

# VIEWPOINTS

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Editor's note: This and the next issue of Viewpoints are devoted to the two most prominent popular movements in Israel: Gush Emunim and Shalom Achshav (Peace Now). Each issue features an article written by an activist in that particular movement. Gush Emunim appeared following the Yom Kippur War and Peace Now following the Sadat peace initiative. From their beginnings, each was capable of mobilizing tens of thousands of supporters for their causes, and, by doing so, played a major role in developing the ways in which the issues of peace and the territories are given public expression.

## GUSH EMUNIM AND ISRAEL'S NATIONAL INTEREST

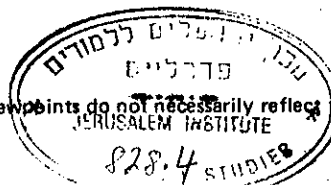
Mordechai Nisan

### HISTORICAL RIGHTS

Gush Emunim, the popular movement for large-scale Israeli settlement in Judea and Samaria, is first and foremost a Jewish phenomenon. It draws upon the ancient belief of Abraham's people that the Land of Israel is the unique possession of the Jewish nation. It expresses the modern Zionist conviction that Jews must actively recover their homeland by forging a living link with it, rather than just emotionally or intellectually pondering that link. And, Gush Emunim understands Israel's present agonies and dangers - besides her glorious dreams - as endemic to the "Jewish condition" in history, and not the result of a particular constellation of international events. Beyond any other attributes of the movement, the Jewish essence of Gush Emunim is vividly apparent in the memories it nourishes from the past as it moves towards the unknown future.

One of the most problematic, though little discussed, questions of recent Jewish history has yet to be answered: why did Israel refrain, after its dramatic military victory in 1967, from settling the liberated areas of Judea and Samaria - the heart and soul of Eretz Israel - taken in one of the most just wars ever fought? After waiting 2,000 years to return to the homeland, after 80 years of Zionist renewal, after 19 years of territorial vulnerability with narrow bor-

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ders, what was it that inhibited Israel from rediscovering, retaking, repossessing Judea and Samaria? Why was the Jewish instinct numb? Why did a natural outpouring of Israeli national energies not follow?

This raises the issue of Israel's self-identity, in a psychological sense, at a deeper level than merely questioning the process of policy-making in 1967 and after. Instead of exercising its moral, legal, and very existential right to incorporate Judea and Samaria - like Jerusalem - into the national fabric of Israeli life, successive governments awaited developments. They hoped to fill the national vacuum with a peace potent instead.

#### IDEOLOGY VS. PRAGMATISM

In this context Gush Emunim represents the force of ideology as opposed to the method of pragmatism. In the West ideology has become a bad word, suggesting blind commitment to ideas, an avoidance of reality, a dogmatic faith that has no place in an enlightened world. In the East - the Communist bloc, Asian nations, the Arab-Muslim world - ideology is a live force. It defines national identity, fixes political goals, and fortifies popular strength. The Viet Cong were very unpragmatic in confronting America, but were ideologically prepared to beat her. The Soviet Union may prove to be pragmatically cooperative with the USA regarding detente, yet still preserves its ideological posture in expanding Communist influence around the globe.

The Arab-Muslim world is 'on fire' and dedicated to return to its religious sources and national roots in ways which threaten to burn all who come into contact in the process. The Arabs know who they are and where they want to go - and who they are willing to sacrifice on the way. It is this world that Israel (and the West) confronts. Israel, still discussing 'who is a Jew,' has yet to articulate its own national identity (which was, until modern times, never in doubt for over 3,000 years!). Israel, divided within, and unsure of its rights, lacks the national unity and conviction to effectively face the external Arab enemy. Seeking a modern pragmatic ethic, social ease, and an American life-style, Israel does not possess the national fibre, collective will and popular determination to successfully deal with the Muslim-Arab world. Israel's pragmatism - no matter how civilized and pleasant it appears - will never be able to compete with the Arab world's ideological strength.

#### THE POLITICS OF SETTLEMENT

The Gush Emunim approach calls for great national effort to settle thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of Jews in the area of Judea and Samaria. Founded in 1974 the movement was an expression of popular hope and vitality after the difficult Yom Kippur War of 1973 and during the national depression that clouded the national spirit and continued to do so, in fact, today. Basing itself on the national-religious yearning of B'nai Akiva, the Gush organized outside the framework of parliamentarism.

politics, yet began to influence the political arena and bring about the creation of new settlements. Ofra, north-east of Jerusalem, was the first Gush Emunim yishuv (settlement) established in 1975. Over the years some 17 communities have gone up; these nuclei are situated primarily in Samaria (the northern part of the West Bank), many located in historical and Biblical places - Shilo, Beit-El, Givon, Dotan - that recall the beginnings of Jewish history in the Land. The Arab design to uproot the Jews from Israel, expressed through some 60 years of armed hostility, would now be countered by planting the Jews deep in the soil of the homeland.

The settlements are very underdeveloped in material terms. Their housing quarters are small and temporary; their size is restricted; their development very slow. The present Likud government was voted into power in 1977 on a platform that called for large-scale Jewish settlement in Judea and Samaria. However, the government has been divided, confused and anxious about fulfilling what it promised its voters. The national interest to create Jewish settlements, while recognized before the elections, was compromised and endangered after them.

Since 1967 a national consensus has identified the basic ingredients of policy towards Judea and Samaria that all governments have accepted: (1) to retain all or at least part of the territory in Israeli hands; (2) to prevent the creation of an Arab PLO state there; (3) to maintain a military foothold as a permanent feature in any final settlement. These goals touch on the very viability of Israel to survive. There are great forces that are trying to deny the achievement of these goals: US policy wants Israel to withdraw from all territories and put her back to the 1967 borders of strategic vulnerability on her eastern frontier; Arab policy wants to eliminate Israel from Judea and Samaria in order to create the PLO state there as a first step to Israel's ultimate and final destruction. Besides large-scale Jewish settlement as Gush Emunim believes, very little can be done to realize the national objective of retaining an Israeli presence in the area.

Settlement activity has a political message. It concretizes the Israeli need to establish a permanent civilian presence on the mountain terrain of Judea and Samaria that overlooks the exposed lowlands and coastal region of Tel-Aviv. It suggests that normal Jewish life is being conducted in the area as a natural expression of a growing society, and not as an unnatural condition of an army ruling another (Arab) population. Settlements like Karnei Shomron, Elkana, Halamish, and Kedumim carry with them - besides the Jewish spirit and the Zionist elan - the political meaning of national determination to preserve the area for Israeli well-being. This perspective leaves far behind the image of the Gush as a group of romantic, misguided youth organizing a 'happening' on the hills of Samaria. In reality, the settlement efforts

of the Gush constitute the only solid basis for putting into practice the national consensus of keeping an Israeli hold on Judea and Samaria.

#### SETTLEMENTS AND SECURITY

The connection between settlements and security should now be more evident. To recognize the strategic importance of Judea and Samaria for Israel and to oppose Jewish settlement is an exercise in political illogic. There is no credible way of preventing a complete loss of the area except through massive Jewish settlement activity to turn Israel's presence into a large, permanent fact. Even the Americans will at times agree that Judea and Samaria would be a danger spot for Israel if controlled unilaterally by an Arab power; therefore, the US would consider instituting security guarantees, early warning stations and demilitarization provisions following an Israeli withdrawal. There is no doubt that Israeli security would be tenuous at best under that new, precarious situation. Singular Arab sovereignty in the territory would nullify the legitimacy and viability of all those security arrangements. Israel would then find herself back to the pre-1967 line with the 10-mile frontier near Netanya and Kfar Saba that Abba Eban called the "borders of Auschwitz."

Massive Jewish settlement, which Gush Emunim has advocated for years, is the only realistic way to retain part or all of Judea and Samaria, prevent the creation of a PLO state there, and maintain a permanent military foothold on the strategic mountain range running from Jenin and Shechem (Nablus) in the north to Hebron in the south. Any other plan, like the Allon scheme for settlement only in the Jordan valley plain along the river, is pure illusion. That isolated slice of Jewish settlement could not survive, as it would be separated from Israel by the Arab entity of the West Bank in which Jews are eliminated. On large-scale settlement in the heartland of the territory is a realistic demonstration of a national resolve to assure strategic security by maintaining a Jewish population in Judea and Samaria.

Settlement activity has a security message. Gush communities are part of the military formation for territorial defense on the eastern front. The settlers constitute the beginnings of a permanent pacification force in a tense area. Their geographical location is vitally relevant to Israel's well-being within pre-1967 lines. For example: the settlement of Maale Adumim, on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho in an unpopulated region, was conceived by former Labor governments necessary to strengthen the safety of the capital from a Jordanian attack from the east (as happened in the Six-Day War). But only very feeble steps were taken to create this new reality on Jerusalem's eastern flank. Maale Adumim is still - about 8 years after its permanent site received official approval - a small temporary settlement. Its permanent location is only now being prepared; it is not built. And Jerusalem

still the first target for an Arab attack coming east across the Jordan River up through the Judean desert to the nation's capital. Is this not an instance of outrageous negligence on the part of Israeli leaders responsible for the country's national security? It was due to Gush Emunim efforts that Maale Adumim first took root in 1975, after an open confrontation with a Labor government that had earlier approved its creation.

Today there are some 12,000 Jews in Judea and Samaria compared to 700,000 Arabs. The Arabs, officially subject to an Israeli military regime, have great liberty in expressing views; in building houses without legal authorization; in planting fields which do not belong to them; and in causing public disturbances (stone-throwing, etc.) without undue fear of official punishment. For the Jews, the regime is stiff indeed. Only land which has been approved by government and then, often, authorized as "state territory" by the courts is open for Jewish settlement. The attempt to expand existing settlements is often prevented by suspect Arab claims which the Israeli authorities are hesitant to expose fearing a "bad international press." The legitimate use of weapons for Jewish self-defense is often condemned by the military regime which had authorized the employment of arms when circumstances justified doing so. While Israel rules, the Arabs continue to expand their hold on Judea and Samaria and lay the foundation for the PLO state-to-be, and the Jews struggle against their own brothers for the chance of saving the area for the country's welfare. A stranger scenario could hardly be imagined.

#### CONSCIENCE OF ISRAEL OR OBSTACLE TO PEACE?

Gush Emunim remains on the margins of political life, yet plays an active role in public affairs. It campaigns through the press and calls on the Jewish population to help finance its efforts. It demonstrates against territorial withdrawal which undermines Israel's national security. It considers that Sadat's insatiable appetite for Israeli concessions and his unswerving efforts to treat Begin as an inferior do not bring strength to Israel or honor to the Jewish people. It carries out unpredictable surprise actions to arouse the government from its lethargy and reactivate a national spirit dormant since 1975. It pushes for more and more Jewish settlement - not to block peace - but to assure that any future settlement with the Arabs is not realized at the expense of the country's national viability. Seeing Gush Emunim as an obstacle to peace is to adopt the Arab view of the conflict which justifies any and all actions and demands and sees in any Israeli action or demand the epitome of intransigence. That is nothing but a self-hating disposition that belittles Jewish pride and threatens Israeli welfare.

The critics of Gush Emunim praise moderation and realism and condemn the 'stiff-necked' and unrealistic approach of the settlement movement. Part of the criticism derives, as Agriculture Minister Ariel Sharon has pointed out, from feelings of jealousy by those segments of the population whose past is a glorious tale of patriotic, pioneering successes which have not, however, been continued by the present generation. Gush Emunim is doing, with courage and sacrifice, what they did and should

now be doing, but are not. Another basis of the criticism is pure weakness, a feeling of exhaustion, a loss of will, and its justification as the 'calm of strength' which is forbearance from reaction. This is really the 'calm of exhaustion' - not a divine self-control but a human failing.

The story is told that when Prime Minister Begin returned from Camp David, having surrendered everything to Sadat and Carter, he explained that he could do nothing else because "the people are tired." Whatever we say, let us at least not praise exhaustion and call it realism and vision. Is it not unrealistic to believe that Israel can be secure and live safely in a 10-mile width border? Is it not naive to trust in the permanence of peace in the Middle East as a way to assure Israel's welfare? The entire pattern of thought and logic underlying Gush Emunim's activity expresses a strong measure of realism in political, military, and ideological terms.

Part of the reason why Israel survived against the onslaught of Arab hatred for over 30 years is because the Jews wanted to live more than the Arabs were able to prevent them from living. The will to live, national resolve not to succumb against overwhelming odds and grave dangers, carried the courageous Jewish people to military victory and to strengthen the foundations of Israeli statehood. With morale down and confidence undermined, the spirit of Gush Emunim promises to uphold national determination in these troubled days. Their settlements, small but vibrant, are the glowing lights in the dark Israeli sky.

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