

## **The Impact of the Holocaust on Politics** **Elementary remarks and several banalities**

**by Professor Shewach Weiss**

Those who examine the impact of the Holocaust on politics deal with the extent, depth, type, and dynamics of the impact but not with the impact itself. The impact itself is considered axiomatic because it is so sweeping and vast. Since the issue is so large and made up of so many overt and covert associations - direct and indirect, Jewish and pan-human, immediate and belated, ethical and practical - a general framework that presents and diagnoses the matter becomes, by nature, a telegraphic prologue to innumerable studies already carried out and yet to come.

There are many indications that the Holocaust is becoming a new religion of sorts of Western civilization - a pervasive historical experience that grows wider and deeper. Alongside the rising tide of historical research and political preoccupation, ritual aspects are spreading. Ritual settings for the Holocaust have been established not only in Israel, the state of the Jewish people and the place where most Holocaust survivors live, but in other countries as well, foremost among them Germany, the United States and Sweden. The rituals are secular, religious, and mixed secular-religious. Next to the killing sites - Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek, Sobibór, Treblinka, Dachau, Sachsenhausen, Stutthof, Babi Yar, Chelmno, Belzec, Buchenwald and other vales of agony; the collection and deportation points: the Umschlagplatz, Theresienstadt and Plaszów; ruins of ghettos; railroad stations; killing sites such as Ponar, Klooga and almost all the forests of Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Russia and Belarus; and the concentration camps of the Germans and their collaborators across Europe, which during World War II became ponds of frozen Jewish blood - monuments, museums and memorials are being erected, and plazas and streets are being named for Holocaust victims and resistance fighters. Adorno said that poetry is no longer possible after Auschwitz, the muses ascended to the heavens with the smoke of the crematoria, as it were. The Holocaust shattered the basic values of Christianity and the rationalism that the French Revolution had brought to the world - two fundamentals of Western culture and civilization. Therefore, it has had a vast impact on history and on politics, which is history as it occurs in the present time.

A stable liberal-democratic republic has been established on the ruins of Nazi Germany. Under the leadership of France, Italy, and West Germany, formerly fractious Western Europe has become a cradle of democracy and a focal point of economic revitalization and prosperity. Under the influence of the United States and of Western Europe, Communist totalitarianism in the Soviet Union and its Eastern and Central European colonies has crumbled, in a process that peaked and matured with the victory of Solidarity under Lech Walesa in Poland and the collapse of the Berlin Wall. The fascist regimes in Spain and Portugal collapsed. The fascist tyrannies in Greece and Latin America collapsed. A process of de-colonialization swept the world, peaking with the abolition of apartheid in South Africa. Totalitarianism and Fascism became illegitimate and worthy of eradication, either through internal uprisings on the part of nations that had been the victims of benighted Fascism or through outside intervention - political, economic, moral and sometimes military - that was usually belated and lacked resolve and total mobilization of the democratic community.

In many senses, a direct line runs between the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Elie Wiesel, the philosopher, author and hero of the Holocaust-survivors' culture, and that given to Nelson Mandela, the victorious hero of the struggle against apartheid - two victims of racism and Fascism who became the most important warriors against racism, discrimination, xenophobia and evil, generally.

The energy that has powered the de-colonialization and democratization processes in the past five decades traces its code to the lessons of World War II and, in the main, to the blanket of shame that settled over the Western world after the monstrous horror of the Holocaust. This process was convoluted, lengthy and accompanied by bloodshed, as Eastern Europe and parts of Central Europe were abandoned to the influence of totalitarian Communism as a prize to the Soviet Union and its leader, Josef Stalin, for their role in eradicating Nazi Germany. In this sense, the beneficent effect of the lessons of World War II and the Holocaust reached Western Europe four decades before it made its way to Eastern Europe.

Thus it happened that, following this most horrific of wars - the terror of which reached its Satanic peak with the murder of millions of Jews, large numbers of Gypsies, and millions of Poles, Germans, and members of other nations who had become thorns in Fascism's flesh - the world underwent a catharsis of sorts and revised its regimes, political borders and political behavior in a democratic, social-democratic and liberal direction. Traditional totalitarian regimes in Europe, the Far East (Japan) and Central and South America also took a democratic turn, either pursuant to outside coercion (Japan, Germany) or as a result of victories by local democratic forces, mostly inspired and sometimes assisted by the West - mainly the United States and its allies.

We are accustomed to reacting gravely to any Fascist phenomenon. We react with gravity when any shade of racism raises its head in democratic elections (Haider in Austria, Waldheim in Austria, Le Pen in France, and "neo-Nazi" parties in Germany, Denmark, Italy, and elsewhere). We react with gravity to manifestations of Holocaust denial; such was our response to the trial in Great Britain of the British historian David Irving. Our reaction is an expression of the struggle against Holocaust denial. However, this preoccupation with racist manifestations, though it is evidence that they exist, indicates the thorough revulsion by a more democratic and enlightened world. Furthermore, the very defensiveness of some Holocaust deniers, and their denials of being deniers, point indirectly to the new anti-nationalist, anti-Fascist, and anti-racist norms.

Fascism as a barbarian political method, as an aggregate and a collection of sickening and frightening phenomena such as racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, wanton evil, dictatorship, and totalitarianism, has become due to World War II - mainly in the shadow of the horrors of the Holocaust - repugnant, deserving of eradication and blatantly illegitimate. The price paid for this awareness was intolerably high, unjust, terrifying and lethal; mostly it was paid by the Jewish people of that wretched generation and in perpetuity, since this wound will never stop bleeding, let alone heal.

The Jewish people, which gave the Western world monotheism and Christianity, was the victim of the Christian faith for generations. Even though Hitlerist Fascism was secular and, at times, anti-religious, it derived its inspiration from Christian anti-

Semitism. Crosses often metamorphosed into swastikas. The swastika-crusades in Europe (and, had the Nazis' program succeeded, in northern Africa and the Middle East) devastated both Europe and the Jewish people.

The impact of the Holocaust may be gauged today in the response of European countries and the United States to Austria's decision to establish a coalition government with the participation of Joerg Haider's Freedom Party.

The firm principle of the sovereignty of states was set forth in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648; the principles of the post-sovereign world were set forth in the Convention on the Crime of Genocide and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights exactly 300 years later, in 1948. The international community, prompted largely and increasingly by the horrors of World War II and the greatest of these horrors - the Holocaust - restrained unbridled sovereignty by imposing normative international and inter-state laws. In a certain sense, Thomas Aquinas' rules that deny pirates the protection of their "sovereign" were expanded to include all types of barbarity and violent behavior against "foreign" minorities - people who are different, of another race, or of another origin. The rules have been further expanded: even when a violent regime subjects its own people to barbarity, it may be punished by the democratic and enlightened international community.

Obviously the fulfillment of the ideas embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Crime of Genocide, the UN Charter, and the Geneva Convention, among other documents, is anything but simple. It could be applied against Milosevic in the matter of Kosovo but is difficult to apply against Russia in regard to Chechnya. Thus, the world's moral and human level and its honoring of human rights have undergone a stepwise improvement, but the extremely powerful and the very remote are still very hard to touch.

When the German Foreign Minister - the leader of a moralistic and almost pacifist party - attempted to persuade the members of the Green Party that Germany should join the countries that would attempt to force Serbia's Milosevic to accept moral ground rules in Kosovo, he said in his speech that in the tension between the values of "No More War" and "No More Auschwitz," the latter should take precedence and Milosevic's barbarian behavior in Kosovo should be thwarted by means of war. Some may fault the democratic community for inconsistency in its behavior; after all, it has not managed to coerce Yeltsin or Putin as it has Milosevic. However, the democratic countries, foremost the United States, are showing a gradual increase in their ability and, in the main, their motivation to struggle against violence and brutal regimes that blatantly violate human rights and taint themselves with the stain of genocide.

*THE HOLOCAUST: the particularistic and the universal approaches, the distance between them, and implications for politics*

We Jews, doomed to total and indiscriminate death before and after the Wannsee Conference (January 1942), insist that the uniqueness of the Holocaust must be preserved. After all, the attitude of Nazi Fascism toward the Jews was exceptional by any measure, unprecedented in history before and after, deeper and bleaker than any bleakness and blacker than any black hole in human annals. This approach also

determined the size of the stain that the European countries have carried since the Holocaust.

In my book, *The Messiah hasn't come* (Renaissance, 1987), I wrote:

"Germany is now making the transition from the Nazi generation to that raised or born after World War II. During this 'seam' period, between the end of the era of collective indictment and [the onset of] that of collective responsibility, I wished to learn something, from up close, about the philosophy of life and the soul-searching among the new Germans."

Ernst Nolte, an important contemporary German historian, wrote on June 6, 1986, that most literature on Nazism overlooks the fact that methodical mass killing began not in Nazi Germany but in "Asia." This matter of "Asia" demands elucidation: the term "Asia" denoted Bolshevik Russia. Thus, the Asians, i.e., the Bolsheviks, were the Nazis' teachers. Furthermore, some historians wish to legitimize the Wehrmacht as having fought for Germany's honor, and not only for its honor but to "prevent a Holocaust among the Germans." Andreas Hillgruber, an important German historian, argues that only victims of the Nazis could identify with the Allies whereas the Germans were facing acts of retribution, mass murder and rape of women, foremost by the "Asian" conquerors (the Red Army); therefore, the actions of the Wehrmacht, which fought tenaciously and (especially from 1944 on) defended Germany itself, deserve identification and even praise and gratitude from those who identify with the German people.

Those who are more concerned about the identity of society than that of the individual - such as Michael Stürmer, who perpetuates the tradition of the neoconservative historian Joachim Ritter - tend to equip Germans with a rationale for the new unity. A pluralistic society that has an exaggerated molecular structure may develop alienation tendencies that can cause national solidarity to disintegrate totally. Therefore, as members of the school of Ritter, Stürmer and others argue, the historian has a political responsibility of sorts to the society (nation) in which he or she operates. People who lean toward this way of thinking are assisting, knowingly or not, those who wish to absolve the Germans of the collective shame of their past by blurring the uniqueness of the Nazi horror and glorifying the Wehrmacht to a greater or lesser extent. Admittedly, this is only one side of the dispute. Other historians oppose these rehabilitationist trends; Habermas does so in a decisive way.

Stürmer asks whether this was a war of the Germans or of Hitler. He wonders what the Jews' fate would have been had the nationalist Right, not Hitler, won the 1933 elections. Would the nationalists, without Hitler, have adopted the policy toward the Jews that Hitler adopted? Stürmer answers this question in the affirmative: they would have applied to German Jewry the policy that Adolf Hitler and the Nazis invoked until 1938. The main policy goal until 1938, Stürmer states, was to encourage Jews to become disengaged from Germany; indeed, about two-thirds of German Jews had left the country by that time. What happened after 1941, in contrast, was a uniquely Hitlerist action that corresponded to his own doctrine. Stürmer admits that much of the German population favored the elimination of the mentally retarded and that about 70,000 such people had been put to death by 1941. However, this program was discontinued (officially) after pressure from the Church. In the Jews' case, in contrast, the masses did not favor the Final Solution and the

extermination; this course of action was stipulated by Hitler. Thus Stürmer attempts to excuse the German people to some extent and to place the main burden of guilt for Auschwitz on Hitler's shoulders. To counter this argument, Habermas asks how one can explain the masses' silence, acquiescence and collaboration in perpetrating and sustaining the killing. Goldhagen's book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, subsequently provided an important answer to this question.

### *Lending the Horrors a Human Dimension*

In his attempts to explain the Nazi phenomenon in anthropological terms, Hillgruber states that the masses' complicity in Nazi crimes shows that they are indeed capable of such actions. By so arguing, Hillgruber actually wishes to lend the horrors a human dimension (in the sense that "anything people do is not strange to us"). However, Hillgruber has no convincing anthropological explanation for the participation of masses of university-trained Germans in the murder machine. Thousands of doctors of the Mengele ilk give Hillgruber's explanations a bumpy ride.

Nolte, who in 1963 published his book, *The Three Faces of Fascism*, wished to lend the Nazis' crimes a dimension that belongs to the generality of history and perhaps to eliminate its terrifying uniqueness. It is only natural, he claims, that all non-German historians who were anti-Nazi, invoked speculations redolent with mythologization of the Third Reich. Nolte also writes that when Chaim Weizmann declared war on Germany at the Zionist Congress in 1939, Hitler toughened his policy toward the Jews in the belief that his Jewish rivals were out to destroy him. Thus, Nolte holds Weizmann partly responsible for Jewish negligence that contributed to the diabolical quality of Hitler's actions. Joachim Fest joined this debate. In an article that appeared on August 29, 1986, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* under the headline "Guilty Memories," Fest joined in a sense, the school that generalized the Nazi horror. Fest argued that the mass killing in Stalin's gulags preceded Auschwitz and the partial extermination of the Cambodian people by Pol Pot followed it. The uniqueness of the Nazi case, according to Fest, was its contribution to the technology of death, i.e., the invention of killing by gas.

Professor Karl Dietrich Bracher, a noted political scientist and an expert on the Weimar period, wrote in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on September 6, 1986 that although the "totalitarian approach" (i.e., that which regards any totalitarian regime as a potential perpetrator of mass-murder and genocide atrocities) helps us understand German Fascism in its Nazi version; Nazism was unquestionably unique in its own way.

The controversy will continue for much time to come. In fact, it is a very old dispute that has re-surfaced with greater vehemence and in a current political context. In the German climate of prosperity, more than fifty-five years after Hitler's time, many Germans would like to dissociate themselves from the Teutonic-Junker-Nazi stereotype. Some historians identify with these trends and may be nurturing them by seeking historiosophic arguments that might absolve Germans of collective guilt. In the 1940s and 1950s, many Germans still said, "We are guilty." They were succeeded by a generation that claimed: "We are not guilty but we have a responsibility to the victims." The trend taking shape today absolves Germans of guilt

and responsibility - if not fully, then in greater part, and if not in greater part, then in smaller part. Concurrently, however, another formula is developing, that of German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer: "No more Auschwitz!"

### *The Victims' Victims*

In a meeting with a young member of the Social Democratic Party at the Bundestag, the man stated that though he was not enthusiastic about the Germans' widespread definition of the Palestinians as "the victims' victims," it was in fact Auschwitz that abetted the establishment of the independent Jewish state (he is well versed in the historical and political nexus of the Holocaust and the Jewish resurrection, in all of its details), and equally it was Auschwitz that inflicted grave harm on the Palestinians because Auschwitz furthered the formation of the Jewish state. The point of this very sophisticated formula is that the Jews have already been compensated for the crimes of Auschwitz, in the form of the Jewish state, but that the Palestinian Arabs have in fact become "victims of Auschwitz" and should now be helped on this account.

While this explanation neither belittles the Nazi atrocity nor denies its uniqueness, again it invests the Holocaust with a sweeping, general historical dimension of sorts by implying that the Nazi Holocaust harmed the Jews and the Jews harmed the Palestinians. Thus, the generality of the atrocities is manifested in the Jews' ability to inflict long-term damage, anguish, and misery upon masses of Palestinians. I consider this syllogism, which I heard from the young German Social Democrat, as flimsy as most of the explanations of Hillgruber, Stürmer, Nolte and even Fest, who wish to invest the horror with a long-term historical dimension and, thereby, to make the Nazi case somewhat less exceptional.

In his poem, "May 8, 1945," Franz Berman Steiner wrote: "We dipped wet flags into the warmth of festive atmosphere; and in the wake of the pounding of the drums, they skated in half-turns on a lake of frozen blood." Germany and Europe are standing on lakes of frozen blood and no attempt to diminish the uniqueness of the Nazi murder machine will transform these lakes into water.

In the 1940s, Heinrich Böll wrote: "... I do not see the state.... I can see only a few decomposing remains, furiously protected by rats...." Böll performed a reckoning with the statistics of Hitler's time. Today's Germany is devoid of excessive statism and zealous nationalism. Its strong trends are democratic-liberal and progressive. There is no Nazi movement of substance. The political system works efficiently. There are no alienated masses; even the "Greens" are moving into the institutional mainstream.

The German Catholic and Protestant churches are also atoning for past sins. Thousands of abandoned church steeples stand in Germany; most of the edifices are staffed by low-ranking stand-ins. The Churches spoke out against the killing of the mentally retarded in the 1930s, and in 1941 indeed managed to stop those mass-murder procedures, but they were stricken mute when it came to the Jews. But today, the churches, along with all of German society, are passing the test in terms of their attitude toward strangers. In response to the intake of people of color - Vietnamese, Tamils, Turks and others - and attempts to stem this immigration by amending the German Constitution, the church has adopted the moral challenge of immigrant absorption and has come out against any intention to amend the Constitution. The motive of the "Death of God" is strongly expressed in postwar German literature, as

in Feinhalles and Ilona (Böll) when Ilona says, "We have to pray in order to console God." (p.179)

Germany's pluralistic constitutional structure also reinforces democracy and mitigates the statist trends that occur in societies generally and in German society particularly. The checks and balances and governing institutions function smoothly.

The Social Democrats and the "Greens" have added a permanent moral dimension to German policy and should not be treated with contempt. Some of them are adhering to the path of thorough soul-searching. Thus Germany continues, albeit inadequately, to invoke an uncompromising moral consideration in respect to social phenomena and policy in Germany and elsewhere, in the sense of being responsible for any atrocity, however distant (e.g., Guenther Eich, "Reflect on All of These"). In a session of the Bundestag that I attended, the plenum cut short an important budget debate and devoted several hours to discussion of Pinochet's reign of terror in Chile. Speakers from all factions vehemently condemned Pinochet's fascist tyranny and demanded that the German government adopt an active policy against it. Had such a phenomenon occurred in the 1950s, it might have been described cynically. Helmut Heissenbuttel expressed such cynicism in his poem, "The New Age," in which he wrote, "...when a former Nazi calls a former Nazi ... a former Nazi ... and they all joined the Communist Party and lived happily ever after...." Today, however, more than fifty years after the events, the call for ethical conduct is sounded by the children and grandchildren, some of whom are sincerely sensitive to injustices even when perpetrated in countries far from home.

We are still discussing here the debate between particularism and universalism, regarding the effect of the Holocaust and its impact on the European, as well as the world political culture.

Hannah Arendt, in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, wrote in the early 1960s that a crime against humanity had been committed against the Jews. By so stating, she stressed the universal approach. Those who monitor the development of political culture after, and in the aftermath of World War II, cannot avoid the universal nature of the impact of the Holocaust on the progression of events. The Holocaust has become a main component of Western culture and the Christian theological debate, and an important factor in the political culture and in practical political behavior. The debate among the particularists will continue, but it is absolutely clear that the impact of the Holocaust on politics is universal at both the normative and the practical levels. If the German Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, is willing to go to war against Milosevic's Serbia and anchors this resolve in the norm of "No More Auschwitz," if the European Union and the United States apply sanctions against the Schuessel-Haider coalition in Austria; if the court in The Hague judges Serb criminals in the context of events in Yugoslavia in the past decade; if in Stockholm, in the winter of 2000, the leaders of forty-seven nations gather for a conference on internalizing the lessons of the Holocaust, and the lessons are associated with the struggle against genocide, racism, and xenophobia including anti-Semitism: this indicates that the "Never Again" approach is winning ground and becoming a norm which is penetrating the heart of Western culture and religious and political life with an intensity that projects onto the rest of the world as well.

T.W. Adorno said: "After Auschwitz, poetry is no longer possible...." It turns out that one may write poems profusely and maintain a state as all nations do. In 1965, Günter Grass wrote that in America one can write a book that does not deal with the past. Today it is difficult to write a book in Europe or America that does not deal with the past. This past exists within the present, projects onto it and radiates into the future.

Heinrich Böll, in a warning about history repeating itself, wrote: "...years later, employment was found for all: they were policemen, soldiers, executioners and munitions workers, and the rest were sent to concentration camps. Marks were burned like water, and we paid the bill when we reached adulthood and maturity...." This penetrating, agonizing personal soul-searching contains a message and a warning to posterity. We, the living, refuse to let the matter slide; we continue to adhere a mark of Cain to the Germans' foreheads. We are not absolved of the duty to struggle against every type of genocide, every social and political manifestation that carries the potential of the executioner.

The State of Israel is not only a symbol of the Holocaust-resurrection nexus; Israel is duty-bound to carry the additional burden of sounding a public alarm when any injustice is committed and it has a unique moral imperative in the conduct of its own affairs.

When we deal with the issue of particularism and universalism, it is important to note that Christianity, in its attitude toward secular society, regularly projects a universal normative climate of sorts (at least among the Christian nations) and purports to station Christian humanism at the forefront of its concerns. One reason that the church is searching its soul (insofar as it is doing so) is Christianity's failure to stem the tide of Nazi barbarism. Also, the behavior and teachings of Pope John Paul II may be an antithesis to that of Pope Pius XII.

If the Holocaust has cast a shadow over Christian humanism, then the Pontiff's political activity (in the broad sense of the term) has the effect of injecting modern humanism into practical politics. In this context, the Holocaust has provided an awesome catharsis. Let us bear in mind that the venerable perception of man's unique station in the universe, the core of Judeo-Christian monotheism, was shattered in the 1930s and 1940s. Since the Holocaust, an effort to revitalize monotheism has been made. Furthermore, the idea that education and scholarship improve the individual, refine his or her soul and make him or her more human flows from Christianity itself. The "Christian humanism" movement, which strives to maintain the significance of religious consciousness in the public mind and, concurrently, to free it from its dependence on the sacramental authority of the Catholic Church, also underlies the development of nationalism. Rationalism also collapsed during that time; the Holocaust is a manifestation of a political system gone awry, e.g., the Wehrmacht's frequent subordination of military logistical considerations to the Nazi mass-murder machine.

### *The Haider Affair as a Parable*

On February 6, 2000, the Government of Israel held a meeting on the Haider affair. The government decided to recall Natan Meron, Israel's ambassador to Vienna. Israel considered the formation of the Schuessel-Haider coalition a "black day for



Austrian democracy." It stated: "The Government of Israel believes that its task and duty is to stand at the forefront of the nations of the world and warn against such a serious phenomenon - a Western government that includes neo-Nazi elements." Thus Israel, as a state, took a political step and urged European and other countries to take political action against a Nazifying Austria.

Concurrently, every media forum and every academic and political setting conducted a probing debate, at the ideological, political and moral levels, about the actions to be taken against Austria. Cardinal questions in matters of ethics and politics resurfaced with greater intensity than occurred when Le Pen in France and Gianfranco Fini in Italy were on the rise. As we recall, Pini, head of the National Alliance, joined Silvio Berlusconi's government in 1994. Thus, the debate concerning the "limits of sovereignty" and the international community's right to intervene in the "internal affairs" of a sovereign state erupted anew. Consequently, the tension between the principles of Westphalia in 1648 and the principles of struggle against genocide in 1948 returned, powerfully, to the international agenda. Those inclined to interpret the right of external interference broadly adopt Thomas Aquinas' principles of moral law (in the *Librum Mare*) against "pirates."

Inspired by the Stockholm conference in January 2000, Robert Schneider wrote the following in the *Nouvel Observateur* (abstracted by *Ha'aretz* on January 7, 2000) about the state of Holocaust awareness, shortly before the formation of the Haider-Schuessel coalition in Austria:

"A week before the Austrians brought a man with a nostalgia for Hitlerism into their government, 600 academics, diplomats, and political leaders from thirty-six countries took part in an international conference in Stockholm on Holocaust remembrance and the need to educate the younger generations. If it is necessary, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, to prove that one should continue inculcating remembrance of the Nazi atrocities in the heart of civilized Europe, the results of the poll published here provide proof. The poll was conducted in France and Germany among young people aged 14-18.

"In both countries, the teenagers' knowledge of the holocaust was deficient. Young Germans are slightly more knowledgeable about the matter - or, to be precise, slightly less ignorant, than their French counterparts. When asked what the Holocaust is, 65 percent of young Germans and 76 percent of young French cannot reply... A majority of 65 percent of French teenagers - the question was not asked in Germany - believe that the mass murders of millions in Rwanda, in the Soviet gulags, and in Cambodia during the reign of Pol Pot are "holocaustic" in nature. This is an old debate on which historians have long been of two minds: should one continue to assert the uniqueness and exclusivity of the Holocaust, notwithstanding the profusion of other crimes against humanity?

"The survey shows that, as the universal line (the Holocaust, the gulags, Pol Pot, Rwanda) becomes more widespread, there is a measure of ignorance or absence of knowledge about these horrors, especially the "old" ones (the Holocaust and the gulags). Even if the surveys portray the situation inaccurately (as they sometimes do), we cannot predict the impact of the events of World War II and the Holocaust in the more distant future and cannot tell whether they will continue to have a cleansing and cathartic effect."

## *The Example of Israel*

When the United Nations resolved, on November 29, 1947, to establish two states in Palestine, one of them a Jewish state, and to create an economic union between the two states, it was clear that underlying the decision of the majority of the UN's fifty-one member nations at that time was the Holocaust.

In a sense, the community of nations "compensated" the Jewish people for its loss by granting it a state of its own. We were also worthy of statehood in view of the historical events and settlement activity in Palestine that preceded the Holocaust, but some of the states that voted in favor made their decision in the shadow of the horrors of the Holocaust and the hundreds of thousands of refugee survivors who were pounding at the gates of their historical homeland. Since then, Israeli and Jewish politics have often stood on the awesome bridge that leads "from Holocaust to resurrection." In my estimation, one of the strongest underpinnings of Israel's security doctrine is the Holocaust consciousness and the historical resolve expressed in the slogan "Never Again!" When the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces in the mid-1990s, Ehud Barak, later to become the country's Prime Minister and Defense Minister, visited Auschwitz at the head of a delegation of officers and soldiers and proclaimed there, facing the crematoria, that "we have come here too late," he expressed, along with yearning, a stance of defense, state, and political nature. When the Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Abba Eban, in his speech after the Six-Day War, made it clear that the war had been a defensive one that was meant to forestall an "Auschwitz borders" situation, he was expressing the State of Israel's political attitude. When the Israeli Right adopts Eban's speech (the last thing that he wanted) in its anxious opposition to the Oslo Accords, it is putting the lessons of the Holocaust to political use. Thus the Holocaust becomes a source of fear and a lesson for Israel's politics and its regional and global relations.

The Left and Right in Israel have different attitudes toward the Holocaust and, in the main, toward the extent of its integration into the political consciousness - just as their views on Jewish consciousness differ. Often the Left is critical of those who, for their taste, deal too intensively with the Holocaust, especially when they insert Holocaust arguments into the internal and external political debate.

The Right has its own version of the lessons of Holocaust. Let me give an example: on one of my visits to the Auschwitz Museum, in 1995, when the controversy over implementing the Oslo Accords was at its peak, I encountered a group of Jewish pupils from Israel, with their teachers and principals, stepping out of the entrance to the crematorium, stunned, horrified and crying. I was the Speaker of the Knesset at that time, and in that capacity had conducted most of the turbulent debates in the Knesset concerning the Oslo Accords. My views as a supporter of these accords and as a pronounced personal supporter of the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin were widely known. One of the teachers turned to me and said in a pleading tone, "Mr. Speaker, this is what we'll be facing again if we return soil of the Land of Israel to the Arabs." I kept my silence, not wishing to generate a political debate in front of the children at the entrance to the crematorium at Auschwitz.

Thus we have returned to the entrance of the crematorium. One who stands facing the crematorium at the Majdanek concentration camp, to which the guard-operator's apartment was attached, the heating system for its bathtub powered by the piping of

the crematorium, who faces the mound of desiccated bones and human ashes at the entrance to the camp, undergoes a sweeping metamorphosis. The world of "after" is a totally different world in every respect - culture, religious attitude, morals and political culture.

The execution of one man in Jerusalem by a Roman court 2000 years ago transformed the human spirit and led to the development of a religion that has had a comprehensive influence on the human spirit, on history and on world politics. Should we be amazed to discover that the systematic murder of millions of people without trial, by means of satanic methods and techniques, projects onto the spirit of man - his very being, his behavior, and also his politics?

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