

## Fifth Conversation

### Chapter Eight: Settlement 1975

#### Precis

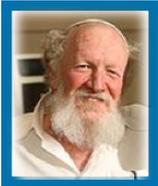
Shavit opens his chapter on settlement by exploring the effects of the 1967 and the 1973 wars. The Six Day war of 1967 brought Israeli control of the territories and liberated a potential messianic force within the ranks of religious Zionism. The 1973 war was a war of deep trauma for Israel and the eventual victory could not change the deep discontent regarding the war, the government and indeed, the entire leadership. A malaise was revealed and the country went into a kind of spiritual tailspin. Many sought new directions and new certainties. It is in the contrasting but cumulative effects of these two wars that Shavit locates the roots of the whole settlement enterprise.

The majority of the chapter consists of conversations with four figures who represent the leadership of the settlement enterprise. The two central conversations, with Pinchas Wallerstein and Yehuda Etzion, are the real meat of the chapter.

Seeing themselves as the continuation of the old Zionist fervor associated with the early Kibbutzim such as Ein Harod, they shared the new “settler outlook”. They believed in the importance of settlement in the Biblical heartland both in order to do God’s will (as they see it) and to revitalize the Zionist enterprise by adding a spiritual dimension.



Wallerstein is the practical do-er. It is he, more than anyone else, who has been responsible for the rapid accumulation of settlements and the necessary accompanying infrastructure of roads, industry and agriculture throughout the whole of the West Bank. Playing the system with great acumen and smartly exploiting government weakness and the cracks between different government agencies, he has created the basis for the hundreds of thousands of settlers who now inhabit the West Bank.



Etzion formulated a revolutionary plan to supplement the gradualism of his friend's approach with a visionary ideology which would involve terror activities, primarily the blowing up of the mosques on the Temple Mount. His underground terrorist organization was caught by the security services in 1984 and he was sentenced to a long jail sentence.

Shavit explores the similarities and differences between the two activists in order to try and understand the ideology that underlies their various actions.

Shavit himself views the whole settlement project with deep antipathy, while finding himself disturbingly connected to it. He suggests that this great conflict between the "Zionism of the plains" and the "Zionism of the mountains", could threaten the entire Zionist project.

# Quotations and Questions

Secular Zionism never climbed Shomron Mountain. It remained in the plains. The renewal and revival of Zionism after the Yom Kippur War was not just about taking strategic control of the highlands of the West Bank. It was about bringing the people of Israel to the mountain of Israel. We would revive Zionism and save Israel by climbing up the mountain, by realizing that without a spiritual depth the state of Israel cannot hold. We would revive it through the understanding that the Zionism of the plains is doomed. Our way is the way of our fathers; we must go back to the land of our fathers, go back to the mountains we lost. We must bring Zionism back to the mountains and bring the mountains back to Zionism.

**This is the first time in the book we hear Israeli voices calling for a religious, spiritual interpretation of Zionism.**

- ♦ While rejecting their methods and even their aims, does Shavit disagree with their diagnosis, that “without a spiritual depth the state of Israel cannot hold”?
- ♦ Do you?

In the simple living room of his modest Ofra home, his [Etzion's] words touch me. Although I reject his worldview and despise his actions, I am not indifferent to what he says. Surprisingly, I recognize the great forces that pulled him to Ofra. I can understand what he says about the plains and the mountains and the history of Zionism. With horror I realize that the DNA of his Zionism and the DNA of my Zionism share a few genes.

- ♦ Do you sense ambivalence in Shavit's reactions during this chapter? If so, what is the nature of his ambivalence? Do you share similar feelings?
- ♦ When arguing for a pluralistic understanding of Zionism, Amos Oz once said that Zionism should be understood as is a surname, a family name. Within families there can be arguments.
- ♦ Do you believe that with these kinds of arguments, the family can hold together?

When I listen to Wallerstein and Etzion, I realize that they did not have a well-defined doctrine regarding the Arabs. When they came to settle in Samaria, they were more ignorant than evil. They saw Israel's 1970s weakness and realized that the Israeli crisis was not only political but spiritual. They felt obliged to deal with the crisis, but the solution they came up with was absurd and completely ignored the demographic reality on the ground. Wallerstein and Etzion did not realize this because they did not think through the consequences of their actions. They were young and rebellious and they were part of a juvenile movement that enjoyed breaking a taboo, crossing a line, and challenging the establishment. But they never knew where they were really headed. They never realized what sort of mess they were about to create. They established Ofra without comprehending its repercussions.

Shavit seems to argue here that there is a crucial moral difference between intentions, and actions: "They were more ignorant than evil."

- ◆ Do you agree with his analysis of Wallerstein and Etzion?
- ◆ How would you categorize his tone: understanding, forgiveness, condescension? Something else?
- ◆ Do you agree that ignorance activism is morally different than acting with evil intent?

“There was no real leadership to speak of, and no real state to speak of...”

- ♦ Have you ever come across people who think like this about their government?
- ♦ What kind of actions does this feeling lead them to?

The question is whether Ofra is a benign continuation of Zionism or a malignant mutation of Zionism. The answer, of course, is that it is both.

- ♦ Does this kind of conclusion help you reach a clearer appreciation of what is at stake, or would you prefer to read something more unequivocal?
- ♦ Shavit suggests that the answer to his either-or question is obvious: “of course”. Is it obvious to you?
- ♦ Some may say that Shavit’s answer is a typically Jewish answer. Does that make it more frustrating, or less?

## Additional Sources



Here are three additional sources that you might want to use in your discussion.

The first is taken from the poem “A Day in the Life of Nablus” by the Palestinian poet, Sharif Elmusa. Elmusa (born 1947) is from a family that became refugees in 1948 and moved to a refugee camp in Jericho. He is currently a professor of Political Science at the American University in Cairo.

...The vendor in dishevelled clothes  
arranges a feast of pears,  
lifts one with pride  
as he might his own child.  
He bellows into the air:  
Go to sleep with a sweet mouth.  
He sees the soldiers.  
He does not brood over power or history.  
...In gowns of soft lights  
the town performs the ritual of sleep.  
Will the vendor, will the woman who lost her house  
sleep with a sweet mouth?  
The settlement, fortress on the mountain -peak,  
and the jail on the hilltop  
flood their dreams with yellow lights...

*Sharif Elmusa “A Day in the Life of Nablus” from “The Space Between our Footsteps” ed. N.S. Nye (Simon and Shuster 1998)*



The second piece is taken from Emuna Elon (born 1955), columnist and author, a religious woman who is also known as a campaigner for women's rights. For many years she lived in Beit El, north of Ramallah. This is from her story "The Maidservant's Son", which tells the story of a complex relationship between Ronit, a woman who lives on a settlement in the West Bank, and Ibtisam the Palestinian woman who cleans house for her.

On her very first day at work Ibtisam had pulled Ronit over to the window above the Italian marble counter, to point to the camp. "That's Jezoun", she announced. Ronit gazed at the heap of miserable huts dotted here and there by pecan and olive trees and encircled with a stone wall. "Is that your home?" inquired Ronit. The Arab woman chortled. "That's nobody's home", she explained, "Jezoun isn't a village at all, it's just the place where we're waiting until we can go back to our land." Ronit wondered silently how they intended to return to their land two generations after a kibbutz or a university had been established on it. She regretted that the architect had placed the kitchen window precisely at that spot, facing the road and the camp. "We haven't returned to the land of our forefathers in order to solve the problems of other nations", she told herself, and went to the plant nursery where she bought five cypress saplings in black plastic bags. Haim suggested that they exchange them for fruit trees but Ronit wanted evergreens which would grow quickly, planted closely together in a row opposite her kitchen window to block the embarrassing view... By the end of three years the five cypresses had reached the height of the window, but they didn't yet conceal the heap of gray shacks from Ronit's view. They also didn't screen the road where our forefathers passed on their way to Shechem or the smoke which rose every day or so from the tires which the refugee children burned on the same road.



The third piece is from much loved song based on the poem “Hoy Artzi Moladeti” (“Oh my Land, my Homeland”) written in 1933 by Shaul Tchernichovsky (1875-1943). It presents an empty land, waiting to be filled and revived by the early Zionist settlers. It can be likened to the Biblical landscape encountered subjectively by the settlers of the mid 1970’s in the areas of Judea and Samaria.

Oh my country, my homeland  
 Bald craggy mountain  
 Faint herd - ewe and kid,  
 Joyous citrus gold.  
 Cloisters, mound, memorial,  
 Plaster domed dwelling,  
 Unpopulated settlement,  
 Olive trees side by side.  
 ...Oh, land of hearts’ desire,  
 Waste land of briar and thorn,  
 Plastered pit, forsaken cistern  
 In the sky an eagle.  
 Perfume of spring orchards  
 Ringing song of camels  
 Everything is drowning in a sea of light  
 And sky blue is over all.

*Saul Tchernichovsky*

If you are interested in this chapter  
you might want to have a look at...

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish\\_Underground](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_Underground)[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish\\_Underground](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_Underground)