

LIBERAL

OASIS

THE TRUTH ABOUT

ISRAEL

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Liberal Oasis is a companion to:

Making David Into Goliath
How the World Turned Against Israel

by Joshua Muravchik

Israel was once hailed as a bastion of humane values surrounded by repression and cruelty. Now it is scorned as the arch pariah of the “international community.” In a devastating dissection of intellectual tropes and craven appeasement parading as high principle, *Making David Into Goliath* is the fascinating story of how enlightened opinion turned against the Jewish state.

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Little, But Not So Shitty

In 2001, the French ambassador to England was heard to deride “that shitty little country, Israel.” Israel is indeed little, ranking 153rd among the world’s countries in geographic size.¹ But shitty? Let us compare it with, say, France whose government and press rallied round the outspoken diplomat.

Because the French so pride themselves on *la gloire*, consider first warfare, far from a noble human endeavor but sometimes a necessary one. Israel defeated the combined Arab armies in 1948, 1967 and 1973 and various states or guerrilla forces each time it has faced them. France, on the other hand, was bailed out by the United States in World War One, surrendered in World War Two, and was defeated by the guerrillas of the Viet Minh in Vietnam and the FLN in Algeria. It was on the winning side in the Cold War, but through no fault of its own, having largely opted out of that struggle by withdrawing from NATO and declaring its nuclear force to be aimed equally in all directions.

In economics, France, one of the first industrial countries, is wealthier than Israel, a recently-developed country, but not by much and probably not for long. According to the International Monetary Fund’s *World Economic Outlook Database* of October 2013, Israel’s per capita income, measured in Purchasing Power Parities, the most reliable tool for country comparisons, reached 98 percent of that of France, whereas only twenty years before Israel’s had been only 80 percent that of France.² All such data come with disclaimers about their exactitude, but the trend line is unmistakable. It seems only a matter of years, and not too many, before Israel passes France in this respect.

Already, Israel has pulled ahead in scores on the UN’s Human Development Index which attempts to measure standards of living in a more concrete way than money. According to the 2012 report of the UN Human Development Program, France ranks 20th among the world’s nations, behind Israel at 16th. Israel’s Index score is .900; France scores .893. This index is made up of three areas of measurement: health, education, and income. Since France is still ahead in income, this means that Israel has already passed it in broad measures of health and education.

Because France is not a little country—its population is about 8-and-a-half times as large as Israel’s—its accomplishments in most things that are countable surpass those of Israel. But if you look at these same things on a per capita basis, Israel comes out ahead virtually every time.

Take patents, for example, the simplest measure of inventiveness. Per person, Israel is already more than three times ahead of France in the number of U.S. patents secured each year. (The U.S. patent is the world standard.) But so much more fertile are Israeli than French inventors that Israel is on a trajectory to surpass France even in absolute numbers. In 1996, French companies and inventors registered six times as many patents in the U.S. as did Israel's. That already put Israel somewhat ahead, per capita. Since then, however, the gap has narrowed steadily. In the late 1990s, France was ahead by a ratio of five-to-one; in the early 2000s by four-to-one; in the middle of that decade by three-to-one. In 2009, France's inventors outdid Israel's by only 2-and-a-half to one. In the next three years the ratio continued to drop gradually toward 2-to-1. Astonishingly, this trend suggests that the day when the 7 million-odd Israelis pull down more patents than the 60-odd million Frenchmen draws near. *Sacrebleu!*

Likewise, per capita, Israel leads France in Nobel prizes, in the number of books published each year and scientific papers published and cited, and in most any other measure of excellence you can think of. There were, as of 2013, almost as many Israelis (39) as French (47) with the title of grand master in chess.³ And the Israeli team, Maccabi Elite, made it to the final four in the annual championship tournament of Euroleague basketball seven times from 2000 to 2012, while the French team never did.⁴

I am of course tweaking the French, a joy that is hard to resist, but the deeper point I want to make is quite serious and has nothing to do with France. Rather it is about Israel. Although it is "little" and young and has had to fight to survive every moment since its gestation, Israel has become one of the world's greatest countries. I use the word "great," not to suggest its military might, although Israel's is formidable, nor its economic accomplishments which are also outstanding. More important, however, Israel's greatness lies in its accomplishments in all fields of humane values, the very same values, ironically, that Israel's liberal and leftist detractors claim to hold dear.

These accomplishments are impressive, as I have been suggesting, even in comparison with France which, despite my tweaks, is one of the world's great civilizations and was the incubator of many of these self-same noble values. France aside, Israel's record on a humanitarian scale is downright overwhelming when seen in comparison to those of its adversaries, whether we speak of the Palestinians or the Arabs or the Muslim world in its entirety.

Liberté

The heritage of the French Revolution has shaped political discourse for more than two centuries. The ideological code of Left to Right was derived from the seating of factions in the revolutionary *Assemblée Nationale*, and the touchstone of the Left, then and ever since, has been the slogan, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, which remains the national motto of France (and Haiti). Let us see how Israel stacks up to these ideals.

The term *liberté* encompasses freedom and democracy, which remain the most basic and powerful measures of respect for human dignity. Happily, thanks to Freedom House, this is also a realm for which we have exhaustive and reliable quantitative measurements.*

Freedom House provides separate assessments of freedom and democracy. What it calls “electoral democracy” is simply a yes or no variable based on the very straightforward question of whether the government is chosen in free, fair, and open elections or not. Altogether, in 2013 Freedom House rated 118, or sixty-one percent, of the world’s countries as “electoral democracies.”⁵

Elections, important though they are, do not in themselves make a country “free.” There are countries, for example, with elected governments but abridgements of press freedom or where courts do not operate without government interference or where endemic corruption vitiates government accountability. Hence, Freedom House also rates each country each year on a scale of “freedom” that is much more textured. It scores countries numerically, by half-numbers, i.e., 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5, etc., with 1 being the best possible score and 7 being the worst. Countries that score from 1 to 2.5 are rated “free.” Those in the range from 3 to 5 are “partly free.” A score anywhere from 5.5 to 7 earns a country the label, “not free.”

How does Israel measure up? And what about its enemies?

Israel, unsurprisingly, rates as an “electoral democracy.” The Arabs? There are 22 members of the Arab League—21 countries plus the Palestinian Authority. Although there have been free elections in Iraq, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority, it is not clear that those who won the elections rule the country, so none has yet met Freedom House’s standard of “electoral democracy.” The only member of the Arab League that Freedom House has called a democracy for several years running is the Comoros, four islands off the eastern coast of Africa with a combined population of 750,000.[†] In its 2013 report Freedom House added Tunisia and Libya.

Looking at the Muslim world as a whole, the picture for democracy is brighter than among the Arab states, but still pretty dim. By most counts, there are 47 countries, apart from the Palestinian Authority, with Muslim majorities. (In a few countries the number of Muslims is so close to fifty percent that it is uncertain whether they belong on the list.) Of these 47, ten were counted as electoral democracies by Freedom House in 2013, in other words 21.3 percent, while the portion of electoral democracies among all of the non-Muslim countries was 73 percent.

Turning from the question of democracy to the more nuanced one of freedom, Israel scored a 1.5 on Freedom House’s rating which qualifies as “free,” but it is not quite as good as being rated 1.0, a mark achieved by 47 countries. Israel, in other words, was in the second tier of “free” countries along with the likes of Italy and Japan, well within the cut-off of 2.5 above which countries are rated only “partly free.”

This means that Israel's freedom score is very good but not perfect, so it is worth considering the context. Countries under attack or at war usually impose some infringements on normal freedoms. Of course, some countries have few freedoms even in peacetime; but even liberal democracies tend to become less free when their safety or survival are at stake. In America, controversy has raged over derogations from normal standards of civil liberty in the name of the Global War on Terror. These included the Patriot Act, the prison at Guantanamo, military tribunals, detentions without trial, "rendition," eavesdropping, etc. These deviations from American judicial norms pale by comparison to those of World War One when dissenters were imprisoned, World War Two when Japanese Americans were interned, or the Civil War when the right of *habeas corpus* was suspended.

Nor was America unique in this respect. While President Franklin Roosevelt was rounding up American citizens of Japanese background (as well as some of German or Italian roots), Prime Minister Winston Churchill tossed Sir Oswald Mosley, leader of Britain's native fascists, and some of his comrades into jail without benefit of any judicial proceeding. Had Freedom House been around during World War Two, it would have given the US and UK scores worse than Israel's 1.5. Yet for Israel, in terms of national security it has always been World War Two—or the equivalent. From the moment of its independence—indeed decades earlier for the Jewish community of Palestine—it has lived in the midst of enemies bent on its destruction. And these would-be destroyers have made a pretty good job of it. Israel has survived, but at a fearsome cost. When the Arabs attacked following the 1947 UN vote to partition Palestine and to allow a Jewish state to come into being, nearly one percent of the Jews perished, the equivalent proportionally to well over a million Americans, given America's population at that time, more like three million in terms of today's America. The 1967 war cost Israel nearly eight hundred lives, the equivalent of more than fifty thousand deaths in the America of its day; and six years later, the 1973 Arab attack took nearly 2,700 more, the equivalent of almost two hundred thousand Americans. More than a thousand Israelis were done to death during the so called *Intifada* that began in 2000, the equivalent of nearly fifty thousand American deaths, or fifteen times the toll of 9/11. On top of this, some five-thousand Israelis have been killed in smaller wars and terror attacks, this roughly equivalent to another quarter of a million Americans.

Today, not all of Israel's neighbors continue to seek its annihilation, but some still do, including well-armed terrorist groups on Israel's northern and southern borders. And, too, the relentless depredations of suicide bombers infiltrating all along its eastern border were brought to a halt only by the construction of a fence-and-wall barrier running most of the length of the country, for which act of passive self-defense Israel has been roundly condemned by Jimmy Carter, Bishop Tutu, the UN General Assembly, and the rest of the mob, including even the International Court of Justice.

Given Israel's diminutive geographic size, its international isolation, the bloody-mindedness of its enemies and the price it has paid in self-defense, few countries live

with a narrower margin of safety. Under these circumstances, it is doubtful that even the most free and liberal states would preserve more freedom and liberality than Israel has done. Indeed one wonders how many others would have done so well.

On the other side of the ledger, the freedom scores of the Arab and Muslim states are abysmal. Among the members of the Arab League, there is not a single state that ranks as “free,” not even the three tenuous democracies which all rank as “partly free,” as do four others, making a total of seven in this category, while fifteen members of the League are “not free” at all. The mean and the median of the Arab states each come out to 5.5. (Recall that on the Freedom House scale, high numbers are less desirable and the band of “not free” consists of ratings from 5.5 to 7.)

The forty-seven Muslim states as a whole present only a slightly prettier picture than the Arab states. Three of them—Indonesia, Sierra Leone, and Senegal, with scores of 2.5—get under the wire into the “free” category; 19 others are “partly free” while the majority, twenty-five, are “not free.” Here, too, the median score is 5.5, but the mean is a bit better, 5.1. Of the 9 countries in the world that score a rock-bottom 7, that are in other words the most repressive tyrannies on the face of the earth, 6 are Muslim-majority states, four of them, Arab.

The dearth of democracy in the Muslim world points to an argument often heard from those who are skeptical of democratic universalism. They say that it is unrealistic to expect democracy to grow where there is no democratic culture or tradition. In large degree this argument is circular. How can a democratic tradition or culture be acquired without practicing democracy? But there is an element of truth to it, nonetheless. In English-speaking countries democracy blossomed as the flower of centuries of parliamentary experience and recognition of the “rights of Englishmen.” In many other places—France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Japan—democracy took hold only on its second or third go-round, after first appearing and disappearing.

If this history helps to explain why democracy is so scarce in the Muslim world, it also casts additional light on Israel’s achievement in this realm. The immigrants who formed the state of Israel and who still form it came overwhelmingly from places where there was no democratic culture or tradition. Half came from the Muslim countries, while the *Ashkenazim*, those who came from Europe, were predominantly from the East not the West. The only political life they knew was, in respective generations, czarist autocracy or Communism.‡

I have not mentioned human rights as a separate category because there are no quantitative data on human rights, but the state of respect for human rights in a country correlates more or less exactly with the degree of freedom and democracy. Although the term, human rights, is not synonymous with freedom or democracy, just as they are not synonymous with each other, nonetheless these three concepts overlap appreciably. It is hard to practice or even define any of these without the others.

Thus, it remains utterly inexplicable (except for the most damning of explanations) that such “human rights groups” as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International pronounce more condemnations on free and democratic Israel than on its dictatorial neighbors and enemies.

Égalité

As with freedom and democracy, so, too, with equality. Israeli society is light years more egalitarian than its neighbors and enemies, and in most dimensions of equality it surpasses most of the rest of the world.

Égalité was understood by the revolutionaries to mean civic equality—each man, a *citoyen*—in contrast to the ascribed hierarchy of feudal ranks. Toward the end of the revolutionary years, a few radicals argued that equality must also mean identical incomes, a view that was developed further with the coinage of “socialism” in the 1820s. In subsequent generations, the idea of equality took on additional meanings, expanding to connote equal treatment of women, members of minority races and religions, and people of different sexual orientations.

In terms of social stratification and the sense of class hierarchy that was so central a spur to the French revolutionists, Israel is one of the most egalitarian countries on earth. Throughout Israeli society, in all manner of social organizations lines of rank appear fainter than perhaps anywhere else. As Dan Senor and Saul Singer put it in their book, *Startup Nation*:

An outsider would see chutzpah everywhere in Israel: in the way university students speak with their professors, employees challenge their bosses, sergeants question their generals, and clerks second-guess government ministers. To Israelis, however, this isn't chutzpah, it's the normal mode of being.⁶

Senor and Singer quote an America-born observer: “Israel is the only place in the world where everybody in a position of power—including prime ministers and army generals—has a nickname used by all, including the masses.”⁷ It is not only the men at the top who are treated with such familiarity. Israeli soldiers address their superiors by first name, not rank, and rarely salute them.

The army is the great socializer in Israel, and also a great equalizer. Females are conscripted, as well as males, and the males go on to serve 20 to 30 years in the reserves. An Israeli man's unit remains constant throughout his decades of reserve duty and becomes a primary social group. It is not uncommon for the distribution of military ranks within a unit to bear little correspondence, or even inverse correspondence, to the income and prestige of the various reservists' occupations in civilian life.

Much the same spirit is evident in politics, government, and business. The sartorial signature of Israel's founding father and first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, was shorts, sandals, and an open-necked shirt, setting a style followed by some other politicians over the next 30 years. A guidebook for foreigners doing business in Israel today advises the reader to "wear your suit if you feel comfortable in it," but warns that his Israeli interlocutor will be in jeans and a casual shirt. The Israeli may address the visitor as "mister" (although usually Israelis are not long on politeness), but the visitor nonetheless is counseled to address the Israeli by first name.

In terms of distribution of income Israel is not so egalitarian. Economists measure income equality with an abstruse calculation that yields something called a "Gini coefficient." Israel's Gini coefficient places it just slightly better than average among countries of the world, taking "better" to mean more equal. If Israel were compared to the Arab or Muslim states, it also would fall right in the middle of the pack, although these data are nebulous since the UN lacks Gini numbers for most of the Arab states, including all of the oil-rich Gulf states which are notorious for their striking contrasts of wealth and poverty.

But not all inequalities are equal, so to speak. Consider this debate. Strong advocates of free enterprise and meritocracy dispute the moral value of income equality, arguing that disparities are a natural, even desirable, concomitant of economic advancement, rewarding effort and creativity. Those of a contrary opinion point out that although wealth may accrue to talent and effort, it may also reflect nothing more than fortunate birth or other luck.

Whatever one thinks of these contrasting views, few would dispute that some disparities are more justifiable morally others. In Saudi Arabia and some other oil-rich states, national wealth derives from the happenstance of sitting upon a valuable natural commodity rather than from ingenuity or effort, and an individual's share in it depends almost entirely on blood or other relationship to the royal owners of the country's natural endowments. In contrast, in places like Israel or the East Asian "four tigers," resource-poor countries that have achieved dramatic economic growth, prosperity comes from professional excellence and entrepreneurial ingenuity, and the distribution of wealth within the society mostly mirrors the distribution of those qualities among its members.

Nonetheless, for current purposes I will stick with the traditional Leftist (or liberal, in the American usage) view that income inequality, as such, is bad. Thus Israel's mediocre ratings on this score are not to its credit.

But a closer examination reveals a somewhat different story. A key reason, perhaps the most important one, that Israel does not show better is that it contains large pools of low earners, who undoubtedly account for much of the income inequality.

Of whom do these pools consist? One very large group comprises new immigrants.

People who pull up roots and arrive in a country where they have not been educated, do not speak the language, and are unfamiliar with social customs are at a large disadvantage, to put it mildly, in the job market. Do you, Mr. American employer, want to hire someone who knows no English? Perhaps, but usually just to sweep floors, bus tables, cut grass, or take out trash. Indeed, in America many such job-seekers settle for under-the-table employment without social benefits or legal protections.

In Israel, the proportion of immigrants is many times higher than in all but a few countries. Indeed, the handful of places where “immigrants” make up a larger share than in Israel are all anomalies: either tax havens like Monaco, where people take out citizenship in order to shield their lucre, or oil-rich sheikhdoms like Qatar where a tiny indigenous population is swamped by foreigners who do almost all the work. These oddities aside, Israel’s immigrant share is in a class by itself. According to UN data, immigrants make up 1.2 percent of the populations of Latin America, 1.4 percent of Asia, 1.9 percent of Africa, and 8.8 percent of wealthy Europe, where the problems of absorption have become a neuralgic issue. In the U.S., which prides itself a “nation of immigrants,” 13 percent of the people are foreign born. Compare these numbers with Israel, where the share of immigrants is 40 percent! In light of that number, it is surprising that Israel’s Gini coefficient shows as little income inequality as it does.

And there is more to be said about this number. Two other population groups are also important in skewing Israel’s income distribution: Arabs and ultra-orthodox Jews. These two clusters earn at a far lower level than other Israelis. Why? Surely, the ultra-orthodox are not victims of discrimination. Rather they adhere to a religious philosophy that places enormous value on childbearing, because fruitfulness is a biblical injunction, and on religious study. To these believers, the unceasing exploration of God’s word, the Torah, is the highest human endeavor.

Through an odd confluence of such religious fervor and the socialist beliefs of Israel’s mostly secular “labor Zionist” leaders, a system evolved in which young men of what is called the *Haredi* community are excused from military service and are awarded welfare while they devote their lives to religious study and procreation. When this arrangement began, the *Haredim* amounted to a tiny number, but thanks to their high birthrate they have become a substantial bloc.

Israel’s Census bureau in 2011 reported on four surveys taken five years earlier, two of which placed the number of *Haredim* at 700,00 and two others at somewhat lower numbers.⁸ This would constitute about ten percent of the national population and closer to fifteen percent of the Israeli Jewish population. According to the *New York Times*, “Some 60 percent of ultra-Orthodox men do not work regular jobs, preferring religious study. More than 50 percent live below the poverty line and get state allowances, compared with 15 percent of the rest of the population.”⁹

In addition to the *Haredim*, a second large pocket of poverty in Israel is made up of Arabs. But not all Arabs. Recent research by Israeli social scientist Dan Schueftan shows

a stark contrast among Israeli Arabs along religious lines, that is, between Muslims and Christians. Like the Arab world as a whole, Israel's Arab population is predominantly Muslim but includes a Christian minority making up just below 10 percent. Schueftan shows that socio-economic circumstances of the Christian Arabs are much better than of the Muslims. Interestingly, the scores of Christian Arabs on measures of education, income, and the like, closely resemble those of *secular* Jews, while the data for Muslim Arabs approximate those for ultra-orthodox Jews. The critical variables, it seems, are family size and the role of women—and possibly, although this is more ephemeral, the degree of materialism.

Among Christian Arabs as well as secular Jews, family size is relatively small, and women are emancipated. They are encouraged to become educated, and many earn post-graduate degrees; most work outside the home. In contrast, for Muslim Arabs, like *Haredi* Jews, women are expected to marry young, thus not to attain high education levels, and to spend their lives as homemakers, raising large families.

The low earnings of these two groups are another principle source of the income inequality measured by the Gini coefficient. What does this mean? It means that a large part of poverty in Israel, larger than elsewhere, is explainable not by a lack of opportunity or some kind of unfairness, but by lifestyle choices. Ultra-orthodox Jews and observant Muslims prefer to be faithful to the tenets of their faiths, placing higher value on their relationships with *Hashem* or *Allah* than on material rewards. Rather than big homes, they would have a home full of offspring. And rather than a second income they would have a wife giving care to those offspring. Is it wrong for individuals to make such choices or for a society to allow them?

In sum, when we look closely at income distribution, which is the aspect of social equality in which Israel's record is least outstanding, we find that the record is far better than at first glance.

Let us consider next the question of equality between ethnic groups. The principal divide among Jews separates *Ashkenazim* from *Sephardim*. The former are of northern European background, mostly from Russia, Poland, Germany, where they spoke primary Yiddish, a Germanic tongue. The term *Sephardim* today refers to those who immigrated to Israel from the Arab lands and North Africa. Some of them (more precisely called *Mizrahim*) trace their lineage in that region to Roman times while others were descended from refugees who had dispersed to the south and southeast when the Jews were expelled from Iberia in the 15th century. The language they carried with them was Ladino, a derivative of Spanish.

The numbers of the two groups in Israel are similar, but the *Ashkenazim*, immigrating from more technologically developed countries, enjoyed consequent advantages. Most of the leadership of the Zionist movement came from their ranks, and they were seen as the dominant group. In the 1970s, an organization calling itself provocatively the Black Panthers made headlines protesting what it said was unfair treatment of the *Sephardim*.

But the group died out after failing to garner 1 percent of the vote in Israel's proportional representation system of voting for parliament, and nothing substantial has arisen to replace it.

The reason is probably that although *Sephardim* do record lower socio-economic scores, there is little evidence that this is due to discrimination or unfair treatment. Moreover, despite their socio-economic status, they are powerful in politics. In 1977, the right-of-center Likud Party broke the three-decade-long skein of Labor Party governments. Although Likud's leader, Menachim Begin, and all subsequent Likud Prime Ministers have been *Ashkenazim*, the party's electoral base is predominantly *Sephardi*. In addition, among the *Sephardim*, the ultra-orthodox camp has formed a more successful electoral bloc, called *Shas*, than their *Ashkenazi* counterparts. Since its founding in the 1980s, *Shas* has secured a place in nine of the twelve governments that have been formed. Whether leaning to the Left or Right the major parties have found it difficult to assemble a coalition government without it.

Although Israel has not yet had a *Sephardi* Prime Minister, various *Sephardi* leaders have served as President, Defense Minister, Foreign Minister, and Chief of Staff of the armed forces, and dozens serve as members of Israel's legislature, the *Knesset*. Economically, *Ashkenazim* still earn about fifty percent more than *Sephardim* on average, but that, as well as the gap in number of years of education that underlies it, has been narrowing, and intermarriage between the two groups now runs around 25 percent.

Thornier questions about equality in Israel are posed by the status of the country's Arab citizens who make up about twenty percent of the population. When the *intifada* erupted in 2000, Jewish Israelis were shocked when some of their Arab countrymen joined in the violence, blocking roads and rioting until suppressed by the police with lethal force. By the time peace was restored, one Jew and thirteen Arabs had died. This prompted the government to create a three-person investigatory commission, chaired by Supreme Court justice Theodor Or and including an Arab judge, Hashim Khatib. While criticizing the police for excessive force and Arab community leaders for incitement, the commission's report homed in on the problem of inequality:

Government handling of the Arab sector has been primarily neglectful and discriminatory. The establishment did not show sufficient sensitivity to the needs of the Arab population, and did not take enough action in order to allocate state resources in an equal manner. The state did not do enough or try hard enough to create equality for its Arab citizens or to uproot discriminatory or unjust phenomenon.¹⁰

Since then, liberal Jewish and Arab-Israeli NGOs have monitored government efforts to promote greater equality. While they consistently find that not enough has been done or that the results have not been sufficient, nonetheless, Israel has done better in evening out socioeconomic differences than most countries encompassing sharply

diverse nationalities.

Consider first health, the best summary measurement of which may be life expectancy. This is higher for Jews than for Arabs in Israel, but not by much. For Jews, the numbers are 83.9 years for women and 80.7 for men. Among Israeli Arabs the number is 80.9 for women and 76.5 for men.¹¹ According to a study released in 2010 by Ben-Gurion University, the most recent data put the life expectancy of Israeli Arabs overall at 79 years, which is two years less than that of Israeli Jews, but one year *more* than that of Americans.¹² This is also almost ten years longer, according to UN statistics, than the life expectancy of the Arab world as whole, and longer than for any individual Arab country except Lebanon.¹³

The other main measure of public health is infant mortality. Sikkuy, The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality, an Israeli advocacy group, reports “a large gap in infant mortality between Jews and Arabs: 3.2 vs. 8.0 per thousand live births, respectively.”¹⁴ Sikkuy’s report acknowledges that the figure for Arabs is driven upward by the Bedouin whose rate is 13 per thousand and is due largely to factors that are not easy for the state to control, to wit, “The main reason for infant mortality among the Negev Bedouin is birth defects and hereditary diseases.” Other data show that Israeli Arabs are far less likely than Jews to submit to prenatal testing of fetuses which presumably means that Jews are more likely to abort abnormal fetuses which also happen to be at higher risk of infant death.

Without further exploring factors that may help explain the Jewish/Arab disparity, perhaps the more important point is that in the range of country scores for infant mortality, both are low numbers. The 8-per-thousand deaths suffered by Arab Israeli newborns is not much worse than for all babies born in the United States, where the number is judged by the World Bank to be 6.8 and was projected by the CIA to be 6.14 in 2010. Or, to consider the global picture, the Arab Israeli figure of 8 is less than half of the global median of around 17 deaths per thousand.

Education is another area in which Jewish Israelis show statistical advantages over their Arab countrymen, but again the differences are not large. Classroom size is perhaps the area of greatest disparity and the hardest to excuse since this would seem to lie well within the power of the state to control. The average elementary school class in Jewish areas, according to Sikkuy, has 24.6 students while the average in Arab areas has 29. For high schools, it is 27.6 students in Jewish areas and 30.5 in Arab.

There are also disparities in educational attainments. The median number of years of schooling completed is 12.7 for Jews as against 11.1 for Arabs.¹⁵ Surely, to at least some degree this reflects the well-known Jewish mania for education. (Perhaps amusingly, the greatest statistical disparity in education between Arabs and Jews in Israel is for school enrollment of *2-year-olds*.¹⁶ Of course this is due largely to the greater participation of Jewish women in the labor force. But it probably also owes

something to Jewish obsessions.)

It turns out, thus, that the gap in educational attainment between Jews and Arabs in Israel pales in comparison to the gap between Jews and gentiles in the United States (where, it may be recalled, out-and-out discrimination against Jews was practiced only a few generations ago). According to the Pew *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* in 2008, 59 percent of Jews in America had a college degree and 35 percent had postgraduate education. Pew did not ask the exact number of years of schooling, but we may safely infer from these numbers that the Jewish median is not lower than 17 (although it may be higher).⁸ For Americans as a whole, the Pew data suggest that the median is 12, since 50 percent of Pew's respondents said that they had nothing more than a high school diploma or less. (And because Jews raise the overall average somewhat, the median for non-Jewish Americans must be slightly below 12.) In short, estimating conservatively, we can calculate that Jews in America have on average 40 to 50 percent more education than gentiles; whereas in Israel Jews have only 14 percent more education than Arabs.

It might be added that, according to 2010 data presented in the *Barro-Lee Educational Attainment Data Set*, an authoritative source relied upon in the UN's *Arab Human Development Report*, the mean number of years of schooling in the Arab countries ranged from a low of 2.5 years in Yemen to a high of 9.4 years in tiny, oil-rich Bahrain. For Israel, the mean is 11.9. We may extrapolate that the mean for Arabs in Israel is about 10.4 years, ** more than in any Arab country. And these numbers probably understate this discrepancy because the *Arab Human Development Report* found that when it adjusted the Barro-Lee numbers for educational quality the gap between the Arab countries and the others widened.

A half century ago, Arabs everywhere in the Middle East had very little education, whether due to values in their own culture or to the contemptuous treatment they received at the hands of colonial rulers. Significant gains have been recorded throughout the region, and those in Israel are especially impressive. According to the Israel Democracy Institute, "between 1961 and 2007, the average numbers of years of schooling [of Israeli Arabs] rose from 1.2 to 11.3, which signifies a more than nine fold increase."¹⁷ How many countries or groups anywhere have recorded such dramatic progress? The IDI paper did not give a figure for Israeli Jews for comparison, but Barro-Lee data show that the overall mean for Israel rose from 7.3 to 11.9. This means that the gains among Israel's Jewish population were far smaller than among its Arabs.

In sum, while some educational disparity endures between Israeli Jews and Arabs, the most remarkable facts about this disparity are the astonishing rate at which it has diminished and that it is smaller than the disparity between Jews and non-Jews outside of Israel. It is testament more to Israel's egalitarianism than to inequality.

Now let us turn to economic issues. In Israel, according to 2008 data, unemployment

among Arab men was 10.3 percent and for Jewish men, 8.2 percent.¹⁸ The disparity among women was greater, 14 percent to 9.6 percent. Since there were far fewer women in the work force, the combined rate would be closer to the rate for males. Unemployment rates are constantly changing, and I have seen other figures with somewhat greater differences, on the ratio of 3 to 2, although since 2008 unemployment has been dropping in Israel across the board which is likely to have narrowed the disparity somewhat. In any case, these numbers compare favorably with available data for Europe (where I can find no statistics for Arabs but rather for Muslims or specific national subgroups).

For example, according to a 2005 Library of Congress study of the UK, “Muslims ... suffer ... disproportionate levels of unemployment (about 15% in comparison to the overall UK unemployment rate of roughly 5%).”¹⁹ The EU’s official Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia noted that in Belgium unemployment for Moroccans and Turks was more than five times higher than for natives; that in Germany “the unemployment rate of ‘foreigners’ ... was almost twice as high as the general average;” that in Ireland “11 percent of Muslims were unemployed as opposed to a total average of 4 per cent.” Yet another authoritative study found that while the “Dutch majority” suffered unemployment of 9 percent, for Turks in Holland the rate was 21 percent and for Moroccans 27 percent. In Denmark, unemployment among Danes was 4.5 while among Turks it stood at 17.8 and among Iraqis (the only Arab group mentioned) 26.9.²⁰ The point of comparison that suggests itself for the United States is racial rather than religious. And here we find that unemployment among blacks runs about double that of whites: 16 percent as against 8.7 in 2010.²¹

If the differences between Jewish and Arab Israelis in unemployment rates are rather small, the differences in income are rather large. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the net income of Arab households is 63 percent that of Jewish households.²² In part this disparity is explained by the much higher participation of Jewish women in the labor force: 68 percent as opposed to only 22 percent for Arab women in Israel.²³ In part, too, it is a function of the higher earning of Jews. On average, an Arab worker makes 70 percent of a Jewish worker, on an hourly basis and 68 percent monthly.²⁴ Some of this disparity is accounted for by the higher level of education among Jews, even though that gap is modest, some by Hebrew language deficiencies, some by the exclusion of Arabs from the networking opportunities afforded by military service, and some, no doubt, by discrimination.

However much weight may be attributed to each of these causes, George Gilder casts a light on the import of this disparity with this arresting point:

The prowess of Jewish entrepreneurs and other professionals ... produces similar gaps in every free country on earth with significant numbers of Jews. Jews, for example, outearn other Caucasians in the United States by an even larger margin than they out-earn Arabs in Israel.²⁵

If Arab household income is 63 percent of that of Jews, it means that Arab per capita income is even lower since the average Arab household is about fifty percent larger. Roughly, therefore, Arab income per person in Israel is only about 40 percent of that of Jews. That is a large disparity, but some cross-country comparisons add context. Using the IMF's World Economic Outlook Database estimates for the year 2013, I have calculated the per capita income of the Arab countries as a group^{††}, and it comes out to just over \$10,000 (measured in Purchasing Power Parities). The same source gives the estimated per capita income of Israelis as just under \$35,000. If Arab per capita income in Israel is forty percent that of Jews, then we can estimate that Arab income in Israel is \$15,000 per capita. That means it is half-again as high as the income of Arabs in Arab countries.

While it is thus clear that Israeli Arabs are more prosperous than most Arabs elsewhere, ironically, the reverse is true for Jews. Israeli Jews are on the whole less well off than Jews elsewhere. The data for this are not exhaustive, but we have enough that the inference is beyond question. The largest number of Jews outside of Israel resides in the United States where per capita income for the entire population is \$46,400. But that of Jews is way above average: it is estimated to be about twice as high as of non-Jews, meaning roughly \$90,000 per capita.²⁶ This means that the income of American Jews is about three times higher than that of Israeli Jews.

Outside of the U.S., the next largest diaspora populations are found in France, Canada and the UK. Per capita incomes in these countries range from 10 to 32.25 percent higher than Israel's. And again, although the data available on the economic conditions of Jews in these countries is fragmentary, it is a safe assumption that the incomes of Jews are on average higher than those of their gentile countrymen. For example we *do* know that in the UK the proportion of Jews with advanced education is double that of non-Jews and so is the proportion in elite occupations;²⁷ and that in Canada the share of Jews in the highest-earning bracket is 7 times as large as for non-Jews.^{28††} Since these countries are on the whole richer than Israel, and since the Jews who live in them are richer than the respective national average, we can say with confidence that French, Canadian and British Jews enjoy substantially higher incomes than Israeli Jews.

We may also safely infer that the Arabs who live in these Western countries are not similarly advantaged. According to the Pew Research Center, the economic level of Muslims in the U.S. mirrors the American average.²⁹ And all evidence suggests that Muslims in Europe, including Arabs, are considerably worse off than the Christian majority.

In other words, the income disparities between Jews and Arabs in Israel are no greater than the disparities between these two groups in other countries where they both live.^{§§}

To complete our survey of equality in Israel, let us consider, finally, the status of women and gays. Anyone familiar with Israel knows that Israeli men have a distinct macho side, and women may not expect to encounter much courtliness. But there is probably no other country in which women are treated as equally as in Israel—with one important area of exception.

That exception concerns family law. In Israel this is governed by religious authority. Jews, Muslims, and Christians are each subject to the jurisdiction of their own faith, and each has its own courts and rules. There is, however, no secular marriage or divorce. This can create a nuisance for non-observant individuals wishing to wed. They can either go through a religious ceremony (sometimes having first to fulfill some religious requirements) or can marry abroad (nearby Cyprus is the favorite destination for such purposes), because foreign marriages, however performed, are recognized. Irksome though these restrictions may be, they affect men and women equally.

Divorce, however, presents a grave problem of inequality. Jewish (and Muslim) law is quite discriminatory in this realm. Men can have a divorce at will, but women cannot. In practice, it is not clear how many individuals are affected by this. Men usually consent to divorce and otherwise may be ordered to do so by the court. But clearly, thanks to relying on ancient customs, women face a severe legal disadvantage that in some cases proves very painful.

The areas in which Israel's practices are admirable with respect to sexual equality begin with military service. This is all the more important because of the central role of the army in Israel's social and economic life and the prestige it enjoys. In Israel's war of independence, when the new country's life hung by a thread, women often fought alongside men. Afterwards, the roles became more differentiated. Today, Israel is one of about fifteen countries where women are subject to conscription. They are obligated initially for two years as compared to three years for men; and they also serve in the reserves until age 24, while men serve much longer.

Generally, women are not assigned to frontline combat roles, but it is unlikely that many women or men would want them to be. And as new inventions make it possible increasingly to aim and fire weapons remotely, often from a keyboard, women are performing more lethal functions. Israel probably does as well as can be done in balancing two objectives: involving women in the defense of the country in a major way; and allowing for the reality (denied by only the most extreme feminist ideologues) that they are less suited for face-to-face combat.

An ancillary aspect of this is the major role of females in Israel's transportation security. While Israel is the most tempting target for Islamic and Leftist terrorists, it has also enjoyed an almost perfect security record for air travel over the last several decades. The key to this is a unique approach based on brain power more than muscle or technology. It is sometimes called, "find the bomber, not the bomb," and it relies on interviews and psychological screening. As anyone who has flown to Israel knows, a

large share of the interviewers, perhaps a majority, are women.

A second major area in which Israeli women come closer to equality than do women in most other countries is pay. The UN's Gender-Related Equality Index for 2009 provides data for countries and regions on female and male estimated earned income.³⁰ The figures for Israel show that females earn 64 percent of what males earn. (These are average yearly earnings, not hourly wages, and they reflect time away from the labor market.) For the U.S. that proportion is 62 percent; for the OECD (mostly Western Europe) it is 57 percent; and for the Arab states it is an eye-catching 22 percent.³¹

Several countries of northern Europe as well as Australia, New Zealand, and Hong Kong show differentials in earnings somewhat narrower than in Israel. But Israel's record is impressive considering that the leading cause of earning disparities between the sexes is maternity. Women's careers are interrupted and shortened by bearing and raising children. Israeli women have a higher rate of fertility than Western women, and thus presumably lose more time to child-care. On average they bear 3 children, compared to about 2 for American women (and New Zealanders) and fewer than 2 for European and Australian women. (Women in Hong Kong average fewer than 1.) The difference in income-parity between Israel and these other countries is in every case relatively small compared to difference in fertility rate, with Israel's being considerably higher.

In addition to the military and the workplace, women have a stronger role in politics in Israel than elsewhere. When Golda Meir became Israel's Prime Minister in 1969, she was only the second woman to become the head of government in the modern world, Indira Gandhi having been the first. Since then, several dozen women have led governments. Like Ms. Gandhi who was the daughter of India's founding father, Jawaharlal Nehru, most of the women who have achieved this position in developing countries have been daughters or widows of eminent national leaders, for example Isabel Peron of Argentina, Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Corazon Aquino of the Philippines, Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia, and others. These are countries where, for the most part, women's equality is not held dear, but family ties are. (However, since Meir, several women without any such connection achieved leadership in Western democracies, notably Margaret Thatcher of Britain and Angela Merkel of Germany.) In national elections in 2013, three of the top eight parties in Israel's 120-seat parliament (the *Knesset*) were led by women.

Israel is one of a couple of dozen countries that present the most accepting legal framework for gays with regard to such issues as homosexual acts, recognition of gay partnerships and marriage, the rights to adopt children and to serve in the armed forces, and the like.

The category in which Israel falls short is in recognizing gay marriage. As I have mentioned, the only form of marriage performed within Israel is religious, not civil, and the authorities of the various faiths who authorize these rites do not do so for same-sex couples. However, Israel does recognize civil marriages performed abroad,

and, thanks to a ruling by the Israel Supreme Court, that applies to gay marriages, too.

This means that Israel's treatment of gays is more tolerant and egalitarian than that of many Western countries. And the contrast between Israel and its neighbors could scarcely be more drastic. None of them bars discrimination based on sexual orientation or grants other rights commonly sought by gay advocates, and all but a few criminalize homosexual acts which may be punished by jail sentences, whipping, and, in some of these countries, by execution.

Apart from legal penalties, and even in the few places where gay sex is not formally banned, gays may be subjected to terrible abuse in their communities and even at the hands of their own families. As a result, and despite the fact that Palestine has more liberal laws about sodomy than most other Arab authorities, an unknown number of gay Palestinians have found refuge in Israel, mostly as illegal immigrants. There are estimated to be several hundred of these, and their plight was captured in a Reuters dispatch:

“Anwar” - who like other Palestinian homosexuals interviewed by Reuters goes by an assumed name - fled the West Bank after his brothers and father suspected he was gay and beat him senseless. Rani said he was tortured by Palestinian police who wanted him to spy on other homosexuals - a charge authorities at his Gaza hometown denied.... Rights activists estimate that 300 mostly male gay Palestinians are quietly eking out a living in Israel, at risk of being forcibly repatriated because they are illegal immigrants or because police consider them a threat.

“The first danger to them is from family and community, as well as (Palestinian) authorities,” said Donatella Rovera of Amnesty International. “Going to Israel is a one-way ticket, and once there their biggest problem is possibly being sent back.”

Hassan Khreisheh, who heads the human rights monitoring committee in the Palestinian Legislative Council, or parliament.... dismissed the runaways living in Israel as “collaborators guilty of various crimes, including homosexuality.” ...

“Ali,” a 19-year-old from the West Bank, said he went into hiding in Tel Aviv after Palestinian militants ordered him to carry out a suicide bombing and “purge his guilt” for being gay. Rani said he knew of three similar cases. “But they refused. We don't want to kill, just to live - in Israel or wherever.”³²

Nonetheless, for some Palestinian activists, the “love that dare not speak its name” is apparently less dear to the heart than the hate that screams from the rooftops, namely the hatred of Israel. A group calling itself Palestinian Queers for BDS issued a statement in 2010 exhorting fellow

Queer activists ... around the globe to stand for justice in Palestine through adopting and implementing broad boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel until the latter has ended its multi-tiered oppression of the Palestinian people. For 62 years Israel's oppressive regime of colonization, occupation and apartheid has systematically and consistently denied the Palestinian people of their basic human rights.

The time frame of "62 years," meaning since 1948, made clear that the group was objecting not only to Israel's occupation of territories it conquered in 1967 but to Israel's existence. For these "queers," national identity apparently takes precedence over sexual identity, which is not a unique choice of priorities. But even they made no effort to deny the obvious: that the treatment of gays in Israel is more egalitarian than in most places, and infinitely more so than in the Arab states.

Fraternité

Fraternité, or brotherhood, the third luminous aspiration of the French revolution, might be rendered as "social solidarity," a clunky phrase, or more simply, empathy, selflessness, generosity. In the centuries since 1789, the world has learned that social solidarity has a Jekyll-and-Hyde character. On the one hand, it entails transcendence of narrow egoism: caring about others, not just oneself. On the other, it often means bonds within a particular group rather than mankind as a whole, and this may at the same time imply antagonism to those outside the group.

This duality is exemplified in the ambiguous history of nationalism. From the French Revolution until World War One, nationalism meant popular rather than royal sovereignty, and thus it entwined with the cause of democracy. After World War One, nationalism metastasized into fascism and other belligerent and anti-democratic movements. Indeed this retrograde side to nationalism had been prefigured decades before the war in the Dreyfus affair. In its positive form, the spirit of social solidarity mobilizes energies to create something beneficial and fruitful for the group or nation. In its negative form it entails denigrating, defeating or even conquering those outside the group.

Jewish solidarity has always aroused unease and suspicion among non-Jews. Jewish identity and belief, starting with God's summons to Abraham to go forth from Ur, includes the notion that the Jews are His chosen people. Naturally enough, this has never gone down well with non-Jews. Theologically, the Jewish idea of chosen-ness is not a matter of besting others, must less ruling them, so much as bearing special burdens. Jews are supposed to observe 613 rules or *mitzvot*, while in Jewish eyes, gentiles are obligated to obey only the seven Noahide laws.

The sense of disproportionate burden was captured by the great Yiddish writer, Sholem Aleichem, who put on the tongue of his character, Tevye the milkman, the words:

“Dear God, for three thousand years we’ve been Your chosen people. Isn’t it time to choose someone else?” Nonetheless, the idea of chosenness and the insular character of Jewish communities (not always of their own wish) can be found at the root of many anti-Semitic stereotypes and canards, from the classic imposture, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, to the speeches of recent Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

As with liberty and equality, so too in the Janus-faced principle of “fraternity,” Israel offers one of the world’s more admirable models. Its achievements begin with binding together a dizzying diversity of Jews, rescuing this people’s most far-flung and endangered remnants, building a nation from scratch by amazing feats of social and physical construction. No country has absorbed nearly as many immigrants relative to its size, and although the process in the state’s early impoverished years was hand-to-mouth, in time elaborate programs were developed to facilitate absorption. Few if any other countries have the like. New arrivals are provided with housing and, briefly, a living allowance. They are enrolled first in full-day language instruction and then are assisted in finding jobs.

The rescue and absorption of fellow Jews is where the spirit of fraternity begins but not where it ends. It extends outward to comprise noteworthy acts of openhandedness toward others, including even potential enemies. In contrast, sadly, the group-solidarity of Israel’s adversaries all too often exemplifies the darker side of collective identity. Popular political platforms, like pan-Arabism and Islamism exude an us-versus-them spirit, as do the nationalist movements of individual states such as the vision of “greater Syria.” The passion in these nostrums is invested in defeating enemies rather than in building something beneficial for one’s own. This priority of the negative over the positive is exemplified in the chilling mantra repeated by numerous Islamist and Palestinian advocates: “You love life; we love death.”

In the era of decolonization since World War Two, we Americans as well as other Westerners have broken our teeth on projects of “nation-building” in Vietnam, Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, not to mention numerous countries in Africa that never quite cohere. Israel, in contrast, stands as a dramatic success not just materially but socially. To be sure the majority of its citizens share Jewishness, but not much else, at least not upon arrival.

For starters, the Jews who arrived in pre-state Palestine spoke no common language. Theodore Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, imagined that German would be the vernacular of the Jewish state.³³ Of course, unlike the Austrian Herzl, relatively few of the Jewish immigrants to Palestine spoke German. The European arrivals came mostly from Eastern Europe and spoke Yiddish and usually one or another Slavic tongue. Those from the orient spoke Ladino and Arabic. It was, rather, the mad dream of a few visionaries that the state that aimed to resurrect the Jewish people should rest on a resurrected language—that no one spoke.

Hebrew had not been in everyday use for millennia, and even in biblical times it was

often not the Jewish vernacular. Mostly, it was the language of the Bible and of worship. But the Bible contains only an estimated 6,000 words;³⁴ and there were indeed many new things under the sun since it first appeared. Contemporary English, for example, contains an estimated quarter of a million words. In the late nineteenth century a small group of Zionists, chief among them Eliezer Yitzhak Perelman who took the name Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, embraced the mission of bringing Hebrew back to life. Their task was both semantic and political. They had to invent words, derived plausibly from the Hebrew core, for the myriad things, ideas and actions that had come into being since Revelation. And then they had to convince the Jews in Palestine to speak those words.

Ben-Yehuda exulted that his son, Ben-Zion Ben-Yehuda, born in 1882, was the first child to grow up speaking Hebrew. But of course Ben-Yehuda had more sway over Ben-Zion than over other Jews. He met resistance from some who loved Yiddish and believed it embodied a treasure of Jewish culture not to be forsaken, and from some whose deep piety led them to believe it sacrilegious to use the holy language in everyday speech. For the latter reason, until now, the words to be heard in the streets or markets or buses of Jerusalem's ultra-orthodox neighborhoods are Yiddish. But this is no more than a rearguard resistance. The linguist Ilan Stavans concludes his book on the subject with this anecdote:

Ben-Yehuda's gravestone had been painted over, graffiti-like.... [A]n acquaintance ... told me that the desecration had ... [been] committed not by hoodlums, not by Arabs, but by fanatical religious Jews.... [W]hen one of Ben-Yehuda's relatives was given the news, she had inquired: "In what language was the graffiti ...?"

"In Hebrew."

"Ah, then Ben-Yehuda won."³⁵

The victory was not only political. Scarcely more than a century since Ben-Yehuda and his colleagues launched their wild project, some five thousand new titles each year are published in Hebrew, according to the annual statistics of the National Library of Israel, not counting the hundreds translated from abroad. Many have garnered international prizes, and one or another has been translated into most of the other major languages of the world. Born-again, Hebrew has become one of the modern world's more fecund languages. To reprise my tweak at the opening of this book, Israel publishes more books per capita than France, notwithstanding the immense disparity in the sizes of the markets (that of the French extending far beyond the borders of France thanks to the linguistic legacy of colonialism), nor the fact that a larger share of Israelis read English and thus have an enormous alternative window on the written word.

Even in liturgical use, the pronunciation of biblical Hebrew was not uniform, the Ashkenazi version having diverged over the centuries from the Sephardi (as, too, had

the respective rituals of the two groups). Although Ashkenazim dominated the Zionist movement, the choice was made to embrace the Sephardi way of speaking as normative for modern Hebrew.

This dividing line between Ashkenazim and Sephardim distinguishes the two major bodies of Israeli Jews although there are countless clusters within them as well as groups that lie entirely outside these categories. Dan Senor and Saul Singer say that, in all, Israel comprises 70 nationalities.³⁶ The disparities between Ashkenazim and Sephardim constituted a formidable challenge to *fraternité* within Israel. In addition to speaking different languages and observing different traditions, the two populations had for centuries been embedded respectively in sharply contrasting cultures, European as opposed to Asian and African. Moreover the impetuses of their immigration were different. Until the Holocaust, the Ashkenazim, though escaping a history of persecution and abuse in Europe, were largely visionaries, drawn to Palestine by the Zionist ideal. The Sephardim acted under more immediate exigencies, having been summarily driven from their homes by their Arab countrymen.

It is inconceivable that the process of combining these two populations could have been smooth, but it has been remarkably successful. Not only has there been a narrowing of income and education gaps between what were in essence a first-world and a third-world people, but their influence on each other has been reciprocal. Apart from the increasingly common intermarriage between the two communities, researchers find that in something as intimate and non-political as fertility rates, the patterns of the two have converged. Thus, a half century ago, Sephardi woman produced on average twice as many children as their Ashkenazi counterparts, 4.61 to 2.39. Since the turn of the century, the fertility rates have become virtually identical. Interestingly, this is not accounted for entirely by a reduction in Sephardi childbearing, which would be natural for the transfer of a group from a traditional culture to a more modern one. Rather, while Sephardi birth rates have fallen, those of Ashkenazim have risen to a level of 3 children per women,³⁷ nearly 50 percent higher than the American rate and twice as high as in several countries of Western Europe.

Perhaps the most important measure of the success of “fraternity” of these groups are surveys showing extremely high positive responses when Ashkenazim and Sephardim of the first and second generation in Israel are asked their attitudes about being Israeli.³⁸ Among native-born Israelis who are the children of Sephardi immigrants, 91% say they are “proud to be an Israeli,” while 85% of the children of Ashkenazi immigrants say the same.^{***} Meanwhile, 97 percent of Ashkenazim and 94% of Sephardim say they are “emotionally connected to Israel.”†††

Respondents were also asked what it means to them to be a Jew, that is, whether they experienced their identity in a religious, cultural, ethnic, racial or other sense. Interestingly, the most common answer by far was that being a Jew meant being part of “a people.” The proportion giving this response, 91 percent, was identical for the

two groups.

Although most are technically Ashkenazim, the approximately one-and-a-quarter million Israelis with origins in what was the Soviet Union constitute a distinct group. Due to generations of repression under Communism, their ties to the culture and religion of their forebears were ruptured radically. For many or most of them, Jewishness consisted of little more than the recollection that a single parent had been Jewish, and by various estimates, one-third or more of these immigrants may lack any Jewish origins whatsoever. Some, after settling in Israel, report resuming their Christian identity.³⁹

The Israeli historian, Alexander Yakobson, makes the interesting observation that some of these Soviet or post-Soviet immigrants have wrought a subtle change in what had long been one of the cardinal characteristics of Jewishness, namely its unusual duality as both a religion and a nationality. By assimilating into Israel, some of these Soviet or post-Soviet immigrants of uncertain Jewish lineage have in effect become part of the Jewish people without converting to Judaism.

Entirely outside the realms of Ashkenazim and Sephardim, a third group, Bukharan Jews, numbering an estimated 100,000, migrated to Israel from Central Asia, mostly Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Their history is murky, and involves claims to descent from one of the lost tribes of Israel.

Yet another self-described lost tribe, the B'nei Menashe, or descendants of Menashe, have appeared in recent years on Israel's doorstep. Of Tibeto-Burman stock from India's Northeastern border states, their claim is viewed skeptically by most experts, but in light of their earnest insistence, Israel agreed to admit them on condition they undergo a ritual of conversion. As of 2013 some two to three thousand had immigrated, with four to five thousand more in the pipeline.

Still another group that surely is a lost tribe albeit not in the sense they mean it, are the Black Hebrews, a sect of African-Americans, some of whom arrived in Israel in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. They claim that they are the real Jews and the white people practicing Judaism are imposters. Apart from the absence of any evidence of a historic connection to Judaism, this group's approach was scarcely endearing — rather than petitioning to be included in Israel, they insisted that they *were* Israel. Unsurprisingly, the Israeli government at first moved to expel them. But eventually they were allowed to remain and gradually have been woven however thinly into the Israeli fabric.

Far and away the most important of purported lost tribes is from Ethiopia, the Beta Israel (House of Israel) whose oral tradition holds that they are the progeny of Dan, "lost" since Mosaic times. On the one hand, DNA testing has shown that they are closer genetically to other Ethiopians and Somalis than to other Jews. But on the other, literary traces of their recognition as Jews by outside visitors can be found back to the Middle Ages. Moreover they adhere to the Torah and observe rituals and use

terminology that closely mirrors pre-dispersion Judaism. Absent is any element of diasporic Jewish practice, that is, they are innocent of the Talmud and of Jewish holidays that arise from historic events subsequent to the Torah, such as Hanukkah. In other words, their sacraments, which are readily-identifiable to other Jews, are of marked antiquity. If this does not prove definitively that they are a “lost tribe,” it surely provides powerful evidence that their claim to Jewish identity is not a guise adopted for some psychological or material advantage.

Jews outside Ethiopia have been aware of the Beta Israel for a long time. The Jewish American academic, Wolf Leslau, reported in *Commentary* in March 1949 on a visit he had made to them in Gondar province, where they were concentrated.⁴⁰ But initially, the Beta exhibited no desire to go to Israel. They did indeed speak of return to Jerusalem in a messianic sense but not as a practical matter. Nor did Israel, overwhelmed in its first decade with accommodating the inrushing Sephardim, wish to attract them.

This changed in the 1970s when Prime Minister Menachem Begin took a more active interest in Ethiopian Jewry than had his predecessors after the Sephardi chief rabbi, followed later by his Ashkenazi counterpart, declared that the historical evidence showed the Ethiopians to be bona fide Jews. Still, this remained mostly an abstract issue until the rise of a revolutionary Marxist government in Ethiopia, followed by a famine, made the circumstances of the Beta Israel increasingly dire.

One who risked his life to escape was a young man named Yafet Alemu. From the time he was a young boy in the village of Ambober in Gondar where he was born, Yafet worked like his father herding sheep and goats and sometimes cows. His father was descended from a line of *keses*, that is, kohans or priests. Although not one himself, he wanted the tradition to continue through one of his sons.

The *kes* was the repository of the prayers and psalms, mostly Davidic, passed down as an oral tradition among people who were largely illiterate. In addition, the *kes* served as a wise man, settling disputes, and as a guardian. Members of the community would give the *kes* a gift, often a goat, as a kind of biblical sacrifice of thanks or atonement, and he in turn would distribute this bounty to the poor. If a woman was widowed, the *kes* would organize the men of the community to donate a day’s labor apiece to plow and sow her fields. Yafet, although only the fourth eldest of five boys (there were also two daughters), seemed to his father to be most suited to the role, due to his diligence and kindly manner.

Thus at age 8, Yafet began to study literally at the feet of *Kes Ben Baruch*. Each evening, after a day of herding, Yafet would join several other acolytes in a circle on the ground, taking in the teachings of the old sage. Yafet distinguished himself at memorizing and chanting the psalms, and the dawning sense of his own abilities kindled in him the desire for formal education. His mother supported this wish, but his father balked until another *kes* interpreted a dream of his to mean that he should allow

the boy to attend school. So at age 14 and a half, Yafet entered first grade.

Although he still spent half a day herding, he advanced through several grades a year until ready for junior high school, which required dorming in a town away from home. Before he left, *Kes Ben Baruch* counseled him: "There are many good things among the gentiles, but also many temptations." One temptation was a fellow student named Edna. Fortunately, she was not gentile, but neither was she the girl whom his father had selected to be his bride. It was a rare instance of filial rebellion, but when the older man discovered that he knew Edna's family and it was one that met his approval, he acquiesced in Yafet's wish to marry the girl of his own choice.

Graduating from high school at age 20, a star pupil, Yafet enrolled in college in Addis Ababa, leaving Edna home in the village with the two little daughters she had by then born. An international Jewish charity secured a visa for him to study in Israel, but Mengistu's secret police took him off the plane just before departure. After a week's interrogation, the security forces released him but kept his identity papers and ordered him to report to them daily.

After one prayerful night, he decided to risk flight without papers and to try to make it to Israel via the Sudan as some other of the Beta Israel had begun to do. That morning he purchased a bus ticket from Addis in the center of the country to Gondar in the north. Mid-journey, his worst fear materialized when a soldier boarded the bus in a routine identity check. Thinking fast, Yafet, seated in the back, jumped up and walked down the aisle to the soldier, collecting the other passengers' papers, as if in a burst of civic spirit. He brought the stack up front to the officer who riffled through them without noticing that it contained no document for the eager volunteer.

Descending from the bus outside of Gondar, Yafet proceeded under cover of night to where Edna and their daughters were staying. She begged to accompany him on his planned escape from the country. She could leave the children with family as was commonly done. But Yafet knew the trip was filled with perils and refused to expose Edna to them. He promised he would eventually reunite them, but she scoffed at this, and inwardly he was not confident he would make it. They both wept until he feared that the intensity of her sobs would lead the neighbors to discover his presence.

An impromptu underground railroad composed primarily of cousins, uncles and other kin guided him from one village to the next in a 30-day trek to the border. One stop was the village of his paternal grandfather with whom he was especially close. The old man gave him a blessing and said: "You will make it safely to Israel, but do not forget your people. You must bring them to Israel, although I may not live to see you again."

In Sudan, a soldier led him to a refugee camp run by the Red Cross, which had been set up in response to fighting along the border. Although the camp had several staff, its director took a personal interest in Yafet, which he explained over a private lunch a few days after Yafet's arrival. Throughout his stay in Addis, his interrogation, and his

flight, Yafet always denied to all authorities that he was a Jew. But the camp director waved away his denials, saying: “You are an Ethiopian Jew, and I am a French Jew.” At this Yafet broke into tears, thinking, “In Sudan, a brother.”

The “brother” furnished Yafet with a visa and air ticket to Switzerland, connecting through another European city that he thinks was Athens but is not sure. As soon as he disembarked to change planes, two men who he later figured out were from the Mossad greeted him and swapped his ticket to Switzerland for one to Tel Aviv.

In an absorption center, studying Hebrew and other basics of Israeli culture, Yafet learned that his parents and most of his siblings had followed his lead, joining an increasing flow of Ethiopian Jews across the border to refugee camps in Sudan. He and a dozen or so other Beta Israel formed a group to advocate for them. Although their purchase on Israeli society was still slender, they made effective synergy with a like-minded American group. Yafet and his fellows were able to provide vital information from the ground, while the Americans knew how to work the system.

As a result, in the last days of 1984, Israeli military and intelligence operatives, with help from American counterparts, organized Operation Moses, a covert airlift of some 8,000 Ethiopians, including Yafet’s parental family, to Israel. The beloved grandfather who had blessed Yafet’s journey had joined the exodus but, in keeping with his own prophecy, had succumbed in a Sudanese camp before reaching the promised land.

Others of the Beta Israel found other paths. Yafet found a French Jew in Israel who secured a scholarship for Edna to study in France, which came with visas for her and their two children. As soon as they touched down in Paris, the three were rerouted to Tel Aviv. Thus they were reunited with Yafet two years after their tearful separation outside Gondar. Two further covert airlifts, Operation Joshua in 1985 and Operation Solomon 1991 brought most of the remaining Beta Israel to Israel.

The story did not end there, however. Another group of Ethiopians presented themselves, called Falash Mura. They were related to the Beta Israel but had been practicing Christianity since the 19th century. While some of the Beta Israel resented the Falash Mura, saying they had converted opportunistically to evade discrimination rather than standing up for their Jewishness, the Falash Mura themselves claimed they had converted under duress and continued to practice Judaism in secret, much like Spanish *marranos* under the inquisition. This threw the Israeli rabbinate, which in Talmudic tradition probes far simpler questions exhaustively, into a tizzy.

Yafet rallied to the cause of the Falash Mura, helping to found an advocacy group for them, called South Wing of Zion. Eventually, it was decided that the Falash Mura’s clam to Judaic status should be recognized for purposes of the Law of the Return (under which any Jew may claim Israeli citizenship) but that a ritual of conversion or of recommitment would be required. Thousands have arrived under this rubric, and the influx continues.

All told, as of 2012 there are 125,500 Israelis of Ethiopian background, two-thirds of them immigrants and one-third Israeli-born offspring of immigrants. In other words they constitute a little over 2 percent of the Jewish population of Israel. Occasionally there have been protests against unfair treatment and journalistic exposes of raw bigotry or discrimination against the Ethiopians by other Jews (and, ironically, by Israeli Arabs). But by any comparative standard, the absorption of Ethiopian Jews stands as another laurel of Israel's humane achievements.

Within a couple of decades these immigrants traversed a cultural distance of centuries if not millennia. As the American scholar, Edward Alexander put it, most had "to be taught to wear shoes, to use knives and forks and toilets, to take medicines, and to understand that electrical wires are not worms, that gas can be dangerous, and that you cannot remove food from grocery stores without giving money in exchange."⁴¹ In one report, the BBC, never slow to cast a dark light on Israel, reported that 75 percent of the Ethiopian-origin Israelis could not write or speak Hebrew. But most of these immigrants—90% of those beyond their mid-30s—were unable to read or write their native tongue, either, being entirely illiterate. How easy, then, to learn a new language?

In the face of this enormous challenge of absorption, Israel extended the Ethiopians' eligibility for immigrant programs to twice or more their normal duration, and it adopted far-reaching "affirmative action" laws, that is, requirements for preferential treatment of the Ethiopians. To maximize integration while holding down culture-shock, the immigrants were housed in absorption centers with other Ethiopians, but these centers were dispersed throughout the country so that the newcomers would rub shoulders with other Israelis and avoid ghettoization. To solemnize the recognition of their rightful place within Israeli society, the public school system was mandated by law to include the history of Ethiopian Jewry in the core curriculum. And a religious holiday, called Sigd or Seged, part of the canon of Ethiopian practice but not of Jewry anywhere else, was declared a national holiday.

Of course, the army also played its large part in mixing Ethiopians into Israeli society. In all, whatever the difficulties, the absorption of Ethiopian Jewry appears far more successful than the experience in other places where two cultures were thrust together, one of them hundreds of years more advanced than the other, for example in the sad stories of native Americans in the United States or aborigines in Australia. An exemplary case was that of Yafet Alemu who became a nurse after mastering Hebrew well enough to study in the language, and then fulfilled his childhood mission of religious leadership by being ordained a rabbi.

To say that Israel has stirred this hodgepodge of immigrants and refugees into a pudding without lumps would be a considerable exaggeration. But it has melded them into flourishing whole, as evidenced by the country's economic and military achievements and its thriving democracy.

True, the task has been made lighter by worshipping the same God, although polls suggest that Israelis are becoming increasingly non-religious. Nonetheless, the God they often decline to worship is the same one. But a common religion is hardly sufficient to assure peace, much less a spirit of brotherhood, as we are reminded by recalling terrible prejudice and even wars between Catholic and Protestant and Orthodox Christians, some of which smolder today in relatively modern places like Ireland and Croatia, not to mention the appalling violence between divergent branches of Islam in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and other quarters of the Islamic world and the persecution of Sufis and other smaller Muslim sects.

And what about those who worship a different God? How well does Israel do in extending a spirit of fraternity toward its non-Jewish citizens? Israeli Arabs are far from being integrated with Jews, but in assessing Israel's shortcomings in this respect, as with the socioeconomic disparities between the two groups, we might ask, compared to what?

Americans will be misled if they approach this issue by way of analogy to our own country. America, for all its history of racial distance and even violence, is nonetheless a country where there are no nationalities, merely "ethnic groups," and where more or less everyone's ethnicity is transcended by his American-ness.

Similarly, most states have a single national identity. But not all do, and those that have tried to maintain multiple national identities have not found it easy. Swedes and Norwegians once constituted a single country but chose to divorce peacefully, as did the Czechs and Slovaks after the fall of Communism.

Some national divorces have been far less than peaceful, such as that of the Croats from the Serbs, and the Bosniacs from both of them, although all three groups speak Serbo-Croatian and come from the same stock. And the same may be said for some national marriages (or rapes). Somewhere between 5 and 25 percent of Turkey's population are Kurds who continue to struggle by means fair and foul for their independence despite a fierce campaign of Turkification, which has included designating Kurds "mountain Turks" as a way to deny their very existence and forbidding them to speak their own language. This is matched or exceeded by many other painful cases, such as Chechens in Russia, Uigurs in China, Hutus and Tutsis, Ibos and Yorubas, and so on.

Before the birth of Israel, Arabs and Jews had competed for control of Palestine. The two groups constituted entirely disparate cultures and spoke different languages. While they had economic relations, they did not live together but, with few exceptions, in separate towns, villages, and neighborhoods, as one would expect with diverse national groups within a single territory.

The Arabs rejected compromise and chose war, but lost. Many of them fled for a variety of reasons that are still hotly debated, but undoubtedly some of the blame for this exodus can be laid at the doorstep of each side. In defeat the Arab states agreed to

armistices but adamantly rejected peace, and Israel, although victorious, felt vulnerable.

Although the Zionist leaders were eager to demonstrate their readiness to accept Arabs as citizens of their new state, there was scant reason to imagine that those Arabs who remained in their homes throughout the war rather than fleeing with their brethren were ready to see themselves as “Israelis,” loyal to the new state. Hence, the schizophrenic-seeming answer of the Jews was to declare these Arabs welcome while keeping a distrustful eye on them. In an odd mixture, they were granted full political rights—they voted and even had some of their number elected to the Knesset—but were kept under martial law, denied the right to move freely about the country.

Martial law was maintained until 1966, when its abolition finally made Arab citizenship more complete, but the question of how the Arab minority fits in the “Jewish state,” is still fraught, especially because their Palestinian and Arab brethren remain at war with Israel.

Colored as it is by security considerations, the problem of Jewish-Arab relations is especially severe with respect to military service, and this in turn has many ramifications. Because Israel’s army is so cherished by its population, and because it is a citizen army in which most men spend decades of reserve service, it is a chief vessel of socialization and networking. Unlike Jews, Arabs are not conscripted. They may volunteer, but only a few do. Leaving the Arabs out of military service protects the state from the danger of disloyal soldiers and spares Arab Israelis the agony of being sent to confront their cousins. However, lack of military service is a social and career handicap for an Israeli, thus for most Israeli Arabs.

For this reason, the least disadvantaged of Israel’s Arabs are the Druze—if indeed they are Arabs. They speak Arabic and are descended from Arabs, but they have functioned as an insular community for a thousand years, since their ancestors embraced their own secretive religious doctrine, deviating from normative Islam. Because they follow a policy of loyalty to whatever state has jurisdiction, their relationship to Israel is different from that of mainstream Arabs. The Syrian and Lebanese Druze are loyal respectively to those states, and the Israeli Druze to Israel.

As a result and also because they have a history of being persecuted by Arab nationalists, Israel’s Druze don’t merely volunteer for service, they have agreed as a community to be conscripted like Jewish Israelis, and in fact according to the Chief of Staff of the Israeli military, the proportion of Druze who serve exceeds that of Jews.⁴² They served initially in all-Druze units, some of which still exist, but since 1990 and in some cases before that, they have been integrated into all kinds of units. Proud of their warrior tradition, they have distinguished themselves in combat, many have been decorated, and some have reached the highest echelons of the Israeli army.

All of this has had an impact on the standing of Druze in the eyes of their Jewish

countrymen and on their success in Israeli society. While still falling below Jews in various measures of educational, professional and economic attainment, they score appreciably higher than mainstream Arabs, ranking about midway between these two poles.

The Bedouin, another insular group that stands apart from the mainstream Arab community, have many sons who enlist in the army, mostly in border patrols where they put to use their skills as desert trackers. Unlike the Druze, they are not conscripted. And they also do not rank high on the various measures of socio-economic performance or circumstance. This seems unsurprising since their nomadic traditions are more ancient and less literate than those of other Arabs. Thus they have further to go to catch up with the highly modern, cosmopolitan world of Israel.

For the majority of Arabs, their place within the society is compromised by Israel's enduring confrontation with neighbors at least some of whom wish its destruction. Nonetheless, in addition to the various efforts to close socioeconomic gaps, and despite the fact that Israel wants to be recognized as "the Jewish state" or the "state of the Jewish people," it tries in ways large and small to affirm that the Arab minority occupies a rightful place within the nation.

Arabic is an official language of the country, along with Hebrew. Road signs throughout appear in Arabic as well as Hebrew (and usually English). All food labels must be in Arabic as well as Hebrew, as must all government announcements. Arabic is even an official language of the Knesset, Israel's legislature: the Arab members are free to conduct legislative business in Arabic, although they rarely do. There is an all-Arabic television station and radio channel, while the main networks, mostly in Hebrew, have hours set aside for broadcasting in Arabic—including news, sports, talk shows and entertainment—and many Hebrew programs carry Arabic subtitling. Just as there is an institute devoted to sustaining the Hebrew language, an analogue to *L'Académie Française*, so, too, there is one for Arabic.

The study of Arabic is mandatory as a second language in public schools in Jewish areas, just as Hebrew is in Arab districts. *Rehov Sumsum*, the Israeli *Sesame Street*, features Mahboub, a bespectacled, bilingual, drum-playing Arab-Israeli blue muppet who helps the orange Jewish muppet, Noah, with his Arabic.

Arabs consistently make up more than ten percent of Israel's Knesset, the largest number of them from Arab nationalist parties, some from a leftist party that also includes Jews, and a sprinkling from the range of Israel's major parties. In addition to the presence of Druze at the highest levels of the military, a few Arabs and Druze serve in Israel's diplomatic corps, and three of the latter have served as ambassadors.⁴³

In the interests of inclusiveness, plans are being laid for a system of national service that would provide alternatives to military enrollment. This, it is hoped, would help Arabs and others to compensate for the social disadvantage of not serving in the armed

forces. Polls, however, show ambivalence toward this idea on the part of the Arabs. In 2010, 47 percent rejected the idea entirely. Thirty-eight percent accepted it under the right conditions, and 11 percent said they would accept it only after a Palestinian state is established.⁴⁴

The ambivalence that Arab Israelis exhibit toward their country was also captured in a 2006 survey of patriotism among Jewish and Arab Israelis.⁴⁵ When asked if they were proud to be Israeli, 44 percent of Arabs said they were very or somewhat proud while 57 percent were not very proud or not proud at all. When asked if they were willing to fight for the state, 27 percent said probably or definitely yes, while 73 percent said probably or definitely no. In contrast, the proportion of positive replies from Jewish respondents to these questions was very high.

To this point, the poll results were not surprising. But when the pollsters asked people to evaluate their country, the answers were startling. Asked whether they agreed that “Israel is a better country than most other countries,” 66 percent of Israeli Jews agreed or strongly agreed, while the share of Israeli Arabs who agreed or strongly agreed was notably higher—a whopping 77 percent! This is a higher positive response than recorded in most analogous polls in Western countries. For example, only 62 percent of Norwegians answer this question in the affirmative, even though their combined blessings of industrial advancement and vast oil deposits make theirs the wealthiest Western country. When asked to respond to the proposition, “I would rather be a citizen of my country than of any other,” 82 percent of Israeli Arabs say they agree or agree strongly.

Various other polls show that Arabs in Israel do not want to leave. Arab residents of East Jerusalem currently hold Israeli identity cards but are not citizens. A September 2011 poll, projecting a future settlement entailing two states, asked Arab Jerusalemites if they would rather become citizens of Israel or Palestine. Thirty-five percent said Israel, 30 percent said Palestine, and 35 said they did not know or refused to answer.⁴⁶

Polls of Arab citizens of Israel yield more lopsided results. Some Jewish Israeli commentators, worried about the growth of the Arab population, have proposed that certain Arab towns abutting the territory of the Palestinian Authority be transferred to Palestinian sovereignty in a peace agreement in exchange for some Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Opinion-takers asked the residents of these areas if they would approve being included in a new Palestinian state, noting that they would not be uprooted; only the border would move. A poll taken in 2000 by the Israeli Arab weekly, *Kul Al-Arab*, of the town of Umm al-Fahm, the largest near the “green line,” found that 83 percent opposed becoming part of Palestine while 11 percent favored it.⁴⁷ A 2010 poll, covering a wider area, found a less dramatic tilt, but in the same direction: 58 percent said they would rather remain citizens of Israel, as opposed to 36 percent who accepted the idea of changing their nationality.⁴⁸

Most of those who would remain said this was because living standards are higher in Israel. A smaller number said it was because Israel is likely to be more democratic than a Palestinian state. Not fully captured in the options the poll presented was Israel's greater modernization and its humanitarian ethos. These were at work, for example, in the 2008 decision of Hadassah University Medical Center to establish a registry for Arab donors of bone marrow and stem cells to facilitate life-saving transplants. Jewish and Arab antigens have some degree of genetic similarity but rarely can a member of one group donate successfully to a member of the other.

True, such a registry had been started for Jewish donors twenty years earlier, perhaps reflecting the inferior status of Israel's Arabs. On the other hand, the registry at Hadassah Hospital is the only one in the world for Arabs and will no doubt save the lives not only of Arab Israelis but also of some citizens of Arab countries, not a single one of which has a registry of its own. Khaled Abu Toameh, the journalist who reports for the *Jerusalem Post*, *U.S. News & World Report* and *NBC News*, put it: "Israel is a wonderful place to live ... a free and open country. I would rather live in Israel as a second class citizen than as a first class citizen in Cairo, Gaza, Amman or Ramallah."⁴⁹

Whatever the deficiencies in the treatment of Arabs in Israel, it is illuminating—or would be—to compare it with the treatment of Jews in Arab lands. But this turns out to be a null set. Why? Because almost no Jews live in Arab lands. Much is made of the plight of the Arabs who fled Palestine in 1948 amidst the war that the Arabs started, and the Arabs' insistence on the "right of return" of the descendants of these Arabs remains a principal obstacle to a peace settlement. But there were also some Jews who fled from places that ended up in Arab hands at the end of that war. While some 150,000 Arabs stayed put behind Jewish lines and became citizens of the new state of Israel, no Jews remained behind Arab lines.

Moreover, the number of Jews who fled the Arab countries at that time was no less, and perhaps greater, than the number of Arab refugees. Ada Aharani, an Israeli academic who has written a book on this subject, estimates the numbers at slightly above 850,000.⁵⁰ Shmuel Trigano, A French academic, puts the number at 900,000, looking at a somewhat longer span of time.⁵¹

Like the Arabs who fled Palestine, these Jews were subject to a push and a pull. Some may have felt attracted to the aborning state of Israel; they were also driven by their Arab neighbors and governments. Indeed this push must have been stronger than that felt by the Arabs of Palestine. For the latter, in addition to the fear of the Jews and the exhortations of some of their own leaders to get out of the way so the Arab armies could annihilate the Jews, there was also the simple fact that they were on the front lines. Civilians flee fighting wherever it may be whenever they can.

But the Jews of the Arab countries were nowhere near front lines. For them, it was a matter of fleeing *toward* the front. Why would they do that? The invitations of the Zionists to come join in an enterprise whose success seemed unlikely could not have

held much allure. To abandon communities to which they had belonged for centuries and in which many had prospered, to leave behind their property and all they knew, including language, to bring their families to face deadly risk—this all amounted to an appealing choice only because the alternative was so bleak or because there was none.

Anti-Jewish feeling had burgeoned in the region beginning in the 1920s and 1930s in response to Zionism and also as a side-effect of the emergence of Arab nationalism. It was stoked assiduously by the Nazis. When a pro-Nazi coup seized Baghdad briefly in 1941 “Pan-Arab nationalists incited the mob to attack the Jews for two days,” as the Iraqi columnist Rashid Al-Khayoun explained in an interview on *Al-Arabiya* TV in 2009. This had the effect of “dragging the Jews out of Iraq.”⁵² After the war, a pogrom in Tripoli in November 1945 took more than 100 lives, and another in the poor Jewish quarter of Cairo was also deadly, as recalled in a recent article in Egypt’s leading newspaper, *Al-Ahram*:

Among the events that contributed to create a climate of fear in the community was the pogrom that took place in Haret Al-Yahud in November 1945. The massacre was the work of the Muslim Brothers who went on a bloody rampage, burning down the neighbourhood and killing people in their path Although the Egyptian government regularly condemned these events and prosecuted the Muslim Brothers for inciting the riots, they failed to protect the Egyptian Jewish community. By demonstrating that Egyptian Jews were no longer safe in their country, the government played into the Zionists’ hands. A mass exodus followed.⁵³

Here and there, where Jews did not flee in 1948, such as a remnant of the Jewish community of Egypt, they fled a few years later when revolutionary regimes seized power, rendering their against-the-odds endurance utterly hopeless. The only exceptions are Morocco, where the patronage of the monarch has permitted a few thousand Jews to live to this day in a country where once they numbered a quarter-million, and Tunisia where about one-thousand live on the island of Djerba and a few hundred on the mainland. Elsewhere the situation has been pitiless. In the early 1980s, soon after its founding, Hizbullah kidnapped and murdered seven of the dozen or so elderly Jews who remained in Lebanon. In Iraqi election campaigns in recent years, flyers have been distributed in which candidates accuse each other of wanting to bring the Jews back to Iraq where they once were so numerous that they constituted the largest of Baghdad’s multiple ethnic groups.

This, of course, is absurd. But why? Why do no Jews demand the “right of return” to their pre-1948 homes just as the Palestinian Arabs do? For the simple and sufficient reason that they would be slaughtered. This, too, is a standard of comparison against which to measure the status of Arabs in Israel.

The contrasting treatment of Arabs in Israel and Jews in the Arab lands is only one reflection of the gulf between Israel and its neighbors in the treatment of minorities,

especially religious sects. For example, consider the Bahai whose faith, followed by an estimated seven million,⁵⁴ was founded in the mid-19th century by Baha'ullah, born Husayn Ali, an Iranian who loved nature, succored the poor, and preached: "that all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers ... that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled."⁵⁵

Imprisoned and tortured by his native land and the Ottoman sultans, Baha'ullah was banished to the fortified town of Akko, and passed his last decades between Akko and Haifa in what is now Israel. For that reason, the two holiest sites to Bahais are in Israel. But not for that reason alone: they are there also because Israel has welcomed the Bahai and made it possible for the faith to establish its administrative center, like a mini-Vatican, in Haifa and to convene meetings there of its leaders from across the world.

In contrast, the adherents of this religion have been treated harshly in Iran where it was born. Bahais have always faced persecution in Iran, but as the Bahai world movement reports:

In 1979, with the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the persecutions took a new direction, becoming an official government policy and being pursued in a systematic way. Since then, more than 200 Bahá'ís have been executed or killed, hundreds more have been imprisoned, and tens of thousands have been deprived of jobs, pensions, businesses, and educational opportunities. Formal Bahá'í administration had to be suspended, and holy places, shrines, and cemeteries have been confiscated, vandalized, or destroyed.⁵⁶

In Egypt, until a court order implemented in 2010, Bahai were not allowed to have official identity papers necessary for marriage, work, education, and the like unless they disguised their faith. This was because identity papers required listing a religion, but only the three "Abrahamic" religions were recognized: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism (never mind that all Jews had long since been driven from Egypt). Bahai have also been persecuted or banned at various times in Morocco, Algeria and Iraq.

The treatment of Christians offers another dramatic case in point. Bombings and other murders and persecutions have driven at least one hundred thousand Iraqi Christians into exile. The World Christian Data Base shows the number of Christians to have fallen from around 710,000 to 569,000. The *New York Times* reports a more dramatic exodus, saying that most of Iraq's Christians have fled.⁵⁷ The Christian communities of Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinian territories are also shrinking, due to flight and conversions to Islam.

In Egypt, Copts have long endured a system of persecution that bars them from admission to certain state universities and from eligibility for certain benefits in the military service and forbids them from building or repairing churches without the

written approval of a provincial governor or the president of the country. Violence against Copts helped trigger the Egyptian uprising of 2011, but the government of Mohamed Morsi elected after the revolution only intensified persecution of Copts. Then, its ouster by the military “unleashed a wave of attacks on churches the like of which Copts had not seen in centuries,” according to Egyptian scholar Samuel Tadros.⁵⁸

In Saudi Arabia, home to hundreds of thousands of Christian guest workers, neither churches nor bibles are permitted.

In Israel, in contrast, Christians enjoy complete freedom of worship and control of their own holy places. Their numbers grow slowly, held down by a low birth rate and by conversions in response to proselytizing that comes entirely from Muslims. In addition, even small Muslim sects, like Ahmadis and Sufis, that face persecution in Muslim lands, may be found unmolested, albeit in tiny numbers, in Israel. And, of course, in contrast to the practice in Egypt, Christians and Muslims may enroll in all of Israel’s institutions of higher learning.

In addition to the measures of fraternity extended to non-Jewish Israelis, Israel also assumes a role of guardianship toward non-Israeli Jews, not the powerful American Jews but smaller, fragile communities elsewhere to which it offers cultural resources, diplomatic support and occasionally even the derring-do of its security services.

It also offers help to a miscellany of strangers. It provided shelter to several hundred Bosniacs and Kosovars fleeing ethnic warfare in the 1990s, most of whom returned to their countries when peace was restored. The three hundred Vietnamese boat people who arrived in Israel in the 1970s have made a permanent home there. A more difficult challenge has been presented by refugees from mayhem and tyranny in Eritrea and genocide and civil war in Sudan who made their way to and across the Israeli border.

By 2012 the total number of these was estimated at sixty thousand, overwhelmingly adult males, precipitating a political and humanitarian crisis. Some were held in makeshift detention centers, while most crammed into poor neighborhoods of Tel Aviv and a few other cities sending crime rates upwards. Complaints about the derelictions of these newcomers were soon followed by reports of demeaning and sometimes violent acts directed against them.

The influx reached 2,000 a month in mid-2012,⁵⁹ a flow many times greater in proportion to population than the rate of illegal immigration to the United States and less assimilable because the Africans reaching Israel lack the social networks that Hispanics who slip across America’s borders can call on and are culturally more alien. Fearing that word of Israel as an attractive destination would spread among the vast numbers of northeast Africans in misery and danger, Jerusalem built a fence along its border with Egypt that appeared to have stemmed the tide by the end of 2012. But efforts to discourage further arrivals, and to encourage those already within Israel

illegally to leave, continued to constitute a neuralgic issue. Neither carrot nor stick has availed. Few of the immigrants accepted cash incentives to depart, although the amount was raised as high as five thousand dollars, and a harsh law authorizing detention of illegals for up to three years was struck down in 2013 by Israel's Supreme Court.

Although this is not a happy story, the underlying fact remains that the refugees came although they had to journey the length of Egypt and sometimes farther, often part of the way on foot. They came because they heard rightly that they would face little threat to their persons in Israel, and stand a chance of making a life there, whereas in nearer countries, mostly populated by their co-religionists and people of cognate ethnic stock, they were likely to be mistreated or killed.

Israel is also one of the few small, newly-developed or still-developing countries to maintain a substantial foreign aid program. It does not distribute money but rather knowledge and services. Initially, in the 1950s, these focused on agriculture, sharing with other poor countries the expertise Israel developed in "making the desert bloom." In recent decades this aid has concentrated in the field of health. Israel's medical services rank with the world's best. Among other things, sadly, the need to treat victims of many terrorist attacks has forced Israel's providers to acquire a rare degree of expertise in burn-care and emergency medicine.

Professionals from more than a hundred countries come to Israel each year for specialized training, while Israeli teams travel to dozens to operate temporary clinics, furnishing treatment for conditions beyond the capacities of the host's medical establishments and sometimes leaving behind permanent facilities. When a devastating earthquake struck Haiti in late 2009, many countries provided emergency aid but Israel led the way. It dispatched hundreds of doctors and nurses and set up a fully equipped field hospital that treated thousands of Haitians. Again, drawing on its bitterly-won expertise with bombings, it dispatched canine units trained to sniff human beings under rubble that succeeded in extricating a number of live survivors from under collapsed buildings. Among many examples, similar aid was provided to the Philippines after the 2013 typhoon, to Indonesia after the 2004 tsunami, to Colombia after 2010 floods and the Congo that year after a huge oil tanker explosion, and to Japan, Turkey, and numerous other countries hit by earthquakes. Israel even offered the same to Iran, but was rebuffed by the government whose spokesman said: "The Islamic Republic of Iran accepts all kinds of humanitarian aid from all countries and international organizations with the exception of the Zionist regime."⁶⁰

Such humanitarian assistance is also provided by Israel's private philanthropies, a remarkable example of which is an organization called Save a Child's Heart. It was founded by Amram Cohen, a pediatric heart surgeon who had immigrated to Israel from the U.S. In 1995, a doctor in Ethiopia contacted Cohen, seeking surgical help for two children whose medical needs exceeded the care available in Ethiopia. The 7-year-old boy, Abdul, and 6-year-old girl, Helena, were Christians, not Jews. But the doctor

knocked on this unlikely door because he had heard from a shared acquaintance that Cohen had donated his services in performing 35 operations on impoverished Korean children while he was stationed in Korea with the U.S. military.

With little hesitation, Cohen agreed to perform the surgery. But that was only a small part of the necessities. He prevailed upon his employer, the Wolfson Medical Center, to provide the hospital facilities gratis. Then he solicited the necessary other doctors and nurses to work with him without pay. And finally, he persuaded El Al airlines to provide free transportation for the patients between Ethiopia and Israel. During preliminaries preceding hospital admission, his parents, who kept an apartment in Netanya, housed the children. Since the patients spoke only Amharic, the elder Cohens secured the assistance of an 18-year old immigrant girl from Ethiopia whose family they had helped to bring to Israel a decade earlier. When they were discharged from the hospital, Cohen took Abdul and Helena to his own home where his wife and their own two pre-teen children nurtured them until they were strong enough to return home.

This experience charted a new direction in Cohen's life. From his youth, he had been an individual of unusual energy and accomplishment, distinguishing himself in piano, chess, athletics, and bible studies. He was so accomplished at the latter that he earned spending money during school years by chanting Torah at synagogue services, a specialized task requiring skill and training. He had played varsity baseball and football in high school, then lettered in soccer at Johns Hopkins University while graduating Phi Beta Kappa. His medical specialty required internships in both cardiac surgery and pediatrics; and during his years in the U.S. military before moving to Israel, he had tended to the religious needs of fellow Jewish servicemen. Once during Operation Desert Storm two bedraggled Iraqi soldiers surrendered to him while he was transporting *humentashen*, special ceremonial pastries, to Jewish GIs in Iraq to celebrate the holiday of Purim. Since his two POWs were starving, he fed them on the *humentashen*—a use no doubt unforeseen by the Maryland parochial school students who had sent them as a gift to support their co-religionists fighting in Desert Storm.

Now an Israeli, the experience of rescuing Abdul and Helena impressed on Cohen that his new home was surrounded geographically by poor countries with poor children and that those with sick hearts had little hope of receiving the treatment he was capable of giving. He was willing to do more surgeries on his own time, while continuing to draw his income from his assigned surgical cases at Wolfson. But he needed to fund the other costs. So he founded the charity, Save a Child's Heart.

It raised funds for the transportation, hospital costs, and recuperative facilities for the little patients. After a few years, the organization got on its feet financially, but Cohen continued to perform the surgeries without pay, assisted by a few other doctors who also volunteered.

Typically, they would travel to a poor area and set up a temporary clinic with the

assistance of local medical personnel. This would be publicized, and local doctors or families would bring or refer patients. Cohen and his colleagues would determine which of them could be treated with medication or minor procedures on the spot, which were beyond help, and which could be saved with full heart surgery, which almost always needed to be performed back at Wolfson for want of adequate surgical facilities locally.

Over the next five years, SACH performed surgery on five to six hundred children from dozens of countries. On a mission to one of them, Tanzania, Cohen, ever the athlete, climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. After reaching the summit, he was struck by altitude sickness, and his own heart gave out. He was 46 years old.

By then, fortunately, Save a Child's Heart was well-enough established that it was able to continue its mission, with one of Cohen's surgical colleagues stepping in as chief surgeon. By the end of 2012, eleven years after the loss of Amram Cohen, SACH had treated more than 3,000 children from 44 countries, approximately half of them from four Arab countries—Iraq, Morocco, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, and most of the rest (about 30%) from Africa. Even during the height of bloodshed between Palestinians and Israelis, a weekly bus carried children from the West Bank and also from Gaza to Wolfson for evaluation and treatment. Among those on whom SACH doctors have operated is a nephew of Marwan Barghouti, the field commander of the second *intifada*, convicted in Israel of murdering five Israelis and undoubtedly responsible for the deaths of many more.

The impact of this work is multiplied by a second part of the charity's program initiated by Cohen. It brings doctors and nurses from the target countries for 3 to 15 months of training at Wolfson and sends fully-equipped teaching teams to offer hands-on instruction at foreign facilities. Thus, thousands of other children have been helped or healed indirectly by SACH.

The Palestinian youngsters whose lives have been saved by SACH make up only a tiny fraction of the many thousands of Palestinians who have received care from the Israeli health system despite the violent conflict between the two sides. A report by Israel's civil administration put the number of Palestinians treated in Israel in 2011 at 115,000 while more than one-hundred Palestinian doctors interned in Israeli hospitals.⁶¹ Israel's medical professionals have a stellar record of fealty to their Hippocratic oaths in rendering care to Palestinian patients, including to individuals who have done terrible things to Israelis. The one-year-old granddaughter of Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, was whisked to Petah Tikva in 2013 for treatment of an infection of her digestive tract.⁶² The year before, Haniyeh's brother-in-law was treated in another Petah Tikva hospital for a heart ailment.⁶³

Israel set up a field hospital in the Golan Heights in 2013 especially to treat casualties of Syria's civil war in addition to the many who have received care inside Israel.⁶⁴

Reuters quoted one insurrectionary who awoke in an Israeli hospital: “I was happy when I found I was here,’ he said. ‘Most fighters know they will get good care in Israel.’”⁶⁵ And the *Financial Times* reported from a facility in Nahariya:

Based on stories told by patients and staff in the hospital, a picture emerges of a network of Syrians, many of them FSA[Free Syrian Army]-affiliated, who, based on word of mouth, have been bringing gravely wounded people from war zones—or from local hospitals unequipped to treat them—to the Israeli border.⁶⁶

Latter Day Virtues

While a great part of the ideals of the global Left can be captured under the rubrics of the French Revolution, one passionate cause entirely unforeseen in 1789 is the wellbeing of the natural environment. On this issue, too, Israel has some remarkable achievements.

Geography endows Israel with an abundance of sunshine and a dearth of rainfall, so it has become a world leader in using solar energy and in water conservation. The UN classifies the Middle East as the world’s most water-stressed region. With populations growing and temperatures warming, this problem grows more severe. Indeed, how to share scarce water is a key issue in peace-process diplomacy among Israel, Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority.

In tackling this problem, Israel has become a global leader in three aspects of water conservation. It recycles more than eighty percent of household waste water, providing nearly half of its agricultural irrigation. According to *Reuters*, “By the turn of the century, Israel was still the only country to recycle waste water extensively.”⁶⁷ A UN report said that “Israel demonstrates the potential” of this method of conservation for use by others.⁶⁸

Israel is also a pioneer in drip agriculture, a technology for delivering water to the roots of plants rather than distributing it indiscriminately into the soil where much simply evaporates. Based on innovations developed on *kibbutzim*, collective farms in the Negev desert, Israel was estimated in 2005 by *Business Week* to control half of the global market for these products.⁶⁹

In addition to these methods of minimizing water use in agriculture, Israel is a leader in desalination of sea water for household use. The opening of the world’s largest desalination plant using a method called “reverse osmosis” south of Tel Aviv in 2013 brought the number of desalination facilities operating in Israel to five, providing the bulk of the country’s water, with experts predicting that all of its household water will come from this source by 2020.⁷⁰ As leaders in this technology, Israeli firms are helping to build similar facilities in Cyprus and California and will undoubtedly do so

in many other places.⁷¹

Thanks to its remarkable work with water resources Israel is, according to Dan Senor and Saul Singer, the only country where the desert is receding⁷², and it is the only one where the number of trees has been increasing.

As for sunshine, eighty percent of Israeli homes use it to heat water, making Israel second to Cyprus in the share of homes using this method.⁷³ Since the early 1990s all new residences have been required to incorporate it.

Bigger stakes for the environment are to be won in using sunlight to generate electricity. Existing photovoltaic cells will do this, but the energy produced is many times more expensive than energy from traditional sources. Israel is one of a number of countries working on technological innovations that would slice the costs. At the Ben-Gurion National Solar Energy Research Center in the Negev desert, Israeli technicians have built the world's largest solar energy dish that is able to multiply the strength of sunbeams one-thousand times through a system of mirrors. That this technology will yield marketable energy is yet to be proven. Using already established designs, a private Israeli company, Solel Solar Systems, acquired in 2009 by the German firm Siemens AG, is a world leader in designing and producing solar thermal collectors. It has constructed a pioneering electricity plant in the Mojave Desert.

A more grandiose effort to reduce Israel's dependence on fossil fuels was launched in 2008 by a company called Project Better Place. It aimed to put Israel in the forefront of replacing the internal combustion engine with battery-powered vehicles. The idea was to take advantage of Israel's compact size to overcome what has been the tallest obstacle to the acceptance of battery-powered cars, namely their limited range. With current technology, suitably-sized batteries need to be recharged after relatively short distances, but since Israel is small, this problem is more manageable. Better Place folded in 2013, but its idea and infrastructure were taken on by another company.⁷⁴

Israel has also achieved gains in wildlife conservation unmatched anywhere in the region. At the beginning of 2011, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority claimed success in its efforts to reintroduce oryx, fallow and roe deer, onagers (a kind of wild ass), and wild ox to natural habitats in the Negev and the Galilee where they had been extinct. In another issue relevant to wildlife conservation, in 2011 Israel became the first country to ban the fur trade, an action celebrated by the Humane Society International as "a world first—a major stand against ... animal cruelty ... an example [for] other countries."⁷⁵ (The law contains an exception for the fur trim that adorns men's hats in certain *Chassidic* sects.)

Creativity and Living Standards

Two books published in 2009, *Startup Nation* by Dan Senor and Saul Singer and *The*

Israel Test by George Gilder, cast a spotlight on Israel's remarkable recent achievements in technology and entrepreneurship. Possessing wealth is not a virtue but producing it arguably is, particularly if that wealth benefits a multitude. Karl Marx, whose ideas have formed the bedrock of left-of-center thinking for the past century-and-a-half, propounded the desirability of socialism largely on the grounds that it would make economies more fruitful and raise material wellbeing all around. With the greater abundance that Marx believed would flow from socialism, humans would be liberated from the grind driven by basic material needs to the pursuit of self-fulfillment. One might then "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, raise cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind [to do]," he wrote in the *German Ideology*.

Marx's vision was flawed, but not his insight that affluence can be liberating. Our world is made up mostly of relatively young nations, born in decolonization after World War Two, almost all of them born poor. One of the major issues of global politics, universally understood as a moral as well as technical challenge, is to see these countries rise to a more comfortable standard of living.

Israel, too, was born poor but today stands in the upper tier of middle-class countries, ranking sixteenth in the world, as I noted before, on the UN's 2012 Human Development Index. As such it offers a model to much of the rest of the world. It is true that Israel has received generous foreign aid from the United States, but most of this has been military assistance to help meet the singular threats Israel faces. Too, Israel has received large donations from Jews around the world, but none of this rivals the revenues from natural resources that have benefited some other countries. Moreover, for the most part, foreign aid to developing countries has produced few enduring gains.

Ironically, for its first 30 years, under the leadership of the Labor Party, Israel saw itself as a socialist country. Spearheaded by collective farms, the *kibbutzim*, it created the world's purest and most successful socialism.⁷⁶ But eventually, the majority, including most *kibbutzniks*, rejected this model, and the country turned to capitalism. Remarkably, in a few decades it has proven as successful at capitalism as it was at socialism.

Israel has become something of a Petri dish for startup companies. Senor and Singer describe it: "Technology companies and global investors are beating a path to Israel [which] boast[s] the highest density of start-ups in the world."⁷⁷ According to Gilder, "Israel recently passed Canada as the home of the most foreign companies on the technology-heavy NASDAQ index."⁷⁸ Senor and Singer add:

it's not just the New York stock exchanges that have been drawn to Israel, but also the most critical and fungible measure of technological promise: venture capital. In 2008, per capita venture capital investments in Israel were 2.5 times greater than in the United States, more than 30 times greater than in Europe, 80 times greater than in China, and 350 times greater than in India.

As Gilder's reference to NASDAQ suggests, Israeli capitalism has batted on a fruitful synergy between entrepreneurial skill, something Jews were known for everywhere except in socialist Israel, and scientific and engineering capacity, drawing on Israel's highly educated population. Much of Israel's inventive creativity has gone into high tech, with its wryly named "silicon wadi" claiming credit for many innovations in cell phones, microchips, and software used round the world.

Israel's growing prosperity has benefitted not only Israelis but also Palestinians, many of whom find jobs in Israel or in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Most of the jobs taken by Palestinians fall at the lower end of Israel's pay spectrum, but by Palestinian standards the compensation is high. During the last *intifada*, Israel cut off access for most Palestinian workers to prevent infiltration by suicide bombers, but the numbers now have gone back up. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reported in 2010 that 11 percent of Palestinian workers were employed by Israel.⁷⁹ In part as a result, the Palestinian territories, contrary to frequent news references to their human suffering, have a very low poverty rate, according to UN statistics. The 2010 UN Human Development Report produced a Multidimensional Poverty Index. Not all countries were listed, but the list included a dozen Arab states and the Palestinian territories. Except for the oil-rich United Arab Emirates, the Palestinians showed the lowest poverty rate among these 13 Arab polities.⁸⁰

In addition to elevating the welfare of Israelis and, to some extent, Palestinians, Israel's technological creativity has a major medical component that benefits ailing people far and wide and will benefit more. This includes the invention of a camera that can be swallowed, yielding images from inside the patient's digestive tract, and a motion-support apparatus that enables paralyzed people to walk, as well as cutting edge advances in bone-marrow transplants, laser surgery, in-vitro fertilization, and breast cancer treatment.

The Happiest Country?

Spengler, the pseudonymous essayist for the *Asia Times* claims that "Israel is the world's happiest country." He deduced this from a simple statistical exercise, plotting fertility rates against suicide rates in developed countries. He limited himself to developed countries because "women have little choice but to spend their lives pregnant in traditional society. In the modern world, where fertility reflects choice rather than compulsion, the choice to raise children expresses love of life." Examining 35 economically-developed countries, Spengler found that Israel had by far the highest fertility rate and the second lowest suicide rate.

Spengler used the concept "happiness," glibly, but he made a strong case that his little exercise reflected in some sense "love of life." Suicide rate comparisons among countries have been invoked in many arguments, and there is no consensus about what they imply. But Israel's high fertility rate is indeed remarkable. True, the number is

inflated by religious Muslims who represent a pocket of “traditional society” and by ultra-orthodox Jews who are traditional by choice, that is, even while having ready access to a more modern alternative lifestyle. Nonetheless, the fertility rate of secular Jewish Israelis is high and rising, and this may be without precedent in the developed world. It does indeed seem to reflect in some sense a “love of life” and to bespeak something wholesome in the society.

Whether or not it is the happiest, Israel is among the world’s best countries—by Spengler’s measure or any others. Born against the odds, surviving in the face of immense resistance, scorned and isolated, Israeli has tackled challenges steeper than others have done, and has attained successes without parallel. Some of its achievements are practical: strength, prosperity, and ingenuity. Some are moral, in fulfillment of the ideals of liberty, equality, brotherhood, and sustenance of the environment. Few other countries, if any, can match this record.

* Polity IV is the name of an unrelated assessment project carried out by academics at the University of Maryland, George Mason University and Colorado State University. Its formulas and variables are more abstruse, aimed at a scholarly audience, but its findings closely parallel those of Freedom House, reinforcing our faith in the validity of the latter.

† Lebanon was an electoral democracy of sorts until 1975, before Freedom House counted such things.

‡ I am indebted to Alexander Jacobson of Hebrew University for bringing this point to my attention.

§ If 59 percent have college degrees that means that the 41st percentile has 16 years. Thus it is a conservative estimate that the 50th percentile—the median—has 17 years.

** All Israeli data I have seen comparing Jewish and Arab school attainment, and that I have cited above, expresses the average in terms of medians, while Barro-Lee compares countries in terms of means. I am assuming that the ratio between the mean scores of Jews and Arabs in Israel is similar to the ratio between their medians. It may not be identical, but it could not be far different.

†† By this I mean the members of the League of Arab States.

‡‡ France shies away from collecting data that distinguishes among subgroups by ethnicity, and I have been unable to find any.

§§ I don’t have the data and doubt they exist but this was probably true even in the Arab countries before 1948 when there were large Jewish communities. Despite being discriminated against, the Jews as a group were quite rich, according to the popular lore of Egypt and Iraq.

*** For the immigrants themselves, the numbers are virtually the same, so to simplify I am just giving figures for a single generation.

††† An amusing sidelight may be seen in these data. Apparently some 12 percent of Ashkenazim feel emotionally connected to Israel but not proud of it, perhaps bespeaking the kind of identity angst familiar to the readers of American Jewish novelists.

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