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## **Jerusalem Seminar**

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### **Israel mainstream beliefs**

Israeli tendency, since the founding of the State, to believe in power and to rely on it was intensified and turned into power intoxication. The difference dwells in the inner attitude to the using of power and aggressive actions. While in the past there was a need to cover and to lie about them, recently the use of power is much more ego-syntonic\* in the collective expressions by policy-makers, media and individuals.

Psychologically, the power intoxication leads to disturbances in the Israeli collective psyche and in individuals within the collective. These disturbances include, among others, the avoidance of historical perception, splitting, a self-image of victim, increased aggression within Israeli society, manifestations of psychological trauma, the prevalence of hate and antisocial behavior.

The complexity of the psychological disturbances blocks the process of creating insight, which is essential for mental health. Insight would contradict what the Israeli militaristic hegemony wants and dictates. It might enable critical thinking as to the principle of relying on power alone and as to the destruction caused not only among the Palestinians but also within Israel.

. \*Instincts or ideas that are acceptable to the ego. J. Laplanche and J. Pontalis, P.151

### The avoidance of historical perception

Avoidance conflict “arises from the simultaneous presence of two or more equal threats... approach towards one of the horns of the dilemma increases the tendency to retreat toward the other, and fear or anxiety is therefore minimized at a point where distances from both are greatest” (Colman P.73).

In the Israeli case, the two threats are: Perceiving the past and perceiving the future. Seeing the past accurately implies recognizing the role of Israel as precipitating present Palestinian violent reactions. This is threatening because it would make Israel largely responsible for the present violent actions and by that contradicting the very core of the Israeli self image of high morality and righteousness. Having a vision for the future requires the vision of a just peace. This is threatening because a just peace would involve returning the occupied lands to the Palestinians. The vision of any return of what has been falsely presented by all Israeli governments as ‘safety zones’ is saturated with fears because it is seen as the end of the Jewish State. Another major threatening issue is the Palestinian Right of Return.

Avoiding both past and future, Israelis in the present psycho-political dynamic reduce their historical vision to zero.

Reducing the historical perspective goes hand in hand with reduced thinking in general and critical thinking particularly. Avoidance of historical perception obliterates the potential for insight, and results in a state of mental catatonia in public political discourse: No voices of political opposition are currently heard. Refusing to look into the past is refusing to take responsibility for one’s actions in the past. In the same way, the incapability of having a vision of the future amounts to refusing to take responsibility for one’s actions in the present.

### **Splitting**

In Kleinian psychoanalysis, splitting is “the most primitive of all defense mechanisms, in which instinctual objects that evoke ambivalence and therefore

anxiety are dealt with by compartmentalizing positive and negative emotions, leading to images of self and others that are not integrated” (Colman p. 700). The Israeli world-view is sharply divided into us Israelis--right and just--and them Palestinians--wrong and evil. This is an infantile dichotomy from a developmental perspective.

Splitting means that large parts of reality can remain unseen. The suffering of the Palestinians can be ignored, since it is attributed to their evil nature. This makes any public discussion of the situation superfluous. Those who oppose the long occupation and war against the Palestinians are thus cast out.

Leading Israeli figures keep saying that the IDF is the purest and most ethical army in the world, while the Palestinians are seen as a bunch of murderous liars and terrorists. This distorted binary inner reality of good and bad disables a coherent perception of reality. Anything inconsistent with the distorted reality cannot be perceived.

Above all, splitting is necessary in order to maintain Israeli basic assumptions that we are good, just, righteous, victims and always united.

### **A self image of victim**

The self image of victim is, in this context, both negative and positive. On the negative side, a victim is helpless, powerless and unfortunate. On the positive side the victim is by definition free of responsibility and blame; perceiving oneself as victim can serve as a justification for wrongdoing.

Israelis have held on to their own historical victim status long past its salient historical time. The state of Israel is the strongest military power in the Middle East, and possesses nuclear capacities, the mightiest air-force, and many other sophisticated weapons. Israel occupies Palestine and controls the lives of Palestinians, their natural resources, economy and movements. In spite of all this Israelis maintain that they are the Palestinians’ victims.

I see this psycho-dynamic in individuals in therapy: Seeing oneself as a victim, a person feels entitled to be mean, cruel, and unjust, deriving his/her energy from fear, anger and hate, and creating similar feelings in his/her partner. A vicious cycle is set in motion. Death and destruction caused by Palestinians serve to fuel these feelings.

### **Increased aggression and violence within Israeli society**

Socialization limits and restrains aggression, directing people toward respecting the lives, dignity and property of others. Society ascertains these goals by exacting a high price for behaviors which violate these values.

In Israel today the lives of others are held cheap. Compassion, tolerance, and respect for others are lacking by large. There is no universal standard to the value of human life: The lives of Jewish Israelis are considered more valuable than those of Palestinian Israeli citizens, or of migrant workers and sex workers. Palestinians from the Occupied Territory are at the bottom of the price scale: their land confiscated freely, their houses demolished by the thousands and their lives extinguished through indiscriminate murders and killings. Palestinians' dignity is shattered on a daily basis at army checkpoints placed at every village, town and city. The settlers in the West Bank are doing the same and are protected by the Israeli army and the police.

One might think about a connection between those facts and the current sharp increase in violence inside Israel.

Throughout the past few years Israel has consistently held the first place in the western world in juvenile violence. Moreover, according to Haaretz journalist Vered Levi-Barzilai (Haaretz, November 7, 2003), "In the past two or three years dozens of cases of murder or serious violence as a result of minor arguments have accumulated. Attackers and victims vary in age and social background. They have no typical characteristics except one: they are all men."

A clear indicator of the mounting violence is its rate toward women. The number of women murdered by family members has more than doubled over the past few years and the number of rapes has increased. The scale of organized crime in the form of murder, “protection” and trafficking in women has risen to a level previously unknown in Israel.

An army can be seen as the bank in which citizens of a nation deposit a portion of their aggression in the belief that it will be managed wisely for the protection of the group. In the case of Israel, the army has unwisely refunded too much of the use of this aggression to the depositors. Other parts of the Israeli system, such as the government and the Supreme Court, do not do their part in supervising and controlling the use of aggression. No wonder, then, that aggression rules--not only in the Occupied Territory but also within Israel--in the family, on the street and everywhere.

### **Psychological trauma**

When confidence in certainty is broken in a state of crisis, psychological trauma appears, expressed in disorientation, anxiety and fear. Other symptoms might be an obsessive need for information expressed in, for example, listening to the news constantly. There might be excessive worry and fears, dysphoria or depression, rages and rampages, loss of confidence in oneself and of trust in others, intolerance, blaming others, and turning to mysticism, to religion, and to extreme political and social ideologies.

All of these symptoms describe psychological patterns currently prevalent in Israeli society.

### **The prevalence of hate**

This state of psychological trauma might be translated into hatred and aggression, and/or into withdrawal and despair. Hate is the inverted libido energy of love. It can serve the ego as a source of energy, and might turn into an

addiction. Hate nourishes angry feelings and actions. Hate and anger will usually serve the ego with a sense of righteousness, efficacy and self-preservation. As in many addictions, reality testing is very poor or even absent. For the sake of a sense of wellbeing and self-preservation, a person or a collective ridden with hate are capable of destroying the environment, the other, but also themselves.

Israeli self hatred arose out of the Jewish experience of being victims before and during the Second World War. The hatred of Israeli Zionists toward the image and the reality of Jews as victims were agonizing so profoundly and extensively that it could not be contained. It was therefore projected onto the Palestinian Other. The more the Palestinians' misery and passivity increased over the years, the more they became for Israelis the proper object for the displaced feelings of contempt and hatred. Being so close, both within the borders of Israel and across the Green Line, they served as a perfectly convenient repository for hatred.

The Palestinians were on the one hand derided and hated for their weakness, on the other hand, the Jewish experience of the Nazis as a horrendous enemy was preserved and the Palestinians were seen, in mythical extension of the Nazis as an overpowering enemy. Hatred of the Palestinians thus serves an emotionally existential need of Jewish collective and Israeli Zionist society.

The depersonalizing of Palestinians as faceless enemies and the labeling of all Palestinians as terrorists are mechanisms which sustain hate. The projection of hatred onto the Palestinians enables the preservation of the self-righteous Israeli Zionist self-image as morally pure, and serves as a cohesive force in Jewish Israeli society. Perceiving the Palestinians as a hated and mighty enemy (in spite of their evident weakness) provides Israelis with the sense that their energies are invested in self-preservation.

Hate towards the Palestinians functions as the outlet of the Israeli Jewish fear of inner fragmentation: The price paid for inner peace is avoiding peace with the Palestinians.

### **Antisocial behavior and the policy of Separation**

“Antisocial personality disorder is characterized by a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others...manifested by repeated unlawful behavior ...irritability and aggressiveness involving frequent assaults or fights...and lack of remorse for the mistreatment of others...”  
(Colman, P.45).

In reaction to the second Intifada, Israel has attempted to deal with its psychological trauma through the supposedly magical tactic of ‘separation’ from the Palestinians. This tactic is being applied one-sidedly, with brutal force, without regard for the Palestinians’ needs and without consulting them. The new forms of ‘separation with control’ allow hatred to flourish. When viable human contacts are prevented, dehumanizing and demonizing of the Palestinians can prevail. The benefits of the previous period of contact, which allowed for some mutual human awareness and dialogue with the other side through commerce, labor, tourism, and human rights activity, have become a distant memory.

Today’s most extreme manifestation of the Israeli government’s policy is the multi-million dollar project of the “Separation Wall” currently under construction deep within the Palestinian territory. As this monstrous barrier surrounds whole cities and groups of villages, isolating and dividing them, indifference to Palestinian suffering is the rule.

A lack of remorse for the mistreatment of others is characteristic of antisocial personality disorder. The more this mistreatment is extreme, the more remarkable is the lack of remorse for it. For example, in the process of assassinating Salah Shehadeh in Gaza without due process, the Israeli Air-

force deployed a massive bomb which killed 15 innocent victims (A. Harel, Haaretz. November 11, 2003). The Air Force Commander in Chief Dan Chalutz reply to criticism for this action was that in his view the attack was justified and does not prevent him from sleeping well at night.

### **In conclusion: The trauma of peace**

In early 1982, I analyzed the psycho-political condition of the Israeli-Zionist society under the title 'The trauma of peace', saying that the severe fragmentation of Israeli society into various sectors which took place at the time, required a war as a tool for inner cohesion, a remedy for social disintegration. The impending peace with Lebanon in the north following the peace treaty signed with Egypt in the south, brought up an inner threat of fragmentation and disintegration to the degree of psychological trauma. I predicted a war that would 'save' Israel from the trauma of the peace.

Now, more than ever, Israeli society is in need of an enemy, which would let it continue avoiding its internal conflicts and fragmentation. An enemy can solve the problem of Israel's need to create and maintain its own cohesiveness and inner borders. Only an external enemy will provide the necessary glue to overcome the internal hatred between secular and orthodox, between Jewish settlers in the Occupied Territory and the Zionist left, between the haves and the haves not and the different ethnic groups. It might also keep Israeli Palestinians from demanding their share in the collective cake.

I am afraid that only a huge shock can bring about a change in Israeli public opinion and in its policy-makers. Israelis might then invest in a just peace with the Palestinians instead of justifying the occupation and investing in it so much of their resources and their health of mind and soul.