



Should we hug or wrestle with Israel?

Robbie Gringras

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My train stopped in the middle of the tracks this morning at exactly 10 a.m. The driver stood up together with all the other passengers to mark a minute's silence. Cars stopped by the side of the road, classes came to a halt, construction work went quiet. Across the country, some 6 million people marked the annihilation of the 6 million. The radio played only melancholia, the cafes and clubs were closed, and there was no sports channel on TV.

And now as Holocaust Day comes to a close, I have a moment to reflect on this experience in the light of the wonderful conversation I've had the privilege of exploring with *Eilu V'eilu*.

Holocaust Day is a moment of 'we'. A time when Jews connect with the collective experience of our people. Religious and ideological differences fall away on this day. We are painfully united not through Torah, but through the experience of *Am – People*. A great teacher, Avram Infeld, teaches that we are entering the Nine Days of We: the nine days leading from Holocaust Day, through Yom HaZikaron (Memorial Day) to Yom HaAtzma-ut (Israeli Independence Day). In marked contrast to the deeply personal, private spiritual path we all travel during the ten days leading from Rosh HaShana to Yom Kippur, these nine days are about us as a collective whole. (Avram Infeld explains it much better than I could in [this short video](#).)

Rabbi Robert Orkand

Over the past few weeks several news items have caught my attention that highlight the “conversation” we have been having on *Eilu V'eilu* about hugging and wrestling with Israel.

The Israeli elections have been held and a new government is now in place. One can only wonder at the absurdity of an electoral system that requires the creation of a coalition that appears to be unmanageable. And yet, I can safely say that beyond my interest in everything related to Israel the electoral system is not my concern. I don't live there and I do not have a vote. However, I do believe that the appointment of Avigdor Lieberman as Foreign Minister is my business. His statements about Arab citizens of Israel, his insistence that they be required to take a loyalty oath, and his suggestion that any Arab citizen who professes identification with the Palestinian people be “encouraged” to live across the “Green Line” fly in the face of deeply seated progressive values that I hold dear. And, this from the person who will represent Israel to the world.

Here is the dilemma: Avigdor Lieberman has gone on record as favoring civil marriage in Israel and a separation of religion and state. On these matters I agree with Lieberman. What, then, do I do? Do I ignore Lieberman's statements about Israeli Arabs with the hope that his views on these other matters will prevail? Should I be quiet because my own movement in Israel has not spoken out against Lieberman? After all, I don't

And although I know it isn't fashionable to connect the Holocaust with Israel, I am struck by an astonishing narrative arc that is summed up in these nine days, marking a move from the ultimate defeat of the Holocaust to the miraculous establishment of a State within only three years. We moved swiftly from collective powerlessness, to collective power.

We Jews of the western world are not good at power, and we are not good at collectivity. Power can corrupt, it can be dangerous, it can flatter to deceive us into believing it is the answer to all problems. Collectivity can suffocate, can stagnate, and can oppress those inside and outside of the collective. We are familiar with the downside of collectivity and power.

But during these nine days we owe it to ourselves to engage with the wonder of the collectivity that brings with it solidarity, unbounded creativity, generosity beyond favors. We owe it to ourselves to acknowledge that through taking power – both in Israel and in North America – the Jewish People has been able to put down roots and enjoy life rather than flee death. To refer to Avram Infeld once more, we must acknowledge that just over 60 years ago the word “refugee” was most commonly associated with the adjective “Jewish”. Now there is no such thing as a Jewish refugee. This is a stunning achievement.

After we emerge from these terrible and wonderful nine days, after we have journeyed from the darkness of the Holocaust, through the pain of Yom HaZikaron, blinking into the light of Yom HaAtzma-ut, we must not forget our embrace of Jewish collective power.

We must never stop wrestling with the enormous responsibilities that come with collective power. All our fears and suspicions are well-founded. It is not easy to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” with a strong army and the

want to make things more difficult for my colleagues and friends in the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism? These are not easy questions and go to the very heart of what it means to have a meaningful relationship with the State of Israel.

Another issue has arisen that demanded a response. As I write this, there is taking place in Geneva a UN-sponsored conference on racism, called “Durban II” by some. In the months leading up to this conference, a number of our American Jewish organizations, including ARZA, urged the United States and other nations to boycott this conference because it was clear that the conference would become an excuse to bash Israel, as happened during Durban I. This is a clear example of our need and ability to come together to support Israel, no matter how we might feel about decisions made by the Israeli government or about the statements made by an Israeli leader such as Lieberman. All of that is put aside when we feel that Israel is being threatened and/or when Israel's right to exist is being denied.

It is not always easy to know when to hug Israel and when to wrestle with her. The point is that loving Israel demands wrestling, for doing so engages us in the grand experiment concerning the creation of a homeland for the Jews that is governed by principles that we have cherished for centuries. I believe that being disengaged is not an option, nor is turning a blind eye to that which threatens the experiment.

Ra offers us all.

Thank you so much for the chance to explore these questions with you. I invite you to join me and Makom as we continue to hug and wrestle at www.makom.haaretz.com.

structure of an entire state at our disposal. But at the same time as fighting for justice - as we must - we need to celebrate and embrace the challenge and opportunity that Israel