

## Israel, a Happy Country

- Tomorrow evening is Yom Haatzmaut, Israel's Independence Day.
- A week ago was Yom Ha-Shoah, Holocaust Memorial Day.
- These two modern holidays are our own version of death and resurrection.

Let's talk about the State of Israel – its achievements, its challenges, and what it means to us.

**Israel has made enormous progress** since its birth on 14 May 1948:

- Economic strength, fast-rising standard of living
  - \$100B economy, larger than that of all its neighbors combined.
- Physical strength in defending itself
  - Outmanned and outgunned, it wins by speed and resourcefulness.
  - Danger of becoming blasé in expecting a win every time – a single loss may mean death of state
- Intellectual strength in a steady stream of technological achievements
  - Powerful creativity, inventiveness, innovative thinking
  - Some details below
- A strong sense of optimism and a joy of living – happiness!
  - Many studies show Israel among “happiest” countries on earth
  - Latest: Israel is world's 8th happiest country out of 155
    - Gallup survey; beaten only by Scandinavian countries, Holland, NZ, Costa Rica.

-Spengler writes in *The Asia Times*

(13 May 2008, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/JE13Ak01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/JE13Ak01.html)):

### **Why Israel is the world's happiest country**

Envy surrounds no country on Earth like the state of Israel, and with good reason: by objective measures, Israel is the happiest nation on Earth at the 60th anniversary of its founding. It is one of the wealthiest, freest and best-educated; and it enjoys a higher life expectancy than Germany or the Netherlands. But most remarkable is that Israelis appear to love life and hate death more than any other nation. If history is made not by rational design but by the demands of the human heart...the light heart of the Israelis in face of continuous danger is a singularity worthy of a closer look.

Can it be a coincidence that this most ancient of nations, and the only nation persuaded that it was summoned into history for God's service, consists of individuals who appear to love life more than any other people? [Their suicide rate is very low.]...

Israel is surrounded by neighbors willing to kill themselves in order to destroy it. "As much as you love life, we love death," Muslim clerics teach; the same formula is found in a Palestinian textbook for second graders.

Apart from the fact that the Arabs are among the least free, least educated, and (apart from the oil states) poorest peoples in the world, they also are the unhappiest, even in their wealthiest kingdoms.

The contrast of Israeli happiness and Arab despondency is what makes peace an elusive goal in the region. It cannot be attributed to material conditions of life. Oil-rich Saudi Arabia ranks 171st on an international quality of life index, below Rwanda...

Even less can we blame unhappiness on experience, for no nation has suffered more than the Jews in living memory, nor has a better excuse to be miserable. Arabs did not invent suicide attacks, but they have produced a population pool willing to die in order to inflict damage greater than any in history. One cannot help but conclude that Muslim clerics do not exaggerate when they express contempt for life...

Israel's love of life, moreover, is more than an ethnic characteristic. Those who know Jewish life through the eccentric lens of Jewish-American novelists such as Saul Bellow and Philip Roth, or the films of Woody Allen, imagine the Jews to be an angst-ridden race of neurotics. Secular Jews in America are no more fertile than their Gentile peers, and by all indications quite as miserable.

For one thing, Israelis are far more religious than American Jews. Two-thirds of Israelis believe in God, although only a quarter observe their religion strictly. Even Israelis averse to religion evince a different kind of secularism than we find in the secular West. They speak the language of the Bible and undergo 12 years of Bible studies in state elementary and secondary schools.

Faith in God's enduring love for a people that believes it was summoned for his purposes out of a slave rabble must be part of the explanation...

What explains the happiness?

-Could it be because they feel every day may be their last, so they might as well make the most of life?

**Yet there are many challenges facing Israel:**

- Relentless hostility from its neighbors, who teach hatred and antisemitism in school and the press
- A nuclear Iran that talks of “wiping it from the map”
- Terrorism and missile attacks
- A fast-multiplying and increasingly hostile Arab minority within its borders
- Increasing hostility from world at large, even nations, using all pretexts not only to criticize it, but to delegitimize it, as a convenient vehicle for traditional antisemitism
- Friction between secular and religious Jews, between Zionist and non-Zionist Jews, among religious Jews over arcane points of law
- Water shortages

### **Pessimists say peace with Arabs will bring:**

- Gradual loss of interest in keeping state Jewish
- Intermarriage with Arabs, resulting in
  - Explosion in number of children with mixed parentage and uncertain identity, with little or no Jewish commitment, or even antisemitic
  - Who will try to annul the Law of Return
- Civil war between secular and religious factions
  - Talmud says sin'at chinam -- senseless hatred -- brought down the Second Temple

### **Comments?**

## Background Notes

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### 1. Some Israeli achievements

Israel, the 100th smallest country in the world, with less than 1/1000th of the population, can claim the following achievements:

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#### Intellectual

- The most university degrees per capita.
- The most museums per capita.
- The most scientific papers per capita (by a large margin - 109 per 10,000).
- The most scientists and technicians per capita, with 145 per 10,000, as opposed to 85 in the US, over 70 in Japan, and less than 60 in Germany, with over 25% of its work force employed in technical professions.
- One of the highest per capita rates of patents filed.
- Second per capita for new books.
- 24% of its workforce holds university degrees
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> after US and Holland
  - 12% hold advanced degrees.

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#### Computer/Electronics

- Highest number of home computers per capita.
- Developed cell phone at Motorola Israel, largest Motorola development center.
- Developed Windows NT and XP operating systems, at Microsoft Israel.
- Developed Pentium MMX Chip technology, at Intel Israel.
  - Designed, developed and produced both Pentium-4 and Centrino processors
- The microprocessor in your computer was most likely made in Israel.
- Developed voice mail technology.
- Both Microsoft and Cisco built their only R&D facilities outside the US in Israel.
- Developed Instant Messenger technology (in 1996, by four Israelis teenagers).

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#### Security

- Designed the airline industry's most impenetrable flight security.

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#### Medicine

- Developed the first fully computerized, no-radiation, diagnostic instrumentation for breast cancer.

- Developed a computerized system for ensuring proper administration of medications, thus removing human error from medical treatment.
  - Every year in US hospitals 7,000 patients die from treatment mistakes.
- Developed the first ingestible video camera, so small it fits inside a pill. (Israel Givun Imaging) Used to view the small intestine from the inside, the camera helps doctors diagnose cancer and digestive disorders.
- Developed a new device that directly helps the heart pump blood, an innovation with the potential to save lives among those with heart failure. The new device is synchronized with the heart's mechanical operations through a sophisticated system of sensors.
- Developed a new acne treatment, the ClearLight device. Produces a high-intensity, ultraviolet-light-free, narrow-band blue light that causes acne bacteria to self-destruct -- all without damaging surrounding skin or tissue.

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## Economy

- Its \$100 billion economy is larger than all of its immediate neighbors combined.
- Largest number of startup companies per capita.
  - In absolute terms, Israel has the largest number of startup companies, except the US (3,500 companies mostly in hi-tech).
- Highest concentration of hi-tech companies (3000) after Silicon Valley in US
- Largest number of biotech startups per capita
- Third highest rate of entrepreneurship
- Highest rate among women and among people over 55.

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## Social

- The only democracy in the Middle East.
- Largest immigrant-absorbing nation on earth per capita. Persecuted Jews come from all over the world.
  - In 1984 and 1991, Israel airlifted 22,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel.
- Golda Meir was world's second elected female leader
- Humanitarian: When US Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya was bombed in 1998, Israeli rescue teams were there within a day and saved three victims from the rubble.

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## Other

- Only country that entered the 21st century with a net gain in its number of trees -- made more remarkable because this was achieved in an area considered mainly desert.
- The average palm tree yields 38 pounds of dates a year and is about 20 feet tall. Israeli palm trees yield 400 pounds/year and are short enough to be harvested from the ground or a short ladder.

-An Israeli company was the first to develop and install a large-scale solar-powered and fully-functional electricity-generating plant, in Mojave desert.

## **2. Israel's Law of Return (Chok haShvut):**

1950

Any Jew can emigrate to Israel and instantly become a citizen

1954

Except a person with a criminal past, likely to endanger public

1965

Except a person identifying as a Jew but where official documents exist that show otherwise

1970

-A Jew is someone born of a Jewish mother or who has converted to Judaism, and is not a member of another religion.

-The law also applies to the spouse, child or grandchild of a Jew, and their spouses, even if the spouses are not Jewish.

Anybody else who wishes to emigrate to Israel must go through the normal immigration process, similar to that available in Western nations.