

Introduction

During the 1950s and early 1960s, America was opening to Jews. We also created our own openings. Even so, the idea of a Jewish political force was still in the future. Religiously, we remained in the ancient rabbinic framework of interpretation. We mined ancient precepts to cope with modern realities.

The Holocaust hovered in the background, as yet unnamed. We knew, of course, of the slaughter of European Jews in World War II. It followed us like a shadow that moves as the day unfolds. Like our political opportunities, the Holocaust had yet to become the dominating force—*the* Holocaust—as it is known today.

In 1948, the state of Israel was created. Unlike the Holocaust, Israel had a name but the content of the state was yet to be determined. At least in America, Jews thought of Israel as a small, pioneering community far from our shores. International travel was still in its infancy. Over the years, the Holocaust and Israel grew together. Although they were separate historical events, over the next decades they became twinned in the Jewish historical imagination. Twinned, they grew to be almost mythic in their reach and power. The turning point was the 1967 Arab-Israeli war when Israel, feeling threatened, routed the Arab world in a lightning-fast, six-day campaign. Shortly after the war, the Holocaust and Israel became as central to Jewishness as the rabbis had been for centuries.

After the 1967 war, the Holocaust was named as the epitome of Jewish suffering. Israel was named as the response to that suffering. Ancient texts and the ancient Jewish God were thrust into the background, and our immediate Jewish history took precedence. The remnants of the past that survived did so only in the wake of the drama of contemporary Jewish life.

Time passed. The Holocaust and Israel took on more and more significance in Jewish life until there was little else to speak or think about. It was a heady time for Jews. We were becoming prime movers and shakers in America on all fronts. The Holocaust was one of our tickets of admission in America; the state of Israel, with its military prowess, emboldened us. As Jews, we stood tall.

The state of Israel itself was complicated. It lived on a razor's edge, strong but vulnerable, defiant yet anxious. For American Jews, Israel served as a symbol

of our arrival as a proud and powerful people. Israel is hardly a symbol to itself, however. Israel is real to Israelis. They talk the talk and walk the walk. They live the Jewish drama in peace, on the threshold of war, and in war. For decades, Israel seemed perpetually on the verge of peace. As I write, and despite the peace initiative headed by U S Secretary of State John Kerry in 2013-2014, its arrival date remains uncertain. Here one must add justice to peace, for the various frameworks of peace offered over the decades, including Secretary Kerry's proposals, have lacked the justice needed for a real resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel was founded as a small state in a larger and complicated Middle East. After the 1967 war, Israel expanded its borders, annexing the eastern part of Jerusalem she had conquered in the war and began building Jewish settlements in the Golan Heights, West Bank, and Gaza territories, also won in the war. Many thought that the settlements and Israel's occupation forces in the territories would be temporary. They weren't. Some thought that after the 1967 war, the region, including Israel, would forsake war. Peace would be right around the corner. It wasn't.

Years continue to pass. American Jews are more deeply entrenched in the Holocaust and Israel than ever before. Israel is more deeply entrenched in wars, settlements, and occupation. Meanwhile, Palestinian voices have been gaining an audience especially in the growing movement equating the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem and the West Bank with South African apartheid. The boycott, divestment and sanctions movement (BDS) that helped end apartheid in South Africa is now being applied to Israel's occupation.

The support for the Palestinian cause around the world has increased exponentially. For American Jews who came of age before the 1967 war, their story was largely unknown. When it became known, many Jews thought that Palestinians only opposed Israel because they opposed Jews. The Holocaust was the epitome of antisemitism. In opposing Israel, it seemed that Palestinians were continuing that history. After all, who could oppose Jews having a state of our own?

Israelis know Palestinians like the back of their hand—that is, as conquerors know the people they conquer. Many Israeli families had gone through the Holocaust. Countless family members had been murdered. For those who had survived, Israel was their refuge. Any challenge to that refuge had to be met with force.

Israelis know the Holocaust close-up. They also know their nation close-up. For Israelis, the Holocaust is existential. Their wars are real. Their

occupation of Palestinians is real. Unlike American Jews, Israelis have their boots on the ground.

When I say Israeli boots on the ground, I mean Jewish boots on the ground. First, because the Israelis who serve in the Israeli Defense Forces are overwhelmingly Jewish, and second, because Israel is an icon in the Jewish community in America and among Jews around the world. The state of Israel comes from the suffering in Jewish history and has been enabled through the political advocacy and financial support of Jews living outside of Israel. Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora make a huge investment in Israel's success, an investment that stems from Jewish solidarity in the face of the Holocaust. Jews everywhere have said, "Never Again."

Today, many Jews in and outside of Israel realize that "Never Again" means more than Jewish survival. Historically, it meant the displacement of Palestinians and Palestine in the creation of the state of Israel. That displacement continues today through settlements in Jerusalem and the West Bank. More and more Jews believe that the Jewish ethical tradition has been outsourced. It exists in a conceptual universe that bears less and less relation to the facts of Jewish life.

While Jewish leaders emphasize Jewish suffering, the great majority of Jews live in a world where Jewish life is secure and strong. The shattering of the Jewish ethical tradition has consequences. It means that the substance of the Holocaust and the possibility of a renewed and just Jewish presence in Israel-Palestine are disappearing from view. Over time, the ground of resistance for Jews begins to give way. The ethical sources of Jewish life are becoming distant. Increasingly, Jewish youth throw up their hands in despair. Apathy becomes the norm.

Some movements among Jews on college campuses point in another direction. Recently, students have revolted against mandates by the campus Jewish organization, Hillel, that speakers with strong criticisms on Israel be severely restricted. Jewish students at Swarthmore and Vassar have declared themselves independent of these directives. They have renamed themselves—"Open Hillel."

There are other voices of dissent. An example is Jewish Voice for Peace. In this organization justice for Palestinians is spoken boldly. As part of Jewish Voice for Peace, there is a Rabbinical Council where rabbis identify themselves as supportive of Palestinian rights. Severely criticizing Israel in public is new in Jewish life. Jewish voices of dissent are becoming more serious and committed.

Nonetheless, over the decades, Jewish life has become increasingly militarized. There is less tolerance for Jews to ask questions about the direction

of our communal life. More Jews are asking if Jewish history comes down to this: Having suffered, are we as Jews to cause others to suffer?

This question should occasion the short and simple answer: “No.” But, as often is the case with Jews in light of Jewish history, what seems simple is more complex. This is true especially after the Holocaust and the state of Israel.

My book is an attempt to explore questions and answers, angles and interpretations relating to contemporary Jewish identity. This hardly means that I am neutral. As every Jew, I have a stake in Jewish history. I have spent my adult life trying to understand what is up for grabs in Jewish life and what stands I need to take in relation to Jewish history.

By some accounts, contemporary Jewish life in America and Israel is flourishing. It is time to celebrate. By other accounts, contemporary Jewish life in America and Israel is in steep ethical decline. It is time to mourn.

For more and more Jews, Jewish life has reached a tipping point. Whereas in earlier times, the struggle revolved around whether the Jewish ethical tradition could bend Jewish power toward justice, these last decades have introduced a new question. Is there anything ethical left in Jewish life worth saving? Israel has gone so far in its occupation of Palestinian land and settlement building in Jerusalem and the West Bank, that the possibility of two states, Israel and Palestine, standing side by side in peace and harmony seems a charade. Some engaged Jews and much of the international community think that through a continuing occupation and extensive settlements, Israel has foreclosed the possibility of the two-state option. The dream of Israel living side by side with a full, real state of Palestine in peace and harmony has become just that—a dream.

Today there is only one state—Israel controlling the territory stretching from Tel Aviv to the Jordan River—but with millions of Palestinians within those borders. That is why many dissenting Jews look askance at the most recent peace process. Frameworks and principles that grant Israel almost everything it already has conquered, occupied and settled finalizes the diminishment of Palestine. Dissenting Jews want more than an Israeli victory that seals the fate of the Palestinian people. Dissenting Jews want justice—for Jews but also for Palestinians.

Thus my description of Jewish life tilts toward the mourning side of the equation. Or, rather, my account explores the soft underbelly of achieving Jewry in advanced modernity in a time where Israel, with an enabling world Jewry, has permanently conquered another people. In my view, then, our glory days are shadowed by more than complexity. They are shadowed by culpability.

A soft underbelly is common to every community, nation, ideology, and religion. But for Jews, that vulnerability is also the place where our strength—Jewish ethics—is strongest. “Jewish ethics” is the modern way of conceptualizing an ancient and more profoundly troubling foundation of Jewish identity. I believe this ancient and troubling foundation is the prophetic.

There is much talk today about essentializing tradition or identity, an academic classification for refusing to posit a core as immutable. We are rightly cautioned against essentializing any entity or idea as it discloses itself. Essentializing terminology like “Jew,” “Jews,” “Jewish,” as if these labels are static, is taboo.

In modern understandings, such identifiers have little meaning in and of themselves. Essentializing leads to errors in definition and categorization. Those who are essentialized can become targets, as “Jews” have been. Essentializing can lead to a warrior mentality against the Other—“we” against “them.” This is part and parcel of Israel’s targeting of Palestinians.

I attempt to address this long and involved story in the pages that follow. I take this caution against essentialism seriously. I leave it to each individual and community to decide where they stand on the issue. Obviously, much of Jewish history, including Jewish life in the twenty-first century, is evolving, mixed, and contextual. Jewish identity is impossible to define in a single brushstroke.

Nonetheless, and with the warning against essentialism taken on, I believe there is something unique and essential about being Jewish. Rather than simply assert this belief, in these pages I attempt to explore aspects of both uniqueness and essentiality. I want to understand the core of Jewishness. I desire to approach that core. I want to embody it.

I lay out this core as foundational to Jewish history, to Jewish life, to being Jewish, to the very definition of “Jew.” This does not mean that all Jews think the same as I do or want what I define as the essence of being Jewish.

In these pages, I travel against the grain of how many Jews perceive their lives and the life of our community. Nonetheless, as a Jew I am far from alone. In an age of unparalleled Jewish success, there are many Jews who travel against the grain of what “Jewish” has come to mean.

The pages ahead lay out the “essentials” of Jewish life as I understand them. Here is my confessional backdrop to those essentials: I believe that ancient Israel gave the prophetic to the world. Of the gifts to the world, there are few that can rival it. Without the prophetic, there is no meaning in the world. There in fact may be no meaning in the world. The prophet embodies the possibility of meaning in the world.

It is easy to dismiss this formulation, especially by those outside the Jewish tradition who embody the prophetic and correctly rail against claims of difference that might lead to claims of superiority. I agree with their dissent. I do not claim that Jews should be privileged. I do not think that Jews are superior. Moreover, history is a hodgepodge of influences, borrowings, and mixing. Jews embody a mix of peoples, histories, traditions and cultural influences. Nonetheless, the world knows the prophetic through the Jewish tradition.

Although the Jewish prophetic is distinctive, it is now found throughout the world. One of the themes I explore is that the prophetic today is in some ways stronger among non-Jews than it is among Jews. Jews are in the peculiar situation of being re-presented the prophetic from outside.

This re-presentation has many facets but the primary shift it embodies is central. For more than a thousand years Christianity and Islam have re-presented the Jewish tradition to Jews. Too often this re-presentation has been negative, as if having absorbed the Jewish witness, Christians and Muslim stand as the triumphal successors to Jews and Judaism. Today, many Christians and Muslims—as well as their secular counterparts—seek a solidarity with Jews. They are grateful for what they have inherited from the Jewish tradition. Instead of denigrating Jews and Judaism, others who carry the prophetic wonder where the prophetic witness of Jews and the Jewish community have gone. They seek out Jews in a gesture of solidarity and work with Jews who retain the prophetic. Instead of demeaning Jews, Jews and others are forging a new interfaith and inter-communal solidarity.

The prophetic is lauded by Jews and others. The prophetic is vilified by Jews and others. Either way, there is no way around the prophetic. The prophetic stalks the world. For better and for worse, Jews are the people who embody the prophetic as an ancient tradition in the modern world.

The consequences of the prophetic are enormous. As gift and burden, there is nothing in the world more powerful. Open warfare is declared against the prophetic.

The prophetic is the unraveling of righteousness assumed. Innocence assumed. Affluence assumed. Progress assumed. Civilization assumed.

I believe that what we Jews have accomplished in the post-Holocaust era stands under prophetic judgment. Our newfound power stands under prophetic judgment. Our memorialization of the Holocaust stands under prophetic judgment. The state of Israel stands under prophetic judgment.

Prophetic judgment comes from a variety of locations. Palestinians judge the militarized behavior of Israel. Nations outside of Europe and America judge

the American–Israeli alliance as colonial and imperial. Those on the bottom of the income and status ladders in the United States judge both Jewish economic success as well as the success of Jews in trumpeting our history of suffering as worthier than theirs.

All of these locations have their say in my writing. Yet I primarily write about the inner workings of the prophetic and Jews wondering out loud about the direction of Jewish life to which others, too, are pointing. My writing is about Jewish particularity, about Jewish history, where we have come from, where we are. And what is to be done.

These pages are about the unraveling of Jewishness in our time. I seek to clarify the elements of that unraveling by separating aspects of Jewish history and examining how we as Jews look at and dwell within the world. I want to separate the dream of Jewishness and the reality of it. In tracing this unraveling, I struggle to clarify what is mysterious and baffling about contemporary Jewish life.

I would love to solve our predicament, lay aside our bad behavior, and practice justice, but obviously I alone cannot change our direction. With other Jews, however, I can witness to our predicament. I can be present to our contradictions. I can surface Jewish voices to condemn what is wrong. I can attempt to write our hope.

The Jewish unraveling is likely to continue for decades. Just when we think we have reached rock bottom, we sink to another level. When Jews occupy another people, what can be expected other than a loss of ethical bearings? What is hopeful within this dark saga is that there are Jews—sometimes Israeli soldiers themselves in organizations like Breaking the Silence—who call out the behavior they once participated in. There are also Israeli organizations – like B’Tselem – that document the human rights abuses of the Israeli military and settlers.

Yet, even here, we enter a most difficult issue. Are these soldiers and human rights workers documenting abuses that will be corrected so that Jewish life will right its course and begin a new process of justice-seeking and reconciliation with the Palestinian people? Or has Jewish life reached a terminus where their testimony and documentation is less a clarion call for change than it is becoming a historical archive that details the end of Jewish history as we have known and inherited it?

Without a two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict—that is, two real states where Palestinians control all of the West Bank and East Jerusalem with a link to a free Gaza—or a one-state solution where Jews and Palestinians participate in governing themselves as equal citizens without restriction

according to religion or ethnic identification—then Jewish life as we have known it with an ethical base is over.

Previous peace processes have held out a glimmer of hope for the possibility of a two states solution. The Kerry initiative is sorely lacking and in some ways is even worse than previous attempts. Overall, Kerry's proposals involve a significant permanent Israeli settlement and population presence in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. For the most part it is silent on Gaza. Even the Palestinian Authority's floating proposals of Israeli military troops in the Jordan Valley and an American-led NATO military force throughout Jerusalem and the West Bank to guarantee the demilitarization of Palestine as a state and placate fears of Israel of an independent Palestine is wanting. Foreign military troops stationed in Palestine is another form of occupation. Such proposals deny Palestinian sovereignty. As well, allowing hundreds of thousands of Israeli settlers on Palestinian land is to accept a permanent diminishment of Palestine. The Palestinians would exist as a ghettoized population in perpetuity.

In the struggle for justice in Israel/Palestine more and more Jews and Palestinians are coming together. Within this struggle, Jews and Palestinians are increasingly critical of the political authorities who speak in their name. Crossing the boundary into solidarity with Palestinian freedom is a potent signifier of the possible future of Jewish and Palestinian life together. Is it too late?

This hardly means that those Jews and Palestinians who argue for justice agree on all matters. Nor does it signify that others in the international community who have joined the quest for justice for Palestinians are in solidarity with Jews as individuals, as a community and with the Jewish tradition. As in any movement, complexity is important to identify and surface. Surely some Jews privilege Jewish flourishing over others. Some Palestinians would like a Palestine—which includes for them the state of Israel – without Jews. Clearly, the international community has mixed feelings about Jews, Jewish influence in politics and Jewish empowerment.

Some one-state theorists who champion BDS do so at the expense of the possibility that, in the post-Holocaust world and with the history of anti-Semitism, Jews might deserve and need a collective political dimension to survive and flourish. Unfortunately, Jewish support for the state of Israel and Israel's behavior itself has poisoned the waters of reflection. Though the life of any community is complex and in need of negotiation, Jewish establishment pronouncements on antisemitism in the world have made nuanced arguments more and more difficult.

Whatever the complexities and the need for thoughtful reflection, the situation is beyond grave. We may be at the end of Jewishness as we have known and inherited it. At the end, there may be a beginning. There may not be. Yes, Jewish history will endure. At issue is what direction it will take since Jewish history has had many trajectories. Surely there is no way back to our previous celebration of Jewish life. Speaking of Jewish life and the state of Israel as innocent is disingenuous. It is willful deceit.

My exploration is primarily about the foundations of the Jewish journey and how the present can be seen in the past. But to stop there would be to fall short. In the pages that follow, I explore the interaction of the Jewish past and the present so that contemporary Jewish life may shed its fated sensibility.

Jews are not fated to suffer. Nor are we fated to be oppressors. There is a middle ground of being empowered and being unjust—of feeling the deep embrace of Jewishness without feeling that we are alone—of being at home in an increasingly interconnected world—of paying attention to our particularity while affirming the particularity of others.

When I embrace my Jewishness, I embrace the world. It is for others to learn how, by embracing the world, they can also embrace Jewishness.

Chapter 1 discusses how what we dream and what we experience in reality defines individuals and communities. Jews have ancient dreams of a homeland. We have spent most of our history outside that home. The homeland promised by God as the people Israel left Egypt looked much different upon arrival. The land may have been flowing with milk and honey in Israel's dream. What the Israelites found and did there cast them into confrontation with God's promise and with God. Soon the Israelites were out of the land and into exile.

The promise of a homeland has resurfaced in Jewish life continuously, in an almost mythic pattern. Jews first began to settle again in the land in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When the Nazis appeared and then took hold of Europe, Jews settled in Palestine in greater numbers. The ancient homeland, a dream of rescue, now materialized in the crucible of history, but the reality of Palestinian life on the land collided with the dream some had of a modern Jewish state. To realize that dream in the ancient homeland meant the cleansing of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homeland. The founding of the state of Israel gave rise to the Nakba, the Palestinian catastrophe.

Was the founding of Israel also the birth of another catastrophe for the Jewish people? There were different types of dream returns for Jews. One was a Jewish state where Jews would dwell alone. This state would be like any other state. Another dream was of a homeland within, among, or next to a homeland for Palestinians in Palestine. Here Jews would recover part of their central focus

on language, education, and social experiments. It is important to consider the two dreams side by side so we know that what became—and continues to be—the state of Israel is not fated. We cannot restore the past. There are no do-overs in history. However, we can open our imagination to a different kind of future.

In chapter 2, I explore the internal workings of ancient Israel as they apply to the ongoing struggle within the Jewish community about the place of empire in Jewish history and beyond. I find that Jews have been on both sides of the “empire divide” since time immemorial. The biblical witness is important here. Ancient Israel flees empire on the wings of a liberating God, or so the biblical story narrates. The Israelites are special, chosen by God, and have a destiny to be a light unto the nations. What is that light? Light is about creating a just society and a way of life that stresses community over empire. Once in the land, however, empire desires surface. Soon Israel has its own earthly king.

To create and sustain empire an Other has to be created, more or less like the Other ancient Israel had been in Egypt. But unlike in Egypt where the Other, Israel, critiqued the empire, Egypt, in the promised land the divide is internal, within Israel itself. The thrust against empire is within the same community that now struggles to attain empire. This early division marks Jewish history in a primordial way. Within this division, the prophets arrive. The prophets proclaim that the movement from community toward empire is a betrayal of God’s own being.

The prophets accuse Israel of turning its back on God. How do we know this? The biblical account—and judgment—is rendered compactly: Israel is recreating Egypt in the land. Later, as Jews sojourn among the peoples of the earth, the prophetic accusation is hurled outward on behalf of universal justice. The empires of the world are on notice. Yet the prophetic retains its internal bite. It resurfaces periodically and with special force in the modern period when Jews enter the struggle for an emancipated Europe. Then, in an emancipated Europe, the Holocaust inscribes Jews with unimaginable suffering.

The prophetic voice is chastened. Yet in the midst of an unexpected, almost miraculous empowerment, the prophetic voice reappears as a critique of Israeli power used unjustly against Palestinians. Few could have predicted this resurgence. I doubt it is a coincidence that the Jewish prophetic voice reappears as Jews finally get back on their feet and began to strut on the world stage for the first time in two millennia.

Jewish history is marked by a prophetic instability. When Jews right their ship, it is upended with ethical questions that come from within. This brings

us back to Israel's God. Could this instability come from an ancient relationship with a fascinating and unstable God?

Chapter 3 moves our exploration to modern America. The uphill struggle of Jews for stability becomes golden in America. For the first time in history, Jews are accepted fully as citizens. Jews participate equally in the political and economic life of the nation. At home in America, Jews identify as American. Still, America has its own complexities for Jews. Over the centuries, America has become an empire. Jews flourish in and are protected by American empire, as is the state of Israel, which has become its own empire in the Middle East.

It is difficult to hear the prophetic voice when the community's life is so intertwined with power. Jews in America and Israel are dependent on America's power. Jews have also become a power unto themselves. Yet it is curious that even with this newfound power and connections to it, Jews have a sense of being alone. How can this be?

The dream and reality are joined. I question whether the power Jews want and need after the Holocaust make Jews more or less secure. For example, if Jews dwell alone, even if it is only in the Jewish imagination, Europe as it was—as a Jewish graveyard during the Nazi period—is essential to maintain. If we dwell alone, even if it is only in our imagination, Israel as it is—a besieged rescue point for a perpetually unwanted Jewry—is essential to maintain as well.

A sense of aloneness coupled with power makes communities and nations do strange things. From the outside, these actions may seem irrational and against their own best interests in the long run. This is occurring in the Jewish world. We strategically position our aloneness as a form of strength and unaccountability. Yet aloneness becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Empires are not immune from the reality that what goes around, comes around. Jews have suffered under empire. When others suffer at the hands of Jews we should expect pushback. What happens to Jews when the empire boomerang hits home?

In the first chapters, I circle the question of Jewish identity. In chapter 4, I explore this issue more closely. What does it mean to be Jewish? In every generation, the question arises. Does Jewish identity change generationally, or beneath some of its contextual exteriors does it remain essentially the same? In surveying the historical landscape, Jewish identity has mostly formed in the Diaspora rather than in the land. In interaction with other cultures, elements of Jewish distinctiveness have remained. Jewishness has likewise contributed to and absorbed elements of other cultures.

Although biblical texts and Jewish prayers pine for the promised land, the majority of Jews, even when return to the land is possible, remain outside.

Despite admonishing texts and haunting prayers, Jews prefer distance from the land. Perhaps this is because the demands on the people are too great in the land. Israel has suffered expulsion from the land multiple times. Why live with that threat constantly hanging over you?

Although Israel prays for God's blessing and leadership, Jews seem to savor their distance from God as well. In exile, God is far away. Even in biblical times, Jews are a rebellious lot. Being rebels, Jews also prefer autonomy. Once more we have a difference between the dream—being in the land with God—and the reality. For many Jews, exile from the land is tolerable, perhaps even preferable.

Jews long for stability, even in exile. They long to banish the prophetic. Without the prophetic, Jews are autonomous. They are free to pursue their lives in peace and can, to their benefit, align themselves with injustice. Without the prophetic, Jews are unaccountable. Adopting the Holocaust and the state of Israel as formative, as unstable as both these events are, might be a way that Jews once again try to distance themselves from the unreasonable demands of being a light unto the nations. If the Holocaust and Israel are named and defined as formative, they ultimately function as a way of shielding Jews from yet another round of inconvenient, even dangerous, accountability.

With the cornerstone of Jewish identity as the prophetic, seeking and maintaining distance from God is a full-time effort. To distance themselves from God, colonial and imperial endeavors on behalf of Jewish memory and empowerment must be continuously augmented. To accomplish this goal with the resources it requires, colonial and imperial outreach must move outside Jewish life. Yet what exists outside ultimately comes to reside within Jewish identity as well. It is an oxymoron to believe that empire outside does not demand empire within.

Like any powerful group, Jews cover over their empire connections with an argued innocence. Conversely, we could choose to listen to the world and the prophetic voice within the Jewish community. Instead of deflection, Jews could instead share our suffering, our dreams, and our hopes with other struggling communities, binding us to them and them to us, in a new solidarity.

Chapters 5 and 6 take us deeper by way of Jewish and Palestinian commentary on the sixtieth and sixty-fifth anniversaries of Israel's founding in 2008 and 2013, respectively. Anniversaries are times to take stock. We look back and ahead while pausing to view where we have arrived. On Israel's sixtieth anniversary, we find that the narrative of contemporary Jewish history and possibility that we usually hear is far more complicated. When we expand our view outside the tried and true the state of Israel's history is found to have

many dark edges. There are far fewer voices on Israel's sixty-fifth anniversary, which is telling in and of itself.

In these chapters, I explore Jewish and Palestinian dissident groups, writers, and activists, of which there are many. An Israeli group, Zochrot, enjoins Jews in Israel to remember what happened to Palestinians as the state was founded. Jeff Halper, an American-born Jewish Israeli, wants Jews to recognize that whatever the hopes were for Israel at the beginning of its existence, Israel has developed an apartheid system much like the one that ruled South Africa. Mazin Qumsiyeh and Joseph Massad are Palestinian thinkers and activists who are critical of Jewish dissidents for the limitations of their analysis. They fight against a Judeocentric view of Palestine and proffer their own perspective of the struggle against Israel's expansion and destruction of Palestinian life.

Other commentators on Israel's anniversaries include the Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel. His and other commentaries, found in *Time* magazine, reflect a more mainstream American understanding of Israel. Not surprisingly, *Time* only asked Jews to contribute. In turn, the Jewish contributors mention Palestinians only in passing, often in a negative way. I finish with an Orthodox Jew, Yakov Rabkin, who portrays anti-Zionism and opposition to a state of Israel as fundamental to Judaism. He even broaches the understanding among some Orthodox that the Holocaust may have been a punishment from God as Jews had strayed from the true faith. At least, the discussion is joined and moves beyond the mainstream presentation of Jewish identity and the Jewish future.

In chapter 7, I return to the beginning and explore what I call the "eternal trauma." The eternal trauma for Jews begins in the formative event of Exodus and all that flows from that experience. This includes the prophetic as the center of Jewish life, history, and identity, the same prophetic that Jews carry through history. Trauma is commonly understood as ordeal, disturbance, and distress – which the Exodus, Israel's entry and existence in the land and the prophetic are – but it also represents possibility. Once experienced, our lives are determined by what we do with trauma. We can succumb to trauma, using it to cause pain to others. Or we can take trauma and mold it into a positive contribution to our lives and the lives of others.

How a people can carry an original trauma of pain and possibility through history is difficult to explain. Since trauma cannot be passed down through history as a biological force, how is it that Jews are marked so clearly by their origins? Perhaps it is simply a cultural phenomenon. Jews are formed by narratives that emphasize these original traumas. There could be a presence that shadows Jewish history beyond culture. Regardless of one's take on the

transmission of trauma, the historical drama remains and is taking on a new and explosive power in our time.

The God of Israel is a peculiar God. At times, God accompanies Israel; at other times, God disappears. In our time, God seems to have left the scene altogether. Yet the prophets remain. They continue to haunt the Jewish people in the time of Jewish empowerment. The biblical prophets are commissioned by God. Can the prophetic persist without God? On the face of it, this is a theoretical question. But, as with the ancient prophetic, it remains tangible. Today the Jewish prophetic exists for the most part without God.

Within empowerment there are prophets who have emerged on the scene from the most unlikely of places—the state of Israel. This is unexpected for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that Israel is seen as the vanguard of Jewish empowerment after the Holocaust. To have Jewish Israelis break with that power, and to do so for the sake of Palestinians, is startling. Some Jewish Israelis take their critique so seriously that they leave the state of Israel entirely. Having returned, they once again enter into exile.

Just as startling, many of these Jewish Israelis no longer identify as Israelis or even as Jews. Yet their protest is so prophetic, so Jewish. That is why I refer to these prophets as Still/Former Jewish/Israelis. They have lived the dream and reality of the Jewish return to the land. They have been the Jewish boots on the ground. Now, at least for them, it is over. I ask what this growing number of disaffected Still/Former Jewish/Israelis have to say to the Jewish community about Jewish identity and the Jewish future. Is the Jewish future to be determined by how many Jews inside and outside of Israel become (un)Jewish? Is becoming (un)Jewish in our time precisely the way to embrace the deepest sense of what it means to be Jewish?

In chapter 8, I explore the way the designation of the Jewish dead of the Holocaust as martyrs has directed establishment Jews to assume power without accountability. Jewish empowerment assumes an almost religious sensibility. Not only is power exercised without restraint, but other options of an interconnected empowerment are diminished or derided. The chapter begins with an exploration of the two Jewish museums in California, one of which, the Judah L. Magnes Museum carried the name of the homeland Zionist, Judah Magnes, without examining his life's work in Palestine. Or, rather, only certain parts of Magnes's work in Palestine are emphasized, such as his role as founding chancellor of Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Deemphasized is that Magnes was a homeland Zionist who encouraged the settlement of Jews in Palestine while remaining adamantly opposed to the formation of the state of Israel.

Another erasure in Jewish history is taken up by Timothy Snyder in his book *Bloodlands*. Snyder offers a bold analysis of what happened in Europe during the years 1933 through 1945. Jews would immediately recognize these as the Holocaust years, but Snyder is interested in reconstructing that history beyond what has become defining. Snyder finds that what is commonly known as the Holocaust was a clash between the empire hopes of Germany and the Soviet Union, with millions of Jews and non-Jews caught in between both empire-hungry entities. Snyder's analysis is devastating. The human carnage he portrays is even worse than the Holocaust suggests. At the same time, he forces a reconsideration of Jewish suffering as unique and singled out.

I then return to our Still/Former Jewish/Israeli. Since the Bloodlands of Europe contained Jews and non-Jews, and the state of Israel has also been involved in war after war that includes Jews and non-Jews, have Jews gone from one Bloodlands in Europe to another in the Middle East? If we strip away a Judeocentric view of Israel and look at the broader Middle East since Israel's founding, is the Middle East a new Bloodlands? Jews who leave Israel and live in a prophetic exile may thus witness to the hope that the Bloodlands—wherever they are—comes to an end.

It is difficult to underestimate the importance of what it would mean if Jews realized that the Holocaust, as horrific as it is narrated, was actually shared with others historically and therefore the memory of the Holocaust must be shared. Sharing the Holocaust in history and memory undermines a central part of Jewish identity and thus is dangerous to those who see the Jewish community as immune to internal and external criticism. Yet deconstructing Jewish aloneness in the Holocaust might become a place of healing for Jews and others. This could also preface a redirection of Jewish politics within and toward a just peace in Israel and Palestine.

Chapter 9 connects the dots of our journey. Jews carry a lot of historical baggage. We also carry a conceptual sensibility in the contemporary world. "Jewish" means something. But to do something positive with "Jewish" in the world means we will have to move from where we are to where we need to be. The first step has to do with how we teach our children and the children of others about the Holocaust. Through Snyder's *Bloodlands*, we understand that what Jews assume about ourselves and what we narrate to the world is partially true. It is also skewed for our benefit—or detriment—since teaching the Holocaust as we have taught it isolates Jews, allows the Holocaust to function to enable power, and ultimately places Jews in danger.

The death camp, Auschwitz, has become a symbolic marker in Jewish history. Holocaust memorials dot the European and American landscapes. The

Holocaust landscape has become central to Jewish self-definition. To allow the Holocaust to transition into a broader arc is a challenge to Jewish self-definition. This is certain to happen with the passage of time, but contemporary history is forcing this upon us in an accelerated time-frame. For a community that has invested itself so heavily in the Holocaust, the prospects are daunting. Thus the desire to hold onto the Holocaust as exclusive to Jews is understandable. Nonetheless, the Holocaust is in transition. It will be taught differently to the next generation of Jews and others.

With the Holocaust shifting, the Jewish sense of and commitment to the state of Israel will change. It already is changing. But the pace of historical events is much faster than changes in narrative discourse. A cognitive dissonance between facts on the ground in Israel-Palestine and the use of the Holocaust to remain unaccountable for injustice grows daily. At issue is whether Jewish dissidents, including our Still/Former Jewish/Israelis, will remain connected to the Jewish community. They are the vanguard of the Jewish future. Will Jewish dissenters be lost to the Jewish community?

Is it antisemitic to criticize Israel? If it is possible to criticize Israel, how far can one go in that criticism? If, as a Jew, or a non-Jew for that matter, you believe that Israel is an apartheid state, is that antisemitic? Or if you do not believe that any nation-state should privilege one ethnic or religious group over another, not even for Jews in Israel? Forces within and outside the Jewish community seek to blunt criticism against Israel by branding such views as hate speech. Does supporting BDS against Israel for its policies toward Palestinians constitute such a crime?

Chapter 10 comes back to the beginning: the prophetic voice. There are some who believe that Jewishness is a prison, an identity from which some Jews want to escape. Jews want to be among others without distinction. Especially with the absence of God, why identify as Jewish? Yet non-Jews define Jews as Jews and other Jews identify Jews as Jews—there seems no escape. Being bound within one's Jewishness can lead in variety of directions. Sometimes the external pressure on being Jewish is enormous. Other times the pressure is internal. If Jewish identity has a prison-like reality to it, this is also the place from which the prophetic springs. This is yet another part of Jewish life that begins in the Bible. Often, the prophets chosen by God want out of that designation. Yet it is within the prophetic that Jews find their core.

The prophetic is an action. It is also a performance. By performance, we do not mean an actor on a stage, as in a play written by someone else. However, the prophet has a stage and, in the end, performing the prophetic has its own patterns of speech and delivery. What is amazing is how similar performing

the prophetic today is to its ancient prototype. Of course, the prophetic is hardly limited to Jews. Through the spread of this ancient vocation through Christianity and Islam, today the prophetic is performed around the world. Though it is usually unrecognized, what is of great importance is how the prophetic is being re-presented to Jews in the time of Jewish empowerment. Through this re-presentation, can Jews as a community reclaim what it once gave to the world?

One example is the boats that carry supplies to the Palestinian of Gaza who are under siege. These boats are real—they carry medical and other needed supplies—but they are also symbolic. They seek to advise Israel and the broader Jewish community that the prophetic is, at root, the conscience of humanity and that root, residing in the heirs of ancient Israel, is atrophying among Jews today. Could exercising the conscience of humanity in Israel-Palestine bring a deeper reckoning for justice on the world scene and especially among Jews?

Closing out the prophetic in its more universal search, I explore two Jewish women, Naomi Klein and Adrienne Rich. Klein is the author of *Shock Doctrine*, where she explores the latest phase of “Disaster Capitalism,” a global get-rich-quick scheme that feeds off the misery and oppression of others in need. Israel is part of this equation as Israel benefits in a myriad of ways from the occupation of Palestinians, as well as from global insecurity after 9/11. Although broad in her reach, Klein focuses more specifically on Israel-Palestine when she signs on to the BDS movement that seeks to force Israel to end their occupation of Palestinian lands.

Adrienne Rich is the late Jewish poet who, because of her mixed parentage, had to choose Jewishness as her primary identity. Like Klein, Rich supported the BDS movement and, like Klein, was a searcher for connections within and among people of conscience. Rich’s evocative poetry and poetic cadences are ripe for the expansion of the prophetic in our time as she seeks to be a Jew “without borders.” In this search, Rich explores the boundaries of the prophetic as a Jew, a woman, and a lesbian. What she finds is that by telling the truth, we create more truth. The opposite is case as well. When we limit that outreach, we begin a cascade of lies that ultimately makes the truth inaccessible.

I close with a meditation on whether Jews—or anyone, for that matter—can be just when injustice reigns. The prophetic is a wager made against the odds and at a personal sacrifice. This is Israel’s ancient wisdom. It is a wisdom exploding in our time.