

April 2nd 2019.

Life's pathways brought me in contact with Leibowitz in the late 1950's in Med school. He was an intellectual giant; his classes were a kind of performance, exceeding far beyond the well worn formulas of the instillation of knowledge and the acquisition of proficiencies. Later on, after my graduation, we struck up a form of friendship. I would make the pilgrimage to his book-laden Jerusalem apartment on Ussishkin street and Greta, his wife, would serve us cups of tea without cookies but with a generous smile. We talked primarily about occurrences and events in the Israeli-Jewish society.

I got to know 'Yesh Gvul' as soon as it was established in 1982 by soldiers and activists who protested against the first Lebanon War and the draft. This movement drew inspiration and support from Professor Leibowitz, who issued a public call to soldiers to refuse to participate in the Lebanon war in particular and in the occupation in general. I, too, was completely in line with them, especially having been an active member in a prior group called "Liberated Territory" (est. 1981-1982) whose main concern was to prevent the war in Lebanon, which we anticipated. We therefore had much in common. One disagreement I did have with the folks at Yesh Gvul related to the fact that it was initially an organization comprised exclusively from male soldiers. After rather protracted discussions, however, the ranks were opened up to include also female supporters and activists. Since then and until this very day, there is nothing but agreement and harmony between us.

In early 1988, with the outbreak of the First Intifada, I initiated and founded Physicians for Human Rights—Israel. It is important to reiterate: in establishing PHR, I succeeded, and take particular pride in having done so, inserting the concept of **human rights** into the Israeli discourse, both into the broad public debate and into the political arena. Until then we spoke about **Citizen rights**, thanks to the illuminations of Shulamit Aloni, but human rights, and the conceptualizations and understandings it suffuses and allows, were, at best, marginal to contemporary discourse.

This, to my mind, was not a coincidence. Today, the concept of human rights has become tied to a moralistic universalist discourse, which is but one of its possible iterations. Thirty years ago, we used human rights to express an agenda that went far beyond mounting reactionary campaigns against the unrestrained violence of an Israeli sovereign run amok: house demolitions, assassinations without trial, intentionally induced humanitarian crises, torture of political prisoners. It touched, rather, the very roots of our political reality here. Since, as Hanna Arendt said, the fundamental human right is the right to have rights, which was exactly what the State of Israel had been denying its Palestinian subjects. The right to political participation is indispensable. It what makes man superior to beast (Ecclesiastes 3:19). Without political rights, all the other rights, important as they are, amount to little more than animal rights slogans. Fighting for the right to access a clinic in the occupied territories is like fighting for feeding troughs for horses. The totalitarian regime reduces the citizen to "a beneficiary of rights" – the right to eat, the right to inhabit, the right to an education, the right to healthcare – which can be denied or extended as need be, transforming human beings into critters. Those who fight for less than political rights for all, fight only to better their own image. Without political rights to all, as we can see in Israel/Palestine, the road is clear to accepting any atrocity: murder; assassinations; mass expulsions; unfettered destruction of houses and entire settlements; collective punishments; lethal withholding of food, water, and medical attention; movement restriction; and killing of unarmed civilian demonstrators.

In 1988, my co-founders in the organization were adamantly opposed to my opening and directing PHR's founding conference, claiming I was a known extremist and that my name and presence would only damage the NGO's reputation. "An extremist?" I asked. The answer was yes. We know you are a member of 'Yesh Gvul' who are seen as extremists and traitors. PHR was almost not founded over this spat. I am intentionally bringing up this inglorious past in contradiction to the rules of propriety in such an honorific ceremony because this discord was and is relevant to the present as well. Back then, in the days of the first intifada, the detractors eventually had to give in to the ludicrous proposition that the woman who founded the

organization was also fit to preside over it. Still, the fact remains that they have not changed their minds then, and have not changed their minds today. This is thrown into relief today, particularly the persistence of not having any critical political discussion on any of the several cardinal issues to the Jewish-Israeli society, of which I will mention only one: **the Israeli rule of apartheid**. I chose to evoke this loaded term not only because the work it does in shedding light on so much of the political realities between the Jordan river and the Sea, but mainly because speaking in candid terms like apartheid with the Israeli-Jewish public today is to truly honor Yeshayahu Leibowitz, whose "extremist" heritage we have come together today to pay our respects, who first used this very term some 50 years ago in relation to Israel/Palestine. Lecturing to a group of students in Jerusalem in 1969, Leibowitz said of the State of Israel: "It will be an illegitimate State. Rabidly nationalistic, heavy-handed, arrests without trials, torture of prisoners, demolition of the houses of suspects, deportation of *personae non gratae*. A New Rhodesia." And one again, in Tel-Aviv in 1980, "Israel and South Africa are the only regimes in the world currently maintaining states of apartheid." Back then, perhaps, these were somber diagnoses of realities still-in-the-making. Today, however, they are imbued with the uncanniness of a prophecy come true.

PHR-Israel presented a radical and comprehensive alternative to the Zionist hegemonic sovereignty: partnership with Palestinians instead of separation. Equality in rights, mutual respect instead of a regime of oppression, full solidarity instead of occupation. If you would, I want to define more clearly what I mean by **respect**: it is the willingness to equally share power. No less.

This comes at a price, of course. External and internal. The former chairman of the IMA (The Israeli Medical Association), went as far as to issue a warning about me: "This is a dangerous woman. She stands at the helm of an organization and is leading it down her own path of Anti-Zionism, Anti-Israel and Anti-Semitism." Please mind the gap between Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism.

Thus, the internal naysayers joined forces with the external ones. It should scarcely be surprising that those who went to such lengths to deride me and chasten me

were all men. The threat I represented (the 'dangerous woman') emerged from the feminist perspective and demand for equality and an uncompromisingly equal share of power, which indeed does constitute a true threat to the age-old male hegemony and domination, one with the potential to abrogate men's enjoyment of the fruits of power. Leibowitz himself supported the feminist cause with his characteristic fervor, and indeed defined himself a feminist. To him "a progressive human society where women are not an integral part of the intellectual culture and in political and social life is literally impossible".

In one of our conversations in his Ussishkin apartment he once quoted Edward Gibbon: "History is little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind", and added, what Gibbon did not say, "And mankind's struggle against them". And I, meekly, told him I thought that the most important struggle is to fight the evil human beings commit against each other. In our discussion I also added that this was the essence of the purpose of every physician. Medicine is not only fighting viruses and germs, or mending arms and legs so that they may be broken all over again, but a struggle against the system and policymakers who enabled and perpetuated this carnage. And this, to me, was essentially the task of PHR. At length, we arrived at an understanding, believe it or not. As Leibowitz himself once said: "Values cannot be argued about, only struggled for. A value is something that obligates its professed bearer."

And indeed, the fight within PHR, as in large swathes of the Israeli left, rages on. For years the board will not agree to hold a discussion on Israeli apartheid. The main argument (other than idle excuses) is that any such mention might cause an uproar and lead to people leaving the organization. A magnificent argument, no doubt. In my opinion – anyone who is unable or unwilling to deal with the realities of our political situation – fare thee well.

In 2008 I lectured in two venues in London on the Israeli apartheid. The SOAS University of London and the Royal Society of Medicine. The PHR Israel board demanded that I issue a statement that what I said in those lectures represented myself only and not the opinion of the organization. My partners disavowed me, the

dangerous woman. I was in league with traitors such as may be found in 'Yesh Gvul'. But never forget: today's traitors are tomorrow's heroes.

No social phenomenon occurs without context. Nationalism, racism and militarism in Israel – elements ever present in Israeli-Zionist society – have lately surged, and their standard bearers amongst the public and especially in the government affects, regrettably, PHR, too. Willingness to fight for professed values, never especially high, is waning amongst human rights' NGOs in Israel. Leibowitz once said he despises heroism and heroes except the heroes of consciousness. That's why he never tired of communicating and explaining to the Israeli Jews that they must do what they can to disrupt the Israeli regime, since it is wicked and rooted in the control over another people. Yes, he said, one must object to such a regime even by force.

Palestinians were here and will continue to be here. They can and some indeed want to live in peace if only the occupier's boot were lifted from their necks. They love this land and are connected to it and we, Israeli Jews, must find a way which is not despotic occupation and apartheid to share it with them.

What might this way be? Recall that Leibowitz called for a civil disobedience campaign in order to disrupt the 'wicked regime' and its continued rule. 'Yesh Gvul' supports the refusniks who carry out bravely, intelligently and effectively Leibowitz's call. Today we should bring the call for civil disobedience up to date and add to it an unequivocal expression of support for the BDS movement, representing the non-violent Palestinian struggle to end the occupation and apartheid led by successive Israeli governments. This movement understands the indispensable role played by a global neo-liberal economic order in deepening and aggravating the great crime taking place between the Jordan river and the Sea.

The majority of PHR's efforts are directed towards extending medical and humanitarian aid, and they are doing remarkable work, but it is in opposition to my judgment and legacy. As I cannot change from within, I turn outwards – to the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples and to the world beyond, represented in such movements as the BDS. Alas, many will not approve. Itzhak Rabin was correct when he said that "politics is not a mutual love association". But if we truly want equality

and respect (as in the willingness to share power) – vis-à-vis the Palestinians, if we truly believe this is the only just and effective way to end the occupation, we must forgo these many privileges we sit atop of. Israeli Jews enjoy privileges spanning all sectors of life: economy, water, lands, planning and infrastructure, education, healthcare, freedom of movement and much more. Ironically, perhaps, the most fanciful of our privileges – that of indulging in a self-fashioned fantastical status of being a democracy governed by the rule of law – our ‘beautiful face’ is the most resilient. And it is one of the BDS’ demands.

We all have much to learn from ‘Yesh Gvul’. Here is an organization willing to take risks and issue a clear call in favor of youngster’s refusals to participate in the occupation. Indeed: here are true companions on our winding political road.

I will finish with a verse by Mahmood Darwish:

Had the olive tree remembered who planted it, its oil would have turned into tears.

Ruchama Marton.