

ADVANCING
JEWISH
THOUGHT

Mosaic

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EDITOR'S LETTER

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Dear friends,

I'm writing this week from sunny Jerusalem, where the air is perfumed by rosemary, coffee, and the nervous political tensions of great constitutional moment. The week is winding its way toward Shabbat, in light of which the city's political tension folds into frenetic preparation for the setting sun. The Knesset's consideration of the judicial override clause combined with the weekly cadence of shopping, baking, and preparing creates the tension. Shabbat brings the release.

In defense of the isolationist Jew

This week we published a serious response to Eric Cohen and Mitchell Rocklin's essay on the spirit of Jewish classical education. Eli Spitzer appreciates what Cohen and Rocklin write, including their labeling of a mindset belonging to many in the haredi community as the Isolationist Jew.

The Isolationist Jew, as Cohen and Rocklin describe him,

... believes that the practice and preservation of Jewish life is the core purpose of education, and that worldly knowledge is only valuable inasmuch as it sustains a Torah-centered life. He sees the Jew as a permanent outsider: a holy (but vulnerable) bystander in a world of lesser (but more powerful) nations. He seeks to separate himself from the messy struggle to renew the West and sees his community as too small to matter even if he tried. And while he recognizes that the best of non-Jewish culture in art, music, and literature may have merit, the Isolationist Jew affords neither the time nor resources to pay it real attention; and he believes that it is better to ignore (or downplay) the West than to open up young, impressionable Jews to its temptations.

Spitzer, a haredi educator in England, entirely embraces this characterization. But whereas Cohen and Rocklin invite Isolationist Jews to turn some of their energies and prodigious Torah learning outward to strengthen Western culture, Spitzer writes in defense of the Isolationist's isolation.

The feminist assertion

In this week's language column, Philologos notices a new feature in Israel's public rhetoric. "A grammatical feature of Hebrew" he writes,

is that, when addressing or speaking about a mixed masculine-feminine group, it's the masculine form of the verb, noun, or pronoun that is used. "*Ha'im atem shom'im oti?*" "Do you hear me?" a speaker will ask an audience of men and women, using the masculine pronoun *atem*, "you," rather than the feminine *aten*, and the masculine verb *shom'im*, "hear," rather than the feminine *shom'ot*. And by the same token, one would normally turn to the Israeli public on television simply as *ezrah eyisrael*, using the masculine *ezrah* (construct plural, *ezrahey*) alone, it being understood that this includes women, too.

What's new can be heard in a recent address from Israel's president Yitzhak Herzog, which begins with his addressing *ezrahiyot v'ezrahey yisra'el*—literally, “female citizens and male citizens of Israel.” In other words, heard in Herzog's insistence upon addressing each sex separately and equally, rather than following the normal and traditional Hebrew usage. That this is a feminist assertion of equality is clear, as is the source of it: Labor leader Merav Michaeli, whose politicized speech Israelis enjoy making fun of.

What makes this example of politicized speech even more fascinating can be seen by asking that most fundamental of all political questions: *compared to what?* The feminist claim is manifest in Israel at a time when, back in the United States, the category of womanhood and the immutability of sex, along with all questions of gender, are fraught and contested. In its insistence on the separate status of women, feminism can now be understood in the contemporary American scene as a kind of conservative impulse, not a radical one.

God's maternal love

On something of the same subject, though from a distinctly different point of view, our podcast guest this week pays careful attention to the ways in which God is described in the Hebrew Bible, noting that there are quite a few times in which the Creator of the Universe is described in distinctly feminine, maternal terms.

By attending to the way those terms are used, we can learn something about God's relation to the peoples of the earth, who were created and conceived as a child was created and conceived by its mother, just as one can learn about God's relation to the Jewish people, who are showered with God's love like a child is embraced by his mother's love. These biblical analogies can help us understand the Jewish conception of God, and they are made possible by attending to the gendered language of the biblical text, and they are impossible to understand in a culture unmoored from ideas about sex rooted in nature and creation.

From the archives

It's been about one year since Russia rolled its tanks into Ukraine, and back then many thought that Kiev and the Ukrainian government would fall within weeks. Today, after several Russian offensive campaigns, each met with Ukrainian counter-offensives, the war continues. Shortly after the conflict began, my *Mosaic* colleague Andrew Koss looked at how Israel's ability to support Ukraine is limited by Russia's extensive presence in the Middle East. That presence, he notes, was made possible by American withdrawal.

With every good wish,

Jonathan Silver
Editor
Mosaic



Orthodox Jewish children in Borough Park, New York on September 12, 2022. Spencer Platt/Getty Images.

ELI SPITZER

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About the author

Eli Spitzer is a *Mosaic* columnist and the headmaster of a hasidic boys' school in London. He blogs and hosts a podcast at elisplitzer.com.

In Defense of the Isolationist Jew

Instead of placing ourselves as the main characters in another mighty civilization's story, our task remains to plough our own furrow, and reap our own harvest.

Eric Cohen and Rabbi Mitchell Rocklin have presented a compelling vision for revamping Jewish day-school education in order to produce cultured and sophisticated “Menorah Jews,” able to synthesize fruitfully their Jewish heritage with that of Western culture and lead a wider cultural revival. A Jewish classical education would, I presume, include John Keats’s line “Beauty is Truth, and Truth is Beauty,” and there is much in their bold essay that is true as well as beautiful. Their debunking of the false promise of progressive education cuts to the very heart of the modern educational malaise. They have, too, correctly discerned that the crucial cultural battleground lies not in the media, or even in the universities, but in the schools where plastic young minds are molded and formed. What is more, they hit the nail firmly on the head in their description of the “Isolationist Jew” who “believes that it is better to ignore (or downplay) the West than to open up young, impressionable Jews to its temptations.” I will attempt here to make the case for that circumspect Isolationist Jew and argue that, while the revival of classical education in wider America is to be welcomed, its importation into Jewish schools is unlikely to bear the fruit Cohen and Rocklin promise.

To do so, I will start with perhaps the most elementary of observations: a system of schooling that aims to produce a particular type of Jew, or a Jew groomed for a specific task, must first ensure that it is producing any type of Jew at all. If the last 200 years of Jewish history teach us anything, it is

that converting Jewish children into Jewish adults is no mean feat, one that requires an emotionally compelling immersion into a culture and worldview that envelopes the life of the child through his or her development. In the Jewish classical school, however, the focus and purpose of education is to expose pupils to “the past heights of human excellence” scaled by non-Jews—and specifically Christians—based on the premise that “Western history, literature, and culture are the heritage and responsibility of every Jew.” What this means in practice is that these impressionable Jewish children will learn, in great detail and breadth, that another civilization is vastly superior to the one they are being instructed by their teachers to identify with and remain loyal to.

It is absolutely correct to observe that, at an early stage of its formation, the injection of Judaic ideas into Greco-Roman civilization produced a new, and unexpectedly brilliant, hybrid vigor. From that point onwards, however, the Jewish contribution to Western civilization has been marginal. If judged by the standards of art, philosophy, science, or culture, Judaism stands justly condemned, not only as a historical laggard, but as an ongoing shackle on its members. Those Jews who have made contributions to the arts and sciences, be it a Heine or a Kafka, an Einstein or a von Neumann, did so, almost without exception, after they or their parents had left Jewish observance and peoplehood behind.

Cohen and Rocklin mount a convincing criticism of progressive subordination of “intellectual and spiritual benefits . . . in the name of efficiency and utility.” However, whatever vices a progressive education in functional skills for the workplace may have, its very weakness as a tool for inspiring and shaping minds makes it compatible with a successful immersion in Jewish culture. The most logical and natural conclusion, by contrast, of a young graduate who has been blessed with receiving a proper classical education in his formative years will, as likely as not, be the same as that made by so many of our brightest and most idealistic minds over the past 200 years: *leave*.

I do not mean to imply that Cohen and Rocklin are unaware of this problem, a problem that, as they hint, has plagued historical forerunners of their approach. Rather, if I understand them correctly, they believe that they have solved it by proposing a unique mission for Jews that requires them to recognize Western culture’s unique greatness while maintaining their separate Jewish identity. If, they argue, we explain to young Jews that they are members a chosen people with a unique historical mission to inspire Western civilization, and “correct” it when it goes astray, they will accept their fate as a nation set aside to be the yeast in the Gentile dough, coaching their Christian neighbors to cultural heights they could not reach on their own. The success of a Jewish classical education thus depends on its ability to convince its pupils “that the weight of glory is on their Jewish shoulders.”

Cohen and Rocklin are, of course, far from the first to propose a project for Jewish renewal based on the proposition Jews have a special purpose among the nations. From the Enlightenment onwards, Jewish theology has been preoccupied with the tension, one that goes all the way back to our earliest documents, between ethnic particularism, and the universalism implied by monotheism. A popular resolution of this conundrum has been that the Jews are a particular nation with a universal mission. This special mission, has of course, varied with the prevailing fashion. The 1885 Pittsburgh Platform identified the Jews' special mission with the rationalist technocracy of *fin-de-siècle* progressivism, the Columbus Platform of 1937 updated it to match New Deal liberalism, and, in the postwar era, the promotion of whatever form of madness had most recently gripped the American elite came to be identified as Judaism's special mission under the name *tikkun olam*.

In Cohen and Rocklin's version of this story, Jews have not only been chosen to act as role models and inspire Gentiles in general, but have a special and insoluble bond, in particular, with the West. This special bond was created by the marriage of Jewish and Greco-Roman ideas nearly 2,000 years ago in the form of Christianity. What this amounts to, therefore, is the proposition that Judaism has a special and unique responsibility towards Christianity. It may be possible, in a pinch, to conceptualize a Western civilization without Christianity at its core and pervading all aspects of its life, though what you are left with is precisely the kind of stunted, rootless culture that classical education is supposed to combat. Doing so would also remove any special connection between Judaism and Western culture, because it is solely through Christianity that these Jewish ideas became part of the West. If Cohen and Rocklin's vision comes to pass and these Jewish ideas are revived through an educational renaissance that we help to inspire, Christianity will, again, be the vehicle for spreading that Jewish message.

In order to solve the obvious incongruity involved in depicting our true mission as lying in promoting the revival of Christianity, Cohen and Rocklin depict the two religions as natural partners, with Judaism providing the core covenantal content, and Christianity a way to market it to a universal audience. This commonality of purpose has, on their telling, been obscured by the Christians' inscrutable decision to persecute us, and our understandable but lamentable inability to see beyond this to the big picture. Now, however, we are in a position to become the allies we were always meant to be. This is a comforting, perhaps even beautiful, picture, but here truth and beauty part company.

The differences between Judaism and Christianity are not about trivial matters, nor are they based on mutual misunderstanding. They concern what are, for religious believers, the most momentous questions imaginable. Did the Creator of the Universe send his only son to redeem all mankind through his death, liberating them from bondage to sin by removing the intolerable burdens of the covenantal law, or not? Upon this question

hinges our most fundamental religious beliefs: what *is* God, what is His relationship to mankind, and what does the life of service to Him consist of?

Let us grant, for the sake of argument that, “the existence of a covenant between God and man, with man as the center of meaning in Creation” is, indeed, “Judaism’s most essential idea,” the fact that our two religions share a common source makes our differences more, not less, profound, because the inescapable conclusion is that either they or we have radically perverted these essential truths into something unrecognizable. True religious dialogue between the two sides of this religious chasm, to the extent that it is even possible, can only be meaningful if it starts with an acknowledgment of these gaping differences, rather than an attempt to collapse them through references to a vague ethical monotheism. To present Christianity as Judaism for mass consumption is an insult to sincere believers in either.

Cohen and Rocklin refer to an impressive range of Jewish scholars and thinkers as precedents for their projects. While some Jewish thinkers have indeed “recognized the importance of Western [or, at any rate, Gentile] ideas for expanding the Jewish imagination,” this has always been a distinctly minority pursuit. Whether it is true, as Cohen and Rocklin daringly write, that Maimonides himself saw the purpose of “codifying Jewish law as a form of resistance to non-Jewish culture,” this is certainly not how Torah study and ritual observance has usually been conceived. Jews do not study the Torah and fulfill its commandments in order to resist assimilation, they resist assimilation in order to study the Torah and fulfill its commandments.

It is notable that, while they write *about* a number of Jewish thinkers, Cohen and Rocklin only quote one of them, three times and at some length, namely Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch. I do not mean this observation as a criticism: their call to educational arms represents a faithful update of Hirsch’s vision (though with, as we shall see, a crucial, and fatal, modification). However, Rabbi Hirsch’s theology itself has a history and context.

When Hirsch wrote that, “the more devotedly Judaism, without abandoning its own unique characteristics, weds itself to all that is good and true in Western culture, the better will it be able to perform its uniquely Jewish mission,” he undoubtedly anticipated the vision of Jewish classical education advocated by Cohen and Rocklin, but he did so essentially alone. Since then, things have changed in a way that further problematize any revival of the Hirschian vision, and not just because Hirsch’s passionate German nationalism and ferocious anti-Zionism turned out to be the worst of bad bets.

Hirsch lived at a time when Western civilization appeared to have successfully combined ethical and technological progress and married both to a thriving high culture. His belief that Christendom, and in particular his beloved Germany, was progressing steadily towards a realization of the values the Jews had first preached 3,000 years before was consistent with

the evidence of his own eyes. He held, not that Christendom was always our natural partner in fulfilling God's covenant with mankind, but that it might, by continuing to develop and shedding much of its historical content, *evolve* into such a partner. We, however, live surrounded by the wreckage left in the wake of the utter failure of Hirsch's dreams, with the dynamic European civilization that captivated him barely more than a memory after the 20th century's one-two punch of Fascist ultra-Spartanism and American ultra-Athenianism.

Faced with the spiritual chaos and ethical insanity that, as a result, confronts us wherever we turn, it is logical to conclude that a return to real Christianity is the West's only path to rehabilitation. I agree that Jews, as decent citizens of Western countries, and as human beings with a concern for the wellbeing of others, should not stand in the way of such a development. I can agree, provisionally, that it would be in our self-interest to do so, though it seems to me that a revival of serious Christianity is not possible without a revival of principled theological anti-Judaism. I will even state out loud what Cohen and Rocklin do not, namely that we have a special duty *as Jews*, to protest the actions of Jews with power and influence who see it as their special responsibility *as Jews* to obstruct any Christian revival and promote progressivism's golden calves.

But that is as far as it can go. It isn't—it cannot be—our special duty as Jews, let alone our very reason for existing, to seek the revival of a rival religion. Our education system, therefore, cannot be based on inculcating an appreciation of Christendom's achievements, not because they aren't remarkable, but precisely because they are. Our civilization's achievements are by comparison modest, our focus narrow, our task, when viewed through human eyes, humble, but they are *ours*. Instead of placing ourselves as the main characters in another mighty civilization's story, our task remains to plough our furrow, and reap our harvest, trusting that, in the fullness of time, our yearnings for redemption will be fulfilled. A betting man would, doubtless, not bank on the hopes of the Isolationist Jew's dreams coming true, but, then, would a betting man 200, let alone 2,000, years ago bank on us being here at all?



Merav Michaeli, Labor party leader and then-minister of transport and road safety on June 02, 2022 in Jerusalem. Alexi Rosenfeld/Getty Images.

PHILOLOGOS

FEBRUARY 22, 2023

About Philologos

Philologos, the renowned Jewish-language columnist, appears twice a month in *Mosaic*.

“Female Citizens and Male Citizens of Israel!”

Where a new grammatical feature of Hebrew speech comes from.

“Citizens of Israel!” the country’s president Yitzhak Herzog began a televised speech this month in which he asked both sides in the current political crisis to take a step back from the brink. Or at least that is how it would translate into English. In Hebrew, what Herzog said was, “*Ezrahiyot v’ezrahey yisra’el!*”—literally, “Female citizens and male citizens of Israel!”

Since Hebrew is a heavily gendered language in which not only nouns but also verbs and pronouns are either masculine or feminine, this might seem an ordinary thing to have done. It wasn’t, though. A grammatical feature of Hebrew is that, when addressing or speaking about a mixed masculine-feminine group, it’s the masculine form of the verb, noun, or pronoun that is used. “*Ha’im atem shom’im oti?*,” “Do you hear me?,” a speaker will ask an audience of men and women, using the masculine pronoun *atem*, “you,” rather than the feminine *aten*, and the masculine verb *shom’im*, “hear,” rather than the feminine *shom’ot*. And by the same token, one would normally turn to the Israeli public on television simply as *ezrahey yisra’el*, using the masculine *ezrah* (construct plural, *ezrahey*) alone, it being understood that this includes women, too.

Indeed, this is how it has been done in the past. “*Ezrahey ha-moledet ha-ivrit*,” “Citizens of the Hebrew homeland,” Menachem Begin launched his first radio address on May 14, 1948, the day Israel declared its independence. (In reading the declaration aloud that same day, Prime Minister

David Ben-Gurion plunged right into it without a salutation.) Such has been the custom in recent years, too, even when speakers have felt the need to take feminist concerns about language into account. Thus, in speaking to the nation at the time of Israel's first coronavirus lockdown two years ago, President Reuven Rivlin addressed it as, "*Ezrahey yisra'el, yakiray v'yakirotay*," "Citizens of Israel, my dear people [masculine] and my dear people [feminine]." Citizens masculine and citizens feminine he left to Herzog.

Prior to 1948, of course, there were no citizens of Israel of any sex to address. Nor, at the time of the American and French revolutions, were there citizens to address anywhere in the modern democratic sense of free men with equal rights and responsibilities. When Robespierre and others addressed the French National Assembly as "*Citoyens*," that single word was a speech in itself.

Free men! But what about women? French is in this respect like Hebrew. Although many French nouns have both masculine and feminine forms, such as *citoyens* and *citoyennes*, the National Assembly would have been understood that *citoyens* referred to women as well. (In English, in which nouns, with rare exceptions, are never gendered, the question could not even have arisen. When George Washington began his first inaugural address in 1785 with "Fellow Citizens of the Senate and the House of Representatives," there could have been no doubt that female senators and representatives, had they only existed, were being referred to as well.) There was nothing inherently sexist in Robespierre's saying "*citoyens*" without adding "*citoyennes*."

Still, it was feminism that responsible for introducing (or reintroducing, if it had been used in such a way before) *citoyennes* alongside *citoyens*. So we are told by Kristin Ross in her book *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*. There, Ross describes a meeting of socialists that took place in Paris in 1868, toward the end of the repressive regime of the Second Empire, to discuss the low wages of working women. In the course of it, she writes drily, "a certain Louis Alfred Briosne, forty-six years old and a *feuillagiste* (artificial flower and leaf maker) by trade took the podium amidst an atmosphere of fairly generalized boredom." She then goes on to quote the account of a participant at the meeting:

Until then, orators had begun to speak with the sacramental formula: "*Mesdames et Messieurs*. . ." This speaker cried out, in a clear and sufficiently vibrant voice, an appellation that had been deeply forgotten for a quarter of a century: "*Citoyennes et Citoyens!*" The room erupted in applause. The man who had been welcomed in this fashion did not, perhaps, go on to say anything more interesting than any of the others had—but what does it matter? By exclaiming his *citoyens*, he had evoked—whether purposely or not—a whole world of memories and hopes [going back to the French Revolution].

Briosne had also used the feminine *citoyennes* alongside, and even in front of, the masculine *citoyens*. Taking the long view, President Herzog's *ezrahiyot v'ezrahey yisra'el* goes back to this. If any single person influenced him, though, it was not Louis Alfred Briosne (of whom he no doubt never heard) but rather Merav Michaeli.

Michaeli's name is no doubt better known to many of you than Briosne's. A feminist, former journalist, the head of Israel's Labor party, and a cabinet minister in the short-lived Bennett-Lapid government, she has made a point in her frequent public appearances of redundantly joining feminine verbs, nouns, and pronouns to masculine ones. As minister of transportation, to take one example, she starred in a promotional ad telling Israelis of her accomplishments in providing them with "all that you need" on the country's trains and buses—which came out in Hebrew as *kol mah* (all) *she'atem* ("that you," masculine) *v'aten* ("and you," feminine) *tsrikhot* ("need," feminine) *v'tsrikhim* ("and need," masculine).

Michaeli's Hebrew has been the butt of much Israeli humor, since its repetitions don't add an iota of content. Yet she, as well as other Israelis who have imitated her or begun to speak in the same way independently, have had an effect. Increasingly one hears in Israeli speech, especially in public utterances, ideologically driven feminine forms added to masculine ones that are already sexually inclusive. President Herzog's *ezrahiyot v'ezrahey yisra'el* is a good example of this. In fact, it owes Michaeli a double debt, because the political crisis that caused the president to address the nation would never have existed had Michaeli not, before the election, rejected pleas that the Labor party run on a single list with the left-wing Meretz—a refusal that led to a loss of Knesset seats for the center-left and the right's victory. In doing so, one might say, she let down her voters and her voters.



TIKVAH PODCAST AT
MOSAIC AND MALKA
SIMKOVICH

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About the authors

A weekly podcast, produced in partnership with the Tikvah Fund, offering up the best thinking on Jewish thought and culture.

Podcast: Malka Simkovich on God's Maternal Love

A professor of Jewish studies joins us to talk about why the Hebrew Bible sometimes portrays God as a mother, and what that means.

Podcast: Malka Simkovich

One of the great debates in the history of Jewish theology is about how to reconcile two contradictory truths. First, that God is beyond human comprehension, and—unlike pagan deities—does not have a corporeal presence and is not subject to human emotions. Second, that the Hebrew Bible often describes God in human, bodily terms, as do the liturgy and rabbinic elaborations on Scripture.

Thus, in one of the most poignant moments of the liturgical year, Jewish worshippers refer to God as *Avinu Malkeinu*, “our Father, our King.” This is but one of many Jewish prayers that, following the biblical text, describe God as a father. And God has long been thought of in paternal terms in the Jewish imagination.

Yet, as Moses Maimonides and other Jewish philosophers never tire of reminding us, God exists beyond such human categories as sex, and can't fully be comprehended as a father. Therefore it is no contradiction that there are also aspects of womanhood and motherhood—specifically its creative, generative capabilities—that can be used in describing God. And perhaps that is why the Hebrew Bible sometimes portrays God not only a

father but also as a mother. Malka Simkovich, whose essay on this subject was published in August 2022 in the *Christian Century*, discusses biblical portrayals of God's maternal love with *Mosaic's* editor Jonathan Silver.

The Arab Revolt against the British That Created the Israel-Palestinian Conflict

FEBRUARY 22, 2023

From Oren Kessler
at *History News Network*

For three years before World War II, Palestinian Arabs attacked Jews and fought against British rule—leaving roughly 500 Jews and 250 British dead. **Oren Kessler**, the author of a new book on the episode, explains how it laid the groundwork for much of what has transpired since then:

The Great Revolt of 1936 to 1939 was the crucible in which Palestinian identity coalesced. It united rival families, urban and rural, rich and poor, in a single struggle against a common foe: the Jewish national enterprise—Zionism—and its midwife the British empire. A six-month general strike, one of the longest anywhere in modern history, roused Arabs and Muslims worldwide to the Palestine cause.

Yet the revolt would ultimately turn on itself. A convulsion of infighting and score-settling shred the Arab social fabric, sidelined pragmatists for extremists, and propelled tens of thousands of refugees out of the country. British forces did the rest, seizing arms, occupying cities, and waging a counterinsurgency. . . . When the dust cleared, at least 5,000—perhaps more than 8,000—Arabs were dead, of whom at least 1,500 likely fell at Arab hands. More than 20,000 were seriously wounded. Arab Palestine's fighting capacity was debilitated, its economy gutted, its leaders—above all, Grand Mufti Amin al-Husseini—banished.

The revolt to end Zionism had instead crushed the Arabs themselves, leaving them crippled in facing the Jews' own drive for statehood a decade on. . . . To the Jews the insurgency would leave a very different inheritance. It was then Zionist leaders began to abandon illusions over Arab acquiescence, to confront the unnerving prospect that fulfilling their dreams of sovereignty might mean forever clinging to the sword.

Ukraine, Israel, and the Russia-Iran Axis

FEBRUARY 22, 2023

From Michael Doran, Emanuele Ottolenghi, and Mark Levin at *Jewish Confederation of Ukraine*

When the Biden administration entered office, argues **Michael Doran**, it believed that China, Russia, and the Middle East presented discrete problems that could be handled separately. The war in Ukraine and the Iranian decision to provide the Kremlin with military hardware have given the lie to this approach. Doran, the Iran expert **Emanuele Ottolenghi**, and the expert on Russian-Jewish affairs **Mark Levin** explain what brings these two authoritarian revanchist powers together, their shared opposition to the Western democracies, and the dangers their cooperation poses to both Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Levin also observes that whatever the results of the current conflict, it is likely to bode ill for Russia's Jews.

As a New Round of Fighting Seems Poised to Begin, Palestinians Must Ask Themselves What They Have Gained from Violence

FEBRUARY 21, 2023
From Shany Mor
at *UnHerd*

Despite the wave of terrorist attacks in the past several weeks, and the various raids the IDF has conducted on the West Bank to apprehend the perpetrators or to prevent further terror, there has not been, in **Shany Mor**'s view, a "spiraling escalation." Nonetheless, Mor worries that the situation of relative peace that has held since the quashing of the second intifada is more tenuous than ever. He also warns against pending legislation that would legalize the Jewish village of H̄omesh in Samaria, which was built in contravention of Israeli law:

The proposed law . . . essentially tells the armed thugs who violated Israeli law for the past few years, commandeered private property, engaged in violent scuffles with the Israel police and the IDF, and were linked repeatedly to harassment of Palestinian civilians nearby, that this is and was a legitimate way to pursue political interests.

At the same time, writes Mor, one must also look to the other side of the conflict to understand the present tensions:

Any serious discussion of the Palestinian state should ask whether or not life has improved since the Palestinians rejected statehood at the end of the Oslo process in 2000 and opted instead for violent confrontation with Israel. This isn't a rhetorical question for Israeli public diplomacy, but one the Palestinians should be asking their leadership.

Yet to pose this question would be to acknowledge a kind of agency that exalted victimhood doesn't allow for. It is now nearly 23 years since Yasir Arafat rejected Ehud Barak's Camp David Summit and instead gambled on a violent terror campaign in the hope of better terms. There was no way of knowing then that this gamble would turn out so badly. At the time, it wasn't viewed as a particularly controversial decision; what's striking, however, is how that perception hasn't changed..

Jimmy Carter's Jewish Problem

OCTOBER 23, 2018
From Meir Soloveichik
at *Commentary*

Jimmy Carter has publicly cited his knowledge of the Old and New Testaments and his Christian faith as having given him special qualifications for shaping Middle East policy, and he has, in his own words, “a strong religious motivation to try to bring peace to what I call the Holy Land.” In his memoir of his years as a senior aide to President Carter, Stuart Eizenstat breaks from his generally admiring tone in telling of two episodes that revealed much about *how* his former boss’s reading of the Bible informed his policies. Both incidents occurred when Carter was teaching Sunday school—something he didn’t give up after his inauguration. **Meir Soloveichik** writes:

The subject of his first class [after assuming the presidency] was the tale of Jesus driving the moneylenders from the Temple. The press soon reported that the president had informed his students that this story was “a turning point” in Christ’s life. “He had directly challenged in a fatal way the existing church, and there was no possible way for the Jewish leaders to avoid the challenge. So they decided to kill Jesus.” Anguished religious leaders involved in interfaith engagement wrote the White House to object to this simplistic gloss on a subject that has inspired persecution, and murder, of Jews for centuries. . . .

He soon spoke at a Sunday-school class again; and, with an Associate Press reporter in attendance, told those assembled that Jesus, in proclaiming himself the messiah, was aware that he was risking death “as quickly as [it] could be arranged by the Jewish leaders, who were very powerful.” . . .

Eizenstat’s book allows us to understand how episodes such as these reveal how Carter’s own insensitivity to the Jewish historical experience, and his understanding of the Bible, colored his attitude toward matters pertaining to the Middle East. The president harbored a deep dislike for Menachem Begin, “with all his obduracy and legalisms,” [a phrase that combines two classic Christian stereotypes of Jews]. Eizenstat further writes that Carter saw American Jewish leaders and Israel “through the filter of the Bible, more the New than the Old Testament.” . . .

At the same time, Eizenstat’s description of Carter’s Christianity, and the impact that it had on his own attitudes, should be a clarion call to all who care about the future. Carter’s story should impress on Jews the fact that American Christian support for Israel is by no means inevitable. Tens of millions of them still love and support the Jewish state, but . . . this is not at all guaranteed to endure in the next generation. . . . [I]nfluenced by the fashionable nature of progressive issues and by biblical criticism, many young evangelicals are predisposed to embrace the Palestinian narrative of Israeli oppression.

Drawing on Robert Nicholson's 2013 essay for *Mosaic*, Soloveichik suggests that this problem can be remedied by bringing Christians to Israel and giving them the opportunity to see its realities.

Religious Freedom, School Choice, and the Politics of Orthodox Jewry in America

FEBRUARY 23, 2023

From Michael A. Helfand
at *18Forty*

Among the foremost legal debates over religion and state in the U.S. at the moment is the question of whether government funds may, or perhaps must, be directed to religious educational institutions. For the Orthodox, who tend to spend a large portion of their income on private religious schooling for their children, the question has pressing, practical consequences. **Michael A. Helfand**, in conversation with David Bashevkin, carefully outlines the fundamental constitutional issues at stake, and tells the story of how, as early as the 1960s, these concerns prompted Orthodox Jews to form a distinct organizational profile within American Jewry. Helfand also addresses the relationship between advocacy for parochial group interests and the broader duties of citizenship.
