

# Perhaps the Messiah will Come

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**I**F SOMEONE HAD told me 50 years ago that the rulers of Israel, Jordan and Egypt had met in secret to make peace, I would have thought that I was dreaming.

If I had been told that the leaders of Egypt and Jordan had offered Israel complete peace in return for leaving the occupied territories, with some exchanges of territory and a token return of refugees, I would have thought that the Messiah had come. I would have started to believe in God or Allah or whoever there is up there.

Yet a few weeks ago it was disclosed that the rulers of Egypt and Jordan had indeed met in secret last year with the Prime Minister of Israel in Aqaba, the pleasant sea resort where the three states touch each other. The two Arab leaders, acting de facto for the entire Arab world, had made this offer. Benyamin Netanyahu gave no answer and went home.

So did the Messiah.

DONALD TRUMP, the comedian-in-chief of the US, some time ago gave his answer to the question about the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Two-states, one-state, whatever the two sides agree on, he answered.

He could just as well have answered: "Two-states, one-state, three-states, four-states, take your pick!"

And indeed, if you live in la-la-land, there is no limit to the number of states. Ten states is as good as one state. The more the merrier.

Perhaps it needed a total innocent like Trump to illustrate how much nonsense can be talked about that choice.

ON THE fifth day of the Six-day war, I published an open letter to the Prime Minister, Levy Eshkol, urging him to offer the Palestinians the opportunity to set up a state of their own in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Immediately after the war, Eshkol invited me for a private conversation. He listened patiently while I explained to him the idea. At the end he said, with a benevolent smile: "Uri, what kind of a merchant are you? A good merchant starts by demanding the maximum and offering the minimum. Then one haggles, and in the end a compromise is reached somewhere in the middle."

"True," I answered, "if one wants to sell a used car. But here we want to change history!"

The fact is that at the time, nobody believed that Israel

would be allowed to keep the territories. It is said that generals always fight the last war. The same is true for statesmen. On the day after the six-day war, Israeli leaders called to mind the day after the 1956 war, when the US President Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Soviet President Nikolai Bulganin compelled David Ben-Gurion to give back all the occupied territory ignominiously.

So there seemed to be only one choice: to give the territories back to King Hussein of Jordan, as the great majority advocated, or to give them to the Palestinian people, as my friends and I, a tiny minority, suggested.

I remember another conversation. The Minister of Trade and Industry, Haim Zadok, a very clever lawyer, made a fiery speech in the Knesset. When he came out of the plenum, I admonished him: "But you don't believe a single world you just said!" To which he replied, laughingly, "Anybody can make a good speech about things he believes in. The art is to make a good speech about things you don't believe in!"

Then he added seriously: "If they compel us to give back all the territories, we shall give back all the territories. If they compel us to give back part of the territories, we shall give back part of the territories. If they don't compel us to give back anything, we shall keep everything."

The incredible happened. President Lyndon Johnson and the entire world did not give a damn. We were left with the entire loot, to this very day.

I CANNOT resist the temptation to repeat again an old joke:

Right after the foundation of the State of Israel, God appeared to David Ben-Gurion and told him: "You have done good by my people. Utter a wish and I shall grant it".

"I wish that Israel shall be a Jewish and a democratic state and encompass all the country between the Mediterranean and the Jordan," Ben-Gurion replied.

"That is too much even for me!" God exclaimed. "But I will grant you two of the three." Since then we can choose between a Jewish and democratic Israel in a part of the country, a democratic state in all of the country that will not be Jewish or a Jewish state in all of the country that will not be democratic.

That is the choice we still face, after all this time.

The Jewish state in all of the country means apartheid.

Israel always maintained cordial relations with the racist Afrikaner state in South Africa, until it collapsed. Creating such a state here is sheer lunacy.

The annexationists have a trick up their sleeve: to annex the West Bank, but not the Gaza Strip. This would create a state with only a 40% Palestinian minority. In such a country there would rage a perpetual intifada.

But in reality, even this is a pipe dream. Gaza cannot be separated forever from Palestine. It has been part of the country since time immemorial. It would have to be annexed, too. This would create a state with a slight Arab majority, a majority bereft of national and civil rights. This majority would grow rapidly.

Such a situation would be untenable in the long run. Israel would be compelled to give the vote to the Arabs.

Utopian idealists would welcome such a solution. How wonderful! The One-state solution! Democracy, equality, the end of nationalism. When I was very young, I too hoped for this solution. Life has cured me. Anyone actually living in the country knows that this is totally impossible. The two nations would fight each other. At least for the first one or two hundred years.

I have never seen a detailed plan of how such a state

would function. Except once: Vladimir Jabotinsky, the brilliant leader of the Zionist far-right, wrote such a plan for the Allies in 1940. If the President of the state will be Jewish, he decreed, the Prime Minister will be Arab. And so on. Jabotinsky died a few months later, along with his plan.

Zionists came here to live in a Jewish state. That was their dominant motive. They cannot even imagine an existence as another Jewish minority. In such a situation, they would slowly emigrate, as the Afrikaners do. Indeed, such an emigration to the US and Germany is already happening under the radar. Zionism has always been a one-way street—towards Palestine. After this “solution”, it would go the other way.

TRUTH IS that there is no choice at all.

The only real solution is the much-maligned “Two States for Two peoples”, the one declared dead many times. It's either that solution or the destruction of both peoples.

So how do Israelis face this reality? They face it the Israeli way: by not facing the reality. They just go on living, day by day, hoping that the problem will just go away.

Perhaps the Messiah will come after all.