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SEVENTEEN

By the Sea



EVERY SUMMER MY FAMILY TRAVELS TO ENGLAND. PERHAPS IT'S BECAUSE our roots are there. Perhaps it's because England is the opposite of our homeland. While Israel is frenzy and constant change, England is tranquillity and continuity. As the plane descends toward Heathrow, a deep though unjustified sense of homecoming overtakes me. And as I drive my wife and three children through Somerset and Dorset, the feeling of calm deepens: we pass flocks of sheep, village pubs, ancient churches. When we reach the stone cottage we rent on the shores of South Devon, my happiness is complete. In the light rain, I stand with my wife, Timna, and my children, Tamara, Michael, and Daniel, at the edge of the white cliff across the field from our house and look out at the deep-green vales descending down to the gray-green ocean. England. There has not been a successful foreign invasion here for centuries. There has not been violence for decades. With its deep calm of solid identity, England has all that we never had and all that we may never have: peace.

Our history is more ancient, I tell my children. When we wrote the Bible, the people of this green isle were illiterate barbarians. But our history is that of "Get thee out of thy country," and our land itself is a mound, one layer of life upon another, layer upon layer of destruction.

Yes, we Jews had Jerusalem when London was still a marsh. But the English have what we can only dream of: they are born in serenity and they die in serenity. Not even world wars endanger their very existence. We, on the other hand, are always restless, for we live between great fires. We thrive between calamities. That's why we are so quick and vital and creative. That's why we are so neurotic and loud and unbearable. We dwell under the looming shadow of a smoking volcano.

England was good to my ancestors. The British Empire opened its gates to Herbert Bentwich and gave him the rights, liberties, and opportunities that Jews had not had for more than fifteen hundred years. It gave his two sons the best education the West had to offer. In the first quarter of the twentieth century it enabled hundreds of thousands of emancipated Jews to live lives of freedom and dignity under the benevolent Crown. Although these islands, too, were tainted with anti-Semitism, Jews did well in business, science, and even politics. Many of them were part of Britain's intellectual and meritocratic elites. So more than a hundred years ago, the Bentwich family went on vacations similar to ours. Some summers they spent down in Cornwall, others up in the Lake District. But mostly the Bentwiches would holiday at the family estate of Carmel Court on the Kentish coast. In their Edwardian manor, they lived as the Ramsays lived in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*; the summer holidays of the Bentwich family could have been just like the summer holidays of the Ramsay family. As Timna takes over the kitchen of our rented cottage, and as the children plunge into the reassuring cacophonous merriment of their games, I think about my Anglo-Jewish ancestors, the Bentwiches, and about myself. What would have become of me had my great-grandfather not uprooted us from the green shores of Britain and settled us on that desolate shore of Palestine? What would have been the fate of my mother and myself and my children if Herbert Bentwich had not been overcome by an obsessive yearning for Zion?

I would like to think that I would have been a literature don at Oxford or a producer at the BBC. I would have a nice house in Hampstead and a thatched-roof cottage in West Dorset. My life would be much more relaxed and far safer than my Israeli life. I would have more leisure time for poetry and music. My children's future would not be under a

cloud. But would I have had a richer inner life? Would my life's experience have been more meaningful?

Demography is vicious. When my great-grandfather enjoyed his time of leisure on the coast of Kent, Jews were 0.8 percent of the British population. Today they are less than 0.5 percent. What makes the demography even more vicious is the fact that in the latter part of the twentieth century, hundreds of thousands of Eastern European Jews immigrated to Great Britain. Many of them were ultra-Orthodox Jews whose sons and daughters now make up a third of Manchester's contemporary Jewish community and a fifth of London's contemporary Jewish community. Less than half of today's Jews are the descendants of the Anglo Jews of 1920. The disappearance rate of Herbert Bentwich's Anglo-Jewish community is staggering. In the last one hundred years, most descendants of Britain's veteran Jews have ceased to be Jewish.

The Anglo-Jewish community of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was remarkable. The union between Jewish talent and British culture produced outstanding poets, writers, playwrights, artists, musicians, scientists, lawyers, bankers, entrepreneurs, politicians, and revolutionaries. Jewish Britons won more than a dozen Nobel Prizes. They created legendary wealth and were prominent in every radical movement that transformed public discourse in the United Kingdom. But this creative community is shrinking fast. Low birth-rates and high intermarriage rates are leading to the disappearance of non-Orthodox Jews. There appears to be a gradual loss of interest in Jewish life and Jewish identity in Britain. The descendants of Herbert Bentwich who were born in England in recent years are not Jewish, and those of my wife's English grandfather are not Jewish, either. Britain still has Rothschilds and Goldsmiths and Millibands, but in a generation or two they, too, will cease to consider themselves Jewish. So as I look out at the gray cliffs of Devon, I know that if my great-grandfather had not removed me from this coast, I myself would probably have been today only half Jewish. Tamara, Michael, and Daniel might not consider themselves Jewish at all. Our private life in Hampstead and Dorset would be full and tranquil, but the collective we belonged to would be vanishing all around us.

Yes, there is America. North America still has a vibrant non-

Orthodox Jewish community. In the United States I could have been a proud liberal Jew teaching at Columbia or writing for *The New York Times*. Like the two of Herbert Bentwich's daughters who immigrated to America, I could have secured my identity there. But the demography of American Jewry is vicious, too. The numbers are controversial, but roughly speaking, in 1950, 3 percent of Americans were Jews; in 1980 it was 2.4 percent, and in 2010 approximately 2 percent. By 2050 Jews might comprise only a fraction of the population of the United States. The same comfortable circumstances that made the numbers of British non-Orthodox Jews diminish in the last fifty years will likely make the numbers of American non-Orthodox Jews diminish over the next fifty years. In the twenty-first century, the Jewish birthrate in North America is low and the intermarriage rate is high. The Jewish population is aging. More and more of the affiliated Jews are Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox or just old. Most secular young Jews have less interest in Israel or organized religion than their parents have. They are drifting away from the center of gravity of Jewish identity; they are disappearing into the non-Jewish space. Some of Herbert Bentwich's young American descendants whose parents did not keep Jewish law do not consider themselves to be Jewish anymore. Both in my secular English-Jewish family and in my secular American-Jewish family one can see the end of the line. One can imagine the last of the Jews.

So as I watch Tamara, Michael, and Daniel walk down the path toward the whitewashed fisherman's cottage that stands in solitude by the sea, I am at odds with myself. One part of me wishes that England would be home for them, that they, too, would live the enchanting life of *To the Lighthouse*. But I realize that we cannot go down this path. Over the years, our tribe could not survive on these lush green meadows. With no Holocaust and no pogroms and no overt anti-Semitism, these islands kill us softly. Enlightened Europe also kills us softly, as does democratic America. Benign Western civilization destroys non-Orthodox Judaism.

That is why Herbert Bentwich's insane journey from the shores of Kent to the shores of Jaffa was necessary. For these soft English hills and old English cottages are not for us. This continuous history and solid identity and deep tranquillity are not for us. For we are a people on the move and on the edge. This is why the concentration of non-

Orthodox Jews in one place was imperative. And the one place where non-Orthodox Jews could be concentrated was the Land of Israel. So Jaffa was inevitable. We had to save ourselves by building a Jewish national home all around Jaffa.

A few days after I return from Devon, I walk through the ancient port of Jaffa. Once it was an orange-exporting port, then an immigrants' port, then a fishing port. In recent years it has become a port of leisure. I find a large bar located in an old warehouse and sit there sipping my favorite single malt while watching the handsome young Israelis eat, drink, and make merry. I listen in on the sweet murmurs of Israel's kinetic nightlife.

Jewish demography in Israel is the mirror image of Jewish demography in the Diaspora. In 1997, approximately 50,000 Jews lived here. Now the Jewish population exceeds six million. While the number of Jews in Britain rose by less than 20 percent and the number of Jews in the United States rose by 350 percent, the number of Jews in Israel rose by more than 10,000 percent.

The contrast between Jewish demographics in the Diaspora and in Israel is astonishing. In 1997, Jews living in Palestine represented only 0.4 percent of world Jewry. In 1950 we accounted for 10.6 percent. In 1980, 25.6 percent. Now we make up almost 45 percent. The historic project that aimed to congregate most of the world's Jews in the Promised Land has had mind-boggling success. Today, the Jewish community in Israel is one of the two largest in the world. Given current trends, by 2025 the majority of the world's Jews will be Israelis.

The mass immigration of Jews to the Land of Israel in the twentieth century is Zionism's greatest triumph. It vindicated the Zionist diagnosis and gave hope to the Zionist prognosis. Zionism's other triumph was the outstanding fertility rate of the Jewish population in Israel. In 2012, America's total fertility was 2.06, Britain's was 1.9, Italy's was 1.4, and so was Germany's. By contrast, Israel's fertility was a staggering 2.65, by far the highest of all OECD countries. While Europe is aging rapidly, Israel is youthful. While the non-Orthodox Jews of the Diaspora are aging, the Jews of Israel are mating and multiplying. While half of Europeans are over forty, half of Israelis are under thirty. They invigorate

our towns and cities and invigorate all I see around this bar in the port of Jaffa.

So what has happened in the Holy Land in the first century of Zionism? What was our impact here? Where have we succeeded and where have we failed? To answer this question, I leave the port of Jaffa and embark on a journey following my great-grandfather's footsteps. Unlike Herbert Bentwich, I don't stop in Mikveh Israel. From Jaffa I travel to Rishon LeZion through the Tel Aviv satellite towns that were not here in 1897: Holon, Bat Yam, Azur. En route is the absence of the Palestinian villages that were erased since 1897: Tel el-Kabir, Yazur, Bayt Dajan. The freeways have many lanes, the intersections are heavy with traffic. Between what was an orange shipping port and what was the first Jewish colony in Judea, there are no more wildflower fields, no pastures or meadows. There are no camels or flocks of sheep, no nomad Bedouins. Palestine was replaced by a great mass of housing for immigrants, endless ugly housing estates that stretch out to the south and east of Jaffa. The ten-mile route that the Thomas Cook carriages traversed on that spring morning in 1897 are now crammed full of sweaty, bustling cities.

When my great-grandfather reached Rishon LeZion in April 1897, it had approximately one hundred families, fifty houses, thirty stables, and three streets. Zionism's first colony was surrounded by 4,000 dunams of vineyards in which its farmers planted more than a million high-quality grapevines. The winery was legendary: the largest in the Middle East and one of the most sophisticated worldwide. At the top of the hill stood an impressive synagogue, and along the wide colonial boulevards rose fine colonial houses. The tiny colony founded the first all-Hebrew school in the world and the first all-Hebrew town hall in the world and Palestine's leading orchestra. Although it was still in its infancy, it was clear that Rishon LeZion had a promising future. As it impressed my great-grandfather in 1897, it impressed Dr. Herzl, who visited a year later. "May it be," the founder of Zionism wrote in Rishon LeZion, "that from this place will spring forth a blessing for our unfortunate brothers."

Indeed, from this place a blessing *has* sprung forth for our unfortunate brothers. From seventy different countries, Jews have fled to

Rishon LeZion. The city's population rose from 500 in 1897 to nearly 250,000 in 2013. The fourth-largest city in Israel now has forty elementary schools, a fast-growing college, a symphony orchestra, and a booming commercial district. In the last twenty-five years alone, the number of its inhabitants rose two and a half times. Seventy-three percent of the local families own the apartments they live in, 74 percent have at least one car, 81 percent have a personal computer, and 96 percent have Internet access. On average, every family in Rishon LeZion has 2.5 mobile phones and more than 2 bedrooms. This middle-class city is also the city of middle Israel: it is neither conservative nor liberal, neither Ashkenazi nor Sephardic, neither religious nor secular. In the 2013 elections, nearly half of its votes went to centrist parties. Rishon LeZion is the typical Jewish Israeli city of the third millennium, inhabited by hardworking immigrants and the children of immigrants who consume a lot and have many children of their own.

From the freeway I turn right to West Rishon. Until 1985 there was nothing here, only the sand dunes Herbert Bentwich saw from a distance in 1897. For nearly a hundred years nothing changed. But in the 1990s the collapse of the Soviet Union brought a million immigrants who had to be settled rapidly. Within a decade the sands were paved over, and within two decades the new West Rishon was larger in size than the old Rishon. At the age of one hundred, Zionism proved to be strong and potent. Once again it performed the miracle of something-from-nothing. Another modern Israeli city was born.

Under the blue skies stand condominium towers that were built quick and huge to answer quick and huge needs. They are efficient and commercial, but they are soulless. The streets look as if they have risen straight off a drafting table. There is a sense of affluence here, but no sense of place.

Like neighboring Rehovot, Rishon LeZion maintained its identity and character for two or three generations. After orange groves replaced the old vineyards, it became a booming citrus colony. But after 1948 came the demographic waves of the 1950s, the 1970s, and the 1990s. The local identity was erased, the unique character obliterated. By now the melting pot was not ideological but economic. And it worked, melding a mishmash of ethnicities and identities and unifying the immigrants under the roof of a gigantic mall.

Ehud Barak once defined the country as a villa in the jungle. But the real Israel is not a villa but a shopping mall: cheap, loud, intense and lively. The shopping mall embodies the Israeli condition—a desperate attempt to lead a pseudo-normal life in abnormal circumstances after an abnormal history and on the verge of an abnormal future. And West Rishon is all about its malls. Consumption is its beating heart.

I walk into Cinema City, a gaudy temple of twenty-six theaters that offer Rishon LeZion the California it wishes to be. Along the corridors stand wax figures of Superman, Batman, Charlie Chaplin, Humphrey Bogart. There is Ben and Jerry's ice cream, Domino's pizza, Coca-Cola. Youngsters wearing Diesel jeans and GAP sweatshirts and A&F jackets lug enormous vats of popcorn. Nothing remains of the initial promise of the unique beginning. And yet, seen through the prism of the horrors of the twentieth century, all that surrounds me evokes only sympathy. For Rishon LeZion is a life-saving project. Although it does not look or sound like one, it is a city of refugee rehabilitation.

From West Rishon, I travel to Ramleh. In 1897, Ramleh was an Arab town with a population of 6,000, known for its mosques, churches, inns, and markets. Its many hostels catered to pilgrims en route from Jaffa to Jerusalem. Today Ramleh is an unhappy Israeli city of 68,000: 50,000 Jews, 15,000 Muslims, 3,000 Christians. Almost all the descendants of the Muslim Arabs who lived here in 1897 were deported in 1948. The present-day Muslim population is made up mainly of Bedouins and Palestinians whose ancestors were transferred here from their villages in Israel's first years.

The Jews who inherited Ramleh are mostly immigrants, of whom nearly 30 percent arrived in the 1990s and 2000s from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Ethiopia. Many of the inhabitants of the dreary housing projects are young and poor. One third subsist on welfare benefits. On a socioeconomic scale of one to ten, Ramleh is a dismal four.

There are a few fine Palestinian houses still standing. There are several spectacular historic sites that are dilapidated and run-down. The market is lively, and there are some good ethnic restaurants around it. By the old Muslim cemetery a new mall is being built alongside a new modern quarter that is designed to attract middle-class professionals.

But all in all, Ramleh is depressed and depressing. After losing its Arab identity, it never acquired a meaningful Israeli one. While Rishon LeZion gives its inhabitants the gloss of consumerism, Ramleh fails to do even that. This city never really recovered from the great cataclysm of 1948.

The Palestinians might say that when Herbert Bentwich arrived here in his Thomas Cook carriage he was carrying with him a virulent bacterium. Like the conquistadors, he wasn't aware of it, but it devastated the Palestinian immune system and Palestinian civilization, and laid waste to old Ramleh. I would not argue, but I would add that eventually the same virulent bacterium attacked the original Zionist dream, too. In 1897 it was still possible to imagine a master plan that would turn the dream into reality, but by 1950 there was no feasibility for any such plan. Need chased need. Pressure chased pressure. Danger chased danger. The naive conquistadors were caught up in the whirlwind of the consequences of their original deed. The historic imperative that had brought them from Europe to Ramleh wreaked a havoc that no one could control. First it demolished the indigenous culture, then it demolished the pioneer culture, then it uprooted the magical orange groves of my childhood and then it created faceless Israeli cities of discontent.

I climb up the 119 steps of the white tower. The panorama of coastal Israel is overwhelming. Town abuts town, neighborhood abuts neighborhood, building abuts building, apartment abuts apartment. Almost three million human beings are squeezed into the three thousand square kilometers surrounding Tel Aviv.

Perhaps there was no other way. To maintain secular Jewish existence in the modern era, we had to congregate in one place. Today, this concentration of people is not only a necessity but the essence of Israel. For it seems we Jews need to crowd together. We need to be with one another, even to fight with one another. It is as if we cannot live by ourselves as individuals, as if we are afraid that on our own we'll vanish. So we do not acknowledge the private domain. We don't distinguish the personal from the public. We warm ourselves against the big chill together, living communally, collectively in a kibbutz, in a moshav, in a housing estate, and in this crowded concentration of population that stretches from Hadera to Gadera and from West Rishon to East Ramleh.

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From Ramleh, I travel to Lydda. The train station is still located in the same stone terminal that the French built for the Turks in 1891. Where the British-Jewish pilgrims waited for the train to Jerusalem in the spring of 1897 now stand smiling Israeli soldiers carrying Israeli-made assault rifles and holding Coke cans and chocolate bars. Two ultra-Orthodox men are fervently discussing current events. A young Russian-speaking couple argue in whispers. A beautiful young Muslim girl in tight jeans and a head scarf passes by.

From the panoramic windows of my air-conditioned train car, I look out at Ramleh, Lydda, and the Plain of Judea. East of the railroad is Tel Gezer. Here stood the ancient settlement of Gezer in 3400 B.C. Here stood a rich and powerful Canaanite city in 1700 B.C. Here stood an ancient Hebrew city in the tenth-century B.C. and a nineteenth-century Palestinian village named Abu Shusha. In 1923, great-grandfather Bentwich bought a stately home here. In 1948, the IDF's Givati Brigade conquered the village of Abu Shusha, killing, expelling, and burning as it went. These days, on the mountain ridge south of Tel Gezer stands the Israeli community of Karnei Yosef, where Amos Yadlin and the grandchildren of Rehovot's orange growers live a life of affluence. Their is Israel triumphant: lavish homes facing the ancient somber barrow.

F-16 bombers fly overhead, preparing for yet another war. Here is another tragic triumph: when blindness finally lifted and the Palestinian villages were at last seen, the Jews acknowledged the drama they were caught in and did not recoil. They didn't panic, didn't retreat or collapse. Rather, they built an iron wall. And within this iron wall, the Jews built their nation-state. Within this wall, they revived the Hebrew language and created a vibrant Israeli culture. Within this wall, they made music and theater, art and cinema. They loved and married and bore children. They looked fate in the eye and did what they had to do and stood guard for more than one hundred years.

Along the railway are plowed fields, grapevines, and row upon row of tightly tied bales of cotton. Beyond the mountain ridge is a secret missile base.

So if I were to address some imaginary ultimate Zionist congress, what would I say? I'd probably say that the need was real. The insight

was genius. The vision was impressive—ambitious but not mad. And the persistence was unique: for over a century, Zionism displayed extraordinary determination, imagination, and innovation. Its adaptability, flexibility, and resolve were outstanding. But as Zionism was late and the Holocaust preempted it, its premise of the mass immigration to this land of the Eastern European Jewish peoples turned out to be false. So was the premise regarding feeble Arab resistance. Therefore, the Zionist project did not become what it was supposed to be: a grand, well-planned engineering project like the Suez Canal or the Panama Canal or Dutch land reclamation from the sea. It did not become a grand enterprise of progress that solved in a rational manner one of humanity's ugliest problems. It did not eradicate anti-Semitism in the way that modern medicine eradicated tuberculosis and polio, or solve the problem of the Jews in the way that modern medicine solved the problem of infant mortality. Rather, Zionism became an unruly process of improving imperfect solutions to acute challenges, addressing new needs, adjusting to new conditions and creating new realities. It reinvented itself again and again, dealing in different ways with what is basically an impossible situation. This is how Zionism wended its way through the twentieth century and this is how it shaped the land. That's why the landscape I see as the train approaches the Judean hills is that of a hazard quilt, one patch over another, one improvised solution alongside another.

The train passes Beit Shemesh—a development town now turning ultra-Orthodox—and glides into the Soreq Gorge. On both sides of the tracks, rocky hills rise. Some slopes are bare; others are covered by a dense Zionist pine forest that hides within its thicket the ruins of some Palestinian villages.

The act of concentrating the Jews in one place was essential but dangerous. If another historic disaster were to strike here, it might be the last. The founding fathers and mothers of Zionism realized this. They knew they were leading one of the most miserable nations in the world to one of the most dangerous places in the world. That's why they were so demanding of themselves and of others. That's why they acted in such a shrewd and resourceful and disciplined manner. They knew that their mission was superhuman, as was the responsibility thrust upon them. But over the years, it was not possible to maintain such a

high level of revolutionary discipline. It wasn't possible to maintain the devotion, precision, and commitment. The following generations lost the historical perspective and the sense of responsibility. They were fooled by the Zionist success story and they lost sight of the existential risk embodied in the Zionist deed. Gradually they lost the concentration and caution required of those walking a tightrope over the abyss. As resolve waned and wisdom dissipated, there was no longer a responsible adult to lead the children's crusade. A movement that got most things right in its early days has gotten almost everything wrong in recent decades.

When his train pulled into Jerusalem, Herbert Bentwich rushed from the city's old and charming train station to the most sacred Jewish site, the Western Wall (the remains of the Second Temple). When I arrive, I rush from Jerusalem's new and charmless train station to the most sacred Israeli site: Yad Vashem, the museum of the history of the Holocaust.

At the entrance I lose my breath. On the walls, ghostly images of children in black and white play violin for a tutor. Lovers in black and white glide on snow. A Jewish shtetl in black and white, a tram. Youngsters dancing in a circle. A girl hugging a doll. Two girls in black and white waving goodbye.

The museum is a triangular structure of reinforced concrete that penetrates the mountain like a bunker. On both sides of the tunnel-like main hall are dark galleries that tell the story. Christian anti-Semitism, Nazi anti-Semitism, Kristallnacht. The burning of books, the burning of synagogues, the imprisonment of humans. The racial laws, the yellow star, ghettos. Murder by hanging, murder by shooting, murder by gas. Thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, 5.7 million. And on both sides of the triangular tunnel Zionism's ultimate arguments: Poniary, Babi Yar, Majdanek, Buchenwald, Sobibor, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Treblinka, Auschwitz. The unforgettable face of the Polish diplomat Jan Karski as he recalls Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who would not bomb Auschwitz in 1944. And the pale yellow map of Europe scattered with inconceivable numbers. Of the 140,000 Jews of Holland—102,000 dead. Of the 817,000 Jews of Romania—380,000

dead. Of the 825,000 Jews of Hungary—565,000 dead. Of the 3,020,000 Jews of the Soviet Union—995,000 dead. Of the 3,325,000 Jews of Poland—3,000,000 dead.

But the figure that strikes me most is the number of Jews killed at the massacre at Babi Yar. On the twenty-ninth and thirtieth of September 1941, 33,771 of the Jews of Kiev were taken to the forest, made to stand next to a ravine, and then shot by the ravine and buried in it. In the forty-eight hours of Babi Yar, more Jews were shot dead than in the first 120 years of the battle for Zion; more Jews were killed than in all of the wars of Israel. So there is a good reason for the fact that this tunnel of European devastation leads at its very end to a bright terrace overlooking the deep green of the Jerusalem mountain forests. And when I stand on the terrace of Yad Vashem I cannot help but feel proud of Israel. I was born an Israeli and I live as an Israeli and as an Israeli I shall die.

From Yad Vashem, I move on to Givat-Shaul. So that Zionism would not lose the war of 1948 and the Jews of Palestine would not end up in some Palestinian Babi Yar, Ben Gurion instructed the Haganah to go on the offensive in April of that year. He ordered the Jewish armed forces to conquer the Palestinian villages blocking the road to Jerusalem: Hulda, Deir-Muhsein, Bayt Mahsir, Saris, al-Qastal. In coordination with the Haganah, the nationalist Irgun and the Stern Gang went on their own village offensive. On April 9, 1948, at dawn, they attacked the west Jerusalem village of Deir Yassin. At least one hundred Palestinians were slaughtered. The bullet-ridden corpses were buried by a platoon of seventeen-year-olds who were sent in to clean up the mess. One of the youngsters was Herbert Bentwich's grandson, who was haunted to the end of his days by the horror he witnessed. But the State of Israel dealt with the trauma in a practical manner: in 1951 it transformed the remains of the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin into the closed psychiatric facility of Kfar Shaul.

I approach the white metal gate and ask the guard if I might enter. She refuses. So I walk along the fence, find a breach in it, and sneak in. An old Palestinian stone house is now an occupational therapy carpentry shop. Another old Palestinian stone house is an open ward. Still more Palestinian stone houses are now closed wards for those who pose a danger to themselves and others. What strikes me is the large number

of religious patients. Many of the men wear white yarmulkes and many of the women cover their heads. Though here and there a modern clinic was added, all in all, the old village is still here. It's ironic that while most Palestinian villages were demolished, one of the few to remain is the one that is the central symbol of the Palestinian catastrophe. Its silent stone houses still tell the tale: what was here and what happened here when the Jews went mad.

The mountain summit of Deir Yassin is now encircled by Kablan Street and Katzenelenbogen Street, the main thoroughfares of the ultra-Orthodox neighborhood of Har Nof. Laborite Israel was reluctant to build on this tainted ridge, but New Israel had no inhibitions. The Likud and Shas coalition governments saw the potential of the real estate of Deir Yassin and capitalized on it. A few steps from the breach in the fence of Kfar Shaul where I entered stands the gaudy, monumental shrine that is Ner-Haim Yeshiva, and the gaudy, monumental shrine that is the Lev Aharon Yeshiva. Between them is the massive dormitory building of the Orot Hateshuva Yeshiva, and the grand Netivei Hatal-mud Yeshiva, and the little yeshiva of Mishkan Hatorah. More than twenty yeshivas and synagogues and religious schools stand on the northern slopes of Deir Yassin, and more than twenty stand on its eastern and southern slopes. Here are tens of thousands of square meters of religious institutions whose students don't work, pay taxes, or fulfill military service. After the grand dream and the great effort and the horrific sin, what Zionism established on the land of Deir Yassin is a new ultra-Orthodox ghetto.

I travel from Deir Yassin to Israel's national site of commemoration, Mount Herzl. This is the Jewish state's Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial and Arlington Cemetery all in one. In days past, it was the Palestinian Mount Sharafa: a few Palestinian stone houses and stone quarries scattered on west Jerusalem's imposing summit. In April 1948, an Irgun squad positioned itself here and rained machine gun fire on Deir Yassin. Sixteen months later, Theodor Herzl was buried on this very same mountain. His majestic state funeral was conceived as a symbolic marking of the end of war and the triumph of the Jewish national movement. In spite of all the obstacles it faced, the great journey that had begun in 1897 had arrived at its destination. The dream was fulfilled: Zionism reached Zion.

The architecture is dignified and restrained. Herzl's unadorned black granite grave is flat, encircled by an irregular ellipse of gardens, garden paths, and stone fences. In one corner are the graves of the Herzl family and the leaders of the Zionist movement. In another corner is the grave of Vladimir Jabotinsky, leader of the right-wing revisionists and prophet of the iron wall. In a third corner lie Israeli presidents, prime ministers, and speakers of parliament. The symbolism is clear: here, on this summit, Zionism merges with Israeliness and Israeliness subsumes Zionism. Here is the exact point where the reality of the State of Israel is derived from Herzl's vision. The symbolic site is modest and solemn. Its strength lies in its republican modesty, economy, and asceticism, in its wide gravel pathways and its sparse Mediterranean shrubbery. It is geometric and rational, with no sign of mysticism or messianism or chauvinism. There is nothing man-made here that is larger than man. Mount Herzl is an unmonumental monument.

The military cemetery is also democratic and subdued. The ranks of the fallen are not engraved on the gravestones. In almost every section, generals are buried beside corporals. There are no patriotic inscriptions praising heroism and homeland. There is no attempt to deprive the dead of their individuality. On the contrary, the small stone plaques emphasize the fact that what lies under each one of them is a human being. The simple epitaphs do not sanctify death in war but leave it as it is: final and horrific.

Mount Herzl is the Israel of my childhood. It is the social-democratic Israel of pre-1967. It is secular, egalitarian, and disciplined, both harsh and human, collective and sensitive. There is no nationalistic kitsch here, no religious kitsch. With quiet dignity it makes a statement: On the mountaintop—the visionary. Below him, his disciples. Below them, the state leaders. Below them, the soldiers. Those who toiled, those who fulfilled, those who paid the ultimate price.

Both Yad Vashem and Deir Yassin ask the same dire questions: Shall we live? Shall we overcome our past? Mount Herzl says we shall. Its pre-occupation narrative claims that we shall live because we do not dwell on the past. We shall live because we successfully suppress Yad Vashem and Deir Yassin. We shall live because we are just and strong and modern. Our Israel is future-oriented. Solidarity, progress, and courage have enabled it to reign over this summit of sovereignty. Yet this benign

narrative has been disintegrating since 1967. Can we renew it? Can twenty-first-century Israel reconstruct the Mount Herzl republic?

From Mount Herzl I travel to Mount Scopus. Standing where Herbert Bentwich bid farewell to the city of his longing in 1897, I ask myself the classic Israeli questions: What will be? What are our chances? Will the Jewish state survive another century? Will we still be here in 2097?

In recent years, Jerusalem has experienced something of a revival: it has more nightlife and more artistic activity and more young energy than it had at the turn of the millennium. But the capital's demography is not promising. In 1897 it had a Jewish majority of 62 percent. By 1967 it had risen to 79 percent. But over the last decades it has shrunk back to almost where it was in 1897: 63 percent. Of the children attending schools in contemporary Jerusalem, approximately 40 percent are ultra-Orthodox and more than 35 percent are Arabs. Less than a quarter of Jerusalem's youth are Jewish Zionists, and only an eighth are nonreligious Jews. It is as if secular Zionism had never happened.

True, Jerusalem is not Israel. But throughout the country, demography is turning against the Jews. Today 46 percent of all of the inhabitants of greater Israel are Palestinians. Their share of the overall population is expected to rise to 50 percent by 2020 and 55 percent by 2040. If present trends persist, the future of Zion will be non-Zionist.

To explore the challenges facing Israel I travel north: from Mount Scopus to Beit El. My great-grandfather was overwhelmed with religious emotions when he saw the supposed archaeological ruins of where Jacob is supposed to have dreamed his ladder dream. But now these remains are barely visible between the prefabricated cement walls and cement towers that Israeli occupiers erected to protect settlers traveling this road from the wrath of occupied Palestinians. From Beit El I follow my great-grandfather's route to Shilo. The remains of the Byzantine church my great-grandfather saw here lie across from an Israeli settlement surrounded by the high fences of those who chose to be masters living by their sword. Both in Beit El and in Shilo, the question is whether Israel will end occupation or whether occupation will end Israel. The same question arises all around Nablus and in the Valley of Dotan. Will the Jewish state dismantle the Jewish settlements, or will

the Jewish settlements dismantle the Jewish state? There are only four paths from this junction: Israel as a criminal state that carries out ethnic cleansing in the occupied territories; Israel as an apartheid state; Israel as a binational state; or Israel as a Jewish-democratic state retreating with much anguish to a border dividing the land. I still believe the Israeli majority prefers the fourth path. But this majority is not solidified or determined. Israel lacks a political force with the will required to lead the painful and risky retreat. It is also not clear whether the Israeli public has the competence needed to evacuate settlements and divide the land. The region of Samaria that Herbert Bentwich crossed in April 1897 now looks like a monumental settlement project. So far, Zionism has not been able to summon from within the forces that will save it from itself. It is up to its neck in the calamitous reality that it created in the West Bank.

I diverge from my great-grandfather's route and head for Mount Baal Hazor. In the introduction to this book, I wrote that two factors make Israel different from any other nation: occupation and intimidation. In the twenty-first century there is no other nation that is occupying another people as we do, and there is no other nation that is intimidated as we are. Now, as an armored IDF bus takes me up to the highest summit in Samaria, I can actually see occupation and intimidation. From the radar base monitoring Israel's airspace, I think of the concentric circles of threat closing in on the Jewish state.

The external circle is the Islamic circle. Israel is a Jewish state that arouses religious animosity among many Muslims. The occupation of Jerusalem and the West Bank amplified this animosity, but it is Israel's very existence as a sovereign non-Islamic entity in a land sacred to Islam and surrounded by Islam that creates the inherent tension between the tiny Jewish nation and the vast Islamic world. For years, Israel dealt with this religious tension wisely. It forged alliances with moderate Islamic states and maintained secretive and commercial relationships with others. It created strategic partnerships and fostered mutual interest arrangements and was very careful not to turn the regional conflict into a religious one. But over the years Israel lost some of its Islamist allies as radical Islam swept to power. Jewish extremism and Islamic fanaticism

fed each other. In some Islamic countries, hostility toward Israel became active. Deep currents of anti-Israel feeling are today an integral part of the political landscape in West Asia and North Africa. At any given moment these forces could combust. Iran is the great threat, but so are some other Muslim powers. A giant circle of a billion and a half Muslims surrounds the Jewish state and threatens its future.

The intermediate circle is the Arab circle. Israel is a Jewish nation-state founded in the heart of the Arab world. The Arab national movement tried to prevent the founding of Israel—and failed. The Arab nations tried to destroy Israel—and failed. As such, the very existence of Israel as a non-Arab nation-state in the Middle East is testimony to the failure of Arab nationalism. When Arab nationalism was weakened and corrupted in the last quarter of the twentieth century, it was forced to set aside its grievances and to superficially recognize Israel. That brought about the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty, and regional stability. But the Arab awakening changes all this. As moderate but corrupt regimes are replaced by new ones, public tension rises and there is widespread demand for a tough line vis-à-vis Israel. There is no great Arab-Israeli war on the horizon, but stability is fragile. Israel now faces less Arab military might but more Arab turmoil. As the Arab nation-state (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon) is collapsing, Israel is being surrounded by failed states or extremist nations. As the Syrian chemical weapons crisis that began in late August 2013 proves, new dangers are on the rise. So peace skates on very thin ice. A wide circle of 370 million Arabs surrounds the Zionist state and threatens its very existence.

The third circle is the Palestinian circle. Israel is perceived by its neighbors to be a settler's state founded on the ruins of indigenous Palestine. Many Palestinians perceive Israel as an alien, dispossessing colony that has no place in the land. The underlying wish of a great number of Palestinians is to turn back the political movement that they blame for shattering their society, destroying their villages, emptying their towns, and turning most of them into refugees. As long as Israel has overwhelming power, moderate Palestinians have to conceal their wish and even suppress it. But moderate Palestinians are in retreat and radical Palestinians are on the rise. As Islamic fundamentalism and Arab extremism become dominant throughout the region, Palestinian prag-

matism is besieged. Thus, if Israel weakens for a moment, the suppressed Palestinian wish will erupt forcefully. And as the overall number of Arab Palestinians overtakes the number of Jewish Israelis, they will be backed by real power. An inner circle of ten million Palestinians threatens Israel's very existence.

In recent years, the three circles of threat have merged. As Islamic forces strengthened, Palestinian and Israeli moderates weakened and the chance to reach a comprehensive peace diminished. At the same time, Israel's unilateral withdrawals from southern Lebanon and the Gaza Strip cleared the ground for terrorist organizations whose rockets and missiles rattle Israel periodically. Here is the catch: if Israel does not retreat from the West Bank, it will be politically and morally doomed, but if it does retreat, it might face an Iranian-backed and Islamic Brotherhood-inspired West Bank regime whose missiles could endanger Israel's security. The need to end occupation is greater than ever, but so are the risks.

Up until now, Zionism was very effective in defending against these three circles of threat. Wise diplomacy prevented the Islamic circle from consolidating into a politically active circle that could strangle Israel. Military might prevented the Arab circle from acquiring the ability to defeat Israel on the battlefield. Sophisticated intelligence prevented the Palestinian circle from destabilizing Israel by the use of terrorism. But pressure is mounting on Israel's iron wall. An Iranian nuclear bomb, a new wave of Arab hostility, or a Palestinian crisis might bring it down. So the challenge Israel faces in its seventh decade is as dramatic as the one it faced in its first years. Atop Mount Baal Hazor it is clear that we are approaching a critical test.

From the highest summit in the West Bank I drive north to Mount Tabor. When I reach its summit, I get out of the car and walk around the Franciscan monastery and observe the valley Herbert Bentwich crossed after traveling through Samaria in 1897. At that time, not one Jewish Zionist lived here. It was all marshes, subsistence farmers, and Bedouins. But from Mount Tabor, the outcome of the hundred-year struggle is apparent: the Valley of Yizrael is mostly Jewish, but the mountains of Galilee are predominantly Arab. While Zionism won the valleys of the Holy Land, the mountains remained Palestinian. For all its efforts, Zionism did not overtake the Negev mountain or the Galilee

mountain or the Central mountain. It remained a coastal phenomenon, sending long tendrils into the inner valleys. The white minarets of the villages beyond Megiddo and Nazareth make the picture clear. The vanishing Arabs are back.

The State of Israel refuses to see its Arab citizens. It has not yet found a way to integrate properly one-fifth of its population. The Arabs who were not driven away in 1948 have been oppressed by Zionism for decades. The Jewish state confiscated much of their land, trampled many of their rights, and did not accord them real equality. In recent years, oppression lessened, but it was not replaced by a genuine civil covenant that will give Arab Israelis their full rights. To this day there is no definition of the commitments of the Jewish democratic state to its Arab minority, and that of the Arab minority to the Jewish democratic state. On the one hand, there is no real equality for Arabs in Israel, but on the other hand the government does not always enforce the law in their domain and allows their towns and villages to live in partial anarchy. What emerges is a dangerous situation of lawlessness. Many Palestinian Israelis don't respect central government, but they also don't feel they belong. Their affinity to the Palestinians outside Israel and the Arabs surrounding Israel mean that their situation is fundamentally different from that of ethnic minorities in North America or Western Europe. Although they are a minority within the Jewish state, they are an integral part of the overwhelming regional majority that makes the Jews of Israel a regional minority. This complexity was never dealt with, and majority-minority relationships within Israel were never defined. For the time being, the economic benefits and the civil rights that the Palestinian Israelis do have keep the peace. Although they do not admit it publicly, they are very much aware of the fact that in many ways they are much better off than their brothers and sisters in Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. But the political bomb is ticking. As the Arab minority grows in number and confidence, it endangers the identity of Israel as a Jewish nation-state. If this crucial issue is not resolved soon, turmoil is inevitable.

I journey on, from Mount Tabor to Tiberias. The Bentwich delegation pitched its white tents south of the ancient city, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. I drive farther south, crossing the Jordan River and

reaching the southern edge of the lake. Here Degania, the world's first kibbutz, tried to combine utopia, commune life, and colonialism. A breathtaking human experiment was carried out on this lakeshore: to invent a democratic version of communism that would save the Jews.

Thirty-nine years after it was founded, Degania was attacked by an invading Syrian army: there were air raids, artillery shelling, and an armored assault. The kibbutzniks and the soldiers defending the commune stopped the tanks with antitank bazookas, rifles, and Molotov cocktails. Dozens of them were killed in the battle and were buried nearby. A small Syrian tank captured in battle stands at the gate to the kibbutz, commemorating their sacrifice.

Facing the mythological tank, I think of the mental challenge facing Israel in the twenty-first century. What enabled the defenders of Degania to fend off the Syrian army at such human cost was the conviction they had. The dream of utopia and the burgeoning reality of the commune gave them the mental strength to withstand challenges such as the war of 1948. But contemporary Israel has no utopia and no commune and only a semblance of the resolve and commitment it once had. Can we survive here without them? Can we still fight for our banal Israel as the soldiers of Degania fought for their kibbutz dream? Can our consumerist democracy hold in times of real hardship? Within the Islamic-threat circle and Arab-threat circle and the Palestinian-challenge circle and the internal-threat circle lies the fifth threat of the mental challenge. Might it be that Israel's collective psyche is no longer suited to Israel's tragic circumstances?

Herbert Bentwich crossed the Sea of Galilee by boat; I drive around the lake by car, passing Tiberias, Tabgha, Capernaum. A few miles north of the ancient fishing village where Jesus is said to have taught is the colony of Rosh Pina. In 1897 it was home to a teacher, Yitzhak Epstein, who tried to bring Jews and Arabs together, teaching their children in the same school. A decade later it was home to an agronomist, Haim Margolis Kalawariski, who was one of the first Zionist leaders to believe in peace. In the late 1920s Rosh Pina was home to a physician, Gideon Mer, who made a point of treating his malaria-stricken Arab neighbors

in his clinic. But in 1937 Rosh Pina spawned the first Jewish terrorist, Shlomo Ben Yosef, hanged by the British after he tried to murder the passengers of an Arab bus climbing Mount Canaan.

The sixth threat Israel faces is the moral threat. A nation bogged down in endless warfare can be easily corrupted. It might turn fascist or militaristic or just brutal. Surprisingly, Israelis have generally upheld democratic values and institutions while being in a permanent state of war. For a long time, they have maintained a reasonably moral society. The majority respected human rights and endorsed liberal democracy. But in recent years there is growing pressure on the very core of Israeli democracy. Occupation takes its moral toll. The ultra-Orthodox and Russian minorities do not always cherish the democratic values that were previously taken for granted. The fear of the growing Arab minority breeds xenophobia and racism. Ongoing occupation, ongoing conflict, and the disintegrating code of humane Zionism are allowing dark forces to menace the nation. Semifascist ideas that attracted the right-wing fringe of the 1930s are now being endorsed by some leading politicians in the ruling parties. But as the 2013 elections prove, not all is dark. Israel still has a sensible, middle-class center. Still, the one hundred-year war creates a moral challenge. The brutality that erupted in the Rosh Pina of 1937 keeps on erupting. Israel's identity as a benign democracy is constantly being challenged.

From Rosh Pina I travel north along the Jordan River. When Herbert Bentwich rode his horse through this Hula Valley there were Arabs in it and there was a shallow lake. In 1947-1948 the Arabs were driven away, and between 1953 and 1957 the lake was drained to make way for agricultural settlement. In the decade that preceded my birth, Zionism overcame the two great obstacles it faced in this valley. With a series of military operations it eliminated the Palestinians, and with a grandiose engineering project it eliminated the lake, clearing an entire region in which it settled veteran pioneers and new immigrants, replacing a backward Palestine with a modern Israel. This dual action of Zionism succeeded in its young days by marshalling a new and powerful Hebrew identity.

Hebrew identity was revolutionary. It defined itself as a revolt against Jewish religion, Jewish Diaspora, and passive Jewish existence. It affirmed itself on the foundations of the Hebrew land, the Hebrew lan-

guage, and the belief in a Hebrew future. It sanctified the Bible while dismissing postbiblical Jewish history and tradition. It cherished progress and action and a secular attitude to life. It was careful to balance its national zeal by having a universal dimension. One of its versions was socialist-nationalist and the other was liberal-nationalist, but both were anticlerical and unprovincial. Both combined collective determination with enlightenment. That is why Zionism could believe it was just and this is how it persuaded others it was just. It's a long, long road, it said, but we shall walk this road and we shall walk it singing. We shall walk it believing that it is not in years to come but here and now; believing that it is not up to God but up to us; believing in this new secular religion of doing it all with our own hands; believing in our ability to drive out the Arabs and empty the lake and move mountains.

Hebrew identity was galvanized in the first third of the twentieth century but remained dominant in the following third of the century. It was the real force that overcame the Arab uprising in 1938, the Palestinian people in 1948, and the Arab nations in 1967. It was the force that established a state and maintained it and absorbed immigration and settled the land. In some respects it was a brutal identity. It detached Israelis from the Diaspora, it cut off their Jewish roots, and it left them with no tradition or cultural continuity. In some respects, it was an artificial identity that imposed on Israelis a man-made existence based on suppression and denial. Lost were the depths and riches of the Jewish soul. But the revolutionary Hebrew identity was imperative if the Zionist revolution was to prevail. It enabled the movement to execute a meg-alomaniacal concept that suited the Israeli condition. It granted Israel the supremacy without which it would not have survived. And it did all this not with solemnity but with delight. It made generations of Israelis walk the long road they were required to walk with gaiety and optimism. We are on our way, they sang. We are on our way, hoppa hey, hoppa hey.

In the last third of the twentieth century, Hebrew identity was dulled. In the early years of the twenty-first century, it seems to have disintegrated. Occupation, globalization, mass immigration, and the rise of non-Zionist minorities have worn down the hegemony of the Hebrews. For better or for worse, the more rigid way of life was replaced by wild pluralism. Gone was the balance between nationalism and uni-

versalism. Gone was the secular revolt against Diaspora and religion. Secular faith weakened, progress weakened, the collective narrative dissolved. Just as some of the brackish water of the Hula began to seep back into the lake bed, Judaism and shtetlism and Arabism returned. Just as the brutal deed done in this valley was partially reversed, so was the brutal deed done to the collective psyche of the Jews. The flourishing enterprise of Israeli self-assurance was overshadowed by existential questions: Succeed or fail? Flourish or perish?

The seventh threat facing Israel is the threat of crumbling identity. The kibbutzim I pass are like a canvas of the model Israeli landscape: tall eucalyptus trees, upright cypresses, plowed fields, and grain silos. But behind the gates, things have changed: the common dining halls and the nurseries are empty. The Israeliness that was once here is not really here anymore. The Hebrew culture that settled this valley and stood fast in this valley is gone. It changed form and changed character and turned into something as yet undefined. As I leave the valley behind me, I know that the question of identity is the crucial one.

At the core of the Zionist revolution was an identity revolution. Identity revolutions are tempting but dangerous. They are like gender transformations. In our case the operation seemed to succeed; the outcome was extraordinary. But the patient was not really at peace with himself and remained restless. Now it is all falling apart. Our new fierce identity is disintegrating into a multitude of identities, some of which are frail and confused. At times we do not recognize ourselves anymore. We are not sure who we really are.

Herbert Bentwich climbed from the river Jordan to the shoulder of Mount Hermon. I am more ambitious: I aim for the summit. Above the Crusader's fortress of Kalat Nimrod and above the Druze village of Majdal Shams and above the Israeli settlement of Neve Ativ and above the lower and then the upper cable cars of the ski resort, I reach the closed military base atop the Hermon. At 2,230 meters above sea level, I stand on the highest summit of the land.

Seven circles of threat: Islamic, Arabic, Palestinian, internal, mental, moral, and identity-based. By choosing this land we put ourselves at the epicenter of seven concentric circles of threat. But in the twenty-

first century what is especially dangerous is that the forces that have backed us since our arrival are growing weak. The West is in relative economic and political decline. The Jews of the Diaspora are in demographic decline. The alliance of Israel with the enlightened Jews of the West is flagging. At the very same time, the Western powers' ability to maintain order in the Middle East is diminishing, as is their ability to prevent the proliferation of nuclear arms in the Third World. While Islamic fanaticism is rising in the East, there are fewer Western forces that would stand by Israel. Israeli occupation, Jewish extremism, and religious fundamentalists are undermining support for Israel among its remaining friends.

In 1967 Israel conquered Mount Hermon and built a strategically vital military intelligence base at its summit. On October 6, 1973, Syria conquered the base and captured its men. Two weeks later dozens of Israelis gave their life on these steep slopes so that Israel could regain dominance over this dominating mountain. Now the most advanced technologies are employed in this science-fiction-like mountainous station. The Hermon high-tech fortress enables Israel to keep an eye on Syria and beyond.

So as I observe the harsh Syrian plains beneath and the sophisticated Israeli high-tech fortress nearby, it occurs to me that Israel itself is a fortress. Like the Crusaders, who preceded us by eight hundred years, we live on a cliff facing east. Like the Christian knights, we depend on our high walls and sharp swords to keep ourselves alive in a region that wants us gone. But the strength of the modern Israeli fortress lies precisely in the fact that it does not act or feel like a fortress.

This was not always so. At first, we tried to take this land with the water towers of utopia under which we built our red-roofed kibbutz houses and watered the brown plowed fields of our ancient homeland. Then, when reality struck, we took the land by establishing tower-and-stockade settlements: prefabricated fortresses that were designed to allow Jews to settle the land as the Arabs were viciously attacking them. For a generation or two, Israel was pretty much tower-and-stockade. Like the Crusaders, it led a life of religious-like devotion that was based on ideology, modesty, and discipline. The Zionist entity lived by a rigid code that enabled it to conquer the land, settle it, and defend it.

But in the last generation our citadel was so successful that it stopped

feeling like a citadel. Every few years we came up with a new invention: Dimona, Mossad, air force, Shin Bet, Arrow missiles, Iron Dome. All these inventions had a common denominator. The might created by normalcy enabled normalcy to perpetuate itself. A free society and a free market gave us an advantage over our adversaries. There was no longer any need for the Crusader-like ethos of tower-and-stockade. On the contrary. While the Crusaders needed a collective chastity to maintain their fortress, we turned liberation and individualism into our source of power. The Israeli fort had become a nonfortified fort producing perpetual supremacy.

But times are changing. The gradual decline of the West and the turmoil in the East are shifting the tectonic plates on either side of the Syrian-African Rift. And on Mount Hermon this is almost visual. Old Syria is gone, Iraq is in transition, Jordan's stability is in doubt. As the mass killing of civilians and the use of chemical weapons prove, brutality is beyond comprehension. The howling winds of change that can be felt on this frontier summit are turning into a hurricane that is sweeping the Middle East. So the future of the fortress on the cliff is not clear. As I look out at the land Herbert Bentwich left behind in the end of April 1897, I wonder how long we can maintain our miraculous survival story. One more generation? Two? Three? Eventually the hand holding the sword must loosen its grip. Eventually the sword itself will rust. No nation can face the world surrounding it for over a hundred years with a jutting spear.

2013 has seen two dramatic developments vis-à-vis the seven challenges that Israel faces. One is the New Middle East, the other is New Politics.

Some years after it excited international public opinion, the Arab Spring is still transforming the Arab world. The chain of events triggered by the Tahrir Square revolution in Egypt has had profound, long-lasting, and surprising effects. The demise of the semisecular and pseudo-modern dictatorships of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Syria (and Iraq) put an end to half-century-long regimes of oppressive corruption. The disintegration of significant Arab nation-states terminates a century-long geostrategic status quo shaped by the colonial powers at the end of World War I. Arab nationalism is now giving way to tribalism. Arab modernity is deteriorating in the face of Islamic fundamen-

talism. As the Arab nation-state and the Arab national identity weaken, turmoil abounds. While Arab monarchies are still standing, failed states and extremist movements and torn-apart nations are replacing what were once secular and cohesive Arab republics.

Gamal Abdel Nasser's Pan-Arab dream is in tatters, Anwar Sadat's moderation has vanished, and the brutal Baath secularism of Saddam Hussein and the Hafez and Bashar Assad is gone. It is no longer clear whether countries like Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Libya can sustain their national identities. The enormous forces that challenged Zionism in the twentieth century dissolved shortly after the century ended.

Obviously, these momentous changes improve Israel's short-term strategic standing. As the Jewish state proves to be the West's only reliable Middle East ally, it regains some of its old legitimacy and is perceived once again as a valuable asset. As the military gap between high-tech Israel and its blighted neighbors widens, it regains its position as the leading regional power. As the disarray in Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Egypt continues, the old threat of an all-out conventional war diminishes. The violent struggle between Sunnis and Shiites is keeping the new religious forces busy. The preoccupation of most Arabs with the internal Arab malaise temporarily neutralizes their capability to endanger Israel's existence. Some of them are actually looking to Israel to save them from radical elements that now pose an immediate threat to their future. So the vigorous Jewish national movement now seems to be much more coherent and effective than the declining Arab national movement that had been its rival for a hundred years. The declaration signed by Lord Balfour on November 2, 1917, has proven to be—thus far—much more viable than the agreement concluded by Mark Sykes and Charles François Picot on May 16, 1916, which divided up Arab land between the United Kingdom and France, thus defining the modern Arab nation states. Yes, Israel is a lonely rock in a stormy ocean. But sixty-six years after its astounding appearance, the rock seems to be far more solid than the tempestuous waters surrounding it.

And yet, in the long term, the New Middle East might prove to be even more dangerous than the old one. Now there is no hope for peace: no moderate Arab leader has the legitimacy needed to sign a new conflict-ending agreement with the Zionist entity. Now even deterrent-based stability is difficult to maintain: no Arab nation is stable enough and

strong enough to guarantee quiet borders and long-term tranquility. Now the risk is growing that eventually Israel will become the Arab world's scapegoat: if political Islam fails to fulfill its promise and the masses rise up against it, the easy way out will be to turn this rage against the infidels living their outrageously prosperous and permissive life next door.

There is increasing danger that sophisticated weapons will fall into the hands of zealots who will be eager to use them against the Jewish state. In short, while the old threat of Arab military might is on the wane, the new danger is Arab chaos. The troubling scenarios are of Arab discontent and Islamic fanaticism knocking on Israel's iron gates. The combination of popular Islamic-Arab resentment from without and desperate Palestinian upheaval from within might yet prove to be explosive. Israel's ability to erect tall (technological) fences and mighty (physical) walls is formidable. As recent years have proven, up to a point, tall fences and mighty walls work. But in the future the besieged-island strategy may exhaust itself. One day the fortified rock might be struck by the angry waves of a regional tsunami.

New politics are the dramatic outcome of Israel's 2013 elections. The phenomenal success of the charismatic television personality, the centrist Yair Lapid, and the young software entrepreneur, the national-religious Naftali Bennett, reshaped the country's political landscape. Ironically, the anticapitalist sentiment of the 2011 social protest movement was transformed at the ballot boxes into an overwhelming anti-ultra-Orthodox vote. Middle Israel rose not against Israel's financial oligarchy but against religious extremists and uninspiring politicians. And to everyone's surprise, the shrinking Zionist majority suddenly galvanized itself, trying to fend off the expanding non-Zionist minorities and seize control over the misguided nation. A new force surfaced. A startling happening took place. New Politics is the new name given to Israel's new political game.

Lapid ran his campaign by forming a new party, Yesh Atid (There Is a Future). His success has spawned talk of the Yesh Atid phenomenon, which is at the core of New Politics but has not been properly defined. Here are some of its features: rejection of the old Left-Right divide; a willful disregard of the Palestinian issue and the Iranian threat and the external challenges Israel faces; emphasis on the daily concerns of or-

inary Israelis (mainly the high cost of living and soaring real estate prices); aversion to special-interest groups and privileged minorities that do not contribute their share to the general good; glorification of the working middle class that shoulders the military and financial burden involved in keeping Israel afloat; adulation of a practical, pragmatic, and sane Israeli identity.

The political base of Yesh Atid is those hard-working, tax-paying, and army-serving Jewish Israelis that Dan Ben David spoke to me about some time ago. In Yair Lapid these productive, middle-of-the-road Israelis find a strong voice and a handsome icon. In the party he founded these reasonable Israelis see the locomotive that will pull the Jewish state out of the mud and lead it forward. Hence the hopes that the 2013 elections evoked, hence the invigorating feeling that change is in the air.

Indeed, change *is* in the air. Although Lapid, who was appointed finance minister, was criticized for a conservative belt-tightening budget, he remains a powerful agent of change. Reforms are everywhere. A flurry of social action and economic reconstruction commands the center stage of Israel's contemporary public life. Attempts are being made to draft the ultra-Orthodox, to reform government, to limit the power of monopolies, to weaken the unions, and to promote a more just market economy. Some of the new ideas are brutally Thatcherite, others are egalitarian. Yet the new hyperactive attitude toward politics is often tainted by populism. Much of it is driven by the desire to please the wider public instantly. Much of it represents the bourgeois politics of self-contentment and self-interest. And there is more than a grain of anti-liberalism in the hostility manifested toward weak minorities. There is an undemocratic taint to the way party politics are run. The implicit acceptance of ongoing occupation is troubling. The lack of interest in the Arab world is alarming. Though New Politics has given the world a new image of a reinvigorated Israel, it is not yet clear what really lies behind the image.

The good news of the second decade of the twenty-first century is that Israel is growing stronger in comparison to its neighbors and that Israel is determined to reform itself. The bad news of the decade is that the Middle East is growing wilder and that Israel has turned its back on it. Military and technological supremacy have allowed the new Israelis to become strangely isolationist: as they look inward, they ignore the

world in which they live. The Palestinians are now the elephant in the room no one dares talk about. Neighboring Arab countries as well as the vast Islamic world are treated as if they were thousands of miles away. Dangerous geohistorical escapism and geostrategic complacency allow the nation once again to be extremely pleased with itself.

As Jews, we have never had it so good. The twentieth century was the most dramatic century in the dramatic history of the Jewish people. The first half of the century was our worst ever: we lost a third of our people, every third Jew. But the second half of the century was wondrous. In North America, we created the perfect Diaspora, while in the Land of Israel we established modern Jewish sovereignty. In Europe and in Latin America and in Australia Jews live well, too. The Jews of the twenty-first century have what their great-grandparents could only dream of: equality, freedom, prosperity, dignity. The persecuted people we were are now emancipated. The pitiable people are now proud. We acquired the ability to fulfill ourselves and live a full life. An unprecedented Jewish renaissance enabled three generations of Jews to believe they escaped Jewish fate. In America this was achieved by the remarkable project of establishing a well-organized, free, meritocratic Jewish community. In Israel, it was achieved by the remarkable success of Zionism. The Jewish national liberation movement gave the Jewish people the basic rights they had been deprived of and the life expectancy they had lost. It conquered a land and liberated a nation and carried out a revolution like no other.

Nowhere is the revolution more apparent than in the Tel Aviv port. Here, south of the Yarkon River, the first Jewish Olympic Games—the Maccabiah—were held in the spring of 1932. Within a few weeks, a sports stadium was hastily constructed in which thousands gathered to watch the hundreds of athletes that traveled to Palestine from twenty-five countries to prove that the Jew of the twentieth century was a new Jew: athletic, muscular, and strong. Here, south of the Maccabiah stadium, Tel Aviv's first international exhibition, the Levant Fair, was held in the late spring of 1934. In only eight months a unique Bauhaus compound was erected in which thirty-six nations and twenty-two hundred firms showed their wares and displayed their faith in Tel Aviv's modernity.

Some six hundred thousand visitors came to see the wonder: on the southern bank of the Yarkon, in the midst of the Orient, a flying camel, the symbol of the Levant Fair, attested to the architectural and commercial excellence connecting Europe to the Near East. West of the Levant Fair grounds, Zionism's first port was inaugurated in the summer of 1936. Within weeks a customs building was built, along with warehouses and a wooden pier on which the first Hebrew stevedore carried the first sack of cement into the first Hebrew port of the first Hebrew city. The thousands that assembled around him sang the hopeful national anthem, "Hatikva," with palpable emotion. Seven months later, they sang "Hatikva" again in the improvised hall in which the first concert of the Palestine Philharmonic Orchestra was held. When the anti-fascist maestro Arturo Toscanini conducted the sixty-five survivors of Fascism who played Brahms, Mendelssohn, and Schubert on the Tel Aviv shore, many in the audience were in tears. Two years later a former Russian revolutionary opened a monumental power station a few hundred yards to the north of the improvised hall. In only nine months the ingenious engineer Pinchas Rotenberg and his thousand men, working around the clock, managed to build the Reading power station that accelerated the electrification of the land and provided power to the fast-growing Tel Aviv. Simultaneously, north of Reading, the first runway of the first airport of the first Hebrew city was paved. In the autumn of 1938 the first international flight took off: Tel Aviv–Haifa–Beirut. In an area no larger than one square kilometer, six different events took place within six years, every one of them the stuff of legend. At the northern edge of Tel Aviv the foundations were laid for a sovereign, modern, creative, vital, and life-loving Jewish existence.

I choose to walk southward from the airport. On the promenade between the runway and the sea, a high-tech company is having a fun day out. Twenty rehelmeted men and women ride by on red-wheeled Segways. Behind them are cyclists in sleeveless shirts and Lycra shorts with determined expressions on their faces. The early morning joggers are more relaxed: married couples and male same-sex couples and female same-sex couples in their fluorescent running gear. I see willowy girls on skates, opinionated pensioners, amateur fishermen. Before me is an Israeli Central Park on the shores of the Mediterranean, a Hampstead Heath in the Middle East—with all the calm and tranquillity that

only free societies can accord their citizens. There is a sense of well-being here that the Jews have not had for nearly two thousand years.

The six enterprises that were inaugurated on these few hundred acres in the 1930s laid the foundation for contemporary Tel Aviv. They all shared initiative, daring, alacrity, inventiveness, ingenuity, and a can-do spirit, but they were not of one cloth. The first two—the Maccabiah and the Levant Fair—were hopeful events. We came here, we were transformed here, we triumphed. But the latter four achievements—the port, the orchestra, the power station, and the airport—were achievements born of peril. They took place under the gathering clouds of the late 1930s, between the German threat and the Arab threat, between the catastrophe expected in Europe and the war beginning in Palestine. While the first two secular miracles occurred facing an open horizon, the latter four occurred facing the pincerlike movement of cruel history closing in.

The can-do spirit and the outstanding energy that characterized Zionism from the outset took a dramatic turn in 1936. From then on, Jewish life in Palestine was an uphill battle: to mobilize faith against fate, to wrestle with fate, to act. And so, digging its harbor and playing its Mendelssohn and erecting its power station and paving its runway, Zionism was already both heroic and tragic.

The power station fascinates me. In later years ugly structures were added, but the original 1938 edifice is all austere grandeur. The Monumental International style chosen by Rotenberg's architects projects modern might. Despite all of the turmoil of the 1930s, the turbines that were about to electrify Palestine were ensconced in a shrine of progress that rose within months on the Yarkon's northern bank. But the tale of the Tel Aviv port is even more significant. Exactly a month after the Arab revolt cut off Tel Aviv from its Jaffa port lifeline, Tel Aviv constructed a wooden pier. It washed out to sea that very night, but it was replaced with a pier of solid steel. But that was not enough. Tel Aviv constructed a jetty and built more piers. Six months after it was besieged, the city sent out of its own port a first crate of oranges—to Buckingham Palace. In doing so, it articulated the Zionist mode of action against those trying to annihilate it. It responded to terror not with terror but with building. It expressed the élan vital of a young nation

fighting adamantly while believing that its will to live would overcome the death surrounding it.

I stand by the cascade of warm water falling from the electricity plant to the Mediterranean. As another group of cyclists passes by, I wonder if we still have within us the fortitude that erected the Tel Aviv power station and dug the Tel Aviv port. For to face the seven circles of threat closing in on us, we need the wisdom and energy and devotion we once had. We need the initiative, daring, alacrity, inventiveness, ingenuity, and can-do spirit. As individuals, we have all of these traits of the "yes-we-can" ethos; this is why our start-ups are so remarkable and our ingenuity unique. But as a collective, we seem to have lost what we once had. This is why our nation-state is dysfunctional and our politics dire. Today ours is a free yet polarized society. So the crucial question is whether the free society that emerged here will generate enough power to withstand the external and internal threats endangering it.

Past experience is encouraging. Time after time we rose to the challenge. This pattern of overcoming threats repeated itself even in the Tel Aviv port in the first years of the twenty-first century. In 2002 a wave of terrorism rattled Israel. Dozens died every month in suicide bombings. The nation was petrified and the economy ground to a halt. But while there was blood in the streets, a new initiative was launched to renovate the historic port that had been neglected for years. Within two years the rundown warehouses were turned into a booming leisure complex: shops, cafés, restaurants, bars, nightclubs. In the very spot the Zionist spirit triumphed over the Arab revolt in the 1930s, the Israeli spirit triumphed over the second intifada nearly seventy years later. So now the challenge is to triumph over our internal weaknesses. There are some good reasons for hope. If the ultra-Orthodox community can be integrated into our modern society in the coming decades, it will bring a rush of energy resembling the one brought about by the Russian immigration of the 1990s. If the Israeli Arabs will be woven into our social and political fabric and given the equality they deserve, they might prefer what democratic Israel has to offer over what is offered by Islamist Arab nations and radical Palestinian political movements. If the windfall of offshore natural gas (which will soon make Israel energy-affluent and much richer) is properly invested, it might provide the

funds needed for a real internal revolution that will revive the Israeli republic. As the elections of 2013 have proven, not all is lost in Israel. There is still sanity here and a constructive attitude and a deep wish to move forward. Anti-democratic forces might subside as more and more ultra-Orthodox, modern-Orthodox, and Russian immigrants accept the norms and ethos of the Jewish democratic state.

I cross the Yarkon River and enter the port. Although it's morning, the cafés on the wooden decks are bustling. All around me are good-looking women and men, fit girls and boys, young families and youngish singles. They eat their continental breakfasts, organic breakfasts, Israeli breakfasts; they sip their double espressos, Camparis and champagne. I see bicycles, scooters, skateboards, prams. Bouquets of helium balloons whose colorful aluminum sheaths shine in the sun. A pantomime performance. An impromptu accordion concert. What a cocktail: an immigrant society and a warrior society against the backdrop of the blue Mediterranean. Jewish history and Israeli present and blue skies. The genetics of pain that burst forth here into gaiety. The genetics of Torah learning that burst forth into creation. Life on the edge, at the water's edge.

I walk on the deck and pass a trendy yoga club. A slim mother walks in wearing tight designer jeans and red All-Star sneakers. Once inside, she parks the orange pram she is pushing next to a dozen other prams and joins dozens of other new mothers in postdelivery Shavasana. Here is vitality. Here is the demography of hope. An almost extinguished species renewing itself. Unlike the free societies of Europe, the Israeli free society reproduces. Ours is not about disaffection and debauchery but about warmth and family. Ours loves children and brings into a harsh world these toddlers who are crawling on the colorful mats facing the sea. As I see it, Israelis are diamonds in the rough. And Israeliness is an iridescent kaleidoscope of broken identities that come together to form a unique human phenomenon. Somehow, something quite incredible emerged in this old-new country. That is why there is an extraordinary emotional quality to our life here. That is why we are not only creative and innovative but authentic and direct and warm and genuine and sexy. That is why personal relationships here are exceptional and human contact is remarkable. After all and despite all, Israeliness is familyness. As different as they are from one another, and although they belong to rival

tribes, the men and women who gathered on this shore managed to form one big, strange, loud, and diverse family.

Here are my own children approaching me: my twenty-two-year-old daughter Tamara bringing with her my nine-year-old Michael and my four-year-old Daniel. Two rowers in garish body suits are taking their boats out to sea and Daniel calls out to them. Michael waves. Tamara laughs. And as we walk back along the jetty, I suddenly realize, it is all here. The irrational project of building this port hurriedly in the wrong location and the inability to turn this shallow port into a deep-water harbor and the inability of a small artificial jetty to provide real protection from the breaking waves of winter. The whole thing should not have come to be in the first place. The project was geographically flawed and economically senseless and poorly planned. But because it captured the imagination, thousands invested capital they didn't have in Tel Aviv Port shares. And because it responded to a deep psychological need, thousands built the port of Tel Aviv. Eventually, this gush of energy created something far larger than its flaws. So although the Tel Aviv port played its intended role for only three years, it became an icon of our independence and innovation and vitality. Every generation and every wave of immigration redefines it. And now it is such a carnival. Thousands of Israelis are celebrating life. Devouring life. Michael runs ahead of me fearlessly. Daniel tries to compete with his brother. Tamara joins her young brothers. And in the golden light now flooding the port, the grandchildren of Herbert Bentwich's granddaughter run gleefully on the wooden deck. Without a care in the world. Without the burden of being Jewish. As if there was no persecution and there will be no persecution. As if there was no Holocaust and there will be no Holocaust. The land is solid under their feet. They are home.

We Israelis face a Herculean mission. To live here we will have to redefine a nation and divide a land and come up with a new Jewish Israeli narrative. We will have to restore a rundown state and unify a shredded society and groom a trustworthy civilian leadership. After ending occupation, we'll have to establish a new, firm, and legitimate iron wall on our postoccupation borders. Facing the regional tide of radical Islam, Israel will have to be an island of enlightenment. Facing seven circles of threat, Israel will have to be moral, progressive, cohesive, creative, and strong. There is no other way for us but to renew what

we launched here when we founded a daring project of modernity on the Yarkon estuary. The battle for our existence rages on.

After Tamara takes Michael and Daniel home, I move on to the port of Jaffa. In recent years, this port, too, was rehabilitated: galleries, restaurants, bars. A futuristic metal structure replaced the old Arab warehouses, but dozens of wooden fishing boats still bob on the quiet water behind the old jetty where Herbert Bentwich disembarked in April 1897.

We probably had to come. And when we came here, we performed wonders. For better or worse, we did the unimaginable. Our play was the most extravagant of modern plays. The drama was breathtaking. But only the end will properly put the beginning into perspective. Only when we know what has become of the protagonists will we know whether they were right or wrong, whether they overcame the tragic decree or were overcome by it.

There will be no utopia here. Israel will never be the ideal nation it set out to be, nor will it be Europe-away-from-Europe. There will be no London here, no Paris, no Vienna. But what has evolved in this land is not to be dismissed. A series of great revolts has created here a truly free society that is alive and kicking and fascinating. This free society is creative and passionate and frenzied. It gives the ones living here a unique quality of life: warmth, directness, openness. Yes, we are orphans. We have no king and no father. We have no coherent identity and no continuous past. In a sense, we have no civic culture. Our grace is the semibarbaric grace of the wild ones. It is the youthful grace of the unbound and the uncouth. We respect no past and no future and no authority. We are irreverent. We are deeply anarchic. And yet, because we are all alone in this world, we stick together. Because we are orphans, we are brothers in arms and in fate.

There was hope for peace, but there will be no peace here. Not soon. There was hope for quiet, but there will be no quiet here. Not in this generation. The foundations of the home we founded are somewhat shaky, and repeating earthquakes rattle it. So what we really have in this land is an ongoing adventure. An odyssey. The Jewish state does not resemble any other nation. What this nation has to offer is not security or well-being or peace of mind. What it has to offer is the intensity of life on the edge. The adrenaline rush of living dangerously, living lust-

fully, living to the extreme. If a Vesuvius-like volcano were to erupt tonight and end our Pompeii, this is what it will petrify: a living people. People that have come from death and were surrounded by death but who nevertheless put up a spectacular spectacle of life. People who danced the dance of life to the very end.

I walk into the very same bar I walked into some weeks ago. Once again I sit by the bar and sip my single malt. I see the ancient port through the windows, and I watch people sitting in restaurants and walking into galleries and wandering about the pier. Bottom line, I think, Zionism was about regenerating Jewish vitality. The Israel tale is the tale of vitality against all odds. So the duality is mind-boggling. We are the most prosaic and prickly people one can imagine. We cannot stand puritanism or sentimentality. We do not trust high words or lofty concepts. And yet we take part daily in a phenomenal historical vision. We participate in an event far greater than ourselves. We are a ragtag cast in an epic motion picture whose plot we do not understand and cannot grasp. The script writer went mad. The director ran away. The producer went bankrupt. But we are still here, on this biblical set. The camera is still rolling. And as the camera pans out and pulls up, it sees us converging on this shore and clinging to this shore and living on this shore. Come what may.