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## ***A Time for Mourning, A Time To Rejoice***

**By Leonard Fein**

In this week of remembrance and celebration, some people are having a hard time. The remembering begins with Yom HaZikaron, Israel's memorial day for those who have fallen in its wars. It is a day of both public and private solemnity.

The cemeteries that dot the country are thronged; once, at a small dinner party in Jerusalem, marked by vigorous conversation among people of the left, the wailing sirens signaling the beginning of the day interrupted the talk. Instantly, everyone rose and stood in silence around the dining room table for two full minutes.

At day's end, abruptly, the funeral cortege is transformed into a mass revelry: Independence Day. The daring juxtaposition announces clearly: There is a time for mourning and a time to rejoice.

Some of those who fail to rejoice are readily understood. Israel's Arab citizens call this "Nakba Day," a day to remember and mourn the calamity of their defeat in 1948. They can hardly be expected to celebrate the birth of a state that has treated them so shabbily.

National reconciliation? One day, perhaps. For now, the tension is captured and the alienation abetted by such words as those of Israel's minister of public security, Avi Dichter: "Those who sit year after year and cry about the Nakba shouldn't be surprised if in the end they really do have a Nakba." Such words inflame; they neither comfort nor calm.

In Iran, the newly elected Jewish member of parliament — there are still some 25,000 Jews in Iran — announces that Israel engages in "anti-human" behavior and that his community has "no relations with Israel." Whether his words accurately reflect his beliefs or, instead, have been chosen for prudential reasons, we do not know. Sad, in either case.

But sadder still was the mood I encountered the other evening at a gathering of mostly young Jewish social justice activists. They'd gathered from around the country to frame an agenda for their activism. The conference organizers, evidently only after taking a deep breath, scheduled one session to talk about Israel. Both during the session and in its aftermath, the discomfort with the topic was nearly palpable.

For some, the discomfort was the product of their own abiding commitment to the Jewish state, and of the fear and frustration they experience in progressive circles when their Zionism comes to their colleagues' attention. For others, the discomfort was with the idea of nationalism itself, an idea they see as in direct opposition to the universalist values they espouse. Finally, there are those who, whatever their views of nationalism in general, cannot make room for the idea of a Jewish state; they see that idea as inherently and actually discriminatory, anti-democratic.

Most of the hundred or so participants in the conference have no memory of Israel as it was before 1967, as it was before it became an occupying and expansionist power. For them, all the talk of drained swamps and blossoming deserts is, at best, just that: talk. At worst, it is propaganda.

They do not remember Jerusalem as a physically cleft city, nor have they memories of the ingathering that marked Israel's first years of independence. A 30 year old today was born in 1978, came to some measure of political consciousness in, say, 1993. Rejoice?

Yes, rejoice.

One is not invited to year-round giddiness. The mourning lasts for a day, and the celebration lasts for a day, and on the third day life, in all its messiness, resumes. Can the critics and the kvetches not find enough content to warrant even one day's worth of pride and pleasure? Ecstasy may be too much to expect just now, may even be thought inappropriate. But joy?

How about the rule of law? Yes, it is under assault, and no, it is not perfect, but there it is, a system commanding respect and therefore inviting pride. How about science and technology? How about free speech? How about literature, and the versatility of the Hebrew language reborn? And how about the stubbornness of the peace-seekers, who might long since have declined into sulking but who instead persist in their labors?

It is easy to trot out the list of failures, of ongoing concerns, of disappointments. It is so easy that it becomes a habit — and for some, an addiction. That makes it doubly important to create an island in time to set aside the furrowed brow and dance the night away. Dancing does not signify mindlessness; it comes to restore just a bit of balance, to make room for the wonder of it all: a Jewish state. Tensions, contradictions, conflict, yes, but these are not by any means the whole of the story or its heart.

Those so burdened by the everyday problems and crises that they can no longer experience wonder would do well to have a look at a May 7 piece Richard Holbrooke wrote for the Washington Post, in which recalls the battle within the American government over the recognition of Israel. It is a fascinating story Holbrooke tells, one that brings great and richly deserved credit to Clark Clifford and to President Truman.

And the story is a powerful reminder of how chancy the enterprise was back then, as also of how much love and labor had been invested by the early arrivals in bringing the Jews of Palestine to their legitimate place as a nation among nations.

Tomorrow will doubtless be a day to renew the “ifs” and “buts,” of which there are no shortage. It will be as well a time to renew the effort to do a better job at statecraft, to focus on all the good things that want doing, some quite urgently. Today is for gathering up the energy for such a tomorrow. So: Rejoice.