



Jerusalem 7:08; Toronto 8:51

Commentary...

Anti-Semitism and the UN

By Jeff Jacoby

A seminar on antisemitism was held at the United Nations this week. Secretary-General Kofi Annan opened the program by rebuking "those who . . . continue to spread lies and vile stereotypes about Jews and Judaism." Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust survivor and Nobel peace laureate, delivered a moving keynote address. Three panels of witnesses -- academics, activists, religious leaders -- spoke about the menace of antisemitism and how to combat it. The event was presided over by Shashi Tharoor, the undersecretary-general for communications, who also delivered the closing remarks.

All in all, you might think, a typical UN program -- one of scores of gatherings the world body hosts each year on a wide array of human rights issues. The antisemitic hatred and violence seething in so much of the world are a grave international problem, so it stands to reason that the UN would make it the focus of regular and serious attention.

Except that it doesn't. Monday's conference on antisemitism was the first in UN history.

The United Nations was born nearly 60 years ago in the wake of the Nazi genocide against the Jews. It was the reaction, in part, of a world stricken by the horror of Auschwitz and Babi Yar. Awareness of the Holocaust informs the UN's seminal documents, above all the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yet not once in its six decades -- not until this week -- had the UN ever convened a meeting to discuss the hatred or persecution of Jews. Not once has it adopted a resolution dealing specifically with antisemitism. Not once has it published a report on anti-Jewish racism or incitement.

"Even when judged against the hypocrisy with which the UN has frequently treated its own founding principles," wrote legal scholar Anne Bayefsky, a professor at Columbia University Law School, in an important article in Commentary earlier this year, "the international body's abiding hostility to the just claims of Israel and the Jewish people remains a special, and especially egregious, case."

Bayefsky's essay, along with an earlier piece in The Wall Street Journal, were devastating. From the UN's earliest years, she showed, antisemitism was the great evil it refused to notice. The first time a resolution dealing even partly with bigotry against Jews came up for a vote was 1959, a year "when some 2,000 anti-Jewish incidents . . . were reported in almost 40 countries." The original title of the resolution was "Manifestations of Antisemitism and Other Forms of Racial Prejudice and Religious Intolerance of a Similar Nature." But by the time it reached the General Assembly floor, the words "antisemitism" had been cut.

The lengths to which the UN will go to avoid any condemnation of Jew-hatred would be comical if they weren't so contemptible. When it adopted an international convention against racial discrimination, it refused to include a reference to antisemitism. "The Soviet Union, its satellites, and its Arab allies," noted Bayefsky, "insisted that antisemitism was a question not of race but of religion." Yet when the UN later adopted a resolution on religious intolerance, the lead sponsor insisted that antisemitism should be omitted because that was a matter not of religion but of race.

The UN's 1975 resolution equating Zionism -- the national liberation movement of the Jewish people -- to racism was only the most notorious illustration of its anti-Jewish bias. The measure was repealed in 1991, but the UN continues to anathematize the world's only Jewish state.

The UN's 2001 Durban conference on racism and xenophobia, for example, turned into an antisemitic bacchanal -- an event so hateful, the US delegation walked out. At times, the venom has sunk to medieval lows. "In presentations to the UN Commission on Human Rights," Bayefsky wrote, Arab delegates have trafficked in blood libels, "accusing the Israelis of . . . needing to kill Arabs for the proper observance of Yom Kippur and of injecting Palestinian children with HIV-positive blood."

The professor's indictment got Kofi Annan's attention. Not only did he accept her challenge to convene a UN conference on antisemitism, he invited her to speak. She agreed, and delivered a speech last Monday the likes of which

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had not been heard at the UN since Daniel Patrick Moynihan blasted the Zionism resolution in 1975. She described the UN as "the leading global purveyor of antisemitism" -- a place where "the language of human rights is hijacked not only to discriminate but to demonize." It was a dramatic presentation, and it drew a standing ovation. (The speech can be read online at the Opinion Journal web site.)

So has the UN arrived at a turning point? Or was Monday's conference merely a fig leaf -- a PR response to some bad press?

That depends entirely on what the secretary-general does next. It is up to Annan to take on the antisemitism within the UN's ranks -- to insist that Israel's pariah status end -- to denounce Jew-hatred as a dangerous scourge. In short, to show moral leadership and courage.

Frankly, I doubt that Annan has it in him. But then, I doubted that Annan would pay any attention to Bayefsky's powerful writings in the first place. I turned out to be wrong about that. Here's hoping I'm wrong again. *The writer is a syndicated columnist for The Boston Globe.* (Boston Globe June 24)

When Both Houses of Congress Voted to Show Support of Israel Last Week Kerry Was MIA - That Should Be Sending a Potent Message to Friends of the Jewish State

By Zev Chafets

Kerry's no-show conveyed a tacit but unmistakable revelation of dissent
Congress voted overwhelmingly last week to affirm the Bush revolution in Middle East policy. On Wednesday, by a 407-9 vote, the House "strongly endorsed" two promises made by the President to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in a letter of April 14: 1) The U.S. agrees that it is "unrealistic" for Israel to pull back to the pre-1967 lines and dismantle its major West Bank settlements, and 2) the U.S. does not expect Israel to resettle Palestinian refugees.

The next day, the Senate passed a similar non-binding resolution. The vote was 95 to 3.

The Bush doctrine, now ratified by both houses of Congress, radically alters more than 30 years of American Middle Eastern diplomacy. It puts the U.S., for the first time, flatly on the Israeli side of the post-Six-Day War dispute. Not surprisingly, Sharon hailed this as "a great day in the history of Israel."

Only three senators voted against the pro-Israel resolution: ex-Klansman Robert Byrd of West Virginia, John Sununu of New Hampshire and independent James Jeffords of Vermont. Richard Lugar of Indiana, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, skipped the ballot. So did only one other senator: John Kerry. He was in California.

Why did Kerry absent himself? He had some commitments on the West Coast - meeting with retired auto exec Lee Iacocca, taking a bow at a Hollywood fund-raising concert - nothing he couldn't have skipped to cast a vote on America's new Israel policy.

No, Kerry ducked out because he didn't want to be there. His no-show conveyed a tacit but unmistakable message of dissent.

President Bush's tilt toward Israel is very unpopular in Old Europe, among American foreign policy establishmentarians and in the Naderite wing of the Democratic Party. All three constituencies matter very much to Kerry. His Senate no-show signals to them that a Kerry administration wouldn't be bound by his predecessor's promises or policies.

This may seem politically courageous. In fact, it is not.

True, support for Israel is widespread in the U.S. - last week's margins in the House and Senate make that plain. But those for whom it is the key issue will undoubtedly vote for Bush. No American President (heck, no Israeli president) has ever been such an ardent Zionist.

For run-of-the-mill pro-Israel Americans, Kerry is supportive enough. Democratic Jews (the party's main Israel constituency) aren't really all that concerned about details. They can live with a return to the "evenhandedness" of the Clinton-Gore years. After all, even Jimmy Carter, who was downright unfriendly to Israel, got around 60% of the Jewish vote in 1980. Kerry can expect considerably more than that.

That's why the accusation that Bush's pro-Israel policies are politically inspired - a charge made most recently by Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.) -

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are absurd. Sure, Sharon's blessing may do the Republicans some good in Miami or Borough Park, Brooklyn. But there simply aren't enough "Israel first" votes to change the outcome of an election.

George Bush knows this. So does John Kerry. That's why the senator could afford to punt on Thursday. It won't hurt him politically, and it broadens his options if he's elected.

President Kerry will be able to shift back to a more "evenhanded" approach to the Middle East conflict without being accused of flip-flopping. After all, on the day the Senate voted to ratify Bush's promises to Israel, Kerry just happened to be 3,000 miles away. (Jewish World Review June 29)

The writer is a columnist for The New York Daily News.

Arafat Gets Rehab By Efraim Inbar

Haaretz has adopted an uncharacteristic dose of "religiosity" by becoming the vehicle for a pathetic attempt by the Israeli radical Left to politically resurrect Yasser Arafat.

The newspaper claims that Arafat was not the instigator of the September 2000 intifada but has consistently searched for a two-state solution in his quest for peaceful coexistence. Haaretz also published an interview with the Palestinian leader which refrained from posing difficult questions. Arafat was allowed to portray himself as a man of peace.

Israeli messianic doves have repeatedly saved Arafat from oblivion. Yossi Beilin and the crowd around him saved Arafat in 1993 at a time when the PLO was weak due to its strategic blunder of supporting Saddam Hussein in the 1991 Gulf War. The group, isolated in Tunis, was on the verge of bankruptcy.

But Beilin et al persuaded Yitzhak Rabin – against his better judgment – to enter into a deal with the PLO, which brought Arafat to the White House, allowed the PLO to regain its dwindling international status, and gave it a territorial foothold in the territories.

These same doves never stopped advocating – as if out of religious conviction – increasingly larger Israeli concessions and a policy of turning a blind eye to the Palestinian violations of the Oslo agreements. The failure of Arafat to honor his pledge to Rabin and desist from terrorist activities was invariably explained away.

The PLO chief's repeated calls for jihad were belittled as insignificant rhetoric. Early Israeli casualties resulting from Palestinian terrorism were seen as "sacrifices for peace."

But peace did not come. It took the majority of Israelis more than a decade and over 1,000 dead to realize the murderous nature of the Palestinian national movement. The swing in public opinion to a more realistic assessment of the conflict is the reason for the recent attempt by the radical Left to rewrite history.

The late-1990s evaluation by Israeli intelligence of Arafat's intentions on final status issues does not in fact matter very much. There was no dispute within the Israeli intelligence community that Arafat had no intention of keeping his promise to stop employing violence. Israeli intelligence supplied information months in advance about Palestinian preparations for armed conflict. Intelligence specialists thought hostilities could be anticipated around September 2000.

In this respect Israeli intelligence functioned well and provided the IDF with a strategic warning. The army consequently trained for the expected low-intensity conflict and took several measures to contain Palestinian violence.

Any attempt to rehabilitate Arafat's credibility runs against his record of behavior after September 2000. His speeches unequivocally laud the suicide-bombers and armed struggle; he was personally involved in funding terrorist cells; he consistently rejected numerous attempts to implement a cease-fire; and he has continuously opposed any reform in the security sector that might have reduced the violence.

In Arafat's recent interview with Haaretz he continued to demand the "right of return" and refused to accept any historical Jewish claim over the holiest place to Jews – the Temple Mount.

It requires an incredible amount of self-delusion, or hutzpa, to try today to sell the Israeli public the story that Arafat remains the right partner for peace.

The intellectual arrogance of messianic doves and their condescending attitude toward the rest of us assumes we all are limitlessly gullible.

Another reason for the timing of the campaign to revive Arafat is Sharon's success in marginalizing him. The common wisdom in Washington and other important capitals – including Arab ones – is that Arafat is an obstacle to peace, and ways need to be devised to neutralize his negative influence. Radical doves understand that only Israel can provide a "kosher certificate" to Arafat that might grant him persona-grata status in the international arena.

Similarly to the early 1990s, it is Israeli leftists obsessed with the Palestinian issue who are trying to bail Arafat out from a difficult predicament. It is clear that Arafat's war, a colossal miscalculation that brought the Palestinians in the territories a great deal of suffering, has ended in failure.

There is no Palestinian state in sight. Much of the infrastructure for such a state has been destroyed in the "armed struggle," leaving Palestinian society fragmented and run by thugs and local warlords. In addition, the international community increasingly views the Palestinians as unable to govern themselves.

In contrast, Israeli society has shown greater resilience than expected in the

protracted conflict. The IDF has successfully overcome international constraints on its freedom of military action against targets in Palestinian-ruled territories, thus denying the enemy safe sanctuaries.

Only the Israeli radical Left is misguided enough to try to resuscitate Arafat. While it definitely deserves him, it is the rest of us who will pay dearly if this foolish exercise is even marginally successful. (Jerusalem Post Jun 29)

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Israel's Wayward Prime Ministers By Daniel Pipes

Two patterns have shaped Israel's history since 1992 and go far to explain Israel's predicament today. First, every elected prime minister has broken his word on how he would deal with the Arabs. Second, each one of them has adopted an unexpectedly concessionary approach.

Here is one example of deception from each of the four prime ministers:

* Yitzhak Rabin promised the Israeli public immediately after winning office in June 1992 that "with the PLO as an organization, I will not negotiate." A year later, however, he did precisely that. Rabin deflected dealing with Yasir Arafat by saying he had found no other Palestinians to do business with, so to "advance peace and find a solution," he had to turn to the PLO.

* Benjamin Netanyahu promised before his election in 1996 that under his leadership, Israel "will never descend from the Golan." In 1998, however, as I established in *The New Republic* and Bill Clinton just confirmed in his memoirs, Netanyahu changed his mind and planned to offer Damascus the entire Golan in return for a peace treaty.

* Ehud Barak flat-out promised during his May 1999 campaign "Jerusalem, united and under our rule forever, period." In July 2000, however, at the Camp David II summit, he offered much of eastern Jerusalem to the Palestinian Authority.

* Ariel Sharon won a landslide victory in January 2003 over his Labor opponent, Amram Mitzna, who called for "evacuating the settlements from Gaza." Mr. Sharon ridiculed this approach, saying that it "would bring the terrorism centers closer to [Israel's] population centers." In December 2003, however, Mr. Sharon adopted Mitzna's unilateral withdrawal idea.

Prime ministers sometimes complain about other ones breaking their word. Mr. Netanyahu, for example, pointed out in August 1995 that Rabin had "promised in his election campaign not to talk with the PLO, not to give up territory during this term of office, and not to establish a Palestinian state. He is breaking all these promises one by one." Of course, when he got to office, Mr. Netanyahu also broke his promises "one by one."

What prompts each of Israel's recent prime ministers to renege on his resolute intentions and instead adopt a policy of unilateral concessions?

In some cases, it is a matter of expediency, notably for Mr. Netanyahu, who believed his reelection chances improved via a deal with the Syrian government. In other cases, there are elements of duplicity – specifically, hiding planned concessions knowing their unpopularity with the voters. Yossi Beilin, one of Mr. Barak's ministers, admitted during the Camp David II summit that he and others in the government had earlier concealed their willingness to divide Jerusalem. "We didn't speak about this in the election campaign, because we knew that the public would not like it."

But expediency and duplicity are just part of the story. In addition, sincere aspirations inspire Israeli prime ministers to abandon strong policies for weak ones. Here we leave the political domain and enter the psychological one. Being prime minister of Israel, a country surrounded by enemies, is a weighty one. It is only too easy for the officeholder, having been elected leader of his people, immodestly to believe that he has a special talent to resolve his country's great, abiding, and potentially fatal problem, that of Arab hostility.

Not for this great man is it enough to plug away at the dull, slow, expensive, and passive policy of deterrence, hoping some distant day to win Arab acceptance. His impatience invariably leads in the same direction – to move things faster, to develop solutions, and to "take chances for peace."

If the prime minister's initiative succeeds, he wins international acclaim and enters the Jewish history books. If it fails – well, it was worth the try and his successors can clean up the mess.

Grandiosity and egoism, ultimately, explain the prime ministerial pattern of going soft. This brings to mind how, for centuries, French kings and presidents have bequeathed grand construction projects in Paris as their personal mark on history. In like spirit, Israeli prime ministers have since 1992 dreamed of bequeathing a grand diplomatic project.

The problem is, these are undemocratic impulses that betray the electorate, undermine faith in government, and erode Israel's position. These negative trends will continue until Israelis elect a modest prime minister. (New York Sun June 29)

Put ISM on Trial By Judy Lash Balint

A 20-year-old IDF private in handcuffs is led into a military court on a base near Ashkelon. Some 80 supporters are there to greet him, waving Israeli flags and carrying signs reading: "Save Our Soldiers" "Free the Soldier," "Prosecute the ISM" and "No Human Shields in War Zones."

The soldier, son of a poor Beduin family from the north of Israel, is accused of manslaughter in the death last year of British International Solidarity Movement member Tom Hurndall.

Hurndall, product of a British public school education, was shot in Rafah in April 2003. He was making his way to an area where the IDF was operating to uncover tunnels used to convey arms and ammunition from Egypt.

IDF officials say that an initial investigation, based on soldiers' accounts, indicated a Palestinian fired on a watchtower and that soldiers returned fire, hitting someone believed to be the gunman.

Hurndall deliberately put himself in the area of known military operations, and took a bullet intended for a terrorist. His supporters say Hurndall was simply attempting to shield Palestinian children. But the IDF noted that ISM activities were "illegal, irresponsible, and dangerous" and led to Hurndall's "tragic death."

Hurndall must have been aware of the risks inherent in his activity in Rafah. In one diary entry he wrote: "A few hundred meters away there are army snipers, and each one of us can appear in a sniper's telescopic sight. It is possible to say with certainty that they are watching us, and my life is in the hands of an Israeli marksman or settler. I know that I will probably never know what hit me, but that is part of my role – to be as exposed as possible."

We'll never know why Hurndall viewed his exposure as a crucial factor in bringing about peace in the Middle East, but this upper-middle-class lad from north London, before arriving in Israel, first tried his hand at being a human shield in Iraq.

Hurndall had joined a group of international volunteers who wanted to put themselves in front of Iraqi schools and hospitals; but when they arrived it soon became apparent that sites would be selected by Iraqi government officials. After two weeks of heated discussion, the shields were given a list of seven sites and an ultimatum to "start shielding or start leaving." Hurndall left, passed through Jordan, where he heard about the activities of the ISM, and entered Israel on a tourist visa.

It's worth noting that a number of ISMers seem to be the well-educated offspring of well-to-do parents. Hurndall attended Winchester College, one of England's most venerable and prestigious boarding schools. Tuition at the 600-year-old school is around \$30,000 per year.

Tom's father, Anthony Hurndall, is a well-known London property lawyer. Mother Jocelyn, who says she is proud of her son, is head of a learning support unit.

Fellow ISM volunteer Radhika Sainath is a US citizen who has been arrested three times for violating Israeli law during repeated entries into the country between 2002-3. She is the daughter of two California physicians and plans on attending graduate school at Columbia University.

In Hurndall's case the resources and prominence of his family enabled them to hire a high-profile British attorney to realize their efforts to prosecute an Israeli soldier for the death of their son. They chose Imran Khan, a controversial high-powered lawyer who tried to prevent then chief of staff Shaul Mofaz entering Britain for an official visit in 2002 because of "war crimes."

Khan and the Hurndalls ran an effective public campaign that led to British pressure on Israel to finger an Israeli soldier for the unfortunate death of young Tom.

The young Beduin soldier – his name has not been released – arrested in January 2004 after Hurndall's demise in a London hospital was serving his country and tried to do his part to smash terrorism. Now he too is paying the price of the ISM's unconscionable efforts to encourage their volunteers to violate closed military zones.

The accused has spent the last six months in jail. His family is so poverty-stricken that they have been able to afford the bus fare to visit him only once during his incarceration. So far his legal representation has been court-assigned, although Nitsana Darshan-Leitner of the Shurat HaDin Law Center has undertaken a campaign to assist the family.

In court the other day, the accused, a stocky, dark young man dressed in a plain military green uniform, sat silently as his defense attorney addressed the court. His eyes didn't engage anyone in the room – neither the witness nor the dozens who had come to support him seemed to be of interest.

The three judges in the small, wood-paneled courtroom listened intently as a military interrogator answered questions about the interrogation and confession extracted from the accused.

How could the court take this written, six-page confession seriously, asked the attorney, when the defendant neither reads nor writes Hebrew? Why did interrogators have the defendant sign the confession at night, at the end of more than nine hours of interrogation, when he was tired and hungry, after he had allegedly stated: "Give me a cup of coffee and a cigarette, and I'll sign anything."?

"The soldier is being scapegoated by the prosecution to appease the British Foreign Office," charged Darshan-Leitner.

Worse than that, noted Shimon, one of the supporters who had bussed down

from Jerusalem. "It's the wrong entity on trial here. It's the ISM who should be sitting there accused, not this soldier, who was doing his best to defend us from terrorist evil." (Jerusalem Post Jun 30)

The writer is author of Jerusalem Diaries: In Tense Times.

Bogus PA Reform Jerusalem Post Editorial

Suddenly, we are being told, Egypt is being helpful and, in relative terms, cosying up to Israel. Israeli and Egyptian officials are meeting openly and smiling together for the cameras. What's the catch?

Egypt has its own ideas of what to do with the diplomatic ferment created by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan. Most of the coverage of Egypt's involvement pretends that the premise of Israel's plan – its unilateralism – is accepted, so all that is left is to prevent Hamas from filling a vacuum.

It should not be surprising, however, that there is another, less noticed aspect to the Egyptian agenda. For all of Egypt's reported frustration with Yasser Arafat and renewed willingness to pressure him, that pressure is effectively being exerted to toward reform rather than removal.

In his meeting with Israeli ministers, Egyptian Intelligence chief Gen. Omar Suleiman pressed for releasing the PA Chairman from his imprisonment in the Mukata in Ramallah. The purpose of this release would, presumably, be to allow Arafat to more effectively head the security forces he is being asked to consolidate from some dozen to three, under a newly appointed interior minister.

The Israeli side, to its credit, strenuously objected to any role being played by Arafat, but on the ground, he is still calling the shots and the Egyptians and the members of the Quartet whose representatives met on Thursday in Taba to approve the Egyptian plan, are once again taking him into account. Assistant Secretary of State William Burns also brought the Arafat issue up during his meeting with Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz in Tel Aviv on Friday.

It seems almost incredible that after all that has transpired over the last four years, one still has to explain why Arafat can never again be seen as a credible partner for negotiations or security arrangements and that any plan involving him is inevitably doomed to fail.

The fact that any plan for the existing Palestinian organizations to battle terror is hopeless was evident from comments made by Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei, reported last week in this newspaper. According to Qurei, not only does the PA have no plans to dismantle the Aksa Martyrs Brigades, but his top priority is to safeguard the security of its members still wanted by Israel. Qurei's promise that the Brigades would play a "political role" in the future came on top of Arafat's invitation to the group's members to join the official security apparatus.

The Aksa Martyrs Brigades is not just another breakaway organization, its members are responsible for a large proportion of the suicide bombings that claimed the lives of hundreds of Israelis. It is officially recognized by the US as a terror organization, the likes of al-Qaida, Hizbullah, and the Hamas.

In this context, the problem is not the efficiency of Arafat's security services but the direction in which their guns are pointed. To expect that direction to change on the basis of a reorganization would be as if the US had tried to tame Iraq by asking Saddam Hussein to consolidate his Republican Guards and hydra-like security apparatus. So that there be no confusion on this point, a senior Fatah official has just announced that the PA has no intention of confiscating the weaponry of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, regardless of any "consolidation" of forces.

A diplomatic success of the Sharon administration has been to convince a significant part of the international community that Arafat is irrelevant to any peace process. It has also become a matter of consensus in the Israeli public and even on the political scene, outside of the Arab parties, it is almost impossible to find an MK who supports resuming talks with Arafat. This achievement is coupled with the IDF's ongoing success in preventing major terror attacks, with no help from the PA.

Israel, the international community, and the Palestinians themselves, share an interest in the Palestinian abandonment of terrorism and the suppression of elements that refuse to do so. There is no reason to believe that the current Palestinian leadership will end its support of terror, let alone actively combat it. The international community, therefore, should focus on that leadership's removal, rather than its resurrection. (Jerusalem Post Jun 27)

Two Encounters By Jonathan Rosenblum

The simplest errand in Eretz Yisrael can often lead one in totally unexpected directions. A few weeks back, I decided to buy my youngest sons cheap watches to help them better keep track of the time on long, lazy Shabbos afternoons and meet their father at the agreed upon times for learning.

My first trip to a nearby watch store yielded no results. The store was locked in the middle of the afternoon. Undaunted, I returned the next day.

This time was the owner was in, and we entered a desultory discussion about the relative merits of different \$12 watches.

I commented matter-of-factly that I had been there the previous day and the store had been locked. "Is that your usual time for Minchah," I asked. No, the storeowner informed me, today was the first day he had opened the store in weeks, ever since his oldest son was killed during Operation Rainbow in the Gaza Strip.

Suddenly we had entered territory for which I was completely unprepared. There was no way to return to the safe harbor of discussing whether it made any difference whether the water resistance on the watch extended to 200 meters. I offered a sympathetic look, and the storeowner started talking about his son. "If he came into the store to talk to me, and you were at the counter, he would wait in line just like any other customer," he said. "It would never occur to him to assert any special rights as the owner's son."

I asked the man whether he had a picture of his son, and he took out from his wallet a photo of a husky young man in army khakis with a green kippah seruga on his head. If we had passed one another on the street, I'm embarrassed to say, I would probably not have noticed him, and if I had, I would probably have thought to myself that the kippah was largely vestigial.

How wrong I would have been. The father mentioned that his son had left extensive notebooks of writings on Mesillat Yesharim and other mussar and hashkafa texts. I asked if I could see them, and he took out a ma'amara his son had written on the relationship of Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben David based on the writings of Rav Kook. The seforim of Rav Kook were not on the shelves on any of the yeshivos in which I learned, but the depth of thought they inspired in this 19-year-old ben Torah was obvious. The father told me that he had cartons filled with similar notebooks.

Since then, I've been back to the store several times, ostensibly to purchase another watch, but really just to let the father speak about his son. Yet each time the store was locked. When I asked the Russian guard at the nearby supermarket, he commented laconically, "Every day closed; every day closed."

Not all Eretz Yisrael's chance encounters, however, are depressing. Last Erev Shabbos, I met a close friend outside the local supermarket, where we were both picking up flowers. He took out of his pocket an Email he had just received from one of his talmidim in a well-known ba'al teshuva yeshiva.

The student had returned to the States for the summer, and was learning late one night in the West Side Kollel with a chavrusa when a stranger wearing a rabbinic frock entered. The stranger looked around and came straight over to the pair. He asked them in Hebrew what they were learning. They told him they were studying the Maharal's Netivot Olam. "A little bit of mussar from Sefiras HaOmer," the other member of the pair commented.

The stranger asked if he could learn with them. He began by telling them to turn to the end of perek 12, where the Maharal discussed the failure of the talmidim of Rabbi Akiva to show proper kavod for one another. As impressed as the young men were by the stranger's ability to immediately point them in exactly the right direction, they were even more so when he began explicating the pshat of the Maharal. Soon he had moved beyond explaining pshat to weaving a rich tapestry drawn from diverse sources.

The Israeli member of the chavrusa grew oddly silent, but the young ba'al teshuva, despite having spent only a year learning in Israel, found that he was able to converse fluently in Hebrew with the stranger. Later he wrote to his rebbe how moved he was by the way that the nocturnal visitor "was really trying to connect to us. . . [He] seemed so pleased that he had found us learning. Even though we, in our kippot serugot, did not look like model kollel guys, he treated us like we were his own talmidim."

After about twenty minutes, the Rosh Kollel entered and told the stranger that they had to be going. The latter seemed reluctant to leave. And before doing so, he asked each of the chavrusas for their full Hebrew names, and put his arm around the baal teshuva next to him and hugged him tightly. He then smiled at the chavrusa across the table and said, "Don't think this is just for him. If I were over there, I'd hug you too."

Only when the stranger had left, did the Israeli member of pair inform his chavrusa, "That was Rabbi _____, one of the world's greatest experts in Maharal." The recent ba'al teshuva instantly recognized the name he had heard his own rebbe pronounce many times with reverence.

He could hardly wait to describe the experience to his rebbe: "Even before I knew who it was, I had this feeling that this is a different kind of person. This is what it is like when a man is filled with Torah. This is a man who makes you want to grow yourself. . . ."

"I've heard you describe that experience to me many times before, but I never really understood it until that night. I don't know what I did to merit such a gift from HaKadosh Baruch Hu. But I'm showing my appreciation the best way I can think of: I still learn Maharal three times a week - maybe now with a little more geshmack."

Both these chance encounters taught me a great deal -- above all how little we know of the true depth of our fellow Jews. Had I passed the young soldier, now gone forever, on the street, I would have known nothing of who he was. And even though I have heard shiurim for twenty years from the gadol in the second story, I was still brought to tears by hearing of his boundless love for every Jew who embarks in any way on the search for truth and the impact of his smile and hug. (Mishpacha June 28)

The Shared Memory of a Song By Yocheved Miriam Russo

Naomi Shemer died Saturday, and the stack of regrets I carry around in my head has grown by a mile. I intended to seek her out, to find her, to say, simply, thank you. But I never did, and now it is too late.

The year 1967 is, for me, lost in a haze. That was the year I graduated from law school in San Francisco, then studied for and took bar exams in two different states. My entire life that year was spent poring over Corpus Juris books, cramming in obscure theories of legal causation and ways in which devious bar examiners could check to see if we really understood "The Rule in Shelley's Case."

Even with that excuse I'm appalled to admit I have no personal recollection of the recapture of Jerusalem beyond some dim memory of newspaper headlines.

Soon after, as I took up the business of lawyering, life began to change. I began searching for a more consistent kind of law, some kind of system, if you will, that would endure beyond the appointment of any individual Supreme Court justice. It took years, but as I first immersed myself in history, then specifically Jewish history, and eventually stumbled unto Torah, I finally found it. That happens, if you aren't careful.

The story of the Six Day War and the reunification of Jerusalem had come into my ken through several written accounts; but not until I checked a Rabbi Berel Wein Torah Tape out of the Chaya Mushka Jewish Public Library in Seattle did it become real.

I was captivated by Wein's personal recollection of June 7, 1967. But when he replayed a radio broadcast, made as our own soldiers reached the Wall, sobbing and offering prayers of thanksgiving, the events of that day imprinted themselves on my mind.

As I listened I saw the soldiers reaching that Wall, I heard the shofar, and I felt myself become a part of the crowd, pushing, cheering and weeping at the same time as we reclaimed that small sliver of the world that is most uniquely ours.

What happened on June 7, 1967 had lost its designation as Jewish history. It became my own history. No matter how many times I listened to that tape, I wept again and again with the joy of that moment. At some point, Rabbi Wein's memories of that day became inseparable from my own.

More years passed. I made aliya, I went to ulpan – level aleph. One day a substitute teacher, Nava Berlin, arrived with a cassette player to teach a session on Naomi Shemer. She handed out copies of an easy-Hebrew biography in addition to a page with the words to "Jerusalem of Gold." She talked of her own memories of that June day, memories that echoed my own – even though mine were transplants, at best.

Toward the end of class Nava put a tape into the tiny cassette player, pushed a button, and the music of "Jerusalem of Gold" poured forth – tinny, a little hard to hear, much of the Hebrew still incomprehensible, but, somehow, it was the most beautiful song I'd ever heard in my life.

Naomi Shemer was not, according to her biographers, a religious woman, and yet we are told it was the story of Rabbi Akiva and his wife, Rachel, that inspired her when she wrote "Jerusalem of Gold."

When Akiva, the poor shepherd, married the rich and beautiful Rachel, her parents were outraged and cut them off. Although Akiva had great proficiency in the study of Torah, the young couple had no money. Akiva, according to tradition, was studying at a yeshiva and was actually damaging his eyesight because he couldn't afford candles. When Rachel heard this she cut off her lovely long hair, sold it, and sent the money to her husband to buy candles.

Years later, when Akiva – by then the famous Rabbi Akiva – had become wealthy, he remembered his wife's sacrifice and bought her a "Jerusalem of Gold," a magnificent golden tiara, to wear in her hair.

The talmudic words "Jerusalem of Gold" echoed in Shemer's mind. In her song she lamented the empty market places, the few visitors to the Wall, the pain of 2,000 years of destruction and ruin. Yet for us, our Jerusalem – our poor, gray, tattered city – was still "gold."

Perhaps because of fortuitous timing, perhaps because of Providence, or maybe just because of the sheer melodic genius of the song itself, Shemer's "Jerusalem of Gold" became the anthem, the song that plays in our heads when we think of the Six Day War and the reunification of our beloved city.

Now, like the history of the day itself, the song has become my own song of longing, of love for Jerusalem, of the sweetness of that particular victory. In my mind, I was there: I sang that song with the crowds, I heard it again and again as we celebrated our success.

I wanted to thank Shemer for the truth and beauty she had created, for giving words and melody to a love for Jerusalem I could never find a way to express on my own.

For generations of immigrants, newcomers not in Israel when we took back the city, she found a way through her music to allow all of us to become a part of that moment.

Now it's too late to thank her. But still, wherever you are, Naomi, on behalf of all of us who came a little late to this magnificent country – our thanks of gold. (Jerusalem Post Jun 29)

The writer is based in Beersheba.