


ing collaboration, based loosely in text and tradition, is essential to the livelihood of art and culture making. With the tools of modern communication and technology, we can reach new heights and many more hearts.

Thirty years ago, second and third generation Israelis like me were just beginning to be exposed to the incredible diversity of cultures

our parents and grandparents had brought with them to create a new society. Today, as my generation matures, and we become the gatekeepers of Israeli arts and cultures, we are uniquely charged with the responsibility of using the technologies and our tolerance of the future to integrate visions of today's Israel with the deep roots of its past. 

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Daniel Gordis

It's not that Israel hasn't told its side of the story. It's that Israel has failed to explain that it *is* a story; that its story is *about* something.

The mere notion that a country can be *about* something sounds strange to our contemporary ears, but Montesquieu, among others, said precisely that. Given that Israel will face enemies and be at war for as long as we can currently imagine, and since Israel's enemies are likely to be portrayed as the underdogs by a world that often prefers that Jews play that role, the Foreign Ministry has a mandate to speak clearly — both to the international community and to Jews in Israel — about what Israel is *about*. The challenge is to shift the spotlight, focusing the world's discussion on why the Jews need a state in the first place, what we are busy building.

Israel is, first and foremost, the story of restoring hope to a people who had no reason to hope. Following the Shoah, on what basis dared we imagine a Jewish future? America's Jews were weak. Europe's had been exterminated. The Soviet regime would only grow more oppressive. Palestine's shores were closed to Jewish refugees who had nowhere else to go.

Statehood restored hope. Exiles were gathered. Hebrew was reborn. Refugees became soldiers. The desert bloomed. Victims began to determine their own destiny. A future, suddenly, was possible. Though the prophet Ezekiel wrote that "our bones are dry, our hope is lost" (37:11), Israel's anthem, "Hatikva," proclaimed *od lo aveda tikvateinu*, "our hope is not yet lost." The world needs to understand that Israel is not about sovereignty, or borders. It's about the very possibility of a Jewish future.

As foreign minister, I'd help design a setting in which Israel becomes the place where Jews imagine what they should become. "Why

did these things happen to us?" does not matter. What matters is, "Given that they did, who and what do we need to be?" In Israel, where Jews are blessed and saddled with sovereignty, they can begin to re-imagine what 21st-century Jewishness might look like.

It is through that lens that the Foreign Ministry must help the world understand the agonizing decisions Israel makes. For example, given that Israel has been forced into war (the disengagement from Gaza could have led to a very different outcome for Gazans had their leadership chosen differently), what rights and responsibilities do a people have when its enemies do not recognize its right to exist? How much should Israel risk the lives of its soldiers in order to protect Palestinian civilians, many of whom offer sanctuary to Israel's armed enemies?

The Israeli story is key to understanding the dilemma we face with Sudanese refugees. Some (though not most) are fleeing genocide. What should Israel — still settling Jewish refugees and worried about the decreasing percentage of Jews that make up its population — do? Part of our story is the Torah's command, "You shall not oppress the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Should Israel just open the border, risking a genuine flood of such refugees? Could Israelis turn them away and still read the Haggadah without shame? Facing that dilemma is what it means to live inside a Jewish story.

Israel's Foreign Ministry must make numerous complex judgments about nurturing relationships with other countries. How will we balance our economic needs and our military prowess with our concern about selling arms to countries whose policies we may abhor, and that our history would suggest we ought not to do business with? When Turkey

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predicates its relationship with us on our being complicit in their denial of the Armenian genocide, how should we respond? Israel needs Turkey as an ally; it borders Syria, it's a democracy, and it's a Moslem country. But at what price? Not only does the Foreign Ministry need to evaluate and build relationships that help Israel become a global player, but also, and no less important,

it needs the world to understand how we assess these critical decisions.

The Foreign Ministry cannot make everything Israel does palatable, or even just. But it can, and must, be at the forefront of reminding the world that Israel is more than just a country; it is a story of rebirth and renewed hope, still awaiting the peace that it once believed would have arrived long ago. 

Minister of the Interior

David Shechter

The minister of the interior of the State of Israel is one of the few people in Israel in whose power it is to take real concrete steps to creating a normal and unified civic society in Israel.

Eligibility for Israeli citizenship must be reconsidered. At present, in accordance with the Law of Return, all new immigrants to Israel, *olim chadashim*, automatically receive citizenship and the full set of rights associated with it — including the right to vote in elections for the Knesset. Thus a strange state of affairs is created whereby a person, barely two months in the country who is unfamiliar not only with the Israeli political system but even with the language in which this system is conducted, is entitled to decide which party should control the reins of government. This situation inherently possesses the potential for manipulation and deception of the new voter, a phenomenon already witnessed on several occasions in the past. I would suggest an interim period, perhaps two-to-three years, after which the citizen would become entitled to vote in Knesset elections.

Another area for reform addresses the situation of non-Jewish relatives of new immigrants. Citizenship for this population would be granted only after three-to-five years, and only after having passed proficiency tests in Hebrew language, the history of Israel and the Jewish people, the fundamentals of the governmental system and basic Israeli laws. During the interim period, these “quasi-citizens” would be obligated to affirm a pledge of allegiance to the state, and if a person from this group engaged in any activities deemed as treacherous or unfaithful to the interests of the country (including forbidden connections with the enemy or espionage), an Israeli court of law would be entitled to revoke potential citizenship and expel him or her from the country.

A small but critical change would be to lib-

eralize passport extensions for Jewish men and women living outside of Israel. The current policies hinder the work of hundreds of Russians holding Israeli passports who do business outside of the country. These people donate millions of dollars to Jewish educational institutions in Russia and Israel, help strengthen the connection between Russian Jews and Israel, and promote Jewish culture and awareness, both in Israel and in the Diaspora. However, instead of bestowing gratitude, Israel inflicts upon them a set of bureaucratic obstacles that must be stopped.

Reforming the conversion process will also be necessary. Three hundred thousand non-Jews, who immigrated together with their Jewish relatives, are living in Israel today. Many of them are not considered Jewish according to halakhah (primarily because their father is Jewish but not their mother). In the Soviet Union, nationality was determined according to the father, and thus, these people considered themselves and felt Jewish their entire lives (and usually their official Soviet documents also classified them as Jews). To their astonishment, upon arriving in Israel, they suddenly became non-Jews. A nationwide network of conversion *ulpanim* (schools) must be established for these and other immigrants who have arrived with Jewish *olim*. And the conversion process must be made easier. Naturally this network must be open and available to all. Although I object to excessive leniencies in the conversion process, I also strongly oppose raising unnecessary difficulties.

It is my intention to adopt a liberal attitude regarding entry visas for foreign workers. Though some opinions suggest that these workers are taking employment opportunities away from Israelis, this is for the most part untrue. Most employment for foreign workers includes jobs that Israelis won't accept, such as

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