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## **The Oslo 'peace accords': a psycho-political perspective**

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*"Modern Foolishness is not ignorance. Modern Foolishness is the absence of doubt about convention."* Gustave Flaubert.

The central and most profound Israeli convention is that 'we' cherish and crave Peace. At the same time 'we' are convinced that all others, especially the Arabs (Palestinians) are warmongers. Facts, naturally, must not be allowed to confuse 'us'.

The Israeli-Jewish self-image as spiritually superior and peace loving is a cardinal element in Israeli society's high self-esteem, and has made possible thousands of cases of state-sponsored killings, injuries, torture, abuse, and dispossession. It justifies the devaluation of the Palestinian enemies and permits the disregard of their human rights.

In referring to the Israeli-Jewish community, we are referring to a 'large group' in Wilfred Bion's terms. The group that describes Israel best is the fight-flight group. The fight-flight group's basic assumptions (which are subconscious) are that it must preserve itself at all costs, and this can be done only by fight or flight. This group does not tolerate weakness and expects casualties since the survival of the group is more important than the needs of its individual members. The group may be characterized by aggressiveness and hostility. The leader must lead the group against a common enemy. If an enemy does not exist, the leader will create one. Simultaneously, the group has a *group-work mentality* that agrees on its

common tasks. In Israel's case the group-work mentality is about Peace: the group is profoundly convinced that peace is its primary concern and goal. The result of the enduring co-existence of these two contradictory mentalities [power veneration and peace volition] is inevitable tension and 'conflict' between them. Basic assumption would interfere with the group task mentality and generate a dysfunctional society.

In order to protect group cohesion in the face of group dysfunction, the leader and the group members must take measures to ensure firm consensus. When consensus, a general "truth", is the fundamental issue, it leads to a mental state where the group, or the nation, assumes priority over individuals. In Israel, great pressure is exerted on everybody to be a part of the national consensus, whatever the price. Criticism of the national consensus is hardly tolerated inside Israel, and totally condemned abroad. As mentioned above, one of the main pillars of the Israeli consensus is that *we are peace lovers. Peace is what we want and desire most.*

For example:

In 1980 following the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel and the impending peace with Lebanon, I observed a great anxiety within Israeli society. When I pointed out that the prospect of peace was being viewed as a threat, or as I named it, *the trauma of peace* - I experienced much hostility in my large group: "How dare you say, even think, things like that? We want peace more than anything else. Are you not an Israeli?"

One might ask why peace, which is the declared aspiration of Israelis, provoked a collective anxiety. The answer is that Israel does not yet have a mature definition of itself. In other words, it is not evident to "us"

who we are. Israel demands time and again that neighbor states recognize it as if Israeli statehood is not a solid fact. Having difficulty figuring out one's identity from within leads to the need to get an answer from without. The maximal "not me" is an enemy. Therefore an enemy defined by the large group is an absolute need. Losing this solid definition through a peace agreement is a real psychological threat.

I predicted a war that would "save" Israel from the trauma of the peace. The war in Lebanon started in June 1982.

In general, people love to get reassurance for their conventions and hate to be confronted with ideas and facts that are disrupting them from adherence to them. The ideas that 'we' are basically afraid of and reject peace cannot be tolerated because it transgresses the rules of the community, betraying the tribal culture and mentality. In Flaubert's words – this is an illustration for 'Modern Foolishness'.

If the power principle is the core of disengagement policy, then sharing power is the core of engagement based on respect.

Separation (disengagement), in contrast to segregation, is possible only if the partners are equal. In other words – it can work only if the partners are acting with mutual respect – which means sharing power. Otherwise – separation is a euphemism for segregation, which serves only the more powerful partner, which in the case of Israel, means creating and maintaining the occupation.

I firmly believe and argue that *the genuine meaning of respect lies in readiness to share power.*

In fact, disengagement-separation-segregation has been the policy of successive Israeli governments ever since the establishment of the

state. Such a policy maintains the imbalance of power and prevents reconciliation. With this policy there is no need for decency and common goals for the two national groups. The powerful side can and will dictate one-sidedly the rules of the game.

In the last 20 years, the name of the game is the **Oslo Process**, the outgrowth of the Oslo Peace Accords. The Oslo Process is an 'as if' peace epoch. In fact it is the ethnic segregation epoch. The Oslo Process and its intermediary agreements implemented, *defacto*, the process of segregation between Israeli-Jews and Palestinian-Arabs, and allowed Israel to shed its responsibility for what it had done in the occupied Palestinian territory over almost five decades. This segregation includes most aspects of life: the infrastructure planning as well as concrete segregation in the sewage infrastructure and water supply, all according to ethnic criteria.

Peace can be just a condition of no war. It is not necessarily a just peace, nor is it necessarily a relationship based on respect.

Some might even consider the relationship between the Americans and the Native Americans "peace". These relationships are characterized by an extreme imbalance between two sides, which are not really partners at all. One side might be strong and the other weak. In a situation like this respect is replaced by diktat.

The Oslo Agreement did not die and peace was not born. We, the Israeli-Jewish group, continue to believe what we say to ourselves and the world: that we want peace and they, the Palestinians, are refusing it. It is easy for us to believe ourselves since the collective subconscious rules and fulfils all its demands – the leader allocates the enemy, the

group follows him and supports aggressive militarism on a daily basis by deepening and expanding the segregation and avoiding any chance of reconciliation.

The Oslo Process and the endless peace negotiations that follow it are powerful because they help to shrink the gap between the subconscious demands and the group-work mentality. It is so efficient because the Oslo Agreement actually serves war (the basic assumptions) while declaring peace (the group-work mentality).

The documents of Oslo didn't deal with human rights or with equality. Maybe this fact is the primal sin of those accords. For us Israelis, equality is an impossible mental mission. The actual beginning of a peace process - apart from the ceremonial signing, demonstrations, and media attention - will have to be reflected in the creation of a different emotional and cognitive system. Perceptions of Palestinians as equal, worthy of human and civil rights just like their Israeli Zionist counterparts – that is the real meaning of the peace process.