

## Sixth Conversation

### Chapter Ten: Peace 1993



#### Precis

Similar to the settlement chapter, this chapter is structured around a series of conversations with central figures in the peace movement. At the center stand three leading figures, Yossi Sarid, Yossi Beilin and Amos Oz with others ranged around them. Shavit, who himself played a central role in that movement, becomes an active participant in the conversations, arguing with them and accusing them of misleading the movement by concentrating on the post-67 territories, and promoting the possibility of gaining peace in exchange for a return of the territories.

Shavit argues that the demand to give back the territories was indeed vital in order to preserve Israel's moral health. However in no way should it have been linked to an assumption that such a returning of territory was capable of bringing peace. The diagnosis was wrong. The root problem he argues is not 1967 but 1948.

He argues that the leaders of the movement were too desperate to reject Dayan's vision of Israel as a nation which would always be forced to live by the sword. For a generation looking for a life of normality, it would have been too hard to accept, and therefore, he suggests, an illusion was set before the public.

He finishes the chapter in Hulda, an area where Jews and Arabs lived relatively harmoniously till 1948 when another murderous attack on a Jewish convoy brought the decision to clear the area of Arabs and to destroy their villages. Ultimately, the root of the problem, says Shavit, is not settlements like Ofra in the territories. It is Hulda. Without solving Hulda, there will perhaps never be an end to the conflict. He doubts whether such a solution is possible for either side.

## Quotations and Questions

“I don’t love the land as I once did. I don’t feel I belong to the nation as I once belonged. In my nightmares I see millions of Palestinians marching to Jerusalem. I see millions of Arabs marching on Israel. I am well over seventy now. I have nothing to lose but the grave I will be buried in. But sometimes, when I look at my grandchildren, my eyes tear up. I am no longer certain that their fate will not be the fate of the children of Rafalowka [my parents’ Polish town].”

- ◆ Have you met someone who shares Sarid’s sharp disappointment with and fear for the Zionist enterprise?
- ◆ What might you say to them or to Sarid if you had the chance?

I worked out a theory. The theory assumed we lived in a tragedy: an almost eternal struggle between two peoples sharing a homeland and fighting over it. For seventy years we Jews had the stamina needed to withstand this tragedy. We were vital enough to be jolly and optimistic while enduring an ongoing conflict. But as fatigue wore us down, we began to deny the tragedy. We wanted to believe there was no tragic decree at the heart of our existence. We had to pretend that it was not by tragic circumstances that our fate was decided, but by our own deeds. The territories we conquered in 1967 gave us an excellent pretext for this much-needed pretense, as it allowed us to concentrate on an internal conflict of our own making. The Right said, "If we only annex the West Bank, we'll be safe and sound." The Left said, "If we only hand over the West Bank, we'll have peace." The Right said, "Our dead died because of the Left's illusions," while the Left said, "Our dead died because of the Right's fantasies." Rather than face a tragic reality imposed on us from without, we chose to create a simplistic narrative of Right against Left.

**On the one hand Shavit places Israel in the heart of an ongoing unavoidable catastrophe. On the other hand acceptance of this tragedy offers a way out of internal Israeli polarization.**

- ♦ **What is your response to this "optimistic" conclusion?**

Most literary definitions of the Tragedy genre would insist on the common element of “inevitability”. A tragic understanding of an event would assume that catastrophe was unavoidable. Shavit is insistent that the Israeli-Palestinian is tragic.

- ◆ In addressing the conflict as tragic, does this mean that no one was at fault? Or everyone?
- ◆ Do you agree that the conflict is unavoidable?

They saw that for the Palestinians the 1967 occupation was disastrous, but they did not see that for many Palestinians there are other matters that are far more severe and visceral than occupation, like the homes they lost in 1948.

- ◆ Taking on board these comments, do you find your attitude to the current Israeli-Palestinian peace talks altered?
- ◆ Remembering back to the accounts of the immigrant refugees to Israel in chapter six, (why) do you think that lost homes in Europe or Iraq were less significant than lost Palestinian homes?

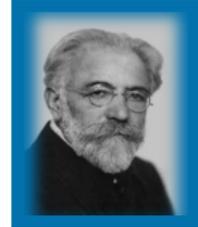
It's Hulda, stupid. Not Ofra, but Hulda, I tell myself. Ofra was a mistake, an aberration, insanity. But in principle, Ofra may have a solution. Hulda is the crux of the matter. Hulda is what the conflict is really about. And Hulda has no solution. Hulda is our fate.

- ♦ Shavit concludes with two challenging but very different comments.
- ♦ What is the difference between a situation that “has no solution”, and one that is “fate”? Is there a different emotional valence?
- ♦ Do Shavit’s comments energize you?

“...without the steel helmet and the gun’s muzzle we will not be able to plant a tree and build a house. Let us not fear to look squarely at the hatred that consumes and fills the lives of hundreds of Arabs who live around us. Let us not drop our gaze, lest our arms weaken. That is the fate of our generation. This is our choice—to be ready and armed, tough and hard—or else the sword shall fall from our hands and our lives will be cut short.”

- ♦ Dayan spoke about the fate of his generation. Do you believe this is the fate of all future generations of Israelis?

## Additional Sources



Here are three additional sources that you might want to incorporate into the discussion.

The first is from Yitzchak Epstein (1862-1943), a teacher and writer from Rosh Pinah. Epstein was the first person to try and put the question of the relations between Arabs and Jews on the agenda of the World Zionist Organization. At that time he alone believed that the whole enterprise of Zionism would rise or fall on the relationships created with the Arabs in the Land.

We are making a flagrant error in human understanding toward a great, resolute, and zealous people. While we feel the love of homeland, in all its intensity, toward the land of our fathers, we forget that the people now living there also has a feeling heart and a loving soul. The Arab, like any person, is strongly attached to his homeland. ...When we come to buy lands in Eretz Israel, we must thoroughly check whose land it is, who works it, and what the rights of the latter are, and we must not complete the purchase until we are certain that no one will be worse off. In this way we will have to forswear most cultivated land. Our approach to land purchase must be a direct expression of our general attitude to the Arab people. The principles that must guide our actions when we settle amidst or near this people are:

- A. The Hebrew people, first and foremost among all peoples in the teaching of justice and law, absolute equality, and human brotherhood, respects not only the individual rights of every person, but also the national rights of every people and tribe.
- B. The people Israel, as it aspires to rebirth, is a partner in thought and in deed to all the peoples who are stirring to life; it honors and respects their aspirations, and when it comes in contact with them, it cultivates their national recognition.

*Yitzchak Epstein 1905*



The second is from Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky (1880-1940), brilliant orator and Zionist leader. He believed that the Arabs could not be “bought”, and would never make peace until they were thoroughly convinced that they could not contend with Zionist strength and that the Jews would be a permanent fixture in the Land of Israel. This is taken from his famous “Iron Wall” article in which he argued that the Jews would only be able to maintain a state by defending its borders as if it was behind an iron wall.

To think that the Arabs will voluntarily consent to the realization of Zionism in return for the cultural and economic benefits we can bestow on them is infantile and has its source in a feeling of contempt which some of our people have for the Arab people. The Arabs, according to these voices are nothing more than a rabble of crass materialists prepared to barter away their patriotism for a developed network of railroads. This view is absolutely groundless... Every indigenous people will resist alien settlers as long as they see any hope of ridding themselves of the danger of foreign settlement....Hence those for whom an agreement with the Arabs is a prerequisite for Zionism, can be sure that this condition will never be fulfilled and that they should therefore renounce their Zionism...But the only way leading to such an agreement is by “erecting an iron wall”, meaning that in the land of Israel there must be a power that will not under any circumstances yield to Arab pressure. In other words, the only way to achieve an agreement with them in the future is by absolutely avoiding any attempts at agreement with them at present.

I do not mean to assert that no agreement whatever is possible with the Arabs of the land of Israel. But a voluntary agreement is just not possible. As long as the Arabs preserve a gleam of hope that they will succeed in getting rid of us, nothing in the world -neither soft words nor alluring promises - can cause them to relinquish this hope, precisely because they are not rabble but a living people.

*Ze'ev Jabotinsky 1923*



The third piece comprises the words of a very popular 1994 peace song called “Choref 73” – the Winter of ’73. It describes the feelings of those children born immediately after the 1973 war, and calls on the leadership to fulfill their promises and to do whatever they can in the cause of peace. The words were written by playwright Shmuel Hasfari (born 1954) and it can be heard in full here.

We are the children of winter 1973  
 You dreamt us first at dawn at the end of the battles  
 You were tired men that thanked their good luck  
 You were worried young women and you wanted so much to love  
 When you conceived us with love in winter 1973  
 You wanted to fill up with your bodies that what the war finished

And we were born the country was wounded and sad  
 You looked at us you hugged us you were trying to find comfort  
 When we were born the elders blessed with tears in their eyes  
 “They said:” we wish those kids will not have to go to the army  
 And your faces in the old picture prove  
 That you said it from the bottom of your hearts  
 When you promised to do everything for us  
 To make an enemy into a loved one

You promised a dove,  
 an olive tree leaf,  
 you promised peace  
 You promised spring at home and blossoms  
 You promised to fulfill promises, you promised a dove...