

From Israel's Perspective, Joe Biden Is as Good as It Gets—for a Democrat

By Shmuel Rosner

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And any vice-presidential pick is better than Susan Rice.

In the pile of old notebooks I saved from when I was covering American politics for an Israeli newspaper (and when reporters still used a pad and pen), I found five mentions of Joe Biden's Israel story.

Most of them are from 2008 — first during the Democratic primary, when Mr. Biden was running against Barack Obama, and then the general election, when Mr. Biden was running alongside Mr. Obama. I was covering that election for the Tel Aviv-based Haaretz, and every mention of Israel was of interest to me. Mr. Biden told the same story at least five times: Whenever he needed to emphasize his long-term commitment to Israel's safety, it's what he turned to most often.

The story goes like this. Mr. Biden starts by saying that he's known "every Israeli prime minister since Golda Meir." Then he shares a few anecdotes about their meeting in 1973. Usually, he relays how Meir told him that Israel had a "secret weapon." Expecting it to be bombs or ammunition, Mr. Biden waits for the prime minister to finish. But then Meir tells him: "Our secret weapon, senator, is we have no place else to go." It usually got applause.

The last mention I can find of the Golda Meir story is from an event in April 2015. It began with the following statement: "My name is Joe Biden, and everybody knows I love Israel."

My instinct is to suspect any politician who uses such grandiose phrases, but the truth is, I don't think Mr. Biden's feelings about Israel are just well-rehearsed crowd pleasers. When I asked Israeli officials who know Mr. Biden, I was told that his sentiment was genuine. One very senior Israeli official, who has known Mr. Biden for many years, told me last week that from an Israeli perspective, he is the ideal Democratic candidate.

This means that we Israelis might be denied our custom of worrying about the American presidential election. We worried about what Bill Clinton might do, because he was relatively unknown. We worried about what George W. Bush might do, because he was the son of a previous president with whom the Israeli government had troubles. We worried about what Mr. Obama might do, because of the views he expressed.

The United States is Israel's main ally in a difficult world. The relationship is a major part of Israel's national security strategy. Without the backing of the United States, Israel looks weaker — and in the Middle East, weaker countries are the prey of stronger countries.

Israelis could be extra worried about the coming

election because we fear losing President Trump. For many reasons, he is seen by Israelis as one of the friendliest leaders in the history of the United States-Israel alliance. Israel is one of few countries in the world in which the president is highly popular: A whopping 56 percent of Israelis prefer Mr. Trump in the upcoming election, compared to 16 percent who support Mr. Biden.

As far as Israelis are concerned, Mr. Biden has two disadvantages. He is not Mr. Trump, and he is a Democrat. In other words, he is not the candidate they support and he comes from the party many of them distrust. In recent years, there's been a steady drift of Democratic voters — and some Democratic politicians — away from Israel. They are more likely to say that the United States should be an impartial broker in the Middle East, rather than take Israel's side — and they tended to oppose recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital. So it's not unjustified for Israelis to worry.

Israelis have a lot of questions for Mr. Biden. Would his administration allow Israel to use military force against Hamas, Hezbollah or Iranian forces in Syria? (The Obama administration once suspended a shipment of Hellfire missiles to Israel because it was displeased with Israel's use of force in Gaza.) Will he restore the Iran nuclear deal, as he says he intends to? Will he pressure Israel to evacuate settlements as the Palestinians want and as more Democratic voters demand?

Of course, it would be foolish to predict the exact policies of a Biden administration in the Middle East. But there is history to consider. Mr. Biden is hardly a newcomer, after all.

He was vice president to Mr. Obama, a leader Israelis remember as a troublemaker. And Mr. Biden battled over West Bank settlements with Israeli prime ministers from Menachem Begin to Benjamin Netanyahu. But he also befriended Israeli leaders, from Shimon Peres to, again, Mr. Netanyahu. "Bibi, I don't agree with a damn thing you say, but I love you," Mr. Biden said in 2012. His love will surely grow even more, if and when the prediction Mr. Netanyahu made more than a quarter century ago — that Mr. Biden would one day be president — becomes a reality.

Mr. Biden understands Israel's concerns. He understands the need to use force. In my notebooks, I found a reference to the April 2007 Democratic primary debate, in which he lectured two of his rivals. "Let's stop all this happy talk here about the use of force doesn't make sense," he said. "You guys can have your happy talk, there's real life." His patience with hostile governments is limited. His direct manner and pragmatic tendencies make

him someone Israelis appreciate and find easy to work with.

My country also hopes that Mr. Biden could provide an opportunity for Israel to re-emerge as a truly bipartisan cause in America. Mr. Biden is a self-defined Zionist and a longtime supporter of Israel familiar with both the issues and the main players, who instinctively understands of the country's security concerns. Sure, pressures from within the party could be a problem. Sure, there would be thorny

disagreements to surmount if he becomes the next president.

But from an Israeli perspective, Mr. Biden is as good as it gets — for a Democrat.

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Hizballah Bears Responsibility for the Beirut Blast

By Hussein Ibish

bloomberg.com

August 5, 2020

There are no prizes for guessing who in Lebanon might be interested in storing such vast quantities of explosive material.

As if the Lebanese haven't suffered enough. For months, they have been caught between an economic meltdown, crumbling public services and a surging pandemic. Now they must count the dead and survey the extensive damage to their capital after two giant explosions on Tuesday.

The blasts, especially the second, were so huge they were reportedly heard and felt in Cyprus. At least 100 people are reported to have been killed — that number will almost certainly rise — and thousands injured. A large expanse of the port and its immediate neighborhood lies in smoking ruin; miles away, streets are full of shattered glass.

Prime Minister Hassan Diab's government says the explosions were caused when careless welding ignited about 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate, a highly combustible material used as fertilizer and for bomb-making. By comparison, Timothy McVeigh used about 2.4 tons of the same chemical in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. The 2015 disaster in the Chinese city of Tianjin was caused by the explosion of 800 tons of ammonium nitrate.

The equivalent of 1,100 Oklahoma City-size bombs could indeed account for the devastation and the reddish mushroom cloud that plumed gaudily over the Beirut port. But it doesn't mean Lebanese will simply accept that the explosion was an unavoidable, force majeure event.

Assuming the official account holds up, the disaster again exposes the rot that is destroying the country — an especially corrosive mix of corruption, ineptitude and malign intentions.

The ammonium nitrate was apparently seized in 2013 from a Moldovan-flagged ship traveling from Georgia to Mozambique. But someone — who, we don't yet know — brought it into Beirut; instead of returning, auctioning or disposing of it, the port management inexcusably allowed it to be stored there for years.

There are no prizes for guessing who in Lebanon might be interested in keeping such vast quantities of explosive material close at hand. The U.S. Treasury and Israel both believe Hezbollah controls many of Beirut's port facilities.

Diab, whose government is entirely dependent on political support from Hezbollah and its Maronite Christian allies, has vowed to hold those responsible to account. More than likely, some minor officials will be fingered for permitting improper storage of highly dangerous material.

Iran-backed Hezbollah, with its large and well-armed militia as well as its political hold on the prime minister, has nothing to fear from the state. But it will not escape public opprobrium: Most Lebanese will assume the ammonium nitrate belonged to the militia, for use in Syria and against Israel.

Why the chemicals exploded is another matter, rich with possibilities of conjecture. In the court of public opinion, the usual suspects will be rounded up from the ongoing shadow war between Iran and Hezbollah on one side and Israel on the other. President Donald Trump, who can be relied upon to make everything worse, speculated it was a deliberate attack. This will be picked up and amplified by conspiracy theorists in the Middle East.

But suspicions of Hezbollah's culpability will intensify on Friday when a United Nations special tribunal for Lebanon that has been looking into the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri is expected to issue verdicts in cases against four Hezbollah cadres being tried in absentia. The men are in hiding, and have not been seen in years; even if they are found guilty, no one expects them to be handed over. Hariri, remember, was killed in a massive blast.

A guilty verdict would increase domestic pressure on Hezbollah, its allies and the government. When Lebanese have finished mourning their dead, anger will return — the kind that fueled the massive street demonstrations that brought down Diab's predecessor last October.

Even without the Beirut blasts, the timing of the verdict would have been awkward for Diab, who is struggling to negotiate an economic bailout with the International Monetary Fund: Among the hurdles is Hezbollah's resistance to the necessary reforms.

Hezbollah finds itself uncomfortably positioned as the principal backer of the government presiding over a thoroughgoing collapse of the Lebanese state and society. It will not easily shake off blame for the Beirut blast, or for the Hariri assassination. Even in this country that has

suffered so much and for so long, the latest of Lebanon's tragedies will not soon be forgotten, nor its perpetrators

forgiven.

End the Jewish State? Let's try some honesty, first

By Daniel Gordis

timesofisrael.com

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To read Peter Beinart's piece is to slog through an array of misrepresentations and omissions, and to feel dismissed because we know he hopes we don't know enough to catch him.

To read Peter Beinart's Twitter feed over the past day is to (almost) get the sense that the publication of his "Yavne: A Jewish Case for Equality in Israel-Palestine" is an occasion of great intellectual moment, a breakthrough in Zionist thinking that might renew American-Jewish enthusiasm for a new, more moral Jewish project in Palestine. While "Yavne" is, indeed, heating up the Twittersphere and other social media worlds, its appearance is not, in fact, the introduction of a bold new idea. In almost 8,000 words, Beinart strings together an astonishing array of sleights of hand and misrepresentations that makes "Yavne" little more than a screed that is an insult to the intelligence of his readers. (While Beinart's NYT Op-Ed today is entitled, "Why I Gave Up on the Two State Solution," there, too, he says that he can "imagine a Jewish home that is not a Jewish state." It's good to know that the sleight of hand is not limited to Jewish Currents, where the main article appeared.) Beinart is a smart guy; he knows that for his readers to buy his thesis, it is important that they not know very much. Luckily for him, that is a safe bet.

Before embarking, it is worth noting that Beinart and I agree about a great deal. (And, I should also mention, we did a podcast together for some time, trying to demonstrate that two people with very different positions could have civil conversations. But that was back when Beinart at least said that he was committed to a Jewish state.) About what do we agree? I share Peter's deep frustration over the plight of Palestinian Arabs. I, too, worry about racism in Israeli society. I, too, want something big to change here. I also think that the status quo is not tenable for the long run. Yet we also disagree about a great deal. He thinks that Israeli ethnic cleansing of the West Bank is likely; I think (and pray) that is it essentially unthinkable. He discounts the threat of Palestinian terror; I suspect that, living in Jerusalem, it is more of an issue for me than it is for him on the Upper West Side. He believes that most Palestinians accept Jews' rights to live in "Palestine"; I think the evidence is much more ambiguous and suspect that hatred of the Jew runs far deeper in Arab society than he wants to admit.

But those are all substantive discussions that would require an extensive and honest exchange of ideas; all I seek to do in the paragraphs that follow is to illustrate how far Beinart's "Yavne" is from honest. A full analysis of the dozens of misrepresentations would require far more room than this platform allows, so that will have to wait. Instead,

in order to afford readers some perspective as Beinart's piece is making waves, I will simply point to some of Beinart's more egregious sleights of hand to indicate what "Yavne" really is.

Beinart writes that "opposing a Jewish state means risking a second Holocaust ... fear of annihilation has come to define what it means to be an authentic Jew." Implicitly, what Beinart is suggesting is that the role that the Holocaust has in American Jewish consciousness says something about how Israelis, too, think about their country's purpose. Israelis are immobilized and shaped, he thinks, by a fear of annihilation. That's how we ostensibly got where we are.

Beinart is correct that fear of annihilation is what for decades enabled many American Jewish organizations to "sell" Israel to American Jews, largely because of the guilt they felt over their inaction during the Holocaust and because selling that fear of annihilation did not require that American Jews possess much knowledge about Judaism, Israel or the Jewish intellectual canon. He is also right that that strategy for selling Israel to American Jews is no longer working. But to assume that fear of annihilation is what motivates Israeli life is to illustrate how little he knows about Israel.

In fact, though, the miracle of Israel is that we no longer worry about annihilation. Of course, we have to be vigilant about Iran. Of course, we need to protect ourselves against Palestinian terror and Hezbollah's lethal arsenal of precision rockets that can hit every inch of Israel. Of course, we need to prepare ourselves for the possibility (likelihood?) that the left wing of the democratic party will gain ascendancy in America and Israel will no longer be able to count on America's support. It is true that we have had to cultivate what Johannes Fest, the German, conservative, Roman Catholic passionate anti-Nazi, called the Jewish "instinct for danger, which had preserved them through the ages."

Yet while we preserve that "instinct for danger," it is not the fear of annihilation that motivates Israel. Israeli children (excepting those who live near Hamas along the Gaza border) do not spend their lives wondering when the enemy will attack – the miracle of Israel is that those days are gone; for Israelis who came of age after the Yom Kippur War, they're even hard to recall. At one Shabbat meal a decade ago, we were having an angst-ridden conversation about some danger Israel faced, when our Israeli-born son-in-law (who also spent many years in IDF Intelligence) said, "I really don't know what you're talking about. I've lived here my whole life and there's never been a single moment when I was worried that anyone could destroy us." It was a reminder to me that even then,

having lived in Israel probably more than a decade, how deeply ingrained the Diaspora mentality, of which Beinart writes. Israelis of our kids' generation (and younger generations, too) never think about annihilation.

Most of us have taken the hermetically sealed bomb shelters in our homes and drilled holes in the steel-reinforced concrete wall for washing machines and dryers, or air conditioning vents for small bedrooms. It's against the law, technically, but we'd much rather have a laundry room than a place to hide. My wife and I have government-issued gas masks somewhere, but I couldn't begin to tell you where they are. We Israelis are not stupid or naïve, but it is not annihilation that motivates our lives in the Jewish state.

So what does motivate our lives? Israel is, for the Israelis who think about such things, a grand experiment in the cultural, intellectual, historical, linguistic and religious rebirth that can unfold when a people is restored, with sovereignty, to its ancestral homeland. If Beinart could read the Shabbat culture sections of either Ha'aretz on the left or Makor Rishon on the right, he would see the celebration of Hebrew poetry each week, the preoccupation with newly published Israeli books, interviews with philosophers and public intellectuals. Yes, there are articles about Bibi and corruption and annexation and the pandemic and poverty and the demise of America and much more — but nowhere would he find fretting about annihilation.

It is obviously not Peter's fault that he cannot read those newspapers or Israeli literature until it is translated (and most of it is not), or mine Israeli op-ed pages of all sorts for a sense of what animates us. He is not to blame for the fact that he only "knows" what animates Israel by listening to the sales pitches of the very American Jewish institutions that he wishes to dismantle. But it's a reality he would do well to acknowledge.

What Beinart does know is that the revitalization of Jewish life that is Israel's hallmark would end with his proposal. We might well not be annihilated. But Jews would quickly become a minority here, just as they were in Europe. They would be surrounded by hostile masses, just as they were in Europe, and that would certainly (and rapidly) destroy the Jewish confidence that has been at the core of the Judaism's revitalization in Israel. In other words, Beinart cares more about the future of the Palestinians than he does about the future of Judaism's richness. That's his right, but he ought to admit that, too. As heretical as this will sound to the Jewish universalist progressives who are Beinart's minions, I care about both the Palestinians and the future of Judaism's richness — but if forced to choose (which would not be the case if the Palestinian position was different), I'm going with the People I am blessed to be a part of.

Other sleights of hand lie literally everywhere one turns. Just as he states as a matter of obvious fact (when he is mostly wrong) that Zionism is motivated by avoiding

annihilation, he is equally dishonest when it comes to defining what Zionism is.

"The essence of Zionism is not a Jewish State in the land of Israel; it is a Jewish home in the land of Israel." Again, banking on his readers' ignorance, Beinart adopts Dmitri Shumsky's read of Herzl's *The Jewish State*, without mentioning that Shumsky's view is far from mainstream, or that Nathan Birnbaum, an associate of Herzl, specifically called for the establishment of a sovereign Jewish state at the First Zionist Congress. When by the late 1930s, Ben-Gurion, Jabotinsky, Begin, Katznelson, Hazaz and others were all certain that they needed a state, it was because they understood that nothing else would keep the Jews in Palestine alive; what they wanted might have been a "home," but no "home" without a "state" was going to be possible. We could have a "state" — or we could have nothing. Beinart thinks we ought to gamble and see once again if maybe they were wrong; that we might end up with nothing does not seem to concern him.

He does mention the Brit Shalom movement's bi-national aspirations in the 1930s, but notably ignores the fact that, due to Arab rejection of their efforts, Brit Shalom has long since been relegated to the dustbin of history. He mentions Gershom Scholem, one of the Jewish world's intellectual giants of the 20th century, in passing, but of course does not note that Scholem, who had at one time been an avid supporter of something like Beinart's vision, later wrote to Hannah Arendt: "Certainly, as an old Brit Shalom follower, I myself have once belonged to the opposite camp. But I am not presumptuous enough to think that the politics of Brit Shalom wouldn't have found precisely the same Arab enemies, enemies who are mainly interested not in our morality or political convictions, but in whether or not we are here in Palestine at all."

Beinart is banking on the assumption that his readers will not know that his "new" idea has already been tried, and it failed. Beinart himself does know that, but positioning himself as the prophet of hope and reconciliation demands that he not mention that.

I offer, for now, but one last example of the sort of sleight of hand that makes Beinart's piece so manipulative of his own readership. In Beinart's world, Palestinians do not have agency. Read the 8,000 words, and you will see fault after fault after fault when it comes to Israel; the Palestinians are almost exclusively the victims here. (Do Beinart's readers know about the Peel Commission attempt to divide the land in 1937? The Partition Plan of 1947? The Arab Leagues' "No Peace, No Negotiations, No Recognition" of 1967? They probably don't, and that suits him just fine.) To read Beinart is to learn that responsibility for today's mess lies with Israel, not with the people who reside next to us. This infantilization of the Arabs has always struck me as utterly racist (and evokes that horrifying American use of "boy" for African American men), but that is another discussion. For the

moment, let's ignore the racism and just look at the dishonesty.

Beinart tell us that in 1994, many Palestinians hoped that the Palestinian Authority, which had just been created by the Oslo Accords, "would be the embryo of their state in the West Bank and Gaza." But, he continues, "as the prospect of Palestinian statehood has faded ..."

Why did it fade? Beinart writes as if someone hung a family portrait too close to a window for decades and then discovered, distraught and anguished, that it had faded away. He does not want his readers to know that Oslo failed because its signing unleashed a massive wave of Palestinian terror and Israeli death (which the Israeli right had predicted). He does not tell us that some Israelis who knew Yitzhak Rabin believe (and have written) that had Rabin not been assassinated, he was going to pull out of the Oslo Accords because it had led to such violence. He tells us that the PLO recognized Israel in 1988, but does not tell his readers that the Second Intifada, which claimed a horrific number of lives on both sides, followed Ehud Barak's offer of statehood Yasser Arafat, who instead of responding by demanding different terms and negotiations, coordinated the Second Intifada and did more than anyone in history to kill Palestinian statehood.

In sum, though this is but a small fraction of the examples to which one could point, to read Beinart's piece is to slog through an array of misrepresentations and omissions, to feel dismissed because we know he hopes we don't know enough to catch him.

Finally, one comment not about Beinart's argument, but his proposal. Ultimately, what Beinart's suggestion that we give up on Jewish statehood shows is how much more American than Jewish are his instincts.

Israel has had a long and complex history, stained time and again by many moral failings. Israelis have almost always responded by demanding that we be better, not by suggesting that we end the project. Israelis' frustration with the peace process, our government's now catastrophic mishandling of the pandemic, our medieval and misogynist, homophobic rabbinate, Israel's now massive unemployment, the "Price Tag" racists whom the government refuses to punish, the poverty in which Holocaust survivors live, the inequality that Israeli Arabs face daily and much more has not given rise to anything akin to America's desire to destroy itself.

The unfettered quest for self-immolation, the intellectual thinness of cancel culture, the rage that pulls down statues of Christopher Columbus and advocates abandoning capitalism for socialism without any regard for how Marx's and Lenin's theories unfolded in the Soviet Union, in China, in Cuba or elsewhere – all that is a distinctly American response. Israelis, for all their many faults, show little sign of the cultural fatigue, intellectual sloppiness or willed oblivion-to-consequences that are

now emblematic of America's youth. What Beinart has done is to essentially take America's desire for self-destruction and ask Israelis to adopt it.

No thanks.

We Israelis, like Americans, have had no perfect leaders. David Ben-Gurion was a racist who had utter disdain for darker-skinned Mizrahi Jews and their culture. Menachem Begin got innocent people killed in the King David bombing and decades later, launched the disastrous Lebanon War. Golda Meir famously asked, "What Palestinian people?" Ariel Sharon allowed the massacre at Sabra and Shatila.

Yet we also know that David Ben-Gurion built a Jewish state against all odds and kept it alive when that seemed impossible. Menachem Begin was instrumental in getting the British to leave Palestine, fought against military rule over Israeli Arabs, made peace with Egypt, returned the Sinai and destroyed Iraq's nuclear reactor. Golda Meir launched Israel's long tradition of reaching out to African countries, out of a belief that if we had independence and hope, they should, too. It was Ariel Sharon who got Israel out of Gaza.

That is why we're not tearing down statues (not that we erect that many, by the way, which is also interesting). We prefer to recognize that life is complicated, that great human beings are invariably also deeply flawed. The same is true of countries. Israel's conflict with the Palestinians is exhausting and depressing and surfaces much of Israel's ugliness. No one should "prove" their love for Israel by denying that.

But Israel was created not to be perfect, but to restore the Jewish people to its ancestral homeland, and thus to allow the Jewish people and its culture to thrive and flourish as it can nowhere else on earth. Looked at that way, Israel is not only miraculous, it is an extraordinary success. We Israelis can see our terrible mistakes and still take pride in what we've accomplished; many of us are horrified by what it still not right here, but we have no interest in Beinart's suggestion that we therefore commit national suicide.

Peter Beinart believes that because we cannot get the Palestinians to recognize our right to a state, we should knock over our proverbial king and give up the project. We believe that while we wait for the Palestinians to want a future more than they want revenge, we should build this society and the Jewish cultural, intellectual, religious and historical revival it makes possible. My bet is that Israelis will continue to build the society that is the largest, culturally richest, most intellectually dynamic Jewish community anywhere in the world, and that we'll still be at it long after Peter Beinart has been entirely forgotten.

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For Biden to be truly pro-Israel, he'll have to do more than just refute Trumpism.

By Nadav Tamir

forward.com

August 10, 2020

The unveiling of the 2020 Democratic Party platform raises the question of what approach the Democratic Party's presidential candidate, former Vice President Joe Biden, will take to foreign policy in general, and towards Israel in particular should he win the election. A Biden presidency promises positive change for the world and Israel, but will it suffice for a breakthrough on the paramount issue facing the future of the Zionist vision? Will the shift be sufficiently significant to extricate us from the status quo inexorably leading the Jewish State toward the moral and democratic catastrophe of a bi-national state?

Biden has all the makings of a successful president in terms of foreign policy. His approach would be antithetical to President Trump's, who espoused an America First doctrine that has turned the U.S. into "America Last" in its capacity to lead the free world.

Should he win the 2020 election, Biden's extensive experience would serve him in restoring the U.S. relationship with its allies in NATO and Asia. Under his leadership, we are likely to see a reawakening of U.S. leadership on critical global issues such as climate change, nuclear proliferation, human rights, epidemic control, as well as win-win free trade agreements, rather than unnecessary prestige-motivated conflicts.

In confronting rogue states such as Iran and North Korea, we would also definitely see an improvement over Trump should Biden win. Trump's bravado aside, during his term, tensions between the two Koreas have escalated, and Iran is closer to nuclear breakout than it was before his election. Cooperation with U.S. allies would replace Trump's erratic conduct vis-à-vis Russia and China, which has weakened the U.S.

And the change for Israel would be significant. Biden has a proven record of support for Israel as chair of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee and as Vice President. The U.S. under his command would resume the P5+1 alliance that enabled coordinated sanctions, significant supervision over Iran and empowerment of Iran's more moderate forces, which the Trump Administration crushed. The U.S. under a Biden administration could influence Syria's future more effectively than it did under Trump, who abandoned the arena to Russia, Turkey and Iran.

Biden would also no doubt resume U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority, which Trump eliminated, thereby restoring an important lever of influence over Palestinian

moderates. He would also likely renew Washington's ties with the Palestinian Authority and reinstate U.S. standing as a mediator with Israel.

Nonetheless, if Biden wants to help Israel confront the only real existential threat to its future, Biden must adopt a stand diametrically opposed to his instinctive tendencies. Despite his friendship for Israel and understanding that the two-state solution is crucial for its future and is in the best interests of the U.S., Biden must learn from his predecessors' failures.

If elected, Biden will have to adopt assertive leadership to extricate Israel from the toxic status quo in which it is mired. He will have to realize that Israeli politics is inherently incapable of historic decisions and that its impact on U.S. politics paralyzes every initiative.

Biden should learn from the presidents who greatly contributed to Israel's strategic standing by flexing the superpower's muscles at the expense of their short-term popularity: President Carter helped Israel attain the most strategic achievement of its history — the peace treaty with Egypt. President George Bush Sr. and his assertive Secretary of State Baker pushed Prime Minister Shamir to attend the Madrid Conference, which launched a new era of diplomatic relations with much of the world, including China and India. Israel's participation also led to PLO recognition of Israel.

Asserting his full presidential authority to help Israel would be less politically risky for Biden than it was for his predecessors. Most U.S. Jews support a two-state solution and Democrats no longer see the conflict as a zero sum game as they did in the past.

A new formula for a permanent agreement is not necessary. The existing ones are applicable. What we need is determination to invest political capital in implementing them.

Biden will undoubtedly be a pro-Israel President. But in order to be a significant president where Israel is concerned, one who translates his support into improving our strategic posture, he will have to move beyond his political comfort zone.

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Visit suburbanorthodox.org for the current issue.

2020 Democratic Party Platform (Draft) PP. 79-80 Middle East

Turning the page on two decades of large-scale military deployments and open-ended wars in the Middle East does not mean the United States will abandon a region where we and our partners²² still have enduring interests.

Democrats believe it's past time, however, to rebalance our tools, engagement, and relationships in the Middle East away from military intervention—leading with pragmatic diplomacy to lay the groundwork for a more peaceful, stable, and free region.

Democrats will call off the Trump Administration's race to war with Iran and prioritize nuclear diplomacy, de-escalation, and regional dialogue.

Democrats believe the United States should not impose regime change on other countries and reject that as the goal of U.S. policy toward Iran.

We believe the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) remains the best means to verifiably cut off all of Iran's pathways to a nuclear bomb.

The Trump Administration's 31 unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA isolated us from our allies and opened the door for Iran to resume its march toward a nuclear weapons capacity that the JCPOA had stopped. That's why returning to mutual compliance with the agreement is so urgent. The nuclear deal was always meant to be the beginning, not the end, of our diplomacy with Iran.

Democrats support a comprehensive diplomatic effort to extend constraints on Iran's nuclear program and address Iran's other threatening activities, including its regional aggression, ballistic missile program, and domestic repression.

Democrats also believe we need to reset our relations with our Gulf partners to better advance our interests and values. The United States has an interest in helping our partners contend with legitimate security threats; we will support their political and economic modernization and encourage efforts to reduce regional tensions. But we have no interest in continuing the blank check era of the Trump Administration, or indulging authoritarian impulses, internal rivalries, catastrophic proxy wars, or efforts to roll back political openings across the region.

Effective relations with the Gulf will help us reconnect Iraq to its neighbors and protect the country's stability, security, and sovereignty.

Democrats support a small, finite, and focused military presence to train our Iraqi partners so they can ensure the lasting defeat of ISIS.

We also support keeping up the offensive against ISIS in Syria to prevent it from regaining a foothold, and will stand by Kurdish and other critical partners in that fight.

We will work to repatriate foreign fighter detainees, and reinvigorate diplomacy to protect the humanitarian needs of all Syrians and find a political resolution for this horrific war.

Democrats believe a strong, secure, and democratic Israel is vital to the interests of the United States.

Our commitment to Israel's security, its qualitative military edge, its right to defend itself, and the 2016 Memorandum of Understanding is ironclad.

Democrats recognize the worth of every Israeli and every Palestinian. That's why we will work to help bring to an end a conflict that has brought so much pain to so many.

We support a negotiated two-state solution that ensures Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic state with recognized borders and upholds the right of Palestinians to live in freedom and security in a viable state of their own.

Democrats oppose any unilateral steps by either side—including annexation—that undermine prospects for two states. Democrats will continue to stand against incitement and terror.

We oppose settlement expansion. We believe that while Jerusalem is a matter for final status negotiations, it should remain the capital of Israel, an undivided city accessible to people of all faiths.

Democrats will restore U.S.-Palestinian diplomatic ties and critical assistance to the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza, consistent with U.S. law.

We oppose any effort to unfairly single out and delegitimize Israel, including at the United Nations or through the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement, while protecting the Constitutional right of our citizens to free speech.

Now Is the Time for the Gulf States to Make Peace with Israel

By Richard Goldberg

jns.org

August 5, 2020

For security against Iran, and for their relationship with the U.S.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are in for a rude awakening if former Vice President Joe Biden defeats President Donald Trump in November and Democrats take control of the U.S. Senate in addition to the House. The only thing that might save them: normalizing relations with Israel.

For now, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi seem preoccupied with whether Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will declare sovereignty over roughly 30 percent of the West Bank, consistent with the Trump peace plan proposal. The UAE ambassador to Washington, Yousef al Otaiba, even penned a column for a leading Israeli newspaper warning that a sovereignty declaration would be a setback for Israeli-Gulf ties. Somehow, while President

Trump's decisions to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, move the American embassy there and defund the UN agency for Palestinian refugees merited little more than pro forma foreign ministry press releases, the Emiratis are waging a full (royal) court press to stop Israel from asserting sovereignty over a slice of the West Bank.

With only a few months left until the November presidential election, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and Emirati Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ) might need to readjust their priorities. Without peace treaties with Israel, their support in Washington could soon collapse. Wasting time and energy fighting an Israeli sovereignty declaration in the West Bank—which may not even happen—will not insulate them from a Democratic takeover next January.

A Biden administration will be tempted to re-enter the Iran nuclear deal, returning to the Obama-era strategy of seeking a balance of power between the Islamic Republic and its Sunni Arab neighbors. The revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (i.e., Iran nuclear deal) would be compounded by congressional efforts to cut off arms sales to the Gulf—or condition them on Saudi Arabia and the UAE ending all operations in Yemen and ending their embargo on Qatar. A renewed push for sanctions on Saudi leaders in response to the killing of Jamal Khashoggi is also likely. Biden and his advisors would face enormous political pressure to acquiesce from the more radically pro-Iran, anti-Gulf faction of the Democratic Party.

Meanwhile, with Iran once again flush with cash from U.S. sanctions relief and importing advanced conventional arms from Russia and China, MBS and MBZ will have only one true ally in the Middle East: the State of Israel. Sovereignty questions in a strip of land more than 1,000 miles away will seem irrelevant when compared to an existential struggle for survival in a region where the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism seeks hegemony.

But what if MBS and MBZ had an ace in the hole—a political backstop to lock in American security guarantees for another half-century and give a would-be Biden administration some ammunition to push back on the most radical proposals in Congress? To make their case for continued U.S. arms sales and political support, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi should demonstrate their ability to advance the U.S. vision of Arab-Israeli peace and regional integration.

In effect, the Saudis and Emiratis should borrow a winning strategy from Jordan and Egypt, both of which have peace treaties with Israel. Jordanian officials claim that Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley would jeopardize Jordan's treaty with Israel, but King Abdullah knows that his influence in the House and Senate Appropriations Committees would wash away if the treaty were ever abandoned. Even in the rockiest of times for

Cairo—the election of the Muslim Brotherhood to power and an ensuing military coup—U.S. military assistance to Egypt survived, albeit with conditions, because of the Camp David Accords.

The move would come with other potential benefits, too. Announcing a peace agreement with Israel would hand President Trump a timely and historic foreign policy victory—facilitating Middle East peace—a transformational accomplishment of such magnitude that voters otherwise distracted by the novel coronavirus will take note. Should Trump win in November, the Gulf would gain important new chits with an unencumbered second-term president.

Conventional wisdom of the pre-Iran deal era posited that the Arab world could not normalize relations with Israel until all Palestinian-related issues were resolved. But the last four years should have dispelled any lingering fears in Gulf capitals that normalization with Israel would spark an "Arab street revolt."

The Palestinians already point fingers at Saudi Arabia for undermining their cause—most recently criticizing a television series that promotes ties with Israel. Iran already declares that the Gulf states "betray Palestine by helping Israel." And yet—even with the United States recognizing the holy city of Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish State of Israel—the momentum toward normalization continues to pick up steam.

If there is a cost to Sunni Arab regimes for publicly associating with Israel, those costs are largely sunk. The secret relationship is no longer secret. The question is whether Gulf leaders have the vision and political will to reap the untapped strategic benefits by formalizing a relationship that everyone already knows exists.

If MBS and MBZ want to establish a politically impenetrable course for U.S.-Gulf relations, now is the time for them to make peace with Israel.

Mr. Goldberg, a former National Security Council official and U.S. House and Senate aide, is a senior advisor at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Hamás's Leader Makes Clear That No Amount of Money Can Buy Peace

By Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) memri.org

July 26, 2020

Proving Jabotinsky right.

Ismail Haniyeh, the Head of the Hamas Political Bureau, said in a July 26, 2020 interview on Lusail News (Qatar) that Israel has previously agreed to the establishment of an airport and seaport in the Gaza Strip in exchange for ceasefire, but that the Palestinian Authority and other Arab parties have blocked this from taking place under the pretext that it would constitute a separation between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. He said that under such an arrangement, Gaza would become like Singapore. He then claimed that a certain Arab country has offered as much as \$15 billion for ports and economic projects in Gaza. Haniyeh explained, however, that Hamas completely rejected these offers because this

would require it "to disband the military wings of the factions."

He said that Hamas is absolutely unwilling to relinquish its weapons, the resistance, Palestinian prisoners in Israel, or the Palestinian Right of Return. He also said that the Palestinians want an airport, a seaport, and other projects in Gaza because they are "entitled" to them. He emphasized that Hamas will not recognize the State of Israel, that Palestine must stretch from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, and that Jerusalem must be the capital of Palestine. He added that Hamas does not fear war, but that it is best to postpone it if possible.

Ismail Haniyeh: "Sometimes, when you engage in battles and wars, you manage to force the enemy to accept the rebuilding of an airport in Gaza, but there are foreign

parties close to us who do not want it to be rebuilt. We also demanded that there be a seaport connecting Gaza to Cyprus. Whenever we are engaged in battles with the enemy, we say that prior to a ceasefire, they should accept the building of an airport and a seaport. Sometimes, Israel acquiesces to this because they want to bring an end to the fighting. However, it turns out that other parties are the obstacle."

Interviewer: "Arab parties?"

Ismail Haniyeh: "Arab parties or the Palestinian Authority, under the pretext that this would manifest the beginning of the separation of the Gaza Strip from the West Bank.

[...]

"The discussion about the Deal of the Century includes the establishment of a political entity in the Gaza Strip – a political entity that would be separate from the West Bank. The Gaza Strip would be considered the Palestinian state, while the West Bank would be dealt with through a policy of annexation, through settlements, or by declaring Jerusalem as the united capital of Israel. As for Gaza, it would become like Singapore. Parties, who we know are on the payroll of certain superpowers, came to us, and offered to establish new projects in the Gaza Strip to the tune of perhaps \$15 billion."

Interviewer: "They made this offer to you?"

Ismail Haniyeh: "Yes. \$15 billion. This includes the construction of an airport, a seaport, and economic projects in Gaza. We said to them: "That's great. We want an airport and a seaport, and we want to break the siege on the Gaza Strip. This is a Palestinian demand, but what are

we supposed to give in return?' Of course, in return, you will... Obviously, they want us to disband the military wings of the factions, and incorporate them in the police force.

[...]

"Naturally, we completely rejected that offer.

[...]

"We cannot, in exchange for money or projects, give up Palestine and our weapons. We will not give up the resistance, Jerusalem, our people in the West Bank, or our Right of Return to the land of Palestine. So we did not go along with those plans.

[...]

"We want to break the siege on the Gaza Strip. We want projects in the Gaza Strip. We want a seaport, We want an airport in the Gaza Strip. But we want these things because we are entitled to them and not in exchange for relinquishing our political principles, our resistance, or our weapons."

Interviewer: "What are your political principles?"

Ismail Haniyeh: "We will not recognize Israel, Palestine must stretch from the [Jordan] River to the [Mediterranean] Sea, the Right of Return [must be fulfilled], the prisoners must be set free, and a fully sovereign Palestinian state must be established with Jerusalem as its capital.

[...]

"Wars have rules and there are things that need to be taken into consideration. We do not fear a war, but postponing it as much as we can is for the best."

Riots and Protests from Portland to Jerusalem

By Caroline Glick

frontpagemag.com

August 10, 2020

And the Israeli Left's media stranglehold.

Over the past several years, public discourse in the United States has seen a lot of new lows. It saw another one this month when House Speaker Nancy Pelosi referred to federal officers in Portland, Oregon as "stormtroopers," that is, Nazi Brownshirts.

In a tweet on July 18 and in subsequent remarks, Pelosi accused the federal forces deployed to Portland of "kidnapping protesters and causing severe injuries in response to graffiti."

Pelosi's allegations would cause a political earthquake—if they were true. But they aren't true. And the fact that she slandered federal officers as Nazis is a deeply disturbing testament to where the Democratic Party—of which she is the senior elected official—stands today and what its intentions are.

For the past two months, the progressive city of Portland in the progressive state of Oregon, has been the scene of chaos and rioting. The liberal media have misleadingly characterized the riots as "peaceful demonstrations."

Night after night, hundreds of "peaceful demonstrators" have vandalized and destroyed stores and other businesses, transforming downtown Portland into a war zone. Over the past five weeks, the focal point of the violence has been the federal courthouse.

"Peaceful protesters" from Antifa and other radical groups have been attacking the federal courthouse in Portland with incendiary devices including pipe bombs and commercial grade fireworks. Federal officers charged with guarding the courthouse have been blinded with lasers and attacked with stones, metal balls shot from slingshots, bricks and two-by-fours, among other things.

The rioters are backed in their efforts by city and state officials as well as national Democrats, who have castigated federal forces protecting the courthouse as "occupiers," the "Gestapo" and of course, "stormtroopers."

As for the alleged "kidnapping" of peaceful protesters, local journalist Andy Ngo explained this week that Pelosi's statement channeled Antifa propaganda.

Ngo told Fox News, “That’s an Antifa talking point that is being repeated by sympathetic media.”

He explained that federal officers charged with protecting federal property are using plainclothes agents in unmarked vehicles to peacefully apprehend leaders of the violence. This is a routine, entirely legal tactic which Ngo explained is only being castigated now is because “it is quite effective.”

On the face of it, as Democratic politicians, Pelosi and her colleagues in Congress and Oregon should support the federal forces trying to end the riots. After all, like New York, Chicago, Minneapolis and Los Angeles, Portland is a Democratic city. The businesses being destroyed are owned by their voters.

So why are Pelosi and her partisan colleagues and their media adjuncts instead depicting the rioters rendering downtown Portland a war zone as “peaceful protesters” and slandering the law enforcement officers defending federal property as Nazis?

The obvious answer is politics. The Democrats support the rioters because as they see things, the longer chaos reigns in the streets of America’s cities, the better their chances of defeating President Donald Trump in November.

The Democrats have a number of resources that the Republicans lack and the riots bring them all to bear.

They have fanatical progressive activists angry that Bernie Sanders isn’t the nominee but willing to burn America.

They have wall-to-wall support from the media, from NBC to The New York Times to Facebook and Twitter.

The Democrats have limitless funds to maintain the violence and mayhem indefinitely. This week, Alexander Soros, George Soros’ son, announced that the family foundation has earmarked another quarter billion dollars to Black Lives Matter. And the Soroses are not alone.

The Trump-Russia collusion narrative largely disintegrated under the weight of evidence and the absurd impeachment process over the past several months. And with its decline the Democrats began casting about for a new cause.

They found it with the coronavirus pandemic. In one fell swoop, the virus from China swept away Trump’s fast-growing economy with record low unemployment across all ethnic and racial groups.

With schools abruptly closed and jobs abruptly lost, the optimistic America of 2019 became the destabilized, poor, frustrated and insecure America of 2020.

Yet, despite the best efforts of the commentators, support for Trump was not falling apart, at least not enough to ensure an electoral victory for Joe Biden. And Americans were beginning to figure out a way through, as the rising stock market indexes indicated.

But then came the riots. The proximate cause of the riots and protests was the police killing of George Floyd. But their context was the pandemic and the elections in

November. The riots gave the Democrats a way to galvanize their radical progressive base (on the streets, in Congress and in the media) around their favorite issues—race and identity politics.

For the Democrats, the best part of the riots is that unlike the pandemic, for demonstrators and their media flacks, it is easy to make the case that Trump is to blame.

Trump’s in charge and America is burning. Trump’s to blame. Trump’s in charge and there is racism in America. Trump’s to blame.

If Trump quells the riots, he will be guilty of police brutality (with stormtroopers)—thus proving the point. If he fails to quell the riots, he is an ineffective boob. And so, with a bottomless pit of money, the riots will continue, at least so long as the Democrats feel they benefit from them and haven’t figured out something else to do.

The demonstrations against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that have been going on for weeks outside the Prime Minister’s Residence in Jerusalem, with satellite demonstrations in Tel Aviv, serve a similar function in Israel. Like their American counterparts, the Israeli demonstrations are massively and sympathetically covered by the media, and enthusiastically supported by politicians from leftist parties. Like their American counterparts, they are disruptive and incredibly loud.

The Israeli protesters aren’t as violent as their American peers, but their messages of hatred of Netanyahu are violent and there have been some violent incidents, which seem to be growing, over the past week or so. Certainly, the number of death threats against Netanyahu and his family published by leftists on social media has grown steeply over the past several weeks.

The protests in Israel serve the same purpose for their Israeli organizers as the American ones do for their organizers. The demonstrations in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv are being conducted to incite hatred of Netanyahu as the enemy of the people and to instill the sense that the country is spinning out of control.

Just as Pelosi and her colleagues demonize law enforcement officers trying to restore order and safety in places like Portland, Seattle and Chicago, the media and Netanyahu’s opponents in Knesset condemn the police for any effort to arrest demonstrators. If federal officers are “stormtroopers,” the police outside the Prime Minister’s Residence are the “personal protection force for the Netanyahu family.”

There are stark differences between the U.S. and Israeli left, which point less to the goals of the protests than to the threat they pose to the long-term stability of both societies. The main difference is the ideological nature of the two lefts.

The American left has an ideological/religious bent. Progressivism, the creed of the American left, is a hybrid of political rather than economic communism and totalitarian messianism. It is anti-American and anti-

Semitic. And while its popularity has grown, it doesn't enjoy the support of anything close to a majority of Americans.

In Israel, in contrast, the left is post-religious and ideologically bankrupt. Its two gods—peace and surrender—came crashing down 20 and 15 years ago, respectively. The failure of the Camp David peace summit in July 2000 and the start of the Palestinian terror war in September 2000 killed the religion of peace. The left's "unilateral withdrawal" god was shattered when months after Israel expelled its citizens from Gaza and handed the area over to the PLO in August 2005, Hamas seized power and embarked on a war against Israel that has yet to end.

Although bereft of an ideological message to sell the public, the left in Israel has considerable power. Its control over Israel's deep state—including the entire legal system—is far more comprehensive than the American left's control over its state apparatuses.

The Israeli left controls most media organs, the universities and cultural institutions. It has limitless funding from foreign governments and private foundations in Europe and the United States.

And the Israeli left has demonstrators who are willing to cause mayhem to promote hatred of Netanyahu.

Like their American counterparts, the demonstrations in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv are happening in the context of the pandemic. The demonstrators have hitched a ride on the economic distress the pandemic has induced. They also benefit from the closure of the public sphere.

With the bars and nightclubs shut down—and all travel abroad blocked until further notice—young people looking for a way to get together have only one option. The anti-Netanyahu demonstrations are the only parties in the country.

No matter who wins in November, it's hard to see how the situation in the United States will stabilize and how order will be restored. The rise of progressive politicians at the expense of moderate Democrats indicates the radicalization of the American left is not a flash in the pan. One electoral cycle won't fix what has been broken incrementally over five decades.

In Israel, in the absence of an ideological left, the main and most tangible danger posed by the demonstrations is that one of the incited protesters will try to kill Netanyahu and his family. Threats to assassinate the prime minister and his wife and children have proliferated on social media as the massively and sympathetically covered protests have grown more incendiary.

But as far as Israeli society as a whole is concerned, so long as Netanyahu and his family remain safe, the protests are not likely to gain much traction. The public on both the right and the left are more moderate than they were 25 years ago. Netanyahu's public resilience—despite the left's 25-year campaign to destroy him—is proof of the limits of the left's power.

There are many conservative commentators on the right side of America's unbridgeable political divide that believe the U.S. public will respond at the ballot box to the violence in their streets by reelecting Trump. Author Victor Davis Hanson wrote this week about the coming "counter-revolution."

In Israel's case, elections, and counter-revolutions, while necessary to enact the reforms required to rein in the deep state and restore Israel's democratic order, probably won't be needed to end the demonstrations. How many people will choose to stand outside screaming once the pubs reopen?

One of the Greatest Minds of Medieval Spanish Jewry

By David Wolpe

mosaicmagazine.com

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Medieval Spain produced many Jewish geniuses. The poet and philosopher Solomon Ibn Gabirol, born 1000 years ago, wrote poetry that is still sung in synagogues all over the world.

In my junior year of college, I studied in Edinburgh and took courses in English and Scottish literature. I wrote a letter to my father, talking about my enthusiasm for the poets Wordsworth and Burns and the other greats of the English canon. His response was memorable. He told me he was glad I appreciated their works, but that I should never forget that English poetry became the poetry of the world "on the backs of British soldiers" and that we Jews too had our great poets, even if our poets had no army to bring their works to the world.

We are about to mark the thousandth anniversary of the birth of a great poet and philosopher of Israel. Solomon Ibn Gabirol was born in late 1021 or early 1022. Although too little known even among many Jews, this

tortured spirit wrote a work of philosophy that was studied for a millennium by Christians who did not know he was a Jew. Remarkably, his greatest achievement was not in philosophy at all but in poetry. Ibn Gabirol's poems became part of Jewish liturgy, enduring this day, especially in the Sephardi world. It is time to revisit the life and work of this prodigious, short-lived genius.

Ibn Gabirol was born in Malaga, on the southern coast of Spain. His life was never easy. He talks about being alone, without "father, mother, or brother" and he was afflicted with a painful, lifelong disease, perhaps lupus. His solitude and suffering were manifest in Ibn Gabirol's prickly personality, and his sense of himself as set apart, an outsider. He possessed an outstanding creative intellect, and so perhaps he might have felt somewhat different and alone no matter his circumstances; but as an orphan without siblings, his plight was an unhappy one.

Early on Ibn Gabirol found a patron, a man by the name of Yekutiel, and he moved to Zaragoza, home to a significant and culturally creative Jewish community. His talent for expression blossomed early in life, and he knew it; already at sixteen he wrote “I am the master and song is a slave to me.” He wrote elsewhere, at the same age, “my song can split rocks and create a fresh spring out of hard stones . . . my word will be inscribed in the memory of all future generations.” It seems fair to say that he had a robust sense of his gifts.

Robust, but not exaggerated. By the age of seventeen he had already composed poems that are still remembered to this day. Unfortunately, as a result of a political conspiracy, Yekutiel was assassinated, and then Ibn Gabirol was once again left alone. He offered two eulogies for his patron. The longer of the two is among his best known poems, beginning, “If Yekutiel’s days have come to an end, the stars in heaven will not shine eternally” and continuing in this melancholic spirit for 200 verses. But his shorter eulogy gives an even more pointed sense of loss, evoking the setting sun and closing with the lines: “The earth—she leaves it cold and bare/ To huddle in the shadows all night long./ At once the sky is dark: you’d think/ Sackcloth it wore for Yekutiel.”

If the solitude that Ibn Gabirol experienced in his early life returned upon Yekutiel’s death, his physical suffering remained with him always. His writing is peppered with memorable reminders of what he endured on a daily basis. “Sickness has wasted my body”; “I toss on my bed the whole night through, as on thorns and piercing reeds.” In a poetic image of his own infirmity, he writes, “My body is emaciated and a weak fly can carry it away on its wings.” So here you see something of Ibn Gabirol’s perspicacity about himself: at one and the same time he would feel self-pity and pride, wallowing in his loneliness and sickness, while in awe at his own capacities of expression and eloquence. Even as a young man, Ibn Gabirol refers to himself as an eagle with broken wings.

Some of his poetry took up social subjects, such as drinking, friendship, and the culture of Spain that surrounded him, apart from his usual devotional focus. In one poem he asks that his body after death be bathed in “the juice of the grape” and his monument be a pile of wine jars, new and old. And this Jew during Spain’s golden age wrote a beautiful poem on the construction of the Alhambra, a project overseen by Joseph, the son of one of the great figures of Spanish Jewry, Shmuel HaNagid. In celebrating the magnificent structure, he was following the model of the Andalusian poets of his time.

As Raymond Scheindlin notes in his aptly titled anthology of golden-age Jewish poetry from Spain, *Wine, Women, and Death*, it was an Andalusian practice of high culture to introduce wine after dinner, and, so gladdened, to recite poetry about drinking, love, and mortality. Such declamations will be best known to Western readers from the *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Ibn Gabirol wrote

somewhat less of this celebrant poetry than some of his contemporaries, but he did compose sharply worded poems about those contemporaries: “Sitting among everybody crooked and foolish his [the poet’s] heart only was wise./ The one slakes you with adder’s poison, the other, flattering, tries to confuse your head.” His brilliance did not expand his soul enough to look with generosity or magnanimity upon his fellows. As his older contemporary and fellow poet Moses Ibn Ezra, wrote, “his anger got the better of his understanding.” As petulant and cantankerous as Ibn Gabirol was, even Ibn Ezra acknowledged him to be the greatest poet of the age.

Ibn Gabirolis probably the author of *Mivḥar P’ninim* (A Collection of Pearls), a work of maxims aimed at inculcating virtue; but it is his stirring liturgical poems, not his ethical writing, for which he is best known in the Jewish world today. Like much of his poetry, they sparkle with lyricism, piety, and a magical use of language.

Particularly in Sephardi prayer books, Ibn Gabirol has contributed some of the best known and most loved prayer-poems. The short and lovely “*Shahar Avakeshkhā*”—in the morning I seek You—is frequently printed as an introduction to the morning service. In the translation of the Conservative movement’s *Lev Shalem* prayer book, it runs:

At dawn I seek You, my refuge, my haven;
Morning and evening, to You I pray,
Though facing Your greatness, I am awed and
confused,
for You know already what I would think and say.

What might in thought and speech can there be?
What power the spirit within me?
Yet, You treasure the sound of human song;
and so I would thank You, as long as Your soul is in
me.

One of Ibn Gabirol’s poems, often included in the Yom Kippur liturgy and at funerals, is based on the words of Eliphaz from the book of Job (4:19: “those who dwell in houses of clay, whose origin is dust”). It concludes:

Pour out Your pity
To the nation that knocks at Your door
For You are our God
And our eyes look to You.

Or, in Raphael Loew’s less literal but more musical rendition:

Thine, thine alone is pity: pour it free
For folk who knock Thy door so urgently.
Since Thou—none else – it be that art our Lord,
To whom, then, should our eyes turn, save to Thee?

Perhaps the most interesting story hidden in Ibn Gabirol's life is tied to his masterpiece, Keter Malkhut (Crown of Kingship). But to understand this story, we need to start by looking at another work—not of poetry, but philosophy.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the theological masterpiece *Fons Vitae* (The Source of Life) was read and appreciated by the leading minds of the time, including Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. It was assumed that a brilliant but unknown Christian or perhaps Muslim theologian had composed the book. Although knowledge of its true origins had skirted around the margins of some for centuries, not until the research of Salomon Munk in 1846 was it definitively shown that Ibn Gabirol was its author. Munk made this discovery by uncovering a 13th-century Hebrew summary of the work by Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera in which the text is attributed to Ibn Gabirol. By comparing the philosophical conceptions in *Fons Vitae* with Ibn Gabirol's poetry, Munk recognized that it had to have been penned by the 11th-century Jewish poet. Munk's discovery astounded the scholarly world.

Fons Vitae does not cite Talmudic passages or, for that matter, any Jewish voices. Indeed, the only thinker mentioned by name is Plato, and the book itself falls squarely within the neoplatonic tradition, according to which everything is from a single origin, and the world, properly seen, is a reflection of that ultimate unity and perfection. Ibn Gabirol's contribution was to analyze everything that existed as a combination of matter and form. All of it points to God. Emanations of God's ultimate reality flow into the world, connecting everything to this Ultimate Source. That idea is known to Jewish readers from Kabbalah. Indeed, once the background of its author came to be known, scholars came to see in *Fons Vitae* additional kabbalistic influences from *Sefer Y'tsirah*, the early work of Jewish mysticism. But, because the idea of emanations are also familiar in medieval writing rooted in other traditions as the great chain of being, and since Ibn Gabirol did not give them Jewish sources, the book was not remembered as having been written by a Jew.

Fons Vitae was published in Hebrew as *M'kor Chaim*. It is composed in the form of a dialogue between a master and a disciple, and begins with the question "why was man created?"—that is, what should we seek in this life? The answer, as one would expect from a philosopher, is that human beings were created for knowledge, to understand the ways of the world and to penetrate its mysteries in order to aid the soul's ascent. The work was preserved not

by the Jewish community, but by the Catholic Church. Its author, before he was revealed as Ibn Gabirol, was called Avicebron (or Avicebrol).

Ibn Gabirol's greatest poem, "Keter Malkhut" is a versified exploration of the same issues in his philosophic work. In it the created world testifies to the greatness of its Creator. But unlike *Fons Vitae*, the poem is filled with biblical and talmudic allusions ending with the familiar phrase from the book of Psalms that also concludes the Amidah prayer: "May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to You O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

Although the poem is erudite and, in places, not easily understood, it too found its way into Jewish liturgy and was occasionally read on Yom Kippur with, as the Hebrew commentator A.Y. Zeidman writes, "hushed whispers, in the midst of the soul's unity with its Creator, in confessional and repentant purity of heart."

In the end, as Ibn Gabirol himself wrote, "the earth returns to the earth and the soul ascends to join the soul." Ibn Gabirol suffered an unfortunate fate in life and beyond. He complained even 1,000 years ago that people did not understand Hebrew and so his writing would go unappreciated. His philosophy was unattributed even as people recognized its genius. Many of his works are lost to us. His artistry was rarely understood by the world beyond the synagogue walls. He suffered, writing that he would "welcome death as a liberator." And yet the same man who felt both loneliness and pride, who wallowed in his misfortune and extolled his own excellence, the man who would welcome death as a liberator also felt God's sustaining presence. "I will praise The singing/ While Thy breath is in me."

Wordsworth and Burns had Britain and its soldiers to rescue them from anonymity. Today we live in an age where there is a Hebrew-speaking country, and so we have the chance to relieve the long-suffering Ibn Gabirol and give him his due. Much of his work is easily available in translation and the books of Raymond Scheindlin and Peter Cole are an excellent place to discover both Ibn Gabirol and other poets of the golden age. The tenth centennial of his birth is a good time to revive the memory of one of the greatest minds of medieval Jewry, a man who sang to God from the midst of his pain and left the music of his words to sound throughout the generations.

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**Current issue also available at suburbanorthodox.org.
If you see something, send something" –editor**