

Letter of Resignation from the Jewish People

By Bertell Ollman

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“Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Whenever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion or political views, that place must – at that moment – become the center of the universe”. ---Elie Wiesel, acceptance speech, Nobel Prize for Peace, December 10, 1986.

Did you ever wonder what your last thought would be just before you died or believed you might die? Well, I did, and a few years ago in the waning moments before going under the knife for a life threatening operation I got my answer. As the nurses wheeled me into the operating room, what burst upon my consciousness was not, as might be expected, the fear of dying but a terrible angst at the idea of dying a Jew. I was appalled to finish my life with my umbilical cord still tied to a people with whom I can no longer identify. That this should be my "last" thought greatly surprised me at the time, and it still does.

What did it mean... and why is it so hard to resign from a people? I was born in Milwaukee to Russian Jewish parents, who never went to synagogue or kept kosher, but often spoke Yiddish at home and considered themselves Jews. I went to Hebrew School for four years and had a Bar Mitzvah. With this background, I held some vaguely Jewish religious beliefs until my late teens when I became an atheist. I still identified myself as a Jew but in a sense that became increasingly hard to define. Some of my friends had become Zionists, and---though I briefly played basketball for a Zionist youth club---they made no headway in converting me to their cause, chiefly---I think---because its main plank seemed to call for moving to Israel. Yet, what I learned in these years about the Holocaust and the plight of Jews around the world was enough to make me sympathetic to the idea of a Jewish

homeland, assuming---I always added---some kind of arrangement could be made with the Palestinians who already lived there.

It was in college---the University of Wisconsin in the mid-1950s---that I became a socialist and an internationalist. Milwaukee, at least my Milwaukee, had been very provincial, and I rejoiced in the opportunities Madison offered for meeting people from all over the world. I think I joined every foreign student organization in my first year there, and not a few of the progressive political clubs. It was also there that I heard a lot more about Israel/Palestine, except now I was learning about it not as a Jew from Milwaukee but as an internationalist, a member of the human community to which Jews and Arabs belonged as equals.

In the following years, as the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians deteriorated from bad to worse and then to much worse, two surprising developments---surprising at least to me---began to unfold. I found myself, despite my best efforts to be fair to both sides, becoming increasingly anti-Israel, while most American Jews, including some Jewish friends who never considered themselves Zionists, became enthusiastic supporters of the Israeli cause. Already in the 1980s, with the first *intifada*, Israel's oppression and humiliation of the Palestinians got so bad that I winced at the thought of belonging to the same people as those who could commit such crimes or, in the case of most American Jews, so easily rationalize them away. Now things have reached a point that I want out. The problem is how to do it. One can quit a club, a religion (one can convert), a country (one can take out another citizenship and go live elsewhere), and even a gender (given current medical science), but how do you resign from a people into which you were born? Repulsed by the actions of their Church, some French Catholics are said to have written a letter to the Pope asking for a de-baptismal certificate. A precedent? But who would I write to? And what would I ask for? Well, I have decided to write to *Tikkun* and to ask for nothing other than a hearing. [This essay first appeared in the journal *Tikkun*, January-February 2005---ed.]

From what I've said so far, it would be easy for some to dismiss me as a self-hating Jew, but that would be a mistake. If anything, I am a self-loving Jew, but the Jew I love in me is the Diaspora Jew, the Jew that was blessed for 2,000 years by having no country to call his/her own. That this was accompanied by many cruel disadvantages is well known, but it had one

crowning advantage that towered over all the rest. By being an outsider in every country and belonging to the family of outsiders throughout the world, Jews on the whole suffered less from the small-minded prejudices that disfigure all forms of nationalism. If you couldn't be a full and equal citizen of the country in which you lived, you could be a citizen of the world, or at least begin to think of yourself as such even before the concepts existed that would help to clarify what this meant. I'm not saying that this is how most Diaspora Jews actually thought, but some did – Spinoza, Marx, Freud, and Einstein being among the best known – and the opportunity as well as the inclination for others to do so came from the very rejection they all experienced in the countries in which they lived. Even the widespread treatment of Jews as somehow less than human provoked a universalist response. As children of the same God, Jews argued, when this was permitted or just quietly reflected when it wasn't, that they shared a common humanity with their oppressors and that this should take precedence over everything else. The anti-Semitic charge, then, that Jews have always and everywhere been cosmopolitan and insufficiently patriotic had at least this much truth to it.

Not many Jews today, of course, take this position. In a 1990 interview, Britain's most famous intellectual and Zionist, Isaiah Berlin, recounted a conversation he had with the French philosopher, Alexander Kojève, who is reported as saying, "You're a Jew. The Jewish people probably have the most interesting history of any people that ever lived. And now you want to be Albania?" Berlin's reply was, "Yes, we do. For our purposes, for Jews, Albania is a step forward." ¹ This was a surprising answer from a culturally sophisticated liberal, an atheist, someone who claimed never to have experienced any anti-Semitism in England, and who wrote extensively about nationalism and its perils. What overrode all such considerations for Berlin was the human need to belong, which he understood as belonging not just to a group but to a particular place. Without their own country, Jews had suffered all manner of oppression as well as the pervasive longing that accompanies any extended exile. Berlin was fond of repeating that all he wanted for Jews is that they be allowed to be a "normal people"---with a homeland---just like the others. Yes, just like the Albanians.

The two questions that remain to be asked, however, are 1) whether the natural drive to belong to something, that served Berlin as his main premise, could be satisfied by something other than a national state, and 2) whether in becoming like Albania (even Greater Albania) Jews have been forced to give up something that was even more valuable in the Judaism of the diaspora. If

it is true---and I am ready to admit it is---that our mental and emotional health requires a strong bond with other people, there is no reason to believe that only national groups which occupy their own land can satisfy this need. There are racial, religious, gender, cultural, political, and class groups without special ties to one country that might do as well. Blacks, Catholics, gays, Free Masons, and class conscious workers are but a few populations that have found ways to satisfy this need to belong without confining themselves to national borders. Membership in our common species offers still another path to this same goal. Given the range of possibilities, which group(s) we "join" or take as our primary identity will depend largely on what is available in the time and place in which we live, how such groups resolve (or promise to resolve) our most pressing problems, and on how we are socialized into viewing these different groups.

As for what was lost in acquiring a homeland, it is important to recognize that Zionism is a form of nationalism like any other, and nationalism – as even sympathetic observers like Albert Einstein were forced to recognize – always has its price. While every Jew knows that Einstein was offered the presidency of the newly independent Jewish state, few understand why he turned it down. In contrast to Berlin, who wanted Jews to become a “normal” people like the others, Einstein wrote, “My awareness of the essential nature of Judaism resists the idea of a Jewish state with borders, an army, and a measure of temporal power, no matter how modest. I am afraid of the inner damage Judaism will sustain – especially from the development of a narrow nationalism within our own ranks, against which we have already had to fight strongly, even without a Jewish state.”² Who can doubt that Einstein was right to worry?

Like all nationalisms, Zionism is also based on an exaggerated sense of superiority as applied to members of the in-group and a feeling of indifference, bordering on contempt, for members of other groups. Jews entered world history with an extreme act of “chutzpah” (for which a new word had to be invented) in which they posed one just God who created everyone, and then, for reasons best known to him, “chose” the Jews to be his special people (why Christians and Moslems so happily accept their inferior status in this arrangement I’ll never understand). But what the Zionists have done is carry this original act of “chutzpah” over to God’s commandments. Where Jews once believed they were “chosen” to receive God’s laws for all humanity, Zionists seem to believe that they were “chosen” to break them

whenever they interfere with the national interest. What room does this leave for a belief in the inherent equality of all human beings?

Admittedly, the ancient Hebrews not only received the Laws from God but also, supposedly, the promise of a particular piece of land. The latter, however, was always linked to the Jews obedience to these laws, of which the most important – given the number of times God refers to it - is the prohibition against idolatry. While the Jews have not built any idols of *Jaweh*, their record on idolatry – perhaps in part the result of the restraint shown in representing God – has probably been worse than that of their neighbors. For well over 3,000 years, Judaism has fought a largely losing fight against idolatry with the temple in Jerusalem, the scrolls of the Torah and the land of Israel coming to embody and gradually to replace the relations with God and the corresponding ethical precepts that they were supposed to represent. But only in Zionism, the current version of this land idolatry, have these precepts been sacrificed altogether. This modern version of the Golden Calf has saved Moses the trouble of smashing the Ten Commandments by doing it for him. That many of today's Zionists don't believe in the God of their fathers simply makes it easier for them to turn *Eretz Israel* into a new God. The idolatry stands. Only now God's laws can be written by a committee without sullyng their nationalist content with any universalist pretensions. If such extreme nationalism is normal – which makes Spinoza, Marx, Freud and Einstein thoroughly abnormal – then, I guess, Berlin finally got his normal people.

The organic tie that Zionism - as is typical with nationalist movements - takes for granted between its people and their territory is also bathed in the kind of mysticism that renders any rational discussion of their situation impossible. This is as true for religious Zionists who actually believe that God made a real estate deal with their ancestors as it is for secular Zionists who conveniently forget the 2,000 years of the Jewish diaspora in staking their "legal" claim to the land (only to recall the Jews' suffering in the diaspora when the discussion shifts to their moral claim to it). What room does this leave for dealing in a humane and rational way with the problems of life in the 21st century? With both morality and reason tailored to serve tribal needs first...and last, the chamber of horrors that Zionism has constructed for the Palestinian people was only a matter of time in coming. Could this be what the ancient Hebrew prophets had in mind when they predicted that the Jewish people would become "a light onto the nations"? Certainly not, nor was it something that Jews themselves could possibly have imagined during

the period of the diaspora, when probably no people attached a greater value to human equality and human reason than the Jews. Einstein could even claim that the most important characteristic of Judaism was its commitment to “the democratic ideal of social justice, coupled with the ideal of mutual aid and tolerance among all men” without anyone laughing at him.³ Now, even God would have to laugh... or cry.

If the diaspora for all its material inadequacies left the Jews, morally speaking, on a kind of pedestal, why did they come down from it? They came down when the pedestal broke. The conditions that underlay Jewish life in the diaspora began to come apart with the progress of capitalism, democracy and the enlightenment long before the Holocaust, which only delivered the final blow. As odd as this may sound for something that lasted almost 2,000 years, Diaspora Judaism was and could only be a period of transition. Emerging out of Biblical Judaism, Diaspora Judaism was constructed from the start on a contradiction between nostalgia for the country that was lost and a forward looking, if often hesitant and partial, commitment to the people and places where Jews came to live. The one looked backward to the tribe and the land they once called their own, and the other looked out upon the whole species and the entire world into which the Jews, more than any other people, had spread. Except, for the longest time, the ties that bound different peoples and places to each other - culturally, religiously, commercially (much of that by Jews) - was loose at best, so that the possibility of taking their new situation to its logical conclusion and declaring themselves citizens of the world is something that most Jews could not even conceive. Still, their attitude toward the rest of humanity, if not yet their actions, made Jews increasingly suspect to the more rooted peoples among whom they lived, who never ceased to condemn Jews for their "cosmopolitanism" (a swear word it seems to virtually everybody but Jews). Then, with the multiple reconfigurations of the globe associated with capitalism, the enlightenment, democracy, and finally socialism, more Jews could recognize that they were indeed citizens of the world and became free to declare so publicly.

But the same social and economic turmoil, with its new opportunities for advancement and - also - frightening rise in anti-Semitism, that led many Jews to exchange their prime identity in the tribe for one in the human species led other Jews to reject their evolving cosmopolitanism in favor of a renewed nationalist project. It is no coincidence that so many Jews became either socialists or Zionists at the end of the 19th and in the early part of the

20th century. Where no change in the condition of the Jewish people had seemed possible earlier, now two alternatives emerged and vied with each other for popular support. The one sought to do away with the oppression of Jews by doing away with all oppressions, and the other sought the same end by removing the Jews to a supposedly safe haven in Palestine. The same processes that gave rise to these two alternatives brought the gradual and then rapid disintegration of Diaspora Judaism. Though most Jews today live outside Israel in what is still called the "diaspora", the great majority belong to either the socialist or, increasingly, Zionist camps (including the weak versions of each) and what remains will probably be drawn into one or the other of these two camps in the near future. Diaspora Judaism, as it existed for almost 2,000 years, has practically ceased to exist. It has divided along the lines of its major contradiction into a socialism that is concerned with the well being of humanity and a nationalism that is only interested in the well being of the Jewish people and their reconquest of Israel. Since Judaism has always tried to synthesize these irreconcilable projects, their definitive separation - forget the artfully packaged nostalgia that finds its way into the media - can be viewed as the end of Judaism itself. Perhaps all there is left are ex-Jews who call themselves socialists or communists and ex-Jews who call themselves Zionists (the secular/religious divide among the latter has little relevance for my purposes).

If neither socialists who reject the nationalist and religious aspects of Diaspora Judaism nor Zionists who reject its universal and humanist dimensions (and often its religious aspects as well) are Jews, then the real debate is over which tradition has retained the best of their common Jewish heritage. Despite their constant chatter about Jews, I would maintain that it is Zionism that has least in common with Judaism. It is not by breaking the limbs of Palestinian youth that the Jewish sages of the past predicted our people would "become a light onto the nations". In Israel today---where "*tsadik*" (righteous person) and "*mensch*" (decent one) apply only to a few who are spat on by the great majority of the population, and "chutzpah" has come to mean the defense of the indefensible, there is little to remind us of the moral core of a once noble tradition.

When I was growing up, my Yiddish speaking mother would often try to correct some aberrant behavior on my part by warning that it was a "*shandeh fur die goyim*" (that I would be shaming not only me and my family but all Jews in front of the gentiles). What I want to cry out loudest in front of all the crimes of Zionism, and all those who try to defend them, is that what they are

doing is a "*shandeh fur die goyim*". They themselves, the big cheeses and the small fry, are all a "*shandeh fur die goyim*". (Ma, I remember). Socialist and ex-Jew that I am, I guess I still have too much respect and love for the Jewish tradition I left behind to want the world to view it in the same way as they rightly view and condemn what the ex-Jews who call themselves Zionists are doing in its name. And if changing my status from ex-Jew (current) to non-Jew (projected) stirs even ten good people (God's "*minyan*") into action against the Zionist hijacking of the Jewish label, then this is a sacrifice I am ready to make.

To those who wonder why the resignation of an atheistic communist from the Jewish people might bother some Jews, I would just point out that the greatest sin a Jew can commit – I was taught this from all sides – is to take leave of his people (usually by converting to another faith). A family will often respond by "sitting *shivah*" over the offending member (treating him or her as dead). The deep shame and anger that many Jews feel when this happens is hard to explain, but it probably has something to do with the intense quality of the social bond that unites all Jews, the result originally, no doubt, of being God's chosen but also of sharing and surviving so many centuries of oppression. While a Christian relates to God as an individual, the Jew's relation to God has always passed through his connection to the chosen people, a people that God also holds collectively responsible for the failures of each of its members. Operating with such an incentive, Jews could never allow themselves the luxury of indifference when it came to the life choices of their co-religionists. With a little Jewish education, this inner connection becomes so ingrained that even some atheist and communist Jews may experience the defection of a Jew from the people as losing a limb from their own body. Certainly, my continuing identification as a Jew, as some kind of a Jew, while lacking any of the attributes of a believer, helps explain why I felt an overpowering need to resign when "Jew" came to mean something I could not accept (or ignore). And the same organic tie may help explain why some Jews, including those of whom I am most critical and who might be expected to rejoice at my resignation, may get so upset by the form that my criticism has taken.

Here I am almost at the end of my letter of resignation and I haven't discussed the Holocaust. For many Zionists that would be enough to reject what I have to say. In my defense, I would like to share a story that Joe Murphy, the former Vice Chancellor of the City University of New York, used to tell about his Jewish mother. "Joe", he has her saying, "there are two kinds

of Jews. One kind has reacted to the unspeakable horror of the Holocaust by vowing that they will do anything to make sure it doesn't happen to our people again. While the other kind of Jews took as their lesson from the same terrible event that they must do whatever they can to make sure it doesn't happen again to any people anywhere. Joe", she went on, "I want you to promise me that you will always be the second kind of Jew". He did, and he was.

The first kind of Jew, most of whom are Zionists and therefore in my language really "ex-Jews", have gone so far as to unashamedly transform the Holocaust itself into a club with which to bash any critic who has the temerity to question what they are doing to the Palestinians, supposedly in self-defense. (See Norman Finkelstein's THE HOLOCAUST INDUSTRY) Any criticism of Zionism, no matter how mild and justified, is equated with anti-Semitism, where anti-Semitism has become a short-hand for people who bear some responsibility for the Holocaust and are really hoping for another one. This is a heavy charge, and it has proved very effective in silencing many potential critics. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the striking revival of media interest in the Holocaust comes at a time when Zionism is in greatest need of such a protective cloak (shroud?). In the process, the worst human rights violation in history is being cynically misused to rationalize one of the worst human rights violations of our time. Joe Murphy's mother would expect the second kind of Jews to be the first to point this out and condemn it.

That leaves the question of safety. Zionists insist that by creating their own state they have improved the safety of Jews not only in Israel but everywhere. Unfortunately, Israel's abominable treatment of the Palestinians together with its "Wieselian" hypocrisy and increasingly arrogant rebuffs to the world community have created more real anti-Semitism not only in the Arab countries but throughout the world than has probably ever existed. At the moment, Zionists feel secure against the inevitable repercussions of their policies by virtue of the shield thrown over them by their American "allies". To the amazement of the entire world, except – it appears – most Americans, Zionism's success in cornering American political support has been nothing less than extraordinary. As far as the conflict in the "Holy Land" is concerned, Americans could just as well dispense with choosing between Democrats and Republicans and vote directly for Sharon. Orthodox Jews, as we know, hire a non-Jew (or "*shabbes goy*") to turn the lights on for them on the Sabbath. Israel, too, has many things that it cannot do for itself, and it has managed to acquire the United States' government as its "*shabbes goy*",

and this one even pays the electric bills. If this isn't a miracle right up there with God's parting of the Red Sea, then we need to learn how it happened, and we don't really know, not yet, not in any detail.

Any good explanation, of course, would have to trace the relations between the Israeli government, the Zionist lobby (in its various dimensions), Christian Fundamentalists (who believe that the second coming of Jesus won't take place until all Jews are gathered in Israel), both American political parties, Jewish voters, and the interests of the American capitalist class in political and economic expansion. For as influential as Israel has been in determining American foreign policy in the Middle East, it couldn't have succeeded so well unless its interests overlapped to a considerable degree with the imperial designs of our ruling class. As regards the Zionist component in this relation, the key step was probably taken by the Israeli government in 1977, when Begin and Likud came to power and decided to forge closer links to the Christian Fundamentalists in the U.S. (seventy million strong) in order to help them become a more effective political lobby and one for whom Zionist goals came first. Netanyahu, on the Israeli side, and Jerry Falwell (who received the prestigious Jabotinsky Prize and ... a private jet from Israel), on the American side, were particularly active in developing this alliance. ⁴ The Bush II Administration offers but the most recent evidence of how well this strategy has worked. Should the Democrats oust the Republicans from office, our government's support for Israel would not diminish in the least, because the Zionist lobby – in this case, with the aid of the Jewish vote, most of which goes to the Democrats – is even more influential in Kerry's party.

This "special" relationship to Israel is unlikely to remain stable, however, since the foundations on which it stands are being rapidly eroded. To begin with, the majority of the American people, as shown by every poll, have never been as pro-Zionist as their government(s), and such positive feelings as do exist have been seriously strained by Israel's inhuman response to the *intifada*. If it was possible to view Israel in its wars with the Arab world as a little David standing up to a mighty Goliath, its army's brutal repression of a virtually unarmed Palestinian people has turned this analogy upside down, so that Israel now looks like the bullying Goliath. With new killings, new "woundings", new humiliations, more destruction of homes, more thefts of land and water, and now the building of an apartheid wall taking place every day (often on T.V.), Israel's policies also call into question the official story of Israel as victim of the same kind of terrorists who bombed New York (hence,

deserving our sympathy and help) rather than as a major instigator of Moslem violence around the world. In addition, the growing unpopularity of the Iraq war (an unending war that should never have begun), for which Israel and its strongest supporters inside the U.S. government were – at a minimum – among the loudest cheerleaders, is also spilling over to American attitudes toward Israel. Finally, the increasing insecurity of Middle East oil supplies with its effects on prices and profits throughout the economy – due to the wars but also to Israel’s escalating barbarity towards an Arab people (with which the U.S. is unavoidably identified) – has begun to drive a wedge between Israel and American capitalist interests. Before long – if it hasn’t happened already – an important section of America’s capitalist ruling class will start demanding that the U.S. government adopt a new approach toward Israel. And, when in the context of these developments the mass of the American public finally wake up to the enormous and still growing costs in blood and money of providing Israel with whatever it wants, of serving as its “*shabbes goy*” - coming as it does at a time of steep budget cuts for all kinds of popular government programs - the surge of anti-Semitism could be such as to threaten the security of Jews and all kinds of ex-Jews everywhere.

Anti-Semitism is often understood as an irrational hatred of Jews not for anything they believe or do, but just because of who they are. This is incorrect, because there are reasons. They just happen to be bad ones, either because they are false (like Jews using the blood of gentile children to make matzas for Passover), or exaggerated, or of ancient vintage, or irrelevant, or – if they apply at all (like Jews being rich, etc.) – they apply only to a few people. This is why hating all Jews is not only irrational but unjust, and, as we know, the results have often been murderous. With this history, every Jew but also every humane and fair-minded non-Jew must oppose the rise of anti-Semitism with all their might. That this history, as painful as it is, does not give Jews any right to commit their own crimes should be evident, and it is monstrous whenever Jewish criminals respond to their accusers with charges of “anti-Semitism”, even if - as in the case of Zionists – they believe their crimes serve the interests of the Jewish people, and even if they have managed – another miracle? – to get the third edition of Webster’s International Dictionary to define “anti-Zionism” as a form of “anti-Semitism”.⁵ In claiming an equation between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, of course, Zionists run the danger of having people accept the logic of their position but not the use to which they put it. According to this logic, one must be both anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic, or neither. The assumption is that faced with this choice, most of their honest critics will simply pack up their tents and go home. But given Zionism’s worsening record in Palestine, the choice could go the other way. That is, some opponents of Zionism, who

are convinced by the logic put forward here and nothing else, might now embrace anti-Semitism as well. Rather than making fewer anti-Zionists, this approach is probably making more anti-Semites. The conclusion can only be that as an insurance policy against future *pogroms* Israel is not only worthless but downright dangerous to the health of those who have put their faith and money into it.

At this point - if not earlier - many readers of this journal will fault me for appearing to treat Zionists as if they are all alike. I am aware, of course, of the many differences in the Zionist camp, and am full of admiration for the courageous efforts by more progressive and humane Zionists in Meretz, Peace Now and Tikkun, among other groups, to oppose the Israeli establishment. They cannot be exempted from my analysis, however - and it's not just because their reforms seemed doomed to failure - since they share at least some of the basic assumptions on which Zionism (in both its Likud and Labor Party versions) is based. Setting up a state in which only Jews were to be full citizens, setting it up in a land already inhabited by millions of non-Jews, seeking to respond to anti-Semitism in the world by a display of Jewish might, seeking to make Jews everywhere feel safer because they now had a country to run away to (should the need arise), and seeking to rationalize all this through a combination of religious myth and the experience of the Holocaust - all this lies at the heart of Zionism, but it is also the logic inherent in these views that have brought us to the present impasse. And I don't see how it could have been otherwise. The occasions where it appears the history of Israel might have taken another turn are but face saving chimeras. Further, it is only by rejecting these views root and branch that we can see Zionism and the situation it has brought about for what they really are, and begin to orient ourselves ideologically and politically accordingly.

For example, ideologically, there is no longer a need to accept that Israel presents us with a clash of two rights, as some moderate and even "socialist" Zionists have put it. There is one right, and the Zionists, who are the invaders and the oppressors, are in the wrong. Only the assumptions that underlie the Zionist project have kept some people from recognizing this. It also means that we cannot regard the violence perpetrated by the Zionist government against Arabs and by Arabs against Jews in Israel today in the same manner. Certainly, I can and do deeply regret all the killing and destruction that is taking place, and I sympathize and suffer more than I can say with the victims and their loved ones on both sides. Only Israel, however, its government and its supporters deserve to be condemned, and not just

because they've made use of planes and tanks and have killed far more innocent people. Of greater relevance here is the fact that it is the Israeli government that has the monopoly of power in the country, and it is the government that has created the rules of this grisly game along with the horrid conditions in which the Palestinians are forced to participate in it. They, and only they, can change these rules and conditions at any time, and therefore must be held responsible for keeping them as they are. They are the real terrorists, and not the poor souls who have been driven so crazy by their escalating oppression and accompanying humiliation that they are willing to use their own bodies as weapons. State terror and not individual terror is the main problem everyone who would like to bring an end to this conflict must confront, and that needs to be reflected in our tactics. Sharon is right in at least one respect: Arafat is irrelevant. So too, perhaps unfortunately, are the rest of the Palestinians when it comes to arriving at a stable peace. Instead of charging the Palestinians with some responsibility for the conflict and diffusing whatever effect we might have, all attention should go to putting pressure, all forms of pressure, on Israel.

Politically, this means avoiding any association with this "rogue state" whatsoever (as we did with South Africa earlier), boycotting it economically and otherwise (keeping it out of the Olympics, for example), bringing pressure on our politicians to stop all U.S. aid (private as well as public) to Israel, supporting various sanctions (including trade sanctions) against it, calling for the strongest possible resolutions at the U.N. and in all other available forums denouncing Zionist human rights abuses, and, of course, confronting head-on the Zionist lobby that would oppose all this. Similar steps should be taken in Europe and elsewhere, but, given America's power in the world in general and in Israel in particular, it is in our country that the fate of the Palestinian people – and ultimately that of Judaism and what's left of the Jewish people - will be decided. While isolating Israel in the ways I have suggested would undoubtedly hurt those inside its borders who are working to change their government's policies, it would also help them by raising the costs of these policies to unacceptable levels. What is clear is that for Jews whose conscience does not stop at their bloodline, silence, moderation, balance are no longer options, if they ever were. Oppressive regimes, after all, have seldom needed more than passive and qualified support to carry out their "business". Along with the growing number of Jews who openly defend Israel's inhuman behavior, these often well meaning Jews also feed the anti-Semitic stereotype that all Jews are complicit in the crimes of Zionism, and so deserve the hatred that these crimes evoke. Isn't this what most Jews thought about the passivity of the so-called "good" Germans during the Nazi period? How much did their passivity – at a time when

taking any action was far more dangerous than it is for us now - contribute to the hostility so many Jews felt toward all Germans? An all out struggle against Zionism by Jews, therefore, is also the most effective way to fight against real anti-Semitism.

Furthermore, if Zionism is indeed a particularly virulent form of nationalism and, increasingly, of racism and if Israel is acting toward its captive minority in ways that resemble more and more how the Nazis treated their Jews, then we must also say so. For obvious reasons, the Zionists are very sensitive about being compared to the Nazis (not so sensitive that it has restrained them in their actions but enough to bellow "unfair" and to charge "anti-Semitism" when it happens). Yet, the facts on the ground, when not obscured by one or another Zionist rationalization, show that the Zionists are the worst anti-Semites in the world today, oppressing a Semitic people as no nation has done since the Nazis. No, the Zionists are not yet quite as bad as the Nazis, not yet, but isn't the world witnessing a creeping ethnic cleansing against the Palestinians at this very moment? If Zionists (and their supporters) find this comparison unduly insulting and unjust, they have only to stop what they are doing (and supporting), but I fear that the logic of their position will only drive them to committing (and supporting) even greater atrocities in the future, including genocide - another Nazi specialty, than they have up to now. What, if anything, has such Zionism got to do with traditional Jewish values?

As far as I'm concerned, the comedian, Lenny Bruce, provided the only good answer to this question when he said, "Dig, I'm Jewish. Count Bassie's Jewish. Ray Charles is Jewish. Eddie Cantor is *goyish*... Marine Corps - heavy *goyish*... If you live in New York or any other big city, you're Jewish. If you live in Butte, Montana, you're going to be *goyish* even if you're Jewish... Kool-Aid is *goyish*. Evaporated milk is *goyish* even if Jews invented it... Pumpernickel is Jewish and, as you know, white bread is very *goyish*... Negroes are all Jews... Irishmen who have rejected their religion are Jewish... Baton twirling is very *goyish*".⁶

To this I would only add, "Noam Chomsky, Mordechai Vanunu and Edward Said are Jewish. Elie Wiesel is *goyish*. So, too, all 'Jewish' neo-cons. Socialism and communism are Jewish. Sharon and Zionism are very *goyish*". And, who knows, if this reading of Judaism were to take hold, I may one day apply for readmission to the Jewish people.

For other writings by Bertell Ollman see, www.dialecticalmarxism.com

Notes

1. Rochelle Furstenberg, "Reflections of a Zionist Don", The Jerusalem Report (Oct., 1990), p.51.
2. Albert Einstein, "Our Debt to Zionism", Ideas and Opinions (Modern Library, N.Y., 1964), p.6. Ben Gurion's view of the offer of the presidency of Israel to Einstein is worth noting. To an associate he commented, "Tell me what to do if he says 'yes'. I've had to offer the post to him because it is impossible not to. But if he accepts, we are in for trouble". Fred Jerome, The Einstein File (St. Martin's Press, N.Y., 2002), p.111.
3. Einstein, Ideas and Opinions, p.212. How Einstein would have reacted to the current situation in Palestine is suggested by such comments as – "The most important aspect of our (Israel's) policy must be our ever-present, manifest desire to institute complete equality for the Arab citizens in our midst... The attitude we adopt toward the Arab minority will provide the real test of our moral standards as a people". (1952) Ibid., p.111; and, in a letter to Weisman (1923), he wrote, "If we do not succeed in finding a path of honest cooperation and coming to terms with the Arabs, we will not have learned anything from our over 2000 year-old ordeal and will deserve the fate which will beset us". Ibid., p.110.
4. Donald Wagner, "Evangelicals and Israel: Theological Roots of a Political Alliance", The Christian Century (Nov. 4, 1998), p.1023.
5. Quoted in Robert Fisk, "A Warning to Those Who Dare Criticize Israel in the Land of Free Speech", The Independent (London: Ap. 24, 2004), p.39.
6. Lenny Bruce, "Jewish and Goyish", Record Number 5 of Lenny Bruce: Let the Buyer Beware (Shout Factory, Sept. 14, 2004), number 6.