

producing larger and larger numbers of Jews who have little connection either to Judaism or to Israel. A left-wing government in Jerusalem that ended the Occupation would not change much in the attitudes of Jews in America. These are empirical questions, which invite a kind of survey research that *Dissent* cannot undertake. We looked instead for a few more personal, less analytical, responses to our questions. Our respondents are not a representative sample, but they do suggest that, in some parts of American Jewry, passions haven't cooled.

For myself, I am as passionate as ever—

TODD GITLIN

*In the world* I was born into, Israel was an emotion wrapped in an idea. Simply by existing, the Jewish state was a portal to deliverance, and since I had been carried through that portal at birth, so to speak, a sense of deliverance was my default emotion. I was a war baby, which is to say, born at a moment when the Jews of Europe (including many relatives, though none close) were being slaughtered, and from then on, back to the earliest time when I can remember any awareness of a larger world, raised in the knowledge that I belonged to a people devastated “in the war,” as my grandmother used to say, the horrors not yet having been designated with that wrongly sacralized one-word name “Holocaust.” But, as in the ancient redemptions, the founding of storybook Israel was the lyrical restart moment; the happiest possible ending (or beginning of an ending) to the grimmest possible story.

Today, the state of Israel feels to me like a personal trauma, a huge, heartbreaking disappointment, a world-historical opportunity forgone, a danger to the Jews, a burden—and also a nation to which, like it or not, I am fastened, where people I love and admire carry on an immensely, grievously difficult struggle for decency against tall odds.

Now, truly it is peculiar, even perverse, to speak of being disappointed, or traumatized, *by a state*. States are social contrivances.

angrier, more worried, but not in any way disengaged. I visit Israel often, sometimes just to hold hands with my embattled friends, but also because their battles are important to me. I want this unexpected return of the Jewish people to history and sovereignty to turn out well. And I pray, the way unbelievers pray, that the next generation of American Jews will continue to want what I want.

Here are some other voices.

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However motivated by ideas, they are not those ideas in themselves, because ideas are incarnated in action, and action is tragic. Certainly states are not paradises, not centers of brotherly and sisterly love. They are systems of power, which means that there are winners and losers. They operate within what social scientists are pleased to call constraints: they are not free. They are institutional; that is, human; that is, fallible. It seems hopelessly romantic, a category error, to feel disappointment in a state or grief and outrage about what it has come to. You'd have to be mightily illusioned in the first place to feel disillusioned. A hard-headed realist would say that any preexisting condition of innocence is begging to be smashed.

And yet, the state of Israel was produced by hearts as well as minds and sustained by both, in particular the hearts of Jews like myself, whose Russian-born grandfather volunteered for the British Army's Jewish Legion against the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. (I cherish a photo of him, taken God knows where, posing in short sleeves and short pants, with two buddies, against a backdrop depicting some generic sort of wilderness.) The portrait of Chaim Weizmann that hung in his living room was a fixture in my mental iconography, too, with Weizmann cast as a liberator and Zionism, his cause, a taken-for-granted, unproblematic good. When

I sang “*Ha-Tikvah*” during my four years in Hebrew school, lumbering among imperfectly memorized and not-much-understood words, the national anthem swept me to devotion, longing, and relief. “*Ha-Tikvah*” was, to me, far more vivid and rapturous than “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

Now, I read the Israeli news every day, oh boy, and most of it tears me apart. Since my most recent visit last October, I read it obsessively. I subscribe to newsletters that bring, almost every day, bad tidings. The government propaganda insults me. I am supposed to think that Israel is a worthy nation because it is superior to apartheid South Africa and that, because it has murderous enemies, it is deserving. As I sit down to write this melancholy reflection, I come upon this Reuters report based on WikiLeaks diplomatic cables just published in a Norwegian newspaper. Reuters cites an American diplomatic cable from November 3, 2008: “As part of their overall embargo plan against Gaza, Israeli officials have confirmed to [U.S. embassy economic officers] on multiple occasions that they intend to keep the Gazan economy on the brink of collapse without quite pushing it over the edge.” Israel wanted Gaza’s economy “functioning at the lowest level possible consistent with avoiding a humanitarian crisis,” Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said, in January of that year, even as he delivered an empty promise not to keep out food for children, medicine, and fuel for essential institutions. And then he said this: “But there is no justification for demanding we allow residents of Gaza to live normal lives while shells and rockets are fired from their streets and courtyards” into southern Israel.

*There is no justification for demanding we allow...normal lives...* This is the reasoning of terrorists. I cannot read the words without reflecting on the normal-looking Jerusalem streets I saw in October, filled with normal-looking women pushing normal-looking children in strollers, and normal-looking teenagers waiting for normal-looking buses at normal bus stops—while a few minutes away was occupied East Jerusalem, with all the dispossessions and incursions done by Israeli forces at the expense of residents who are very

much *not* permitted to live normal lives. But, says the leadership of the Jewish state, not everybody is entitled to live normal lives.

*I take it personally*, being a Jew start to finish, which has meant different things for me at different points in my life, but always one or another kind of complicity. During the Six-Day War, in 1967, a new friend, the writer Richard M. Elman, wrote me that he was heading for Israel to volunteer as a soldier. I was mystified and wrote back to say so. What I said to him was that my passion, as an *American* radical, was to oppose the awful war for which my country was responsible. We were going to build Jerusalem in America’s not-so-green and not-altogether-pleasant land. It didn’t work out that way...certainly not in every respect. But I never doubted, during my youth in the New Left, that it was as a whole human being that I had signed up, very much including my Jewish soul.

Dick Elman felt something I didn’t feel at twenty-four: that an American Jew was obliged to the state of Israel. Love it, loathe it, feel proud of it or disgraced by it, join settlements or peacenik organizations, an American Jew *qua* Jew carries the weight of it. I came to that sense in my own way and time. In 1973, news that Egyptian forces had crossed the Suez Canal sent me in tears to a San Francisco shul I had never set foot in before, knowing acutely, desperately, that if the state of Israel was going to be destroyed, I wanted to receive the news among Jews. In 1975, driving in San Francisco, when I heard on the radio about the UN General Assembly passing the infamous “Zionism = racism” resolution, written in Orwellian duckspeak, I swore out loud my revulsion that in a world of nations, all of which are founded on mythic ideas with various downsides, one in particular should have been singled out for condemnation. I puffed myself up to declare that Israel wasn’t going to be destroyed: *Over my dead body*.

Well, the same applies today and for the foreseeable future. Friends don’t let friends destroy themselves if there’s the slightest thing they can do about it.

What should the relationship of American

Jews be to the actually existing state of Israel? Doubly serious, doubly sober, doubly burdened, doubly insulted, doubly obliged. We are entangled in two states of emergency. The state of Israel is not the imagined promised land where the Jews are led by Paul Newman or where secure, rugged boys and girls plant trees purchased in the names of boys and girls like me, safely ensconced in the Bronx. It is America's crazed doppelgänger, careering stupidly into a future that risks both countries and scourges both peoples. We shore it up, subsidize it, apologize for it, care wisely and unwisely about its fate, suffer for it and with it. No one can think that the self-destruction that the state of Israel courts in its myopia, clumsiness, and paranoia—and yes, paranoids have real enemies—takes place outside us.

SARAH LEONARD

*I was raised* enough of a Jew to take some things for granted: certain blessings rolling off the tongue; instinctual skepticism of pork chops; good deeds ringing in my mind as “mitzvot”; a general support for Israel. I attended a Conservative Hebrew school as a child, lost my faith in God to Holocaust education, and have not voluntarily attended services since the seventh grade. Still, as many a secular, cultural, or spiritual Jew will tell you, you do not escape a Jewish upbringing by skipping services. I know well enough that the feelings toward Judaism and Israel instilled through my upbringing stalk my rational disinterest. These deep-rooted feelings give rise to such impossible desires as that the Jewish state should be different—more just, more compassionate, more understanding of oppression and tragedy—than any other. No amount of conscious secularization can uproot my concern for Israel's fate or waive the feeling that we owe a special empathy to oppressed peoples.

I was not wholly conscious of these loyalties until recently. Yes, one might talk to Jewish parents or grandparents about, say, the

I was struck by a talk *Dissent's* founding editor Irving Howe gave in 1989, arguing that American Jews, their Judaism unserious, were going to wake up one day to discover that their sense of being Jewish was so wrapped up with a connection to Israel that as Israel became less supportable, so would their sense of being Jewish. I fear that the passage of two decades proves him more right than wrong.

It is as an American and a Jew, and an American Jew, that I rage, rage against the dying of the light.

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Gaza bombings of 2008-2009 and know that they would shut down. Israel does no wrong. Israel doesn't mean to do wrong. Hamas wants to annihilate the Jews, sweep Israel into the sea, and *don't we have a right to protect ourselves?* Peter Beinart, in his June 2010 essay “The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment,” projected this experience beyond familial discussions and into the realm of power and policy. Why, he asked, were young Jews ceasing to care about Israel? “For several decades, the Jewish establishment has asked American Jews to check their liberalism at Zionism's door, and now, to their horror, they are finding that many young Jews have checked their Zionism instead.”

My connection to Israel throughout high school and into college waned. I despised the united front, the idea of all Jews versus all critics. I would have liked to think that I fit the pollster Frank Luntz's findings about my generation, as summarized very well by Beinart:

First, “they reserve the right to question the Israeli position.” These young Jews, Luntz explained, “resist anything they see as