

---

# ISRAELAT

# 75

## A CONVERSATION

---

LIEL LEIBOVITZ  
JOHN PODHORETZ / DAN SENOR  
BEN SHAPIRO  
MEIR Y. SOLOVEICHIK  
BRET STEPHENS





**T**HIS CONVERSATION took place over Zoom on April 27, 2023. Liel Leibovitz is a columnist for *Tablet* and wrote last month’s cover article, “The Return of Paganism.” John Podhoretz is the editor of COMMENTARY. Dan Senor is a member of COMMENTARY’s board of directors and the co-author of *Start-Up Nation*. Ben Shapiro is the author of *The Right Side of History* and host of *The Ben Shapiro Show*. Meir Y. Soloveichik is a rabbi and academic who writes the Jewish Commentary column in this magazine. Bret Stephens is a contributing editor to COMMENTARY and a Pulitzer Prize–winning columnist for the *New York Times*.

**JOHN PODHORETZ:** In 1948, the Jewish population of Palestine—just as it was about to become Israel—was 716,000. It is now 7.1 million, a tenfold increase, 75 years later. This very radical experiment that under almost preposterous circumstances, and horrible circumstances, was undertaken. Other experiments in the creation of new nations had taken place, of course, in the wake of World War I, and proved illusory or weak or incredibly destabilizing. The other great incepted nation of the 20th century was the Soviet Union. It lasted 74 years. Israel has made it to 75. Why did this experiment in nation-building succeed?

**MEIR SOLOVEICHIK:** I can answer that question with Jeremiah 16:14: “Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers.”

What Jeremiah was predicting is that there would come a time when the Jewish ingathering will be so beyond questioning that it will be seen as a providential miracle, or perhaps *the* providential miracle of Jewish faith. This is not, of course, to say that human initiative—indeed, genius—played no role in the founding of the Jewish state, or in the inception of the Zionist movement that was at the heart of the endeavor. But even with that in mind, what *has* occurred is so stupefying that something greater, someone greater, is revealed behind this series of events.

On a recent trip to Israel, I took the new high-speed train from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. When I came back to New York, I took out my train ticket and saw the words in Hebrew: *Rakevet Israel*, “Train of Israel.” And I suddenly remembered *The Jewish State*, Theodor Herzl’s 1896 pamphlet. His idea of that state seemed fantastical at the time, but Herzl spoke as though it could absolutely come into existence again. But in the section where he discusses what language

the residents of the Jewish state will be speaking, he writes that, *of course*, they’re not going to speak Hebrew. He says it will be akin to Switzerland, where everyone, he says, will speak their own language and miss the country of their origin. That Hebrew train ticket means that Israel has exceeded even Herzl’s most incredible imaginings.

**LIEL LEIBOVITZ:** Since Solly dropped the H bomb and invoked Herzl, I want to offer one of my favorite thought experiments. We’re now 152 years after the Risorgimento, which unified the Italian city-states. Today, if you were to walk the streets of Napoli and ask any Italian if they consider themselves a Garibaldist, they will look at you as if you’d just fallen from the sky. What was once a national movement to kind of create a homeland for a group of people who could define themselves as Italians achieved its goal a century and a half ago and vanished. But here we all are speaking of ourselves as Zionists, which many people are taught was some kind of 19th-century national movement to rebuild the Jewish homeland for the Jews for reasons of safety and to protect us against anti-Semitism. I think it is becoming increasingly clear that the Israeli story really makes very little sense independently of the Jewish story. And seen as such, it is simply the fruition of the ancient, theological, emotional, philosophical, historical story of the Jewish people. This is not to downplay the tremendous ingenuity, courage, sacrifice, and valor of people who did so much and gave so much for this to become a reality.

**BRET STEPHENS:** I want to push back a bit on what Solly said. If you took an iPhone or an airplane or any other item of high technology and presented it to an intelligent person of 300 years ago, they would think it was somehow a piece of magic, or the work of God. To me, like the iPhone, the story of Israel is a story of extraordinary creativity, imagination, persistence, and genius. And necessity—the necessity that most Jews wished hadn’t had to come about, because so many arrived on Israel’s shores destitute, desperate, nowhere else to go. None of this is a result of miracles.





*Hungarian journalist and founder of Zionism, Theodor Herzl.*

**“IN THE JEWISH STATE, THEODOR HERZL’S 1896 PAMPHLET, HIS IDEA OF THAT STATE SEEMED FANTASTICAL AT THE TIME, BUT HERZL SPOKE AS THOUGH IT COULD ABSOLUTELY COME INTO EXISTENCE AGAIN.”**

**—MEIR SOLOVEICHIK**

The notion of divine providence runs the risk of making us a little lazy about understanding what made Israel succeed, what makes it tick, and how easily it could all go wrong. You know, we’ve got 75 years of success. It could still go belly-up very, very quickly if we just assume, well, it’s going to keep succeeding, because we have 3,000 years of Jewish history in the hand of God steering us in the right direction. For most of those years of human history, the hand of God wasn’t doing us too many favors. What we now have is a product of statesmanship and foresight and individual as well as collective effort. And that’s the way we should think about it. We should think about it as the political equivalent of the most marvelous technology invented by the hand of man.

**BEN SHAPIRO:** Bret, I think you’re right, that it would be disastrous if we fall into the trap of saying, “God will sustain us, no matter what happens next” and deny it’s incumbent on us to do the work. But you’d be hard-pressed to find any religious Zionist who disagrees with you. The idea that God without human action is somehow going to maintain the state—that obviously is not true. But that’s also

why viewing Israel as the *culmination* of the story is mistaken. Everyone understands how fragile Israel is; the reason I think that everybody stepped back from the brink on judicial reform, to a certain extent, was not just the exigencies of the circumstances but because everybody understands that this state is the chance for the Jewish people—that if this fails, then it’s the equivalent of the Temple being destroyed.

There’s another side to the miracle, as Rav Abraham Isaac Kook, the great religious Zionist founder, discussed. And that is how it suggests the reality of the divine curse upon the land—how the land was cursed as a result of the Jewish exile, with the promise that when the Jews came back, the land will flourish.

The Zionist Jews arrived in a land that was pestilential and malaria-ridden, and they have turned it into the 27th-most-powerful economy on planet Earth, the number-one launcher of unicorn companies, a place that is robustly democratic in the most undemocratic area on planet Earth. And they’ve done all of this in 75 years. Still, you have to recognize the fragility of the

**“ISRAEL IS THE ONLY ARMY IN THE WORLD THAT IS COMPLETELY ANTI-HIERARCHICAL. YOU JUST THINK OF THE ROLE THAT THE MILITARY HAS IN ISRAELI SOCIETY AND ISRAELI CULTURE, YOU HAVE TO ASK: DID IT FEED THIS ANTI-HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE TO THE SOCIETY, OR WAS IT JUST REFLECTING IT?”**

**—DAN SENOR**

miracle because we’ve seen miracles in Jewish history before that were rejected or overturned, right? I mean, God literally gives the Jews the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, and five minutes later, they’re making the golden calf. So, while this may be the beginning of the redemption, the end of the story hasn’t been written.

**BRET STEPHENS:** I think of that miracle in a slightly different way—as a unique cultural miracle, in which Jewish civilization blends ideas or practices that are usually found in opposition. One set of ideas produces extraordinary social, cultural civilizational coherence; the other produces a culture of argument and independent thinking. And that actually is the secret sauce of the Jewish state: debate and cohesion in both tension and harmony.



*Israeli flag bearers, Independence Day Parade in 1951.*

**JOHN PODHORETZ:** Dan, you wrote the book on this, and in your effort to describe the “start-up nation,” you say that Israeli culture is relatively flat.\* Despite a Bible that sets up an incredibly specific set of hierarchies in religious action, in day-to-day practice, the Jewish people ingathered in a nation for the first time in two millennia are pretty much all at the same social level.

**DAN SENOR:** There are a few conversations I’ve had over the years that brought this into focus for me. One was when I was working at the Pentagon and in Iraq with the U.S. military. I’d spend time with U.S. military personnel who had done joint training exercises with the IDF. And their core observation was they could not believe how decentralized the IDF was. Remember, these are people who did joint training exercises with countries all over the world. And they said Israel is the only one in the world that is completely anti-hierarchical. Junior people can challenge senior

\* *Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel’s Economic Miracle*, by Dan Senor and Saul Singer (Twelve)





officers and do so. They don't defy orders, obviously, but the culture of debate and disagreement was something these Americans had not seen anywhere else. So, when you just think of the role that the military has in Israeli society and Israeli culture, you have to ask: Did it feed this anti-hierarchical structure to the society, or was it just reflecting it?

Second, Eric Schmidt, who at the time was the CEO of Google, told my co-author Saul Singer and me that Google recruits talent from countries all over the world. And he said, you take the average Israeli who's 25 years old, and you put them against their peers, anywhere in the world, and you won't find anyone at that age more comfortable with taking on big responsibility than an Israeli—just taking on managing risk, and willing to disagree if necessary with people beneath them, beside them, above them. Every company and every government that visits Israel, their people are rattled by this quality in Israeli society. But I think it's a huge, huge factor, at least in the success of Israel's economy. I think it predates everything—predates the tech boom, predates the Netanyahu reforms in the finance ministry, it predates everything. If you want a culture of ingenuity, a culture of risk, taking a culture of incredibly innovative problem-solving, you have to have a pretty anti-hierarchical structure where people can metaphorically go into the lab and throw a bunch of things at the wall and see what sticks and argue about it. And in most countries in the world, especially most postcolonial countries, that's not really tolerated.

**MEIR SOLOVEICHIK:** I just want to build on what Dan said in responding to Bret. There's no question that the creativity at the heart of Israel is essential to the wonder that it is. And that creativity is linked to the very creativity that built the state. But the difference between the iPhone and Israel is that nobody predicted in texts written thousands of years ago that in the future, someone would create a small panel that can be held in your hands, and that you would waste hours a day watching videos of cats on it. If someone *had* written that several thousand years ago, then we would have a parallel case. But the situation here is that several thousand years ago, texts predicted that the Jews will be exiled, the Jews will be dispersed, and then they will experience the restoration in the valley of the Dry Bones, and from the grave they will emerge, make their way to the Holy Land. And as Ben said, areas that were once arid desert and wilderness will become veritable gardens of God. And a desolate Jerusalem will be filled with grandparents and grandchildren. These prophecies were all written thousands of years ago. They've all come true. Occam's razor teaches

me that it's *my* perspective, that there is a divine hand at work, that is the realist perspective, and that the secular perspective is the one suffused with dogmatism.

**LIEL LEIBOVITZ:** From inside the transcendent camp, let me reach out with a peace offering to Dan and Bret and those who are suspecting that we're really giving all the credit to Ha-Shem. I think the amazing thing to remember here is that foundationally, Israel is different from all other nations on earth, save for the United States, inasmuch as it is a covenantal nation. The great example of covenantal thinking for me—and this is a man-made thing, operating under a theological premise—is the Talmud. These rabbis were sitting there after five centuries in which Jews worshipped in a very particular way. And then their Temple burns down. So: No more religion. So: They do two very radical things. First of all, they say, we're going to take everything that we knew, we're going to take our religion and put it into a book. Which in itself is kind of mind-blowing. But then they say it's not just going to be a book of rules, because, as Bret suggests, things change so much in 300 years, how can you know what rules can survive the changes? So instead of writing down the rules, they decided to record their arguments, and invite us to partake in the arguments. And that is why you see the reality that Dan so brilliantly captures in his book—people who have little hierarchy or structure but possess urgency from the sense that it is literally incumbent upon every one of them to partake in this creation. That is a tremendous engine for growth and change. But it does come, I think, fundamentally and foundationally, from one's relationship with Ha-Shem and from an understanding that, as an Israeli, you are playing a different role in history than just being stuck in traffic on the Ayalon and rushing to your office.

**BRET STEPHENS:** You mentioned earlier, John, the previous round of independent states that came after World War I. But really, Israel belongs to the crowd of nations—Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Algeria, the rest of Africa—that emerged after World War II. And when you look at Israel in that context, you have to be struck by how the decision-making that went into the founding of the state and its earliest years was consistently good decision-making. Number one, it wasn't maximalist. It was always pragmatic: Let's make the most of what we've got, and *Dayenu*, it will be enough.

Unlike almost every other state of that generation, it had a leading figure, in David Ben-Gurion, who was not a military leader or a strong man. And the state emerged from a tradition that, though it was economically wrongheaded in its socialism, had a pro-Western, anti-totalitarian, political orientation. And while it was hardly a 21st-century model of inclusivity,



it avoided civil war—much more than can be said for its peer group of nations. Or the way different tribes in various postcolonial African states continued and continue to battle.

The final point is that Israel, despite being genuinely victimized both before and after its creation, refused to behave as a victim nation, obsessed with what had been done to it by evil external powers. It constantly had what psychologists call an “internal locus of control.” It believed that its ability to improve itself depended chiefly on its own efforts. So the story of Zionism, for all of its flaws, is a master class in nation-making and -building.

**JOHN PODHORETZ:** Is Israel still a refuge state? Do we support it, as Jews, because there are at least nine and a half million people living there who have nowhere else to go—and maybe 20 million people with nowhere else to go by the time the 21st century comes to an end?

**DAN SENOR:** It’s important that it continues to be a state for refugees. But I don’t think necessity is going to be the biggest source of immigration to Israel. Yes, when you walk certain parts of Israel, you hear much more French speaking than you did, for instance, 10 years ago, and when you talk to people who’ve moved there recently from France, they talk about rising anti-Semitism. But by and large, most people I speak to who’ve moved to Israel do it because they want to be part of something. They want to be part of building Israel. It’s not out of fear. It’s out of excitement. It’s promise and opportunity. As one scholar in Israel put it to me, Israel is small enough that you can still make a difference, that in living your day-to-day life, you can actually do things that matter. But it’s still a country that’s big enough where doing things that matter there might have much bigger implications. I just find that a lot of Jews I know feel it is exciting to them to be a part of something that is really big for a variety of reasons, for ideological reasons, for religious reasons. I don’t hear them saying, “I’m moving there because I’m scared.”

**LIEL LEIBOVITZ:** I think what’s impressive and moving Jews is the understanding that in being part of a covenantal nation, they actually have the opportunity to participate in the next very exciting wave of 75 or 7,500 years of rebuilding this nation. And here’s one of my favorite stories. Right after the Six-Day War, a bunch of rabbis got together and they said, Look, this seems to be a monumental occasion. We are now back in Jerusalem. The city is reunified. So maybe it’s time to change the prayer cycle, because there are a lot of prayers that call for the restoration of Jerusalem. And haven’t we already done it? Isn’t it Mission Accom-

plished time? And almost alone, Ovadia Yosef, who would become the chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel, said no. The only thing that you guys built or put together is *Yerushala'im Shel Mata*, the Jerusalem of below. The thing that we’re building now is *Yerushala'im Shel Ma'ala*, the Jerusalem of above. The fulfillment of biblical prophecies and the things that might follow them—some of that sounds like total crazy talk. But I think the people who are living there in Israel and those who are moving there in droves—including people who are very, very comfortable here in America—are doing it because they understand that by doing so, they have an opportunity to live not just remunerative lives in their careers in an economy that’s thriving in a culture that’s robust, but also spiritually. They can offer themselves and their children something that they simply can’t get as Jews anywhere else in the world.

**BRET STEPHENS:** That’s an important point. What’s the difference between Israel and, say, Belgium? I think the difference is that Israel is a purpose-driven nation. The Belgians could all become French or Dutch tomorrow, right? It would not make a gigantic difference to most inhabitants; people would get new passports, and that would be that. I don’t think it would change the day-to-day essentials of life in Antwerp or Namur at all. But the Jews, and Israel in particular, have this sense of purpose. And it’s, I think, what explains why, when surveys of national happiness are published, the people of Israel—a country where you send your children into a military that regularly gets into bloody conflicts, that is small and sometimes feels claustrophobic, where terrorism is sometimes a daily and certainly a monthly fact of life, and where much of the world won’t recognize you or hates you or denigrates you—express a high degree of happiness. Happiness is impossible without a sense of purpose. Purpose is what Israel and Zionism provide. And I think that’s what connects the high to the low, right? That’s what connects the spiritual to the temporal, the mundane to the heavenly.

**JOHN PODHORETZ:** Bibi Netanyahu is given credit for remarkable diplomatic outreach, from opening dozens of embassies to the Abraham Accords. How much of his success is due to the fact that other countries look and see that a country awash in war and terrorism has nonetheless gone from being the 104th-richest country in the world to the 27th-richest country? Maybe what they think is that Israel has succeeded against all odds, and they want to be around a success. Perhaps the purpose-driven quality of Israel has transmitted itself far beyond its borders to other countries whose leaders think, maybe, Israel knows something we can learn from.



*David Ben-Gurion*

**BEN SHAPIRO:** Bret, I think you're right, that it would be disastrous if anyone falls into the trap of saying, "God will sustain us, no matter what happens next" and denies it's incumbent on them to do the work.

The basic thesis that you're spelling out is Vladimir Jabotinsky's "iron wall"—the idea that if Israel exists as a powerful polity, it will earn respect by impressing upon the world that the Jews are not going anywhere, that the Jews are durable. When there are questions about the state's durability, you see attacks on it increase, you see the possibility of violence increase, which means that once again Israel has to demonstrate to its enemies and to the world that it is a purpose-driven country. For large swathes of the West, the reason Israel needed to be established was to be a refuge state and only a refuge state. Like when President Obama suggested Israel was basically just an outgrowth of the Holocaust; he said, essentially, we all felt bad for you guys, so we gave you a state. And that's why Israel exists. Which is why, I think, a lot of Western sympathy for Israel has waned—that's specifically because of its durability. And the fact that many people would prefer to think of Israel as a victim

**"UNLIKE ALMOST EVERY OTHER STATE OF THAT GENERATION, IT HAD A LEADING FIGURE, IN DAVID BEN-GURION, WHO WAS NOT A MILITARY LEADER OR A STRONG MAN. AND THE STATE EMERGED FROM A TRADITION THAT, THOUGH IT WAS ECONOMICALLY WRONGHEADED IN ITS SOCIALISM, HAD A PRO-WESTERN, ANTI-TOTALITARIAN, POLITICAL ORIENTATION."**  
—BRET STEPHENS

state, when it's never held itself out to be a victim state. In reality, Israel has no choice but to go forward. It can't embrace weakness to gain sympathy because its very survival would be at stake.

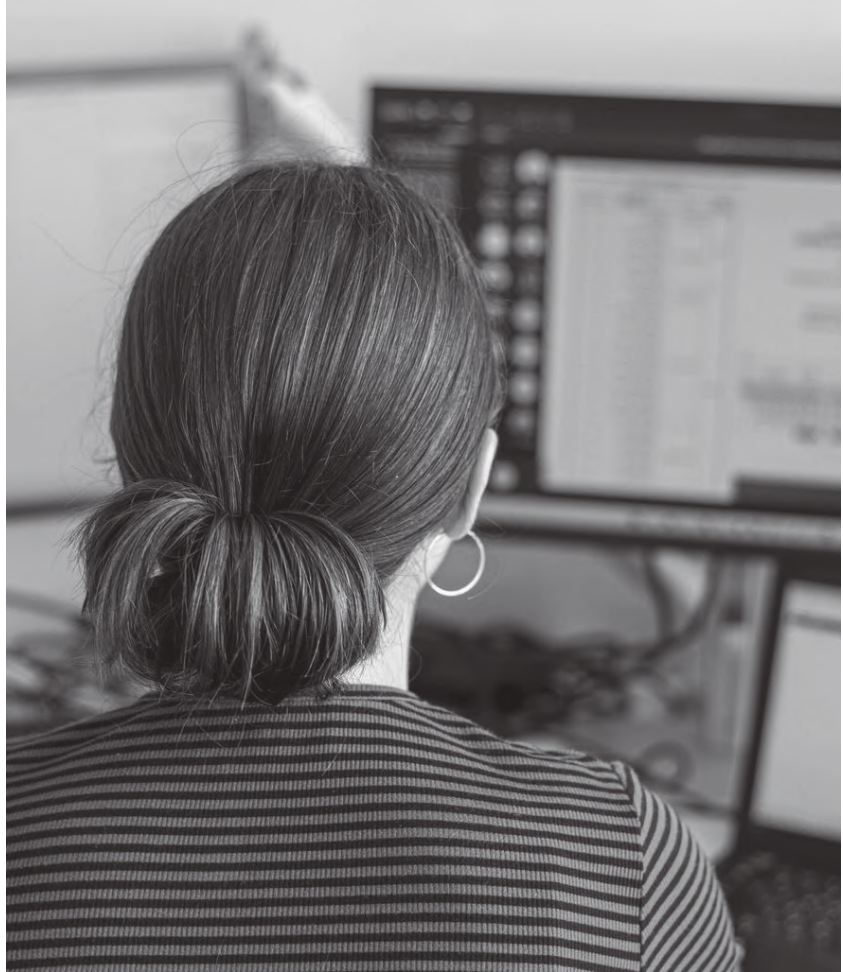
I think what we're really watching in Israel is the transition from "the covenant of fate" to "the covenant of destiny," as described by Solly's great relative, Joseph Soloveitchik. The covenant of fate is the one Jews share due to our history as a victimized people who needed a refuge state. The covenant of destiny says that Israel is here with a purpose, and that purpose is going to be projected forward. That struggle to move



**“THERE ARE ALL THESE VENTURE FUNDS AND INCUBATORS THAT ARE SPONSORING BUSINESS-PLAN COMPETITIONS FOR MEMBERS OF THE HAREDI COMMUNITY, FOR HAREDIM WHO DON’T SEE CONFLICT BETWEEN TORAH STUDY AND A RIGIDLY RELIGIOUS LIFE AND PARTICIPATING IN THE BIGGEST SOURCE OF ECONOMIC GROWTH IN ISRAEL.” —DAN SENOR**

from covenant of faith to covenant of destiny is causing growing pains in Israel right now. But the reason that the I think those growing pains are going to be outgrown is because the reality of life in Israel is just very different than it is for Jewish populations pretty much anywhere else on earth.

**DAN SENOR:** Can I add to this, Ben? So the overwhelming majority of Israelis—over 70 percent, according to the data gathered by Camil Fuchs—are having some kind of intergenerational Shabbat dinner Friday nights. Anecdotally, every single secular Israeli I know does something on Friday night, usually with a minimum of two generations at the table, and usually



*Ultra-Orthodox woman working in high-tech*

three. These are secular people who basically live on a Jewish calendar. It’s not just Shabbat and Yom Kippur, it’s Shavuot and Sukkot and dozens of other holidays celebrated officially nowhere else in the world. They live on that Jewish calendar. And they speak Hebrew, obviously, a biblical language. And they all devote some portion of their lives and their children’s lives to defend their presence on this biblical land. They are living very religious lives. There’s nowhere else in the world where Jews are living that kind of Jewish life.

**MEIR SOLOVEICHIK:** This brings our discussion full circle. I agree with Bret that the actions of Israeli leadership and the decisions of Israeli leadership in 1948 were indeed a master class in state creation (with the notable exception of Ben-Gurion ordering his militia to fire upon his fellow Jews on the *Altalena*). But when it comes to what Ben-Gurion thought the culture and religious nature of the state would be, the state he was bringing into being, it’s striking how wrong he was. Ben-Gurion, of course, worked to bring the Jews of Sephardic descent to the land of Israel. But he assumed that they would have to culturally assimilate themselves to the secular ways of some of Israel’s



founding elite. He assumed that a traditional religion would eventually wane in Israel.

Today, we have the exact opposite. We have an Israeli culture that is, in many ways, much more Sephardic than Ashkenazic. We have every Israeli politician the day after Passover going out to commemorate Mimouna, a wild and exuberant celebration that originated in Morocco. If you would have told Ben-Gurion that Mimouna was in Israel's future, I'm not sure what he would have made of that. And we have, of course, as both Dan and Ben mentioned, the incredible vitality of faith, and tradition, and ritual. I would like to cite an incredible article about Israel that appeared in the *New York Times*, which was about Ishay Ribo, an Israeli singer of Sephardic descent, who is a self-described bridge between Ashkenazic Jews and Sephardic Jews, between secular and religious, between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, who sings to every audience. But his songs draw on biblical tradition, Mishnaic descriptions of the Temple service, and he's singing the songs all over Israel. And that is the ultimate embodiment of what Israel is, what it's becoming, and what it ultimately will be.

**JOHN PODHORETZ:** Still, there does appear to be a growing divide between Israelis for whom religion is at the center of their lives and Israelis for whom religion is not at the center of their lives. No?

**LIEL LEIBOVITZ:** I think what we're seeing here is a continuation of the seminal founding argument of Zionism itself. That argument was between people who wanted a Jewish state and people who wanted a state for Jews. The latter group, many of them Ashkenazi, many of them, quote-unquote "secular"—they would probably say, "Sure, we live in the reality that Dan described so well. And those things mean a lot to us. But if you ask us what the great good truly is, well, we'd say it's the interchangeable cosmopolitan virtues of any other secular Western progressive democracy. And if it ever came to some kind of nation-defining clash, we would choose the thing that is most recognizable to us, which is meritocratic, technocratic Western liberalism."

Whereas the people who want a Jewish state say, "Well, you know, look, democracy is extremely important to us. In fact, we believe it is synonymous with Judaism. But the thing that we're truly passionate about, the reason we're here, the reason we sacrifice, is that we have an opportunity, miraculous or otherwise, to partake in the rebuilding and reinvention of Jewish culture in a sovereign Jewish nation for only the third time in history."

I think these are very profound differences. I think the absolute overwhelming majority of Israelis—and I would put the numbers at two-thirds, maybe

three-quarters—want a Jewish state and, in fact, feel very passionate about it. But there is a group of Israelis—about a quarter to a third—who say, in effect, "Yeah, it's nice that we have Judaism as a sort of hood ornament slash operating system. But what we really want is Berlin slash New York slash Paris on the Mediterranean."

**BRET STEPHENS:** That's a useful formulation. Another way of thinking about it is that the important divide in Israeli society is between those who want in and those who want out. I think the last six months of turmoil, for all the divisions that were exposed, actually suggest that the overwhelming majority of Israelis still want in, in terms of their voice, their vote, their participation, their place in the society, their profound concern for the nature of the state and the ordering of its institutions. The argument itself is a sign of vigorous civic health. In unsuccessful societies, people with the means to do so just get on planes and go elsewhere. Yet even now, with Israelis talking about getting foreign passports, most of them, including the Haredim, Israeli Arabs, East Jerusalemites, still want in. And that's what really matters. And you can want in a myriad of ways, right? But so long as the forces are centripetal, not centrifugal, you're going to have a successful state and more unity than division.

**DAN SENOR:** We've talked about secular Israelis who are leading, in some way, a religiously Jewish life. There are also a growing number of members of the Haredi community that want in on aspects of secular professional life, particularly in the tech scene. Look at Mobileye, the largest company in Israel. It's headquartered in Jerusalem. I mean, this is an unbelievable notion—the largest tech company in Israel is not in Tel Aviv, the secular capital, but Jerusalem, the religious capital. It has something like 3,500 or 4,000 employees, many of whom they pull from Jerusalem. So you see religious people, mostly women from Haredi communities, at work there, coding.

There are all these venture funds and incubators that are sponsoring business-plan competitions for members of the Haredi community, for Haredim who don't see conflict between Torah study and a rigidly religious life and participating in the biggest source of economic growth in Israel. I heard about a business-plan competition that was organized for members of the Haredi community. The head of Mobileye told me he thought they'd get like 15 or 20 business plans. Then, something like 250 teams from B'nei Brak showed up with business plans.

They had a competition, they took out space at Tel Aviv University, they took a hall for 1,000 people, which he thought they'd never fill—and 3,000 people





showed up from B'nei Brak to cheer on their family and their friends and their teams. Now, if you extrapolate from this data, and you look at the growth of the Haredi community in Israel, you can say this tech boom among Haredim is miniscule. But the point is: This is the direction things are moving in. More and more people want in, to Bret's point. And so, I don't think the divide is that stark.

A second point on who wants in and who wants out. We talked about, Do Jews from the Diaspora want in, and why? And what motivates them to move? The other question to ask is about Israelis who are living comfortably in Israel but could live comfortably anywhere else in the world, who experiment with leaving and then tend to come back. For decades, we've heard about an Israeli brain drain, people leaving Tel Aviv and moving to Silicon Valley or Berlin. And then they come back. They usually come back when they have kids, because they want their children to participate in the Israeli experience, not the Western experience and not the Diaspora. They want their children to serve in the army, and they want their children to feel like they're part of something larger. I think all arrows point toward more and more Israelis, no matter whether they think they should be living in a Jewish state or a state for the Jews. They want in.

**JOHN PODHORETZ:** Israel's history up till now suggests it's a fool's errand to believe we can envision the Israeli future, because something new in history is being built here. It is new, it is unprecedented, and it is without any model. And it's going to be fantastically exciting to watch. And nerve-wracking. And anxiety-provoking. And full of apocalyptic rhetoric about how the country itself is going to destroy itself. It hasn't yet destroyed itself, quite the opposite. That's also what leads me in the providential direction. Something has

been happening and something is incubating that surpasses human understanding—from the foundation of the state to where it is now to where it might be in 2100.

**BRET STEPHENS:** What I can assure you is in 2100 a bunch of Jews will be kvetching, talking about how things were just ever so much better...

**JOHN PODHORETZ:** in 2023, yeah.

**BRET STEPHENS:** And how the state is on the verge of extinction and has never been more divided.

**DAN SENOR:** Of course. Go look at the headlines around 1952 during the debate over German reparations. Oh my God. Remember, Menachem Begin led a protest of 15,000 people to storm the Knesset with calls for the violent overthrow of the government. Look at the country after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. And this was not like the Kennedy assassination. Literally, half the country blamed the other half for it. There have been plenty of times apocalyptic rhetoric was the order of the day.

**BEN SHAPIRO:** This is what we're all saying, from different points of view. If you dropped a Jew from any moment in virtually all of human history into Jerusalem today, and then made the argument that we weren't living in a fulfillment of the prophetic vision, I think you'd have a real tough argument to make. There's no way that person could sit in a city with 650,000 Jews that is thriving economically, that is technologically advanced, where he looks overhead and you see an F-16 with a Jewish star on it, and then thinks to himself, "Well, this is totally within the mainstream in history, probably I could have predicted it."

**BRET STEPHENS:** The only caution in this conversation is that our capacity to screw it up is real and possibly bottomless.

**BEN SHAPIRO:** That's not an argument against Providence. That's an argument against man. [S▶](#)