AVRAHAM BURG in conversation with OMER BARTOV

The Holocaust Is Over: We Must Rise From Its Ashes

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LIVE from the New York Public Library

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PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Good evening. My name is Paul Holdengräber and I'm the Director of Public Programs at the New York Public Library, now known as LIVE from the New York Public Library. Tonight it is my pleasure to present to you Avraham Burg in conversation or debating Omer Bartov.

A few announcements and some thank-yous, as well. 192 Books is as always with us tonight—the fabulous independent bookstore. After the discussions, Avraham Burg will sign his new

book, *The Holocaust Is Over*. We also will have Omer Bartov's book *Hitler's Army*, which I'm sure he will be happy to sign as well. So thank you very much, 192 Books. Thank you also to *Metro*. They are our media sponsor. Wonderful to have our events announced boldly in their pages. I would also like to thank our wine sponsor, Oriel. Please consider joining the Library; become a Friend. In these times of economic crisis, the Library needs you more than ever. Certainly LIVE does. For just forty dollars, you can become a Friend of the New York Public Library. If you ask me, that's a fairly cheap date, so please consider joining tonight.

LIVE is thrilled to announce that the discussion does not end when this program ends in about a hundred and fifty-one minutes. We are now partnering with WNYC's Culture blog to continue the conversation online. So please visit WNYC.org tomorrow and leave any comments. The Burg/Bartov debate will be posted tomorrow on WNYC. Audience members can thus ask questions they may not have a chance to ask tonight. Thank you very much for posting your questions tomorrow. Speaking of questions, you will find cards on which to write your brilliant questions tonight. At the end of the conversation I will come and have some selected, and I will read a few legible and intelligible ones for our speakers to address. So write clearly, concisely, with insight and, of course, panache.

As you know, our tagline, our motto is no longer making the lions roar, but it is Expect Wasabi and what wasabi are you still expected to expect this season? Well, the season is winding down. On Friday we have Zadie Smith delivering the Robert Silvers Lecture, entitled "Speaking in Tongues," and on Tuesday December 9 our grand finale with conductor and pianist Daniel Barenboim, who I will have the pleasure of interviewing. He will be speaking, as will Avraham

Burg and Omer Bartov, about Israel and Palestine but he also will be speaking about the power of music and the importance of silence and listening. So do join our e-mail list to hear about these events and the events in the future in the spring when we pick up again sometime in February.

And now it is my pleasure to have here the former speaker of the Knesset, Avraham Burg, author of *The Holocaust Is Over: We Must Rise from Its Ashes*, and Omer Bartov, a preeminent historian at Brown University. Among his books are *Hitler's Army*, *The Jew in Cinema*. He is currently a history of Buczacz, in Eastern Galicia. I hope this will be a spirited conversation and debate. Thank you very much.

(applause)

OMER BARTOV: Thank you. Good evening. It has been—or it will be my role to conduct a conversation this evening in this forum that I've never been to before. We'll call this the B & B Conversation, Bartov/Burg, and I'm hoping that we will be able to have an open discussion of some issues regarding both Avrum Burg's new book and issues related to that. I believe that we will probably have several disagreements regarding the conclusions of the book and assertions made in the book, but I know already from having sat and spoken with Avrum Burg that we have also a great deal in common.

There will be an underlying theme to a number of questions that I will raise here and so maybe I will give it right away, and then I'll raise a few issues that hopefully we can debate and develop.

The underlying theme, as I was reading the book, was the following: That my sense that there is a fundamental issue at hand that the book may be skirting. Though the book is dealing with several important issues that have to do with Israel's existence, identity, relationship with the rest of the world, relationship with Jewry outside of Israel and yet there is a fundamental issue that the book does not confront, and that is the issue of the confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians, and I was curious as to why that is the case. Why does the author not actually talk about what to my mind is at the core of the problem of Israeli existence, Israel's relationship with itself, with its neighbors, with issues of citizenship, with the law of return, and of course Israel's relationship with the rest of the world and its somewhat abnormal condition. So that's the underlying issue, and I hope that we will get to it, but I don't want to start with it because I feel that it will take us on the wrong track.

So let me start with something that may eventually lead to that and the issue is this: Burg is obviously very critical of Zionism both as a movement and maybe even more so as it was implemented in reality in Israel over many years. So both of Jewish nationalism as a notion and of Zionism as a political movement and its implementation in Israel. And what I'm wondering is—and it will lead I think to other questions—is are you critical of nationalism as a phenomenon and as something you would like to see done away with or changed into something else, or do you have a particular view of Jewish nationalism and Zionism quite independently of nationalism as a political ideology?

AVRAHAM BURG: Can we skip to the next question, please? **(laughter)** Good evening. **(laughter)** I know usually when I think about the issue of Zionism, which is a very loaded

issue—you just say the word, immediately the room is divided pro and against and post and pre and anti and etcetera, I ask myself and I ask you, who is a Zionist? Is a Zionist the one born to a Zionist mother? **(laughter)** I mean, it's very difficult. You put a terminology—a term on the table as if there is one definition for it and from now and on we have to discuss it objectively while I'm not at all sure we're having the same definition all the participants in the discussion are having the same definition. So I'd like first to introduce a definition of what Zionism is for me and where am I and where do I think it should go and then I'll try to address the other part, which is nationalism particular or general.

For me, Zionism was the scaffolding, using Ben-Gurion terminology, the scaffolding that was supposed to help the Jewish people to rebuild, to restruct itself from an exilic reality into sovereignty and the structure went on and on and on and on and now a hundred and fifty or a hundred and some years later, when you look around the Jewish existential reality, you realize that actually the Jewish people built two structures. One is the semiautonomous American Jewry, which was not here a hundred and fifty years ago, with powerful influence, access to the corridors of power, impact on the culture and civilization and so other dimensions of local life here, plus the infrastructure of the community of solidarity and fraternity and support system and education, etcetera, and the sovereignty over there in the Middle East, and I ask myself, for a people, maybe the only people in modern history, who succeeded to rebuild itself twice and we have two beautiful structures. Isn't it about time to remove the scaffolding and look at the beauty of the building and the beauty of the structure? And my answer is "yes," and for me Zionism is a chapter, a glorious chapter in my past, but not the *only* chapter. It was written, it's a launching pad, it's a starting point. It's about time to move forward. What is the forward? What is the next

Knesset landscape? What is the coming narrative? It's to be discussed, but we have to move forward.

And when I ask myself, "So what is—what is—what is your identity, what it is built off, what are the materials, what are the ingredients of your very self, I would say, "My family name is that I am a human being. I belong to the family of people, to the family of human, to the family of nations, I'm as human being as the rest of them. My middle name is I'm Jewish and my given—my first name is I'm an Israeli." I do not need a fourth definition to define me unless I need it to discriminate an element within the Israeli society in such a way that it looks ideological rather than ugly.

Having said that, the issue of Jewish nationalism, like the issue of nationalism in general, is a challenging issue and for me the question is not yet solved. Ever since the [unintelligible]. I believe there is a role for the Jewish people in the family of nations and every nation and every state and every society and every culture and every civilization is having a role in this huge orchestra we call the family of nations but when it is in the last sixty years expressed through overnationalism, compromising the very elementary foundations of what Judaism is all about, which is humanity, universalism, compassion, etcetera, this is a deal I want to reexamine. It is not a deal I buy, you know, at face value.

OMER BARTOV: Let me know try to phrase this is a bit differently.

AVRAHAM BURG: Listen, I was in the business of not answering questions for twenty-five years. **(laughter)** I mean, you won't find any better tonight, okay, so— **(laughter)**

OMER BARTOV: I will try again. But I will put it a bit differently. There is a certain contradiction—I think a rather major contradiction—within your argument, and it's reflected also in what you were saying now and it appears in many places in the book and I'm of course curious are you aware of it and if you are what do you think about that contradiction? And the contradiction is this: on the one hand, you strive to provide some, some keys, some ideas, as to how to normalize Israeli society. You feel that there is something not right about Israeli society and one of them of course is that it's compulsively, you argue, involved with the Holocaust and it cannot—it needs to liberate itself from the Holocaust so as to look at the world with different eyes, and that's an argument that we can have. It's curious to some extent, because of course as you know Zionism itself as a political movement argued that it was created to normalize Jewish existence. Jewish existence in the Holocaust was sick and degenerate and if the Jews went to Palestine and started their own state then they would be normal. And so you are, to some extent, using terminology from an ideology that you have problems with, only putting it differently. You want to normalize what some argue had been normalized already and you want to normalize it back to some extent to what it was. So this is an argument on normality.

But that's only part of the question. The other side is the way you ended your previous statement and that's the following: that you do have a view of the Jewish people as something that is almost immemorial, that goes back to biblical times, that goes back to the Talmud, that you feel yourself, I believe, closely tied to, and that has a role to play in the world. This is a people that

has a mission. This is a people that is different from the other nations. Indeed, it is a people, as you say in various places that ought to ask as a light unto the nations *ke-or la-goyim*. And so how do you normalize the existence of a people by telling it that it is not normal at all, that is different, and that in fact it is elevated, and the only problem with it is that it created a state that brings it down, that makes it into what it should not have ever been.

AVRAHAM BURG: That's one question?

OMER BARTOV: That's the first question.

(laughter)

AVRAHAM BURG: Okay. Whew. First about the language I'm using or the building blocks of my arguments—I apologize, but I'm not coming from the pure academic place in which I have to measure correctly and scientifically every, every terminology I use, in everyday language. I'm a simple man. Okay, so I speak the language people speak and I use the materials that I have on my table or I have in my backyard or wherever it is and I try to take the language plus the baggage of the language to the places where it came from and where it should go to. And therefore if there are contradictions, there are contradictions into me, it's not about the lingual dimension of it, it's about things that are torturing me.

And the book is somehow a kind of a journey, I begin it in a very sad place in which I feel that "wow, we are so obsessed with, so occupied with, so tortured by the memories, so traumatized

by the memories, that maybe we will never go out of it." I mean, I have a couple of friends, one of them, or a few of them, two of them, were abused, female friends who were abused. One of them will never go out of the trauma, will never go out of this awful experience of hers and I ask myself "maybe nations as a collective traumatized entity cannot go out of traumas as well" and that was the beginning of the journey.

Only later on, and maybe we'll come to that and maybe not, later on the journey took me to different places, so using the terminology is fine with me, because this is what I have, this is what I hear. When you listen for example to the current rhetorics in Israel, they ask Benjamin Netanyahu, "What do you say about Ahmadinejad?" So Mr. Netanyahu is the king of bottom lines, I mean he is the master of one-liners, okay, is saying, "Ah! It's 1938 all over again," as if in 1938 we had the most powerful army in the region, as if in 1938 we had the most important Western superpowers to support us with a safety net, as if in 1938 we had the Catholic Church changing its dogma with the Nostra Aetate which is a different attitude toward the Jews and as if and as if and as if Ahmadinejad is Hitler. I mean, you do some, I mean it's Hitler on sale, **(laughter)** I mean, I mean what is it? What is it? Why do you use it? Why do you cheapen the memory to such a level? And under this is where I begin my restructuring of the conversation.

But then the question of chosenness of the Jewish people, what does that mean? For me, being unique does not necessarily mean I'm arrogant or superior or there is any kind of Jewish supremacy. On the contrary, like every individual has a role, so some collectives having a role as well. And I see a role for my people like I see a role for some other nations and some other

people. Can you really understand Western civilization today without the last two thousand years—two hundred years of the American Revolution and its contribution to world democracy and world liberties? No, you cannot! Can you really understand the contemporary Western conversation without the intellectual, moral investment of George W. Bush to its conversation? No you cannot! I mean every nation has something to say. So do I. And I'm—in that sense, if you will accuse me and say "Avraham, you are a utopian." I would say, "Yes I am, I am a utopian." And when I try to look backwards to understand my own history and my late father, who was a very, very smart man, wise and warm but very smart and used to say "history is the politics of the past and politics is the history of the future" and in between politics and history I am trying to realize who I am.

So I look backwards and I see there was not even one era in my history that my people did not function and did not answer to a kind of a higher call. At the depths of slavery in Egypt after hundreds of years of slavery, no rescue, no light, no opening, all of a sudden there is a call, "let my people go," which echoes up until today. That was a higher call. A couple of months later, which is a couple of stories later in the Bible, where at Sinai, it's a Sinai covenant and all of a sudden it's the first ever, at least in the Western civilization, men made or human-made constitution organizing the relations between people and people—what is mine, what is yours, what is allowed, what is not allowed, etcetera, etcetera, and when you read the prophets, and their moral higher codes, it's unbelievable, it can go on and on and on and on.

I never believed—that's not the way I was brought up by my parents—but that Jews survive in order to survive, that Jews exist in order to exist, the Jews continue in order to continue. Every

cat can survive in order to survive—so what if it's a circumcised cat? **(laughter)** This is not an issue! The issue is that here you have, here you have, a part of humanity which has a very unique voice, a very unique sound, and if I do not use it correctly, there is no reason for existence, at least not for me as a Jew, yes as a human being, but not as a Jew, and this is exactly the kind of utopian contribution I would like to add to the world and for me the role of my generation is to tell my kids, "Listen, you will be the first generation ever in which there will be a generation that no living witness will be alive."

It's a drama. It's the first time. How do we shape the ability of this generation to remember, to sanctify, to continue? How do we take them from trauma to trust? Do we clone—do we copy paste or cut paste the previous experiences and tell them keep it—repeat it again and again and again and again and live into this trauma or should you become something else? And I'll tell you what it is this something else. This something else means that "never again" is not "never again" for Jews only, and therefore we should have the thickest walls around ourselves and the deepest shelters wherever possible. For me "never again" is "never again to anybody who needs it" and if there is a victim somewhere there in Darfur or somewhere there in the suburbs or I don't know where and he or she needs the help of the yesterday's victim, that's my role.

OMER BARTOV: So you see, I mean, my problem with this is the following: we come from the same generation and we are both trying to understand our relationship to a past that ended before we were born and how we bring up our children with everything that we have taken from that into a world that we still don't quite know, a world that is changing all the time. And my question with this is the following: You are a utopian, clearly you are, and what you are saying

now is utopian and much of it is very moving, but utopian ideas, utopian ideologies, as we know looking at the century that troubles us all, do not always lead us to the heights of morality, to great ethics, they have led us in all kinds of ways. There was a morality of Nazis, too, of course. There is a morality of Islamists, there is a morality of Jewish fundamentalists. People have their own sense of moral calls and of utopia, and utopian ideologies in general have not taken us to good places, not in the last century.

What troubles me is that—as you mentioned Darfur, now, and it appears in the book and several other cases of genocide, crimes against humanity, that have occurred since these great words were written everywhere in Europe in 1945—never again, nie wieder, jamais plus everyone was saying it won't happen again and it did happen again. Of course it didn't happen again because the Jews in Israel were not trying to prevent it. There were other reasons why it happened again. And the six hundred thousand people who were living in Palestine in 1945 didn't have much to do with it happening again. But it happened again, clearly.

But if you were to do what you advocate someplace in the book, that is to invite the ICC, the International Criminal Court, to be established in Jerusalem on international territory, you know and I know that the first country to be indicted in front of the International Criminal Court would be Israel. Because you come from the country, you were the speaker of the Knesset, you were head of the Jewish Agency, you know that Israel right now is in defiance of international law. So we can talk about it would be great for us to—why don't we do something about Darfur? We don't need to do something about Darfur in Israel. In Israel one can start at home, there is a great deal to do there.

And your book doesn't talk about that. It talks about international morality, it talks about the role of the Jews. The Jews, whether we like it or not, have a state now. We have to say that in 1948, in 1945 there were six hundred thousand people living in that state. The population of that state has gone up by a factor of ten, right? That's not bad. It is industrialized, it is technologically developed, it has absorbed huge numbers of people. For better or worse, it has done quite well for itself in modernizing itself, right? But it is also in breach of international law. It is occupying land that does not belong to it, and it treats the people it occupies abysmally. And it has been doing it for a long time, including the entire time, Avraham, that you were in politics, all that time. And to come and say we need to—"why doesn't Israel play now a moral role in the world?—sounds to me not appropriate. I think it would be wonderful if it did that but one needs to start at home.

What is the saying *"tol korah mi-ben enekha"* "Take a beam from your own eye and not a toothpick from your opponent's teeth," and this somehow does not come there and I have to say that I became increasingly troubled when I was reading that because it was utopian not only in the sense of wanting to create a better world, which most of us would like to, certainly for our children, but it was utopian in that it was not facing reality, it was not speaking about the actual problem. I would ask you this: I would ask you is it possible that it's not the fact that Israel is obsessed with the Holocaust that has made it so difficult for Israeli society to be normal—it is Israel's continuing inability, for a variety of reasons, to confront its own political problems—the fact that it has become an occupier—that makes it flee to the Holocaust as a legitimizer and that if it were able to deal with its own problems, its own specific political problems, not utopias, not

to improve the lot of humanity, just to improve the people who are ten miles away from where you live.

If it were to do that, then maybe people would have less of a need to talk about the Holocaust and to talk about Ahmadinejad as Hitler rather than to say, "Well, he's a kind of dangerous guy who has nuclear weapons, potentially." That to me sounds like a more realistic way of dealing with indeed crucial issues of an identity of a society that is struggling with it.

AVRAHAM BURG: That was the answer, let me ask you the question, okay? **(laughter)** Assuming Israel is everything you describe, and I buy into some of it, okay, without utopia, without a higher call, without anything, that's the reality, the criminal court of nations, whatever it is, we are all war crimes, we are all this, and what do you do about it, what do you suggest, what we should do realistically?

OMER BARTOV: Well, this is what I was looking for in your book.

AVRAHAM BURG: Listen, they said it is a conversation, they said it was a conversation, so I converse with you.

OMER BARTOV: I'll write about it in my book.

(laughter)

AVRAHAM BURG: So tell them.

OMER BARTOV: I could give a preview.

AVRAHAM BURG: I'm here for you, I'll promote your book.

OMER BARTOV: It is really, it is really an issue that people are trying to grapple with. It is obviously not a simple issue to resolve. If it were, then we might have had some resolution to it, and some of what you say, such as that clearly without—if we're going to politics now—without a strong American involvement in enforcing a settlement in the Middle East, this will not happen and that this should also come through pressures from the domestic American Jewish community on the American administration would be much more forceful in forcing both Israel and the Palestinians to reach a deal, for which the parameters are very simple and known to everyone. There's not much there to talk about, there's just no one who can implement it. So we know that.

The problem is why is it not happening? And one reason that it is not happening is this kind of utopian thinking. That is, to my mind, it's the escape from reality, the escape from looking into what is actually happening in your home, and thinking either in catastrophic terms as you described well, or in utopian terms, which are the terms that you use positively. And I think that neither of them leads you anywhere particularly good. And to my mind, my reading of the twentieth century, including the fate of the Jews, but not only the fate of the Jews, in fact every genocide that you can think about, had a utopian agenda, every one.

That kind of utopian thinking has precisely the ingredients that lead to more disasters, to more oppression, to more destruction of human beings, and what I was hoping at some point was that you would sit back and say, "I was involved in Israeli politics for all these years. I grew up in a political home." You saw the transformation of your father's party from the national religious party, the moderate religious party to a party that was the greenhouse of those people that you now condemn, of Gush-Emunim**,** of the new pioneers, of the people who are the core of the oppression that Israel has established in the West Bank. So to take from that something and to say, "well, how do we face our reality?"

AVRAHAM BURG: Let's just make a short list of what I'm indicted for, okay? Occupation is me, utopia is me, the bloodshed of the twentieth century is me, my father's party is me. Okay, yeah, okay, let's see what we do about it, okay? Since I agree with most of your working assumptions and your conclusions, so let's argue.

OMER BARTOV: You should never argue with people who disagree with you.

AVRAHAM BURG: Oh, come on, come on.

OMER BARTOV: That's a joke.

AVRAHAM BURG: I love polemics, I believe you know deep inside I believe that if there is a God, God created the world with polemics, because if I agree with you and you agree with me and we all agree with them it's such a boring world, **(laughter)** nothing, but if we disagree and

we sharpen the disagreements, kind of an Hegelian baby comes out of it, there is an offspring of something coming out of this disagreement and I think polemics is very important. One other thing which is, I don't know if we'll have time to discuss it tonight, that happens both in the Jewish world and in the Israeli world, is that there is actually no serious discussion. It is such closed reality and it is very difficult to challenge it.

Let's go first for bloodshed, okay? Utopian bloodshed—it's an issue, I mean, it's an idea for a book, but I have a feeling that all during history that a lot of blood was shed on behalf of God and a lot of it on behalf of men, and most of it on behalf of indifference, okay. I've no problem with utopia, and I have no problem with many ideas and ideologies as long as people who are supposed to be the guardians, the checks and balances, of the reality, are not indifferent people. You mentioned the twentieth century—more than a hundred and sixty-five million people were killed in the twentieth century in genocides and Holocaust and massacres and crimes against humanity and crimes against peace. Most of the world was at best indifferent.

So if you ask me what do I prefer to be indifferent, to simply do not care, or having a alternative idea, a positive utopia rather than a dangerous one, I go for my positive one, and I'll come back to that point in a second. One of the reasons you—and you came back time and again and time and again till I was persuaded I am not in politics anymore. I left politics because for many, many years I was an okay politician, okay. I know the technique, I know my way around, I knew how to get reelected, okay? Never mind about what I did, but every four years I was reelected, okay? And I realized—after a long time in politics, I realized that there was a closing on me, and I didn't know exactly what is it. But what eventually I discovered that for me Israel, the Israel I

saw through the prism of politics, became a very efficient kingdom with no prophecy. We decide, we do, we go, we exercise, we maneuver, we come and go—everything works, somehow. Well, where the heck are we going? Nobody has a clue, "this way, that way, the other way, no idea," and it troubled me so much so I decided I cannot operate in a reality in which I've got no compass, I've got no direction, I don't know where I'll go, so I wanted to withdraw and to think—the only way I know how to think is by writing.

Now, in Israel, you have to realize, maybe not you have to realize, but us have to realize, that Israel does not have a kind of a political thinking. I mean, you have academia, which is Martian brains, I mean, up there I don't know where is it, and you have politics, which is no brainer at all. And in between there is an abyss, there is *gornisht* there is nothing. I mean, you do not have the *New Yorker*, and *Tikkun* and *The New Republic* and *The Nation* and this and that, you don't have it, not even *Vanity Fair*. **(laughter)** I mean, you don't have it. There is no place in which you can develop something which is between politics and philosophy which is political thinking. There are hardly any think tanks in Israel. There are many tanks but not very much of thinking, okay? **(laughter)**

And I've tried to address the issue, and you ask me why didn't you write about the conflict. I apologize but that was my previous book, not yet published, but I will recommend it, okay. I wrote a book called *God Is Back*, it's not an autobiography, it's about the religious dimension of world conflict and Israeli conflict in which I argue that the religious dimension of our reality is a microcosm of the world and the world is a macrocosm of Israel. You want to understand us, look at the world. You want to understand the world, look at us. And there I dedicated a lot of time to

the conflict and its other dimensions. But, I mean, it looks—for me it sounded stupid to repeat in every book the previous book, so why having a new book, so that's just the second chapter, so to say. But having said that, I'm not at all sure, having said that, I do not want to address, I do not want to address the latent hidden accusation of yours that Israel is a nation of war criminals—

OMER BARTOV: No, I didn't say that.

AVRAHAM BURG: So it's just my—I mean, my English is not that good, I apologize, okay?

OMER BARTOV: I will rephrase it in a moment.

AVRAHAM BURG: I don't want to address it here because I think it takes us to a different place, okay, but the issue of the occupation is an issue. I for many, many years, I was an activist in each and every possible peace movement in Israel ever, since I was born, okay? I'm a peacenik, I'm a Communist, I'm a no-goodnik, I'm a lefty—you name it, I'm all of the above. And for years I was sure that the primary sin is the occupation. Once we get rid of the occupation, it's a panacea, it is it, and then I realized that the reason we do not put an end to the occupation because there is something much more primal, much more earlier than the occupation itself, and this is the trauma.

Whenever they kill us, and it's always they and they always kill us, it is one victim plus six million plus two thousand years of persecution. It is never just this one simple victim. I was when I—by the end of the book I want to Berlin with my youngest son Noam. He's the only one

I succeeded to persuade not to go to the annual trip to Auschwitz. The only one I succeeded. So we went in the footsteps of my father. We went to Dresden, and Leipzig and Berlin and we were exposed to different, to different conversation between us and Europe and us and the Holocaust and us and the generation of my father. And then by the last day we flew in a charter flight so of course we got a call "Mr. Burg the flight is delayed by twenty-four hours." Okay, what do you do twenty-four hours, no checklists, no libraries, no memorials, no tombstones, no cemeteries, no museums—nothing. I mean, we did it all, so what do we do. I asked Noam, "what do you say, what we should do?" "Let's go to the zoo."

I haven't been to the zoo in I don't know a hundred years. So we go to the zoo, after two minutes I got the idea, for me all the animals are something like dogs—big dogs, small dogs, high dogs, little dogs, but Noam he is an expert. So I said listen, I will sit here and you go around. And I was sitting in front of the cage of the monkeys, okay. And there are many monkeys going up and going down and going up and going down, you know how the monkeys are going this way and that way, and there is a monkey sitting there in the corner immobile, sitting like this, very sad, looks very Jewish, **(laughter)** and I look at the monkey and the monkey looks at me and I look at him and we have a kind of a conversation and he doesn't move. So there was this German supervisor who passed by and I said, "Excuse me, sir, why this monkey is not moving?" He said, "Listen, he is having a release phobia." And I said, "What is a release phobia?" So he said, "You see how they make a progress, all of them, they release a hand and they just take a risk and jump to the next branch and then they leave this one and they jump to the next one and that is how they make a progress, up and down and down and up, but this one, he has a release phobia, he doesn't dare to release the branch, so he cannot make any progress, he cannot climb up he cannot

come down." And he said a couple of times he went up and could not come down so they brought him down and he's sitting there like whenever he sits there—at that moment came Noam, and he said, "Daddy, there is a good ice cream there." So we ran for the ice cream and I forgot to ask the German supervisor, "Can you overcome the release phobia?" okay.

And I believe that if we will not address the earlier fundamental basic deepest trauma, recovery through end of occupation or through anything else will not help. And why do I come with such a powerful, maybe overemphasized, positive utopia? Why is it so? First, because I believe in it, but there is something else there. The twentieth century no doubt was a very secular century. I mean, all of these man-made utopias—Nazism, fascism, communism, socialism, capitalism, you name it. All of those tried to shape the world, to design a new human reality. They're all over. The number-one survivor of the twentieth century is God—he's the only one who survived it, but then I look at our reality and I asked myself, "What dictates—in a very malicious, manipulative, dangerous way, what dictates the Israeli direction in the last I don't know how many years?" This is the messianic utopia.

And each and every time in our history, messianism met and merged with Jewish politics it ended up in a tragedy, and I try to offer an alternative concept of Judaism, which is messiahless, which is human-based rather than redemption-based, which is around us people rather than about some dangerous ideas of redemptive messianism that would develop during Jewish history when it was a theory when you implement them, when we are the masters, they are so volatile, not for us but for the world entirely. And this is why I come up with this alternative utopia.

OMER BARTOV: You know, one thought that I had was maybe we should put at least part of the population of Israel in that zoo and see if the guardian could resolve their release phobia.

AVRAHAM BURG: Thank God you don't invite the German supervisor.

OMER BARTOV: No, with the German supervisor. That's exactly what I was thinking. **(laughter)** That would be interesting. You know, I'm having trouble even with the way you are presenting it now because there are two—and maybe I'm not getting it—but there are basically two levels. You know in the book you mention Hannah Arendt and very positively her writing on the Eichmann Trial and I mean again, I know, we were exposed to the Eichmann trial at the same time and probably also in a similar manner and I think a whole—I absolutely agree, a whole generation of Israelis were—

AVRAHAM BURG: Sixty percent of the Israelis who were fourteen and above at the time of the Eichmann trial were exposed to the trial through the radio broadcast.

OMER BARTOV: Yeah, and I have very distinct memories of sitting there on the balcony having supper and listening to the radio and everybody else was doing the same and listening to that and there was one channel and the channel was broadcasting that. But, you know, you mention Arendt very positively. Arendt wrote very strongly against utopian political thinking. I mean, her notion was that real politics is politics where people contest ideas, not when there is one idea that everybody conforms to, that you bring history to an end. What is utopia? What is utopia within an historical trajectory? It's where history ends. You come to a place where

everybody's happy. And once everybody's happy, there is no more politics, there is no more history, it's the end, it's Fukuyama. We are finished, that's it.

Now, that means of course, in utopian thinking, that in order to reach that great end, even a heavy price is well worth it because ultimately all of us, or at least all of us who get there, will benefit and we will no longer have any strife and in the way you speak about it, you speak both about your revulsion from the history of the twentieth century and the fact that Israel is obsessed with the Holocaust and at the same time what you're providing is a kind of recipe that is—it's not utopian in the sense that I think you mean, that it's maybe it's too good, it's too naïve. It's utopian in that that would put an end to everything. If we somehow realize what our mission, our mission as the Jewish people, is, and we've already assumed that there is "the Jewish people," that it has a continuous history from the beginning to the end, and that it has a mission, and all we need to do is recognize it. Once we recognize it, the world will be better, we will bring a tikkun to the world.

And I, frankly, am a bit terrified by that. That is the kind of thinking—the gap between that thinking and the thinking of the people in the hills in the West Bank to my mind is not great because it is not realistic thinking. It is thinking that is out of history, that is out of time, that is out of context. It is thinking that promises something that is obviously only in the mind or only in the heart or only someplace that is not in real life. You know, so in that sense and now I'm not—it's not a matter of, you know, criticizing something or other that you say in the book. It's a fundamental question. You know, there was an election here in the United States now.

AVRAHAM BURG: Really, I didn't know.

OMER BARTOV: And the president was elected, I think, I think, I may be wrong. But the president who was elected I think was elected primarily for one reason: that he appeared to people to both be a complete change from everything that happened before and at the same time to be pragmatic, to be realistic, not to speak in these high terms, despite all the attacks on him, that what he said was, "there are problems, there are issues that one has to face as they are," and if you speak about—what was the term—"spreading democracy," you know, then that's not politics, that's rhetoric, that's utopia. There was a joke in Israel that I'm sure you know after 9/11 that people said in Israel that before 9/11 there was a hope in Israel that Israel would start being like the rest of the world, and after 9/11 it turns out that the world was becoming like Israel.

So there is this and I have to add that we do live in a world—whether or not we agree with utopian thinking of one kind or another, we do live in a world in which there are actual real issues, actual real dangers. The fact that Ahmadinejad is not Hitler is obvious. The fact that a nuclear bomb in Iran is not such a great idea is also obvious. It's scary. It's not so good. The fact that you have Islamist fundamentalist terrorist groups that strike here and strike there is an issue. It's not something that a realization of Jewish mission in the world will change. There is utopian thinking by such people which our change will not necessarily make a difference to. They also have utopian thinking, they also believe that they will bring a better world for some people and that to me is something that we have to somehow interject in this conversation.

AVRAHAM BURG: You know, it's funny. You shout at me, "why you have utopia? Be pragmatic, be pragmatic," then you begin, "but we have this mission, this mission, this mission, and this mission," and not all of those are ours.

OMER BARTOV: It's not a mission, okay, I didn't say we have a mission.

AVRAHAM BURG: Not all of this checklist is my responsibility, okay, American administration as well.

Now, I'd like to try to organize some of the things you raise here. First, though I am not coming from the academia and I do not have the tools to analyze Hannah Arendt, so be it. I was impressed by her. I even dedicated my book to her and from the minute I read it, from the minute I know there are actually may be at least two if not three or four Hannah Arendts, okay. You speak about Hannah Arendt the anti-utopian which is mainly at *The Origins of Totalitarianism* where she argues, see what is done to us. I am not at all sure that Hannah Arendt of Heidegger is the same, but this is a different conversation, but Hannah Arendt of *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* which was a bestseller in the world— published in *The New Yorker* first as covering the trial and then a book—was not published in Israel up until thirty years, forty years after the trial. There she does not deal with utopia or not. There she deals with what is the role of Israel after the Holocaust and if you read correctly between her lines everywhere she goes along the direction, though maybe not as far as I want to go, about how could that trial become a symbol of light upon the nations? This is a utopian thinking by Arendt herself, somehow, right? So next time bring Arendt here and talk to her. It's not my fault, it's hers. **(laughter)**

But having said that, I would like to disagree with you on one thing and offer a kind of an apologetic interpretation to what is the content of my utopia. I was for so many years, so many years as you mentioned before I was born into it. I was part of the Israeli *takhles* mentality. You know what *is takhles*? *takhles* is something like bottom line. Okay, what's your bottom line. And we live in this *takhles* mentality, this bottom-line reality. Nobody reads all the lines before. Nobody reads books anymore, nobody reads pages anymore. Give me your bottom line, I'll give you my bottom line, let's agree or disagree and that's it. And the depth of the discussion disappeared, evaporated, is not there.

And I'm concerned about a state of Israel which is or is not going to bomb or to nuke Iran and is or is not going to expel people from the West Bank this or another, that it will be a bottom-line discussion, a pragmatic, realistic one, what is now, we have a problem at hand, let's do something about it and cut a new deal, and I say no, the issues are so complicated, we need a deeper thinking, we need some philosophical, moral dimension to the discussion, so missing from the Israeli equations. I don't know about America, okay, but I know about ours. So I tried to introduce—part of what I tried to do is to introduce some previous lines to the bottom line. You can agree, you can disagree, I invite you to offer your own previous lines, but for God's sake, let's write some lines.

And when I tried to answer myself, I mean, to defend myself from your attack. I mean, why I am such a bad guy having this naïveté, or trying to be a good man or a good person who likes to do good for the world, and I will not use the contemporary Jewish slogan of *tikun olam* —

everybody's repairing the world, it looks like a garage, **(laughter)** I mean, I won't use it, but I have something there. And if you ask me, "Okay Avraham, what is your utopia, where is it coming from?" I'll tell you a historic anecdote, but it is very meaningful for me. Here is Maimonides, of the twelfth, thirteenth century, living in Spain and he is being asked about—and he discusses a very theoretical discussion *hilkhot melakhim* Jewish kingdom. I mean it is after thousands of some years, twelve hundred years after the ruin and the destruction of the Second Temple, no kingdom, no statehood, nothing, I mean and he has volumes, pages and chapters one after the kingdom, this after the kingdom, death and I come first and you go second—beautiful theoretical discussion of about how the Jewish kingdom looks like and then in the last chapter it is *hilkhot melekh ha-mashiah* which is the concept of king messiah. And then there is an unbelievable line. Says Maimonides, and remember, he is living in Spain, which is conquered one time by the Christians and then again by the Muslims, it was the *conquista* and *reconquista* and never mind who conquers whom, on the way they kick the Jew. **(laughter)**

I mean he was the lowest, most humiliated element of this theological or faith conversation and when he is being asked about, "Okay, what's about us," his peers, his disciples, his supporters, his pupils, his children are asking him, "What about us, Rabbi, where are we going?" So he says, "There won't be a messiah, there won't be a redemption, *en be-yamenu eleh* but there is nothing between our very days which are the days of humiliation and oppression and occupation in Spain. Maimonides there is nothing between our very days and the days of messiah but oppressions of nations only in the sense that according to Maimonides's redemption messianic days and other days of Lubavitcher and other days of I don't know the evangelical Second Coming, the Armageddon of Bruce Willis or whatever it is. It is not that. Nothing will be

changed, no gold on the streets, just one thing—at this very day a nation will not oppress a nation. People will not occupy people. Humans will not abuse humans. Is that that bad to aspire for this situation?

This is where my struggle is coming from. From the power of this ancient Maimonides toward this end of the days, these messianic days I want to have peace. I'm ready for compromises. This is where I develop my compassion and my reconciliation. It's not just a theoretical, virtual bullshit—it is something that is so concrete because this is actually the energy which enables so many ideological, positive, humanistic movements to operate. So it is a utopia, but it is not only a utopia, it is a very pragmatic thing.

OMER BARTOV: I will vote for you.

(laughter)

AVRAHAM BURG: Now that I've retired, now you talk. **(laughter)** Just buy my book, okay?

OMER BARTOV: I got it for free.

AVRAHAM BURG: But it was the galley.

OMER BARTOV: I mean it's wonderful, you know, the wolf will dwell with the sheep or vice versa and it's not a political ideology, it is as you said it's a utopia and I think—

AVRAHAM BURG: Omer, I'm sorry to be an Israeli for you for a sentence and to interrupt you, okay. You spoke about Barack Obama. Everybody has his or her own Barack Obama, okay? Mine is "here comes a politician who understands democracy and the democratic process as a reality in which you must contain your opponents as well," and the fact that today he appointed the secretary of state a one who was his arch opponent—she was his problem in the campaign, not John McCain—is a message by itself. The fact that the White House will see again a president who is a dialogist rather than a cowboy, rather than a shooter, is a message to the world. So where is it coming from? It is coming exactly from these places.

OMER BARTOV: Let's not argue about that because that will take us—

AVRAHAM BURG: We had a different [unintelligible] in Obama but nonetheless.

OMER BARTOV: I want to just try to bring us to another level and then maybe we'll open up. There is as you know during the Oslo Accords, which was a moment of great hope for many people in Israel and outside of Israel. Certain things were spoken about openly in Israel I think for the first time. One thing was a term that you use in the book of course as well, that Israel will become a society of all its citizens, *hevrat kol ezraheha* which really means in Israelispeak that Israel will be a society in which Jews and non-Jews will have the same rights. It's like when we talk about race relations in America, it doesn't mean race relations, it means black and white. And in Israel *hevrat kol ezraheha* it really means that.

AVRAHAM BURG: It's a code.

OMER BARTOV: It's a code. And that's not about Palestinians who are under Israeli occupation, but Arabs or Christians who are Israeli citizens who do not get equal treatment although by law hypothetically they do. That was one issue that was raised. The second issue which was raised and you raise it also in the book, which is a really important one is the Israeli law of return. Now, there is a slight correction, I would say, in the sense that Israel is not the only country that has a law of return. There are least two more. Germany is one of them and the second is Turkey. And there's a reason why they have laws of return. They are historical reasons and they are not entirely dissimilar from the reason that Israel has a law of return. But that's beside the point.

What was interesting was that this was raised at the time of the Oslo Accords and that people could actually speak about it. It doesn't mean that they agreed, it doesn't mean that you could have abolished the law of return, but that people were willing to raise an issue that would have been taboo before that and then it disappeared, there is no discussion of that now in Israel, certainly not public discussion, there is no discussion of Israel as a society for its citizens, this is gone. And why am I raising this? Because I think that these are issues that indeed make Israel different. Not unique, because there are other countries like that, but different with a very clear goal that can be achieved. These are achievable goals, but there are conditions for that.

That is, these goals I believe cannot be achieved as long as Israel is in conflict with the people that it is occupying. You can't do that before that and the reason that there was such a

discussion—which also was a time that Hamas was very weak in Gaza and so forth—was that people had hope. When people had hope they were not thinking in messianic terms, they were not going to Hamas, and they were not speaking in Jewish messianic terms, they were doing the opposite. They were thinking, "now is the time that we can have a more normal society," and when that was taken away from them, they went back to the kind of thinking that is out there, that is not achievable in pragmatic terms, that is achievable only in the world of myth and mysticism.

And this is where I really wanted to try and articulate this again. How do you see that relationship between this kind of messianism, between this fanaticism, this kind of close-mindedness? Whether it is the Holocaust or not. I don't think it is only the Holocaust, but that's another issue but this obsession, this fear, this terror which obviously, this trauma, whichever it is called, what is the relationship between that and the fact that people do not see that they can move from one day to the next?

AVRAHAM BURG: Both sides. Both sides. Ours and theirs.

OMER BARTOV: Yes, of course it's on both sides. Of course it's on both sides. I mean, a conflict is between two sides and these two sides have become increasingly similar to each other. I mean, one of the ironies of this conflict is that both sides have drawn closer as they—as they find it increasingly difficult to compromise, they've become more and more like each other. And the Holocaust, by the way, has been integrated also into a Palestinian narrative. It's not only a Jewish problem now, it's also a Palestinian problem. They also have Treblinka and all that. So

yes, there is this kind of very strange meeting, and I'm trying to get you to think about that, because you do have certainly much more experience than I do and than most people sitting here, much more experience with real Israeli politics. How does one do that? And is there not—and frankly, I'm interested in that, this is not to attack you. Is there not a danger that when one speaks in these elevated terms and neglects those things like Oslo Accords, something where you speak precisely about maps, when you give people hope that they will have schools, that they will have markets, that they will have job opportunities, that you leave them behind, that you basically leave them in the hands of those people who will bring to them totally different utopias, not the ones that you are looking for.

AVRAHAM BURG: Fundamentally I do not believe that any discussion should be either/or: either you're a utopian or you're a pragmatist. I mean, discussion might be a kind of a New Age discussion—it's this and that—I mean you might have a big a idea and you have some small, I mean petty politics. I mean, there might be a time when we all need direction, okay, and it's a kind of a challenge but I fully agree with you that hope at the time replaced so many other things, and I do not want—since we didn't develop this evening toward the conflict—I'll say only one thing: there were many reasons why Oslo failed—ours and theirs and theirs and ours and the Americans and everybody might find somebody to blame.

Next time we will come to the table—and there will be a next time—I don't know how complicated it is, I don't know how much—what the price will be, but there will be a next time. My recommendation will be let's not begin with the real estate first, which was: "You take this piece of land, and I take this building, and the line will become this and the fence will be that

high." Let's begin addressing something else. Here you have two fearful, traumatized societies. Let's address fears and traumas. Let's understand what troubles them, what are they afraid from, what traumatized them, and try to help them to overcome it. Let's expose to them what troubles us and what are our fears, and let them help us, empowering us to overcome our own fears. Only when we shall help each other to overcome together the fears and the traumas, recovery, and then moving into the immediate, into the practical political realm, will be possible.

I hope that there will be there leaders who will be able to address this kind of fears and wounds. Like for example, like for example we discuss what is happening now in America. So many—I mean there is an expectation for a healing period, and we need a healing period before, right after the very long killing period we've had. Having said that, the law of return was discussed because of many reasons. And I really—I don't—it's for me, it is a subtitle for something else. What is it—it's a subtitle for two other things. First, in every discussion in the Knesset, although it is not the accurate history, at every discussion in the Knesset, when the law of return is raised, there is always the working assumption and the understanding that the law of return is the mirror of the Nuremberg Law. It is not exactly like that, but whomever Hitler wanted to kill, we are ready to save. The logic is something I do not buy here, the sense that here again defining the citizenship of my country, Hitler defines for me who is a Jew.

Deeper than this, sixty years after the Holocaust, I cannot buy, I do not want to buy that the only definition the state of Israel can define a Jew is by genetic—a Jew is a one born to a Jewish mother. I cannot buy it! For me, Judaism is not a set of genetics. For me, Judaism is a set of values. And when I put it on the Israel table a year and a half ago and you can imagine that not

all of them were as docile as you are and they had something to say about me and my mother's occupation and this and that. **(laughter)** I said "Listen, I understand, I understand your anger, I understand your emotion. Let me give you a Talmudic dilemma. And in a Talmudic dilemma, since it is a theoretical one, there are no deals, no half and half, no this and that, go for the dilemma. You walk down the river and two people are drowning in the river and you can save one only, no deals, one only, the Dalai Lama and the Rabbi Kahane. For whom you jump? For whom you jump?"

Yeah, he's still alive, okay, but the answer is a crystallizing answer, okay? If you, whatever you are you jump for the arch racist of our generation, Rabbi Kahane, it means that for you Judaism is genetic first. And if you jump for the Dalai Lama, at least theoretically, philosophically, morally, it means that for you Judaism is a set of values. And when I say this, I would like to take us to one more bus stop with your permission.

We define Israel as a Jewish democratic state. I mean, it sounds so good, I mean, it's two at the price of one, I mean, what's wrong with it, I mean, Jewish democratic state, it's great. Whenever I hear it, I'm so troubled I'm almost frightened by this definition. When you say democratic, it means that we are the source of authority of ourselves—you have a will and I have a will and she has a will and they have a will, and we together create our own collective will and we decide for ourselves whom are we, how do we do it, what are our priorities—what is the yes and what is the no—what are the yeses and what are the nos—we, the humans, are the source of authority of ourselves.

When you say Jewish and you remember to whom the state of Israel officially and the Israeli society unofficially gave the authority and the responsibility to interpret what Judaism is all about—to a rabbinical, orthodox, narrow-minded interpretation, most of it messianic, who believe that the state of Israel is the dawn of our redemption. For them, the Jewishness of the state of Israel, the Jewishness of the Jewish state of Israel, is a device also of authority, it is there the ultimate superior source of authority—thank God we have the Arabs, thank God we have war, thank God they don't understand what's good for them and they fight with us, so we have an external excuse not to deal with our internal affairs, but if one day God forbid the Arabs will declare peace, will put down their swords, will say "no problem, we'll love you, we're all brothers, we're all sisters, we love Jackie Mason, **(laughter)** we all—we have the same culture, we are on the same page," immediately Israel will turn inside and immediately the clash between theocracy and democracy—it's not church and state, it's Knesset and beta-Knesset, okay?—immediately it will collide, immediately it will erupt and I—the way I understand what states are all about, especially moderate states, I *cannot* agree and I *cannot* accept that any state has any religious dimension in its definition.

A state is an indifferent tool given to the people to organizate the education and the economy and the security and the sewage and whatever it is, but there is no divine program behind it, and the minute you load it and you charge it with this kind of a program comes again my earlier fear that Jewish politics and Jewish messianism is explosive and volatile, and therefore for me the definition of the state of Israel should *not* be for the sake of Israel, should not be a Jewish democratic state, because it's a ticking bomb, it should be the state of Israel is the state of the Jewish people, whomever will decide to live there will live there, its system is democratic and it

belongs to all of its citizens, and if the Jewish people will vote by its legs, will not live there, will walk away, there is no technical measure in which I can impose the Jewishness of the state of Israel on the non-Jewish majority, God forbid. And, therefore, no law of return, nothing whatsoever, no definition of the state in artificial definitions eventually will solve the challenge that we are having over there. Is the state of Israel really the place in which the Jewish people decide that this is their modern and current-time homeland? If it is, let's live there, if we are the majority, we have to behave according to the minority, if we are the minority, there are some consequences of it.

OMER BARTOV: Well, no one will disagree with most of what you said, I think. Also many people in the United States.

AVRAHAM BURG: Oh, come on. **(laughter)** No one. No one but ninety percent of the Israelis. No one, hardly no one.

OMER BARTOV: No, actually, I really think that's not the case.

AVRAHAM BURG: Oh, come on, Omer.

OMER BARTOV: I don't think that's the case. They would disagree if you said that it is defined simply as a democratic state, the democratic state of Israel and that the term Jewish, the state of the Jews people or the state of the Jewish people.

AVRAHAM BURG: The Jewish state and the state of the Jews is not the same. The Jewish state means that the instrument itself has an essence of Jewishness. State of the Jews means it's my responsibility—it's the community responsibility.

OMER BARTOV: This is—you know, the state defines itself is not the way these kind of religious authorities define it. There is a difference between how the state is actually—you should know that better than I. The state does not define itself as a religious state.

AVRAHAM BURG: Oh, no.

OMER BARTOV: What the state has done, and you write about it, and we know, what the state did under Ben-Gurion right when it was established, was it was giving certain rights to the religious minority, to the Orthodox religious minority, but it did not define itself as a religious state.

AVRAHAM BURG: Oh, no.

OMER BARTOV: And the law of return, and there may be a myth in the Knesset that you cite about that, but the law of return is actually a law that has been recognized by the Israeli supreme court and the definition.

AVRAHAM BURG: So what.

OMER BARTOV: There is a definition by a—well, it's a court. It's a civilian court and has nothing to do with the rabbinate. My question was somewhat different—and I don't want to disagree with what you were saying—I agree with most of it. My question was different. There are certain states that have this notion of a law of return and there is a history to that in Israel. Why that law was created? The idea of course was that this would be a state that would accept any Jew who wants to live in it, could automatically become a citizen. The Federal Republic of Germany that has Germany in its name, too, has also enacted a law that made it possible for Germans who had lived since the twelfth century in Romania to come to Germany—Saxons who had migrated there God knows when—to come to Germany as Germans and they were defined in all kinds of ways. They went back to a law of citizenship in Germany from 1930 that obviously had a lot of racist elements in it and it was accepted into German law and was only modified in the 1990s.

Now, what I am saying is not that one should defend the law of return as it is, and because it is a law that has actually facilitated discrimination in Israel, there is no doubt about it. What I am saying is that the change cannot come simply because of your kind of rhetoric, that the change can come only when there is a change to the conditions that have promoted that. There will be a conflict in Israel and there has to be a conflict in Israel within Israel itself between the religious establishment and the majority secular population.

There were such conflicts in other countries. We know in 1905 there was a law in France of separation between church and state. It didn't come simply because the French thought, "oh, that is a good idea." There was a big struggle that went on there. Israel has not had that struggle.

AVRAHAM BURG: Yet.

OMER BARTOV: And it will have it. But it does not have it because it is constantly preoccupied with everything else. It is a highly distracted society and it's distracted by this situation that it has for a large part created itself.

AVRAHAM BURG: Absolutely right.

OMER BARTOV: What you say, it's lucky we have the conflict with the Arabs. We've been hearing that you and I since we were kids. This was both the reality about the joke about why Israeli politics never moves forward. And what I'm saying is we can move it forward, but we cannot move it forward simply by saying it's not good to have it. We can move it forward by identifying what is the main obstacle? What is the core of the problem? And to my mind the core of the problem lies elsewhere and I maintain that ultimately when I read your text and when I listen to you I feel that you as I started, that you're skirting the core. That you're moving yourself between a view of history and of Jews and of mission that is divorced from reality that has to do with other things, other views, other worldviews, and between a sincere, candid desire to make that into a better society and that the way from one to the other, the path, has to go elsewhere. But I want to finish with something, if I may, just because maybe we should open and then I'll let you have the last word.

AVRAHAM BURG: No, you don't have to—I'll use one of the questions to answer you.

(laughter)

OMER BARTOV: No, I will let you have the last word.

AVRAHAM BURG: You don't have to.

OMER BARTOV: And what I want to finish is something very personal. You—in the book and in the end you speak about your father in very moving terms and about your relationship with him and, you know, for—again for people of my generation—and I've never been to your home, but your father was very often in my home because he was on television and on the radio, you know, and then you speak about the world that he came from and you speak about German Jewry as a kind of epitome of Jewish existence in the nineteenth century and into the early part of the twentieth century. And I felt both very moved by that and then I thought—wait a minute, but what about the world that my parents came from? What about the world that most Jews came from, they didn't come from Germany, they came from a very different world, and many of the Jews in that world, the *yekkes* as they became as they came to Israel rather looked down on them, on the Ostjuden, on the world of Galicia—

AVRAHAM BURG: And rightly so.

(laughter)

OMER BARTOV: And rightly so. I think you answered my question.

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: On this note, a perfect place to end on this note and start—thank you!

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Some questions are for Avraham Burg alone, but I will make all questions here for Avraham Burg and Omer Bartov. I think you both have had an equal share of the stage. And so this question let's start—for Avraham Burg but for both of you—do you support the two-state solution?

AVRAHAM BURG: I support it. I think the days of the two-state solution formula are numbered. Not because I think there is any better solution and not because I think there is any better formula, but I see, as Omer pushed me so hard these last two hours or so, I see reality.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Finally. It's good. Good!

AVRAHAM BURG: And every now and then I look around. And what do I see in the reality down there? I see two societies abducted by religious elements who are having—in a very dialectic way—having the same vision. The settlers in Israel were a tiny minority, but in the last

forty years they've simply kidnapped the Israeli majority. They're having a vision of the greater land of Israel, a one-state solution. The Hamas people, who kidnapped one way or another the Palestinian majority—who in Oslo seventy percent of it expressed its motivation for a settlement—and they are having the vision of the greater land of Palestine. It's a one-state solution in a different way. And as long as these two kidnappers are talking to each other through violence and religious fundamentalism and these kind of religious exchanges etcetera etcetera the time is just wasted and the time is not—I mean, we've thought for so many years, time is on our side—the more time goes, they will understand. Well, nobody understands that the more time passes, and the more time is wasted, eventually there are realities on ground that later on will be very, very difficult, if possible at all, to bring back, to take back.

And the question is where is the point of no return? I have no idea. But we have passed it or soon to pass it or in the near future going to pass it without the clear cut between the two populations, eventually we'll have to develop new kind of games of—of rules of engagement, which is a one-state reality. I like it not. Is it possible to maintain? Almost impossible. Is it a sure recipe for bloodshed? The answer is yes. Is the two-state solution better than that? I'm sure. Do I see readiness on the Israel side, including Israeli—currently Israeli politics or future Israeli politics and the Palestinian side having the courage to go for the cut, to go for the amputation? I don't see that.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Omer Bartov, what do you think?

OMER BARTOV: The short answer is yes. The slightly longer answer is that there is no alternative because the only alternative that people speak about is a one state for two people, a binational state. So you take two people who have learned to hate each other and to kill each other over decades and you put them in one state and you look at the history of the twentieth century, or even in the 1990s and you see that you are creating a situation of ongoing ethnic violence and ultimately ethnic cleansing. So there is only one solution, but, of course, there are two main obstacles to it really. One obstacle is the fanatics and the extremists on both sides, who are minorities but who are determined, and the other is a total dearth of leadership. There is no leadership on the Israeli side, there's no leadership on the Palestinian side, and there's no leadership in America until now and it's the only country that can do something about it up to now that will force that solution. Would it be possible to force it? I'm sure it is.

I actually have no doubt, the lines of the separation are not difficult to negotiate and to agree on. There will have to be force and many people, including many thousands or tens of thousands of Israeli fanatics, will have to spend some time in jail. But that will be the only way to resolve something that will if it isn't resolved now not end up in what some people argue in a binational state that I don't think will happen will end in ethnic cleansing.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Why has Israeli leadership been so unimaginative in the last twenty years? **(laughter)** Why—in other words, in other words, why do we again probably have Netanyahu and not someone like a Barack Obama in Israel?

AVRAHAM BURG: Omer, you go first.

(laughter)

OMER BARTOV: I've been out of Israeli politics for twenty years, I leave the floor to you.

AVRAHAM BURG: Here are the two Jews walking toward each other—who asked this question? I must know! There are two Jews walking toward each other in the streets of Tel Aviv, and one is holding two gigantic watermelons under his armpits, and the other one is asking him, "excuse me, do you know where is Bialik Street?" And he said, "Will you hold the watermelons for a minute?" So he takes the watermelons and he says, "I don't know!" **(laughter)**

Okay. No, no, listen, I know. I don't have a comprehensive answer to a question which troubles us all, but I'll give a partial explanation. Israel in the last eighty, ninety, maybe even hundred years, was a recruited society. Which means everybody was called for every mission every time, all around the clock, all around the year, and at the first periods of the state, up until I don't know what, twenty, twenty-five, maybe up until the war in '73, I don't know exactly when, when was the watershed. The personal fulfillment of the individual was in the public realm. You went to the army and you served many years in the army, you went to politics and you were an emissary rather than an elected person. You were a *shaliah* Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. Nowadays because of many sociological and political reasons the personal fulfillment is not in the public realm anymore. You see it in economy and you see it flourishing, a brilliant economy, you see it in high tech, you see it in academia, okay, you see it in literature, you see it in poetry, you see it in art, you see it in so many places that at the time were locked, or maybe did not even exist. There

was no private sector in Israeli society up until middle eighties, so all of this creativity and all of this brilliance went to some other place, did not yet come back to assume responsibility for the most important part of our life, which is politics and democracy, but part of this reality is that the other alternatives emptied Israeli parliamentarian life.

OMER BARTOV: You know, I mean, I agree that Israel actually in many ways, also a little bit despite your description in the book, has become a more open society, has become a more tolerant society in many ways, despite everything that we agree on. I mean, I can say about myself, look, someone like me, who if I were to have left Israel in the 1950s, and come often to Israel during from the 1950s into the 1970s, I would have been seen as someone who abandoned ship, as a deserter, as you are aware, nowadays, no, no, it has become a much more open society then, but I don't think that explains the dearth of leadership. Because you could have leadership in open societies and societies in which people strive to their own good. The question was why don't we have a Barack Obama? I mean, America is not unlike Israel, right, in that sense. People want to fulfill themselves, and the United States has produced a lot of very mediocre leaders as we know and some brilliant ones.

I think there is something—and I was trying to articulate that in my mind, but I think there is something that has to do with 1967. I think it has to do with the moment in Israel which was the messianic moment in Israel. In 1967 the Third Temple was built and we had come to the end, we had come to utopia, we were there. But of course right away it turned out utopia isn't so great, there was a war of attrition and before we knew it there was '73 and between '67 and '73 something happened also in Israeli politics. And what happened was a fixation of the mind. What

you found in Israel. If you think back about the Labor leadership in Israel between ’67 and ’73, it became fixated. It was strong, it was opinionated—

AVRAHAM BURG: Arrogant.

OMER BARTOV: And it was rigid. And it would not change its mind. This was Golda Meir. This was Moshe Dayan. These people who had a view and that view had nothing to do with reality anymore. They were right. And then came ’73, the big trauma and Israel between these two dates have never after that. There was a moment—there was a moment in Israel which was really curious, and that was the moment, the last two years of Rabin. Who was everything like that generation himself. He was like Golda, he was like Dayan, he was exactly the same and he was a brutal man who understood to a large extent only the language of strength—he said “break their bones” and so forth.

And Rabin in his last two years understood something. He understood that one had to step out of that rigidity, that one had to look at the world with different eyes. Both for his own very pragmatic, practical reasons, such as a nuclear program in Iran, this was on his mind, of course, and because he understood what this was doing to Israeli society. And I want to just say, if I may, just cite one example because I had an exchange with Rabin in 1988 when the First Intifada began. I was sent a postcard that we all signed at the time it was about a brutal killing of a Palestinian boy who was thrown off the jeep of the Israeli border guards and killed and we all signed protests and I was so angry and I was then writing about Wehrmacht and the brutalization of German soldiers and I don’t like analogies with the Nazis and I don’t like some of the

analogies that you make, I have to say, but at the time, I was so mad, and I was writing about that that I wrote on this postcard in very small letters, I said, "look what the Israeli army is doing and we know where this would lead."

And, to my astonishment, two weeks later, I got a letter from the Ministry of Defense, he was then Minister of Defense, one line signed by Rabin, he said, "How dare you compare the Wehrmacht to the Israeli army?" Okay. I thought "he read this," so I wrote another letter and then I explained in greater length, and I got a second letter back from him saying, "How dare you?" So he didn't come then but there was a moment there in 1988, I think, that Rabin saw something and he could see that one could go from one point to the next and of course he was assassinated, and as you write, many people in Israel now think that the man who killed him should come out of jail. So something happened and it was in this moment I think.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: About fifty questions we got tonight. And in closing, I will read four of them in one go. They all in some way have to do with your title in some sense and with how one overcomes trauma. So bear with me and then answer them all together or in four parts, as you wish. "As the grandson of a survivor of the Armenian genocide of 1915, I am aware that most people who have not suffered a genocide think we need to move on. This generally is not the attitude towards the Holocaust. Do you still think that most non-Jews and others understand the traumas of almost complete extermination?" For Burg: "How would you bring about losing the trauma of the Holocaust? Would you stop teaching it?" "There are well-established techniques used for helping individuals move out of trauma into healing. What methods do you suggest for helping the Jewish people move away from their trauma into a place of healing?"

And finally, “When you say the Holocaust is over do you mean we should stop thinking about it, or do you have a suggestion of how to harness this collective memory in a way that meets collective trauma and tears off the Palestinians and thus leads us into reconciliation?”

AVRAHAM BURG: We need a follow-up evening tomorrow evening because each and every one of these items is a chapter by its own. I will touch only parts of it, not all of it. I come, I visit a lot the Armenian genocide, holocaust, in my book. One of my arguments is—because of many reasons, one of them is that in 1933 said Hitler, “who remembers nowadays the Armenian holocaust, so let’s do it.” That’s actually something to do with the memory on one hand and the indifference on the other hand, what do you do in order to prevent any future Hitler in any future reality to say, “Hey, don’t forget. We remember and we’re not indifferent and we won’t let you, any future tyrant, to do awful things like this.”

But for this to happen, one of my arguments is that I do not feel comfortable with the fact that we monopolize the suffering. So many of us, my family included and my friends and my acquaintances, they feel that Holocaust happened only to us and all the rest of the disasters are—whatever they are, they are not them, we have a monopoly and don’t you dare to get close to it. And my feeling is that we must be much more generous with our experience. It happened to us as Jews on the one hand, yes, but it happened to us as human beings by other human beings as well, and therefore it’s a wider, universal lesson to be learned by other nations and other people under other situations and it can, God forbid, happen to any people both as a victim and as a victimizer if there will not be enough attention paid to current political processes and dynamics around the world.

The second is I would be the last one who will recommend to forget because I am obsessed by memories, and I remember this and I remember that and this detail and the other detail and this and that and eventually the way I understand my people, one of the DNAs of the Jewish existence is the memory—we have so many commandments to remember. Remember this, remember this, remember the Shabbat, remember Amalek remember I mean we are about memory, so we are not a people that can forget that easily, but I'm angry about the usage and the manipulation which cheapens the Holocaust conversation and discourse.

I told you about Benjamin Netanyahu. I'll tell you about another one. Last year or two years ago there was a gay pride parade in Jerusalem, so you can imagine when there is a parade like this in Jerusalem, it's beautiful, okay, a lot of tolerance, a lot of compassion, a lot of acceptance, **(laughter)** I mean the beauty of the City of Peace, okay? So in no time the mud hit the fan, okay. And here there is a demonstration in Meah Shearim, the ultraorthodox quarter of Jerusalem against the parade, the gay and lesbian parade in Jerusalem, so you have the demonstrators here, the protesters here, and the police between them and the rest of the street, and most of the policemen are people, I take it, some of them are Druze, some of them are Bedouins, whatever, most of them were not Jewish, according to what was reported, and here is the TV and I'm sitting at home and couple of thousands of protestors in Jerusalem and they shout at the policemen "you are Germans, you are worse than Germans, you are Nazis," etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, that's the conversation.

I mean, I know that the only thing which unifies all the three monotheistic religions is antihomosexuality, this I understand, but from this to use the German analogy and the German equation on something like that is cheapening the conversation. I can give you so many examples how it is being used politically. When Ronald Reagan asked in ’82 asked Menachem Begin, “what are you doing in Beirut, what’s going on there?” told him Menachem Begin, “Whenever I bomb Yasir Arafat’s bunker, I feel like I bombed Adolf Hitler’s bunker in Berlin.” For him the Palestinian covenant was like *Mein Kampf*.

What’s going on here? I mean how can you use it in such a daily, ordinary, ordinary manipulative way? So what I say is I want to remove almost completely the Holocaust and the Holocaust usage from the daily conversation, from the political manipulation, and put it to a different place, to the place where the memory really belongs, to the place in which we really sanctify what happened there and the place in which we really take a vow and we promise ourselves it will never happen again to whomever it might God forbid happen.

And this brings me to the last element. We celebrate in Israel Yom ha-Shoah, the Day of Holocaust, I don’t know if they mention it here, I think at the Israeli Consulate, they do. I’m not at all sure how they do it in some other places. The birth of this special day is a protest by itself. It was part of the Zionist secular modern establishment to say “the Holocaust is so unique, so we will not remember it and we will not commemorate it like all the other Jewish traumas in the *past* in Tishah be-Av, which is a special day dedicated in our calendar to all previous traumas we’ve had. We’ll have a special day and I’m not at all sure I’m happy about it. I believe that the

Holocaust is part of the Jewish history, it is not unique to our—it is not ex—how do you say *mi-huts le...*

OMER BARTOV: Out of context.

AVRAHAM BURG: I'm so tired, it is not out of the context if I used Omer's—out of the immediate historical context; it is part of our history. And the history of the Jews has a very smart mechanism. You know, we are all around for four thousand years. If for every pogrom, disaster, slaughter, massacre we had a special date, we need a year of two thousand days, it's impossible. So they did something so smart, the sages, and those who shaped and designed our history and our calendar. They actually put all the memories of all the traumas in one day, this is the Tishah be-Av. So many things happened to us in the ninth day of Av. and the wisdom behind it is very smart. Judaism is not about the trauma. Judaism is about life. Judaism is not about permanent warning, but about real optimism, so there is one day in which we dedicate all of our energy into what has happened—we remember, we sanctify, we pray, we educate, etcetera, and we move onwards and one of the ways if I'm asked how to remember the *Shoah*. I believe that down the road a hundred years from today, thousand years from today, Yom ha-Shoah. will be less and less and less important and if it will not be part of the traditional Jewish Tishah be-Av it will be almost forgotten.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Join me in thanking Omer Bartov and Avraham Burg.

(applause)