



ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

foreign interlopers—
European
governments. The settlement is
meant to block Israeli
development of the all-important
E-1 quadrant connecting
Jerusalem to Maaleh Adumim
(and from there to the strategic

Commentary...

Netanyahu, Now is the Best Time to Act

By David M. Weinberg

The unjustified wild reaction to Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir's important 13-minute ascent to the Temple Mount this week tells us one thing: The world holds Israel and especially Israel's new government in complete contempt. It thinks it can dictate to Israel how it should administer the holiest place (to Jews) in the world, how it should define who is a Jew, where Israelis should and should not live or "settle," when the Israeli police and army can open fire against terrorists and more. The world is going to object to almost every policy for which the new Israeli government was elected.

My conclusion: Strike while the iron is hot. The new government should move swiftly to make its most important changes while it is still relatively united, and the world is still reeling. A chorus of international condemnations will follow in any case, and Israel might as well plow through this onslaught in a concentrated fashion.

Justice Minister Yariv Levin has set out on this exact path by introducing a cluster of legal reforms that in one fell swoop will properly realign the balance of power between the judiciary, legislature and government. Not everything he is pushing is perfectly wise nor will it pass Knesset exactly as tabled. (For example, a 61-vote Supreme Court override is an overreach; 70+ votes would be wiser.) But changing the way justices are selected and canceling the ability of the Supreme Court to super-subjectively and on a whim strike down Knesset legislation as "unreasonable" or "unbalanced" is long overdue. No other country in the world has a Supreme Court so imperious. Israel should implement its legal reforms as it sees fit.

Additionally, change in the way the Temple Mount is administered is long overdue. The so-called "status quo," which was put in place after the Six-Day War when Jews and Christians almost always had access to the holy Mount without restrictions on days and hours just like Muslims, is long dead, killed by Palestinian and Islamic violence, seditious sermonizing and infuriating denialism, outrageous archaeological crimes, Waqf administrative aggression and pugnacious Jordanian mission creep.

On the immediate agenda is a proposal to expand access for Jews to the Temple Mount. Currently, Jews are allowed to visit only Sunday through Thursday for a few hours each morning under tight and often-abusive Waqf supervision and to enter via only one of the nine gates leading into the Mount. (That is the Moghrabi Gate, whose decrepit and rickety access bridge needs to be completely rebuilt, despite Jordanian objections.) Israel should roll back these restrictions and revert to the "status quo."

And while on the subject, I'll add that I strongly oppose any thought of interfering with Muslim worship at the mosque on the Temple Mount. But that does not mean that Jewish rights at the site should be delegitimized, denigrated and dismissed, or that the Waqf can wreak its apocalyptic war against Israel without restraint.

I also oppose all extremists, but Ben-Gvir did not violate any status quo by visiting the Temple Mount. Previous Israeli ministers of public security visited the Temple Mount too. And if the Jordanian and British crown princes and the Turkish foreign minister can visit the Temple Mount without interference, so should any Israeli official, rabbi or officer be able to do so.

Any Western spokesman who repeats the modern-day blood libel about Israelis "violating" a Muslim holy site or "storming the Noble Sanctuary" is bating and justifying Palestinian violence.

Next on the agenda is the dismantling of Khan al-Ahmar, the purposefully provocative and illegal Bedouin settlement on the eastern outskirts of Jerusalem, which has been funded and defended by brazen

Jordan Valley), and therefore it must be moved. The squatters have had more than 10 years of recourse to Israeli courts all the way up to the Supreme Court, and even that liberal top court has cleared the way for determined Israeli action. But with European Union encouragement and under Palestinian Authority pressure, the squatters have rejected every generous Israeli resettlement proposal. Israel should take down Khan al-Ahmar and the IDF should also act against eight dozen other illegal Palestinian settlements in Area C.

Furthermore, the responsibilities of the Defense Ministry's recalcitrant and ineffective Civil Administration in Judea and Samaria should be transferred to other Israeli ministries. This is necessary to halt illegal Palestinian activities (from belligerent settlement to pollution, water theft and destruction of archaeological treasures); to provide Israeli residents of Judea and Samaria with much better services; and to rapidly advance infrastructure projects (like roads, sewage treatment facilities and industrial zones) for the benefit of both Israelis and Palestinians.

In a completely different direction, reform of the Israeli educational system is urgent. This begins with rolling back the illogical cuts in mandatory high school studies of the humanities and Jewish history that were announced by the terrible previous Minister of Education Yifat Shasha-Biton. It continues with a restructuring of the funding system so that school principals have more latitude in hiring and firing teachers and in choosing extracurricular activities.

In the economic sphere, resolute action is necessary to end the outrageous tax burden on small and mid-sized Israeli businesses, which pay 23% in tax, while high-tech firms get a gazillion tax breaks leading to an effective tax rate of only 13%. Small companies and big high-tech firms should both be paying taxes of about 17-20%, no more and no less.

The Israeli left wing and ultra-liberals abroad already are screaming that the legal reforms to balance power "will bring about the end of democracy," that the lifting of the Temple Mount restrictions "will bring about regional war," that the resettlement of Khan al-Ahmar "will cause another intifada," that the Defense Ministry's disinvestment of the Civil Administration in Judea and Samaria "will constitute a war crime of permanent occupation," that education reforms will "corrupt" the school system and "impose" Judaism on the public, that tax reform will "enfeeble" Israel's high-tech sector and "mortgage" Israel's future—but all this is simply not true.

Israel's best course of action would be to plow through the overwrought criticism and implement policy change with dispatch. What doesn't get done in the next 6-12 months will get bogged down in interecine squabbling or be impeded by accumulated foreign pressure. (Israel Hayom Jan 8)

Let My People Pray By Morton A. Klein

The Zionist Organization of America criticizes Jordanian King Abdullah II's latest illegal threats regarding Judaism's holiest site, the Temple Mount, which violate the Israel-Jordan peace agreements. The Jordanian king told CNN that he is "prepared for conflict," has "red lines," and that "we have to be concerned about the next intifada" (i.e., terror war in which Palestinian Arabs murder and maim innocent Jews) if there is a "change of status" at the site.

Abdullah II is threatening violence if Jews (and other non-Muslims) are allowed to exercise their legal, religious and moral rights to freely pray at Judaism's holiest site.

A major fact being ignored: The Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty, signed by Jordan's King Hussein (Abdullah II's father) on Oct. 26, 1994, guarantees Jews freedom of access to the Temple Mount.

Article 9.1 of the treaty states: “PLACES OF HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE. Each party will provide freedom of access to places of religious and historical significance.”

Former U.S. Ambassador to Israel David M. Friedman confirmed this, tweeting on Jan. 4: “Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty of 1994 required both nations to ensure access of all faiths to significant religious sites, including the Temple Mount... Jews are not prohibited from visiting the Temple Mount under the Treaty or under the definition of ‘status quo’ (murky as it is) and government ministers have done so on many occasions. No threat from Hamas should impair this reality.”

The racist, sexist, unjust status quo of black Americans and women not being allowed to vote was ended; the racist, unjust status quo of black Americans not being allowed to attend “white” high schools and universities was ended; and the anti-Semitic, unjust “status quo” of Jews not being allowed to visit and pray at their holiest site must be ended as well.

The ostensible status quo prevailing at the Temple Mount today violates signed international agreements, as well as Israel’s 1967 “Protection of Holy Places Law.”

The real “change in status” has been the unjust, discriminatory, illegal restrictions on Jewish access and prayer, and the Jordanian Wakf’s decades of malfeasance, destruction of Jewish antiquities and violations on the Temple Mount. The proposed Temple Mount Preservation Act of 2001, co-sponsored by 37 bipartisan Congress members, confirmed that the Jordanian Wakf engaged in “large-scale bulldozing and destruction of the Temple Mount antiquities. Thousands of tons of fill have been unearthed and simply dumped into the nearby Kidron Valley. Archeologists have verified these artifacts date from the period of the First Temple [over 2,500 years ago].”

Allowing and facilitating Jewish access and prayer at Judaism’s holiest site would merely help restore the agreed-to lawful status of this site, as a place where all people will have free access to pray.

Abdullah II’s threats of violence also violate additional provisions of the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty, including the requirements that Jordan must “refrain from organizing, instigating, inciting, assisting or participating in acts or threats of belligerency, hostility, subversion or violence against the other Party [Israel]” (Article 4.3.2); respect Israel’s sovereignty and territorial integrity (Article 2.1); mutually cooperate on security (Article 4.1); and not interfere with Israel’s inherent right of self-defense (Article 4. a).

The Jordanian king’s threat is exacerbating the recent arrogant, anti-Semitic, racist, discriminatory, unlawful, unjust demands and propaganda falsehoods employed by the Biden administration, Hamas terrorists, the Palestinian Authority terrorist dictatorship and certain other Arab governments, to make the Jewish people’s holiest site Judenrein (off limits to Jews).

Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir peacefully strolled on the perimeter of the Temple Mount for about 13 minutes (without stepping foot in the mosque). And yet, Israel was absurdly and falsely accused of “storming the mosque,” “invading the mosque,” “provoking violence” and planning to build a “new Jewish Temple” there. (See “The Biden Administration Sides with Discrimination on the Temple Mount,” by Morton A. Klein, JNS, Jan. 4, 2023.)

Jewish history on the Temple Mount predates the beginning of Islam by over 2,200 years. Abraham bound Isaac there in approximately 1677 BCE. King David purchased the Temple Mount and built an altar to God there, and David’s son King Solomon completed building the First Temple on the site in 957 BCE—over 1,600 years before Islam was founded in 610 CE.

The Jewish Temples stood on the Temple Mount for approximately 1,000 years—again, long before Islam came onto the scene. Jews made pilgrimages to the Temples three times a year (on Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot); 180 (out of the 613) mitzvahs (Jewish commandments) relate to the Temple. And while Muslims pray facing their holiest place, Mecca, Jews all over the world pray facing their holiest place, the Temple Mount.

By contrast, the Muslims’ (false) claim that the site is holy to them was invented in about 1100 C.E.—centuries after Mohammed’s death in 632 C.E., is based on a mere dream, not an actual occurrence, that Mohammed visited the “farthest mosque.” Notably, Al-Aqsa Mosque

wasn’t even built until decades after Mohammed’s death, and wasn’t and could not have been the “farthest mosque” in his dream. Moreover, there wasn’t a single mosque in Jerusalem when the Koran was written. Mohammed moreover never visited the Temple Mount in real life. Thus a misrepresented dream is being used to try to wipe out thousands of years of actual Jewish history.

King Abdullah II revealed his real goal when he made egregious and numerous illegal demands last April to fully control the Temple Mount.

Jordan absurdly demanded:

1. That Israel give the Jordanian Islamic Wakf full authority over the Temple Mount, including the authority to severely restrict (or prevent) non-Muslim visits.
2. That non-Muslims be required to apply to visit in writing in advance.
3. That Israeli security forces be forbidden to enter the Temple Mount, even when Palestinian Arabs violently riot, shoot and/or throw rocks, iron bars and firebombs at Jewish and other worshipers on the Temple Mount or the Kotel (Western Wall) plaza below.
4. That non-Muslim prayer necessities (prayer books, Torahs, tallits) be banned from the site.
5. That non-Muslim visitors be restricted to groups of no more than five people (thereby preventing Jews from forming a minyan to pray).
6. That non-Muslims be restricted to tour routes of no more than 150 meters in each direction.
7. That a dress code be enforced for non-Muslims (demeaning dhimmi dress codes for Jews).

In addition, the Wakf planned to charge non-Muslims admission fees—requiring Jews to pay Muslims to visit Judaism’s holiest site!

All these demands violate the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty’s guarantee that Jews will have full access to their holiest site. (See “ZOA Condemns Jordan’s Egregious Demands to Control Jews’ Holiest Site – the Temple Mount – and to Limit Security & Non-Muslim Visits,” April 28, 2022.)

ZOA urges Jordan, other Arab and Muslim countries, the United States, other countries and the United Nations to respect the provisions of the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty, and the religious, moral and just rights of the Jewish people. Enough with this conspicuous Jew-hatred and Israel-hatred! Let my people pray! (Israel Hayom Jan 9)

It’s About Time to ‘Shackle’ Israel’s Supreme Court

By Nathan Lewin

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s new government ignited a domestic firestorm with the legislative proposal by Justice Minister Yariv Levin to “overhaul” Israel’s judiciary and empower the Knesset to override a Supreme Court decision invalidating duly enacted legislation. Protests have erupted on the streets of Tel Aviv, and celebrated legal scholars are claiming that approval of Levin’s proposal will spell the end of what some call Israel’s “thriving but inadequately entrenched democracy.” Alan Dershowitz—who otherwise strongly supports Netanyahu—says that he would join the protesters because Levin’s proposal would “weaken” the Supreme Court and make it difficult to defend Israel in international tribunals.

The time has come for the Knesset—the only institution that can legitimately enact into law the policies that Israel’s citizens democratically prefer—to define the role that the judiciary (and particularly the Supreme Court) should play. Levin’s most vocal opponent has been former Israeli Chief Justice Aharon Barak. He has come out of the relative silence of retirement to appear in three Israeli television interviews in which he declared that Levin’s law is a “chain that will strangle Israeli democracy” and would mark “the beginning of the end” of Israel’s sovereignty. Critics say Barak is responsible for the excesses now attributed to Israel’s Supreme Court because his court unilaterally seized exclusive authority while Barak was president of the Supreme Court between 1995 and 2006. Barak has theatrically offered to be “put before a firing squad” if his demise would move Levin to withdraw his proposed “drastic shake-up.”

By contrasting the history of their Supreme Courts, Israeli and American lawyers should realize that the Israeli Supreme Court, and primarily Barak personally, is primarily responsible for the criticism that now calls for a legislative remedy. Although it has enjoyed the power to invalidate official action as unconstitutional since *Marbury v. Madison*, the U.S. Supreme Court has long prescribed limitations on its own power. The court may sustain a party's constitutional challenge to a law only if that party has "standing"—can demonstrate that the challenged law infringes that party's personal liberty. The U.S. Supreme Court has also set a boundary for its own authority by permitting federal courts to decide only actual "cases or controversies." This denies the court any power to issue pronouncements on hypotheticals.

Under Barak's leadership, the Israeli Supreme Court rejected all self-imposed "shackles." Calling Barak an "enlightened despot," respected American federal appellate judge Richard Posner said in a 2007 review of a volume in which Barak laid out his judicial philosophy that Barak had "created out of whole cloth a degree of judicial power undreamed of even by our most aggressive Supreme Court justices." Israel's justices—once appointed by a self-perpetuating body controlled totally by sitting Supreme Court members (although today's selection committee has only three Supreme Court members of a nine-member body)—have perpetuated Barak's extraordinary authority. On 22 occasions the court has declared a law passed by the Knesset to be invalid because it violates a freedom protected by Israel's Basic Law.

Contrary to the opinions expressed by Levin's critics, democracy is not threatened if a democratically elected legislature sets the rules under which a law passed by a majority of the legislature is voided whenever a majority of judges believe that it offends a Basic Law. Whether 61 votes in the Knesset should override the decision of a judicial majority so as to restore a law to full effect or whether it should take 70 or 80 Knesset members is a detail that the Knesset can debate and decide. Whether a simple majority of a Supreme Court panel should qualify to void a law or whether invalidation of a Knesset law should require the concurrence of 8 or 11 justices is a choice the democratically elected Knesset should make. These are legislative judgments, not judicial prerogatives.

Levin's proposed law would make several other reasonable-if-debatable changes affecting the membership and power of Israel's judiciary. It would retain much of the same Israeli judicial structure, including the number of Supreme Court justices and the duration of their service. (One wonders whether, in light of today's life expectancies and the ages of American presidents and potential candidates for the 2024 U.S. elections, an Israeli Supreme Court might determine that the current mandatory-at-70 retirement for Supreme Court justices violates a liberty protected by the Basic Law.) Its terms—including the limitations it prescribes on the effect of decisions rendered by a majority of the Supreme Court—deserve respectful and deliberate consideration. (JNS Jan 9)

This article is in response to a very pessimistic and despairing essay by the American/Israeli translator and author Hillel Halkin "On That Distant Day" about Israel's new government. Halkin's article can be found at www.JewishReviewofBooks.com

Method to Our Madness: A Response to Hillel Halkin

By Ze'ev Maghen

Hillel Halkin is the reason I moved to Israel. I read his *Letters to an American Jewish Friend* at sixteen, and my life trajectory was changed forever—mine and that of a great many other young Jews. Hillel is, for me, Zionism incarnate, and I love him.

But even heroes can be wrong. One need look no further than the beginning of Halkin's eloquent lamentation to see how. That is where he informs us that his erstwhile Jewish neighbor—who voted for anti-Zionist Arab parties and then jumped ship to live out his days in a Portuguese villa—is in the right, whereas we, who vote for emphatically Zionist parties like the Likud, Ha-Tzionut Ha-Datit, and Otmah Yehudit, and who will never leave this country under any

circumstances (even if the radical left takes control), we are the problem.

And, for Halkin, the fact that we are the problem—that we represent the very ruination of the Zionist enterprise and that the government we elected consists of a bunch of "rascals"—doesn't require any real explanation. It is an axiom that sets the stage for the real question: is there any chance that we benighted, barbarous Neanderthals can be ejected from the corridors of power and sent back to our caves?

Readers of Halkin's heartfelt requiem are supposed to take as a given that Benjamin Netanyahu's "only demonstrated principles [are] his own ambition and survival." It is, apparently, beyond the realm of possibility that this prime minister, who has spent his entire life in the service of the State of Israel, is motivated even partially by any lingering vestiges of genuine Zionist idealism.

The ultra-Orthodox, for their part, are—well—ultra-Orthodox: a bunch of black-hat, backward medievalists who—just like Netanyahu—harbor no ideals whatsoever. Their political parties "will always join hands with whoever most fully grants their religious and financial demands." Describing the Ashkenazi party United Torah Judaism, Halkin writes that it "has traditionally devoted its efforts to promoting the power of its rabbis and procuring all it could from government budgets for its followers and their institutions." Political parties that seek to benefit their constituents? Shocking! Almost as shocking as the fact that these money-grubbing opportunists channel such funds primarily into the promotion of Torah study, rather than into buying larger houses, more ornate furniture, or fancier—or any—cars.

These unenlightened free riders, continues Halkin, "do not participate in the workforce"—this, despite a fresh study conducted by The Israel Democracy Institute showing that 53% of ultra-Orthodox males and 80% of ultra-Orthodox females are gainfully employed, and that almost half of the haredi population volunteers regularly in charity organizations which—as any Israeli who has ever needed an ambulance, a free meal, assistance with his special-needs kid, or a gratis mobility scooter for his grandmother will readily attest—hugely benefit all sectors of society, secular as well as religious.

Oh, and their religious school systems "do not teach basic subjects like English and mathematics." Now English is currently the bane of Israel's existence (as we shall see momentarily below), and is, at any rate, on its way out as the international lingua franca as a result of exponentially improving simultaneous translation software. As for math, I will pit your average ultra-Orthodox yeshiva student against the valedictorian of Israel's most elite secular high school in a logic and reasoning contest any day of the week.

Of course, all of the above sidesteps the most salient point: that the ultra-Orthodox, whatever our differences may be with them, have always been, and remain today, the Jewish People's backbone. If we could ever stop demonizing them daily in the media, celebrating every child of theirs who defects to Tel Aviv bohemianism or a life of debauched promiscuity, and stop striving like the dickens to coerce them into adopting our modern Western worldviews and lifestyles—most of which fly in the face of thousands of years of sacred Jewish tradition—then the ultra-Orthodox might just come out of their self-enforced insularity and become one of Israel's greatest assets.

But Halkin's real nemeses are the newly ascendant religious Zionists, like the "hypernationalist and Jewish supremacist" parties. If by these epithets Halkin means that their members and supporters care more for Jews—their national family—than they do for the enemies of the Jews; that they are hell-bent on putting a stop to the weekly slaughter of innocent Jewish civilians by Arab terrorists; and that they believe that the Land of Israel belongs to the Jewish People, and oppose the erection of a jihadist Palestinian polity controlled by Hamas, then this is just classical Zionism. Ben-Gurion would affix his signature to these propositions as quickly and unhesitatingly as Ben-Gvir.

Halkin seeks to decipher for his readers the conundrum of the rise of the religious right. "With every dunam of Palestinian land taken for an Israeli settlement; every Palestinian stone thrown at the car of a

settler; every act of revenge against a Palestinian village; every Arab stabbing or shooting of a Jew....” Let us leave aside the particular Jewish sickness of rising above the quarrel and taking the neutral, God’s-eye view (true Zionist normalcy consists in taking one’s own side). The real problem here is Halkin’s patronizing assumption that the “fear and fury” engendered by all this mutual escalation has led many Israelis to “vote for the parties that best express these emotions.” We right-wing voters politely and calmly—not, God forbid, emotionally or furiously—beg to take exception to the imputation that we make our choices in the ballot box solely based on our inflamed kishkes.

Here are just a few of our rational reasons for ushering in the new government:

First of all, we, who aren’t headed for Portugal any time soon and whose children and grandchildren will, God willing, grow up here in Israel, want peace more than anybody. We believe, as has many an Israeli strategist hailing from both sides of the political-ideological divide, that peace will come only if we are strong, and only if we are insistent on our rights to this land. In addition, we have noted that when the liberal left-leaning Yair Lapid was at the helm, he came up with no better or more humane ideas for dealing with the conflict than any of his predecessors (including Rabin and Peres). We also remember that only two Israeli governments brought about peace deals of any worth—the Camp David agreement and the Abraham Accords—and they were both right-wing.

Some of us also know (and no one knows better than Halkin) that what offended the Palestinians most deeply about the fin de siècle Zionist arrivals was not the pioneers’ religiosity, but their secularism. Others of us know that the Qur’an’s central beef with the Jews is that they are not sufficiently assiduous in observing the Torah’s commandments. In short, we right-wing voters venture that our loyalty to our religious tradition is not necessarily an obstacle, and may well represent an advantage, in the struggle to find a modus vivendi between us and our adversaries.

Moreover, a large proportion of Israelis—especially, but not exclusively, those on the secular left—no longer remember why this country exists. For several decades now I have lectured IDF intelligence units on various Middle Eastern and Islamic topics. I always make sure to throw in the reminder that “the State of Israel was created, and continues to exist, for one purpose: to ensure the survival and prosperity of the Jewish People.” In response, my audiences make equally sure to voice their virtually unanimous dismay at my unprecedentedly “racist,” “obscurantist,” and “fascist” statement.

It’s not their fault; it’s Zionism’s fault. The Zionist luminaries spent all day every day pondering the “Jewish Question,” but they were particularly determined that the new, “normalized” Jew who grew up in the homeland would do nothing of the sort. They sought to create a generation that was no longer plagued by the neurotic preoccupation with our nation’s past and future, a generation that lived healthily in the here and now, and related to its geographical location in the same manner that every other nation relates to theirs: as a place to live, and nothing more. And in this the Zionists succeeded.

So today, and for some time now, even the average, “centrist” Israeli will tell you that his or her “Zionism” involves creating or maintaining a liberal, democratic, egalitarian, inclusive, individualist, environmentally conscious, economically prosperous, globally connected, etc., etc., society. Many of these goals are worthy, but none of them were what Zionism was about, and, what is far more serious, none of them can provide a compelling *raison d’être* today for the continued, long-term existence of the State of Israel in a hostile Middle East as the national home of the Jewish People.

Moreover, the fact that many of the above universalist (i.e., European-American) objectives cause profound pain and concern to a growing segment of Israeli citizenry is roundly ignored. Orthodox Jews who seek to create gender-segregated spaces in academia and elsewhere, so that they can learn a profession and participate more fully in Israeli society, are forbidden to do so by the Israeli Supreme Court. Religious male soldiers are told, in the face of their strongly held beliefs, that they must ride in their tanks together with female counterparts. “Gay Pride Month” is celebrated in dozens of Israel’s

major cities, including Jerusalem, with elaborate fanfare; there is no “Torah Month.” (And while we’re on the subject, Itamar Ben-Gvir just publicly affirmed that he opposed discriminatory laws against the LGBTQ community, and that “If my son told me he was a homosexual, I would hug him.”)

Not surprisingly, the large section of the Israeli populace that no longer views this country as a vessel for the perpetuation, welfare, growth, and development of the Jewish People not only acts without reference to Zionism, it acts in ways that directly undermine Zionism.

Hebrew, revived (mostly by the secular left) after two thousand years spent in a coma, and made into the basis for the resplendent Jewish national renaissance in our old-new land, is on its way out in Israel, and with it our collective uniqueness. Shop signs, company names, and marketing slogans throughout the country are now often solely in English. Israel’s two main television stations are called HOT and YES. The vast majority of the youth listen to mostly American music, which is also the default choice in the cafes, restaurants, stores, and malls. Every Israeli knows that the only way to induce Israeli army radio, or any other secular station, to play more than two songs in a row in Hebrew is for over seven of our citizens to die horribly in a terrorist attack. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem—founded by the likes of Ussishkin, Ahad Ha’Am and Bialik—has announced that it is inaugurating a pan-university eradication of Hebrew in favor of English as its pedagogical language.

Many high tech companies in Israel throw annual Christmas parties for their Jewish employees. Returning from Britain this past Hanukkah, a huge Christmas tree welcomed me to Ben Gurion Airport, and its faux-evergreen friends accompanied me step by step, store by store, all the way through Baggage Pick-Up to Passport Control to the waiting taxi. It appears that Halkin’s (rather jarring) complaint that Zionism has not succeeded in curing us of our Judaism was misplaced: the cure, it appears, is underway!

But a goodly number of Israelis are still “sick”: we know that without maintaining at least a hefty portion of the traditions, the rituals, the customs, the learning, the dos and the don’ts of Judaism, Zionism and the State of Israel don’t stand a chance. We know that unless we keep present in our minds our polity’s Jewish nationalist *raison d’être*, and keep at bay those universalist, Western-based notions that are geared by definition to undermine nationalism in all its forms, this country is done for.

True, finding the way to fuse the many demands on our minds and hearts involved in being simultaneously Jews, Zionists, and human beings will be no easy task. But we have no choice but to engage in that task, without allowing any of those components of our identity to fall by the wayside (as the Left has so clearly done).

No less true, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shows no signs of abating. On the contrary: what little dialogue there once was between us and them has virtually disappeared (under the Left no less than the Right). We now communicate via weapons alone. But if, God forbid, our enemies remain utterly implacable no matter what overtures or compromises we make—which is a distinct possibility—then I confess I’d rather have a fierce, hawkish Zionist in the cockpit than a progressive, Westernized wimp for whom this land, and the people who have returned to it after two millennia of incomparable suffering, don’t mean all that much.

Hillel Halkin knows every single thing I have written here, and then some. His inflamed kishkes got the better of him, that’s all. And I know, despite my own somewhat splenetic critique above, that nobody in the State of Israel is more qualified than Halkin to assist us in the truly Samsonian project of merging our Jewish, Zionist, and human selves into one effective force for good. So I think—I know!—that consigning himself to an anguished demise up there on the Zikhron Yaakov promontory—a sort of Moses on Mount Nebo in reverse—is extremely premature.

Don’t give up on us, Hillel. We need you.

The writer is chair of the department of Middle East studies at Bar-Ilan University. (Jewish Review of Books Jan 10)