

Obama won't wink back

REMEMBER DOV WEISGLASS? The one who said that peace must wait until the Palestinians become Finns? Who talked about preserving the peace process in formaldehyde?

However, Weisglass will mainly be remembered less for his mouth than his eyes. Weisglass is the King of the Wink.

This week, Binyamin Netanyahu called him in for urgent consultations. He needed a lesson in "working with the eyes" (as cheating is called in modern Hebrew slang).

Winking is the main instrument of the settlement enterprise. The wink is the real father of the settlements. The settlers wink. The government winks. Officials don't issue a permit, but wink. They say no, and wink. Wink and build. Wink and connect to electricity and water. Wink and send soldiers to protect the outposts, and also remove the Palestinians from adjoining fields and olive groves.

The wink is also the main instrument of Israeli diplomacy. Everything is done by winking. The Americans demand a freeze of the settlements – and wink. The Israelis agree to the freeze – and wink back.

Trouble is that there is no printed sign for a wink. The computer has no standard symbol for it. So Hillary Clinton could honestly assert this week that no wink is documented in any agreement signed by the US and Israel. Not in any memorandum of oral exchanges. So there are no understandings. No mention at all of a wink in any file or document.

Worse: it seems that in Afro-American culture the wink is unknown. When Netanyahu came to the White House and winked – Barack Obama did not respond. Winked again, and again Obama did not understand. Winked and winked and winked until his face ached – nothing. Obama thought, perhaps, that Netanyahu had a nervous tic. Really embarrassing.

What can you do with someone who is no winkee? How, for God's sake, does one get him to wink back?

THAT IS the main problem confronting the Prime Minister of Israel.

Tomorrow he is going to deliver a Great Speech. Not just great, Historic. His resounding response to Obama's speech in Egypt. Everything has been done to put the two events on the same level. Obama spoke at Cairo University? Netanyahu will speak at Bar-Ilan University, the religious right-wing institution that nurtured the murderer of Yitzhak Rabin.

But that is the only similarity. Obama outlined the

contours of a New Middle East? Netanyahu will outline the contours of the Old Middle East. Obama spoke about a future of peace, cooperation and mutual respect? Netanyahu will speak about a past of Holocaust, violence, hatred and fears.

Netanyahu's biggest problem is to make believe that the old is new. To make yesterday's tired old clichés sound like the rallying call for tomorrow. But how to do that without using winks, facing a person who does not understand winks?

How to speak about the "natural increase" of the settlers without winking? How to speak about a Palestinian state without winking? How to speak about speeding up peace negotiations with the Palestinians without winking?

The most expert tailors have been called for advice about the emperor's new clothes. Ministers and Knesset members and professors and magicians and, of course, Shimon Peres.

All of them rallied to the call: to tailor a beautiful robe, fashionable trousers and a colorful tie – such as only the very wisest of people will see.

ONCE WE could rely on the Holocaust. We said Holocaust, and the room fell silent. We could oppress the Palestinians, steal their lands, set up settlements, scatter checkpoints everywhere like the droppings of flies, blockade Gaza and so on. When the Goyim opened their mouths to protest, we cried "Holocaust" – and the words froze on their lips.

So what to do with someone who himself speaks incessantly about the Holocaust and denounces its deniers? A person who actually bothers to visit a concentration camp and drags with him "Mr. Holocaust", Elie Wiesel, in person?

No wonder that our Prime Minister tosses and turns in his bed and finds no rest for his soul. Netanyahu without the Holocaust is like the Pope without the cross. Netanyahu without a "second Holocaust" – how can he speak about Iran? What can he say about the Existential Danger, which prevents us from dismantling cabins in Judea and sheds in Samaria?

(Thank God for small mercies: at least Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, our main asset in the region, has been reelected.)

SO HOW will Netanyahu pitch his Historic Speech?

He will have to try and hammer a square peg into a round hole. To say Yes when he means No. That is what his predecessors did. Ehud Barak did it. Ariel Sharon did it. Ehud Olmert did it. With one big difference: they did

it with a sly wink. Netanyahu will have to do it with a straight face.

He must speak about Two States without mentioning two states. To speak about freezing the settlements while building work there is proceeding at full speed.

In the past, there were many ways of going on with the settlement. "The Jewish brain produces patents", as a popular Hebrew song goes. New neighborhoods were built under the pretense that they were simply an extension of existing ones – at a distance of ten meters, or a hundred, or a thousand or two, as long as they were in the range of visibility. Or it was said that the building activity was taking place within the boundaries of existing settlements – helped by the fact that the municipal area of Maaleh Adumin settlement, for example, is officially as big as all of Tel-Aviv.

One can also brandish George W. Bush's famous letter, in which he expressed his opinion that in any future peace agreement "existing Israeli population centers" should be joined to Israel. But Bush did not define the "population centers" nor outline their borders. And he certainly did not say that we are allowed to build there before the signing of a final agreement, including possible swaps of territory. Not that he had any authority to decide such matters in the first place.

One can also talk about "natural increase". No problem: women can be turned into factories for children, preferable twins and triplets. Also, one can adopt children from the age of 1 to 101. After all, if there is a new child in the family, one needs to build another room, another house, another neighborhood.

(By the way, "natural increase" is, of course, a strictly Jewish matter. Arabs have no natural increase. Their increase is unnatural.)

AND WHAT about the State of Palestine, as projected by Obama?

Israeli TV did a beautiful job this week, when it reminded us what Netanyahu said only six years ago: "A Palestinian state – NO!" because "Yes to a Palestinian state means No to the Jewish state."

Netanyahu seems to think that it is only a matter of presentation. He can mention that in the past we already accepted the Road Map, which contains something about a Palestinian state. True, we made the acceptance conditional on 14 "reservations" which castrated it and turned it into a meaningless scrap of paper. But perhaps Obama will be content with that.

To sum up: no need to talk about Two States when they have already been mentioned in the Road Map (its name be cursed), which we declared dead a long time ago, but which we now consider alive again, and where something like two states is mentioned, so there is no need to repeat it - enough to allude to it in an oblique way.

But what to do if, in spite of everything, the Americans insist that Netanyahu emit the two words "Palestinian state" from his own mouth? If there is no way out, Netanyahu may mutter them somehow, silently adding phooey-phooey-phooey and loudly adding qualifications that empty them of all content. That is what Barak did, then Sharon, then Olmert.

The declarations of Tzipi Livni and her people produce the impression that they are stuck at the same point. They, too, seem to believe that we can go on speaking about two states and doing the very opposite, about freezing the settlements and go on building there. No new message is coming from this camp, but only criticism of Netanyahu for not changing his style to please Obama.

BUT WHAT Obama is asking for is not a new formulation of old slogans. He demands the acceptance of the principle of Two States as a basis for concrete and rigorous action: achieving an agreement on the establishment of a state called Palestine, with its capital in East Jerusalem, without settlements and all the other paraphernalia of the occupation.

He demands the start of negotiations forthwith, so that within two or three years – before the end of his current term – real peace will be established, a peace that will ensure the existence and security of "the Jewish state of Israel" (as George Mitchell put it this week) and the Arab state of Palestine, side by side.

All this as part of a new Greater Middle Eastern order, from Pakistan to Morocco, and as a part of a world-wide vision.

Against this demand, no winking a la Weisglass or verbal gimmicks a la Peres will be of any avail. In tomorrow's speech, Netanyahu will have to choose between three alternatives: a head-on collision with the United States, a total change in his policy, or resignation.

The era of winks is over.