

# Because there is Nothing

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**T**HE FLOOD OF corruption affairs that is now engulfing the Netanyahu family and its assistants and servitors does not seem to diminish his popularity among those who call themselves “the People”.

On the contrary, according to the opinion polls, the voters of the other nationalist parties are rushing to the rescue of “Bibi”.

They believe that he is a great statesman, the savior of Israel, and are therefore ready to forgive and forget everything else. Huge bribes, generous gifts, everything.

Strange. Because my attitude is exactly the opposite. I am not ready to forgive “Bibi” anything for being a great statesman, because I think that he is a very minor statesman. Indeed, no statesman at all.

THE FINAL judgment about Bibi's capabilities was passed by his father early in his career.

Benzion Netanyahu, a history professor who was an expert on the Spanish inquisition, did not have a very high opinion of his second son. He much preferred the oldest son, Jonathan, who was killed in the Entebbe operation. This, by the way, may be the source of Bibi's deep complexes.

Politically, Benzion was the most extreme rightist there ever was. He despised Vladimir Jabotinsky, the brilliant leader of the right-wing Zionists, as well as his pupil, Menachem Begin. For him, both were liberal weaklings.

Benzion, who felt that his talents were not appreciated in Israel and went to teach in the United States, where he brought up his sons, said about Binyamin: “He could make a good foreign secretary, but not a prime minister.” Never was a more precise judgment made about Bibi.

Binyamin Netanyahu is indeed excellent foreign minister material. He speaks perfect (American) English, though without the literary depth of his predecessor, Abba Eban. About Eban, David Ben-Gurion famously remarked: “He can make beautiful speeches, but you must tell him what to say.”

Bibi is a perfect representative. He knows how to behave with the great of this earth. He cuts a good figure at international conferences. He makes well-crafted speeches on important occasions, though he tends to use primitive gimmicks a Churchill would not touch.

A foreign minister functions, nowadays, as the traveling salesman of his country. Indeed. Bibi was once a traveling salesman for a furniture company. Since traveling has become so easy, foreign ministers fulfill most of the functions that in past centuries were reserved for ambassadors.

As his father so shrewdly observed, there is a huge difference between the duties of a foreign minister and those of a prime minister. The foreign minister implements policy. The prime minister determines policy.

The ideal prime minister is a man (or a woman) of vision. He knows what his country needs—not only today, but for generations to come. His vision embraces the entire needs of his country, of which foreign relations is only one aspect, and not necessarily the most important one. He sees the social, economic, cultural and military aspects of his vision.

Benzion Netanyahu knew that his son did not possess these capabilities. A good appearance is just not enough, especially for a leader of a country with such complicated problems, interior and exterior, as Israel.

WHEN ONE thinks about Franklin Delano Roosevelt, one remembers his saying “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.” Thinking of Winston Churchill, one remembers: “Never was so much owed by so many to so few.”

Thinking about Bibi, what profound saying does one remember? Nothing but his comment about the many corruption cases in which he is involved: “There will be nothing because there is nothing.”

BINYAMIN NETANYAHU'S main occupation, between criminal interrogations, is traveling abroad and meeting with the world's leaders. One week in Paris meeting President Macron, the next in Moscow meeting President Putin. In between, an African country or two.

What is achieved in these multiple meetings? Well, nothing to speak of.

That is very shrewd. It touches a deep nerve in Jewish consciousness.

For many generations, Jews were a helpless minority in many countries, West and East. They were entirely dependent on the graces of the local lord, count, Sultan. To remain in his good graces, a member of the Jewish community, generally the richest, took it upon himself to

gratify the ruler, flatter him and bribe him. Such a person became the king of the ghetto, admired by his community.

As a phenomenon, Bibi is a successor of this tradition.

NOBODY LOVED Abba Eban. Even those who admired his extraordinary talents did not admire the man. He was considered un-Israeli, not a he-man as a typical Israeli man should be.

Bibi's public standing is quite different. As a former commando fighter he is as he-mannish as Israelis desire. He looks as an Israeli should look. No problem there.

But ask one of his admirers what Bibi has actually achieved in his 12 years as prime minister, and he will be at a loss to answer. David Ben-Gurion founded the state, Menachem Begin made peace with Egypt, Yitzhak Rabin made the Oslo agreement. But Bibi?

Yet at least half of Israel admires Bibi without bounds. They are ready to forgive him countless affairs of corruption—from receiving the most expensive Cuban cigars as gifts from multi-billionaires to outright bribes which may amount to many million dollars. So what?

The social composition of his camp is even odder. They are the masses of Oriental Jews, who feel despised, downtrodden and discriminated against in every respect. By whom? By the Ashkenazi upper classes, the “whites”, the Left. Yet nobody could be more Ashkenazi upper-class than Bibi.

Nobody has yet found the key to this mystery.

SO WHAT is Netanyahu's “vision” for the future? How is Israel to survive in the next decades as a colonial power, surrounded by Arab and Muslim states which may one day unite against it? How is Israel to remain master of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, populated by the Palestinian people, not to mention East Jerusalem and the shrines holy to a billion and a half Muslims throughout the world?

It seems that Bibi's answer is “Don't look, just go on!” In his way of thinking, his solution is: no solution. Just

continue what Israel is doing anyway: deny the Palestinians any national and even human rights, implant Israeli settlements in the West Bank at a steady but cautious pace, and otherwise maintain the status quo.

He is a cautious person, far from being an adventurer. Most of his admirers would like him to annex the West Bank outright, or at least large chunks of it. Bibi restrains them. What's the hurry?

But doing nothing is no real answer. In the end, Israel will have to decide: make peace with the Palestinian people (and the entire Arab and Muslim world), or annex all the occupied territories without conferring citizenship on the Arab population. Ergo: an official apartheid state, which may turn in the course of generations into an Arab-majority bi-national state, the nightmare of almost all Jewish Israelis.

There is, of course, another vision, which nobody mentions: waiting for an opportunity to implement another Naqba, expel the entire Palestinian people from Palestine. However, such an opportunity seems unlikely to present itself a second time.

Bibi seems unconcerned. He is a man of the status quo. But having no vision of his own means that consciously or unconsciously he holds in his heart the vision of his father: get the Arabs out. Take possession of the whole land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan (at least), as the Biblical Israelites once did.

WHAT WILL Bibi do in face of the corruption indictments closing in on him?

Hang on. Whatever happens. Indictment, trial, conviction, just hang on. If everything falls to pieces, democracy, the courts, law enforcement agencies—just hang on.

Not the course one would expect from a great statesman. But then, he is no statesman at all, great or small.

I repeat the suggestion I made last week: in due time have him confess, grant him an immediate pardon. Let him keep the loot, and—bye bye, Bibi.