's articles in the press are totally different from his prose.

Hanan Sever  
Kibbutz Yiftah

### *Already Out of Control*

Thank you for sending me the first issue of AZURE. My appreciation is exceeded by my recognition of the fine job you have done. I really was in for a pleasant surprise, quite satisfied over your courage to publish—in these dark days—a new intellectual journal. I was even more pleased to witness the high standard. Judging by your ability to sustain The Shalem Center and to continue distributing background materials that are critical for an understanding of current events, I believe that you will go a long way with AZURE. Both the name and the content are deserving of heartfelt congratulations.

Our era is *already* out of control, due both to the mess we inherited from the Labor-Meretz government—stuck like a bone in the throat of the new administration, which is unable to either swallow it or spit it out—and to the diversity of political forces that Netanyahu has gathered into his government. Thus, AZURE is especially important today.

I will not deny that you caused me great satisfaction by printing Ofir Haivry's "Act and Comprehend" (AZURE 1, Summer 1996), a paean to his scholarship and seriousness; the same goes for Yoram Hazony's exposé on the gang of anti-Zionists who go by the name of "Post-Zionism."

Tzvi Shiloah  
Herzliya

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### *Checking the Tzitzit*

I was pleased to see AZURE added to the *tzitzit* [fringed garment]; even if the *talit* [prayer shawl] is not all *t'chelet* [azure], the addition is still important and timely. I hope the project will continue on indefinitely and without interruption. Three cheers for the translation of the letter from Martin Luther King (AZURE 1, Summer 1996). It contains several key insights that have a high degree of relevance to our own reality. Please allow me several short comments on the content of the articles:

1. In his preface, the editor emphasizes [in the Hebrew edition] that "AZURE was born for lack of choice." I am bewildered by this undervaluation. AZURE's importance and proper place are assured even without the existence of a fundamental and multi-sectoral crisis. A forum for clarification, and a focused one at that, is always beneficial.

2. In his preface, the editor mentions the "majority of Israel's elite." This is a concept that has not been adequately examined. Who exactly is this "elite"? Theater-goers? Yeshiva students? Academics? We are not automatically obligated to adopt the definitions that a certain cultural group in Israel is attempting to inculcate.

3. Similarly, Yoram Hazony writes in his article, "The End of Zionism?"

that Post-Zionism has become the "dominant cultural force in the country." Is this really so? Where on the spectrum do we locate the Torah-based research institutes, the *hesder* yeshivas, and the yeshiva army preparatory academies? What about the haredi and non-Jewish sectors, who do not see themselves at all as part of the Zionist camp—nor of its successor? It seems to me that we should seriously consider whether all of this is really true, or whether it emanates from biased parties that have succeeded in making it part and parcel of Israel's public discourse.

4. Also in regard to the "cultural war" discussed by the editor, I am not convinced that the great divide is really between those who totally negate Judaism and those who champion it. It would appear that the noise of the detractors is much louder than their actual relative weight in Israeli culture and among its consumers.

**Meir Gross**  
Beit El

### *Failing Substitutes*

I congratulate you on your article "The End of Zionism?" which I thought was the most perceptive (if equally trou-

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bling) analysis of the situation in Israel I have read in years.

I have just completed a book on the American Jewish community, whose conclusions are at least somewhat parallel to your own regarding Israel. I suggest that the adoption of substitutes for Judaism—new forms of what is now known as “Jewishness” and consisting of liberal politics, “Jewish culture,” ethnicity, Holocaust studies, etc.—is clearly failing to keep Jews Jewish; and conclude that a community built around anything but the old-time religion will not survive in this country. But the American Jewish community is entirely dedicated to the liberal attitude toward religion, namely that it is a dangerous, divisive, reactionary force that must be marginalized lest Jews lose their chance for integration and social advancement.

Congratulations on your superb piece.

**Elliott Abrams**  
Senior Fellow  
Hudson Institute  
Washington, D.C.

### ***Honest Intellect***

Upon receiving a copy of *AZURE: IDEAS FOR THE JEWISH NATION*, I want to express my most sincere thanks to you

while wishing enormous success to The Shalem Center. An honest intellectual approach to the needs, problems and aspirations of the Jewish people and the State of Israel represents a very important contribution to their future and well-being.

I am sure that by reading the contents of *AZURE*, I will gain a better understanding of Israel and its people. So allow me to repeat my most sincere thanks to you and your institution, and to express my hopes that the effort you have initiated be effective and long-lasting.

**Manuel E. Lopez Trigo**  
Ambassador from Costa Rica  
Jerusalem

### ***Philosophers and Principles***

Regarding Ofir Haivry’s article, “Act and Comprehend”:

In view of the discussion of Thales, I would like to add that there are Jewish parallels and possible influences on his views. It was long fashionable to minimize this influence, despite the identification of Thales, “the first Greek philosopher,” as a Phoenician by Herodotus. This Aryanist or anti-Semitic prejudice has given way in some recent studies to the recognition that both Thales and another

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early philosopher, Pythagoras, were Phoenicians.

In regard to the mention of Cyrus as a “non-Jewish king” who is yet called *mashiah*, it might interest you to know that some believe that Cyrus descended from the ten northern tribes who were exiled after the fall of Samaria and settled in northern Mesopotamia and places further east by the Assyrians. Cyrus is described (I believe, in the *Cyropaedia* of Xenophon) as having received his education in a school devoted to the principle of justice.

Elliot A. Green  
Jerusalem

### ***Nefarious Normality***

For some months I have been pleased to receive The Shalem Center’s periodic publications concerning social and political conditions in Israel. I have been in full agreement with your analyses and conclusions, and am always eager to receive your materials.

I am absolutely delighted, however, with your latest publication, *AZURE*. I don’t remember when I last felt so uplifted about any kind of reading as I did after having read Yoram

Hazony’s article, “The End of Zionism?” It is nothing less than a confirmation and true reflection of my own feelings and convictions concerning present conditions in Israel.

I had followed with intense interest the campaign that the Likud and Benjamin Netanyahu had mounted before the election and am proud to say that as far back as two years ago I had predicted Netanyahu’s election as the next prime minister of Israel.

But I was quite dismayed with the results of the election. The victory of the Likud was much too narrow. Where were the “think tanks” of the “right”? Where were the professors and thinkers and the media when it came to the point for Israel to be made aware and warned about the consequences of the concept of “Post-Zionism”—the predictable total failure of the peace process and the nefarious efforts of Shimon Peres and his entourage to become “normal” and eventually perhaps join the Arab League, as is most eloquently pointed out in *AZURE*?

Finally, please accept my wife Eve’s and my congratulations on the occasion of your first issue of *AZURE*. We do hope for many to follow.

Joseph P. Morrison  
Miami, Florida

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### *Wind in the Willows*

In his article “Act and Comprehend,” Ofir Haivry asserts that homes should be built in order to bolster the nation’s bond with disputed parts of the homeland. According to Haivry, homes to a large extent engender a sense of belonging and strengthen the bond, and therefore—if I may interpret his remarks—the sight of a Burger Ranch restaurant alongside skyscrapers would be the ultimate sign of a firm grip on the land.

I have a serious problem with this idea. Form may indeed have an impact on content, but homes can result only from belief and vision, not the other way around. The caustic public debate today over building stems not from a difference of opinion on particular plots of land, but is an outgrowth of culture and creative activity, such as literature, cinema and theater. Since the establishment of the state, Israeli writers have endeavored to anchor their national-political views in a wide-ranging and impressive canon. Yesterday’s extremists are today’s centrists, not because their opinions have softened or become moderated, but because they have succeeded in explaining them at every opportunity. Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua, S. Yizhar and many others are considered today (and justifiably so) to be

the country’s authentic cultural luminaries. Their track record is beyond dispute: Hundreds of plays, endless shelves of books and records, all representing the same national-political view, were the only way the public’s thirst for culture could be quenched—a thirst that keeps intensifying. With nowhere else to go, the soul makes do with substitutes; it is satiated by the poisonous drink, without protest or scorn. The homes built over the years in Kiryat Arba or in Shiloh did not provide the slightest respite for the exhausted soul. The homes preached to the converted, only serving to deepen the gap, seeming—then as now—alien and not natural, fantasies of a sector steeped in perilous illusions, a sector that follows the path of a nebulous divine imperative or of murky emotions that have no place in modern Israeli society.

Where is it written that one must live in the territories? Who said that it is good to die for our country? Why are the graves of our forefathers so important? Serious answers to these questions have never been written in a clear and modern idiom. Yeshiva boys serve in the military, full of motivation and ideals, but we have never read a book written by one of them; if they would ever go to the theater, they would know that an Israeli play has never been written from a perspective simi-

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lar to theirs, not to speak of the cinema.

The classic exilic Jewish way of thinking actually flourished in the ghetto. It was sheltered from the influence of the gentiles and the outside world. The ghetto ensured that the members of the community would stay inside and would not seek their self-realization elsewhere. It turns out that the ghetto, together with European Jewry, “made aliya” and quickly found its place in Israel. The religious Zionists set up settlements and yeshivas, and raised large families. Even if they live in the city, serve in the army like everyone else and work at the neighborhood bank, the majority are still living in a cultural and spiritual ghetto—a ghetto that never forced them to grapple with the lofty spiritual challenge presented by their partners in building the state, their intellectual rivals. It was cozy in the ghetto, secure and warm. There one saw no need to explain or justify oneself, nor was there enough time or desire to write books or plays.

Today, everything is collapsing. The roots of the collapse are firmly planted in current rabbinic attitudes that perpetuate the spirit of the diaspora, attitudes to the effect that it is better to hide behind the yeshiva walls, or at least behind the walls of the bank or hospital, in a supportive and pro-

tected environment, and not expose oneself to “secular” culture. Anywhere you turn, you will see a yarmulke, often at the highest levels, and even in the army—the height of material existence. The Zionist rabbis tout their talented youth, organize a rally in the city square and salute: “Behold Solomon’s litter, sixty brave men all around, all of them girded with swords and well-versed in the art of war”—we are not afraid, we live in peace with the left and with secularism, we are exposed to the most “dangerous” environments and have remained Zionist and religious as in the past; everything is rosy.

The rabbis appear to have forgotten that when the first army preparatory academies were formed eight years ago, the entire rabbinic establishment was up in arms, maintaining adamantly that the *hesder* system was good enough, and that there was no reason for a young religious man to join the regular army—naturally, it was considered “dangerous.” But the religious youth voted with their feet. Spiritual desiccation and the disjunction between religion and state engendered a strong predilection for the elite units. While their peers from the *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* began to show the first signs of flagging motivation, among the religious youth it blossomed. Perhaps this was, in part, a compensation

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for a feeling widespread in the religious community of somehow not belonging, a result of years of repression and the castration of all spiritual and artistic impulses by the religious schools and yeshivas.

Today, wherever you look, you will find religious military officers who find support from the rabbinic establishment. Having seen the success of the preparatory academies, the Zionist rabbinate adopted it as its own, lending its stamp of approval. This was not the result of a sudden passion for pluralism or a new vision of the future of Zionism; it was simply the recognition of a reality that turned out to be fairly successful. This military reality refreshes the soul of the young religious man, a soul that seeks to show its place in society, a place equal to that of his secular comrades.

The spiritual void was stopped up with military putty, and today one gets the impression that the needs of the religious community are satisfied. But it is only a temporary, facile solution. Sooner or later, our sons will also understand that the army is not an end in itself, that a country cannot be built solely on the foundation of security and defense of the homeland. A serious inquiry is needed on the question of “What are we doing here?” an inquiry that cannot remain only on the level of halachic rulings or dusty, eighty-year-old journal articles.

The declaration that religious Zionism has integrated itself all spheres of life is no more than self-delusion. Whereas this may be true on the lighter side of reality—the material facet, uniform for everyone; it is undeniably false on the spiritual side, which is complex and arduous, presenting tough demands. Do religious Zionists wish to demonstrate spiritual excellence? Let them write books and plays, publish articles, compose music, do something spiritual—at least do *something*. We can see for ourselves that not a single refreshing and original spiritual work has been written in the last fifty years, a work with roots planted in religion, or by an author of significant Tora stature. The only thing produced has been updates and commentaries, vocalized luxury editions of one sort or another, a rehash of something already extant. Despite the fact that religious people should naturally spearhead the country’s spiritual pursuits, connect to the upper worlds, in reality there is only retreat and a diminution of the spirit. The rabbis are *not* the cultural vanguard of religious Zionism, despite their pretense to the contrary. They are the bearers of halacha and commentary, of religion and establishment. Their style of thought is dogmatic and exilic; they do not even fathom the need for artists, painters or authors, and as a result religious Zionism today finds

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itself in a crisis no less deep than that of secular Zionism. There is still an important difference: The most typical expression of the problem, demotivation, bypassed religious Zionism, which has not yet figured out why it does what it does, and it is not yet left without answers. But the time for demoralization will come, as well. Religious Zionism in all its years of existence has not specified its outlook—not even to itself. There are the stupendous works of Rabbi Kook, and that's it. Since then, apparently, nothing has happened.

Building homes is the easy way out. It transfers responsibility from the individual, imposing it on the Housing Minister, the government and thousands of foreign workers. A real bond will not develop without a profound dialogue that takes into account all the aspects of cultural life. "If God does not build the house, the workers labored for naught." Without a clear and deep vision, the house cannot persevere. Without spiritual foundations, there can be no material stability. Thousands of homes in Ariel did nothing to endear the general public, since they were not the product of dialogue and cultural-spiritual persuasion, but rather as part of an ideology that does not know how to manifest itself. Scary-looking, Uzi-toting settlers in army parkas are the representatives of the settlements in the territories.

They are the occupants of the house for which the workers labored for naught—frustrated occupants who do not understand where they went wrong.

When we say "Michael Jordan," we think of more than basketball; we also see his smile and personality beaming from behind the ball. The same goes for books and drawings, plays and poetry. Aviv Gefen is more famous than his words or melodies; he represents a worldview, even without resorting to words. Today's youth buy Aviv Gefen, not just his records. The religious public cannot sell its opinions and ideas because it is still incapable of articulating them in the vernacular. An allegiance develops only where a mutually agreed-upon message is dispatched and absorbed. The religious public has not broadcast such messages for many years; this sector remains locked in the ghetto, talking only to itself, afraid primarily of itself. Afraid that it will be contaminated, that the outside world will not measure up to its standard of spiritual quality, that it will fail. And thus, "every man has his sword upon his thigh because of the fear by night." The sword of creativity, spirit and excitement remains fastened to the weakened body; the sword can no longer revolve, because it is too difficult. The religious are not represented at the Betzalel art school, nor at Nisan Nativ, nor at the music academy. If there are

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one or two, it means that in spite of everything their souls were restless and could not endure the spiritual shallowness they had inherited.

The situation is critical, the dam about to burst. There is no time to sit around, no time for hesitation. We must get up and act. We need authors. We need painters. We need poets, mu-

sicians, actors and singers. We need a wide range of activity. We need brave rabbis and open-minded educators. We need to acknowledge reality. We need awareness.

**Da'el Shalev**  
Jerusalem

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*AZURE welcomes letters to the Editor. Letters should be sent to: AZURE, The Shalem Center, 22 Hatzfira St., Jerusalem, Israel. Letters may be edited for length.*

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