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The Boundaries of Our Destiny: Mapping Oslo and the Future of the Jewish People

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Abstract: In December of 1997, just months before the official celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Israel's independence, I boarded a plane for Germany. This was my fifth trip to Germany and my third lecture tour of that country. As a Jew, each time I travel to Germany I feel the intensity of its history. Usually my visits last ten days and by then I am drained and wanting to leave for home. Because of the Holocaust and the historical propensity toward violence, at least in Germany's modem appearance as a state, many of those who guide my tours and who talk to me about their own family's involvement during the Nazi years seem almost paralysed with fear. I have never been to a country where the most thoughtful citizens had a fear of their own state, their fellow citizens, and perhaps even of themselves. The recent reunification of Germany is a case in point. What many in the world celebrate is also feared as the beginning of a new era where the sins of the past might be forgotten and repeated.

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The Boundaries of Our Destiny
Mapping Oslo and the Future of the Jewish People

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In December of 1997, just months before the official celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Israel's independence, I boarded a plane for Germany. This was my fifth trip to Germany and my third lecture tour of that country. As a Jew, each time I travel to Germany I feel the intensity of its history. Usually my visits last ten days and by then I am drained and wanting to leave for home. Because of the Holocaust and the historical propensity toward violence, at least in Germany's modern appearance as a state, many of those who guide my tours and who talk to me about their own family's involvement during the Nazi years seem almost paralysed with fear. I have never been to a country where the most thoughtful citizens had a fear of their own state, their fellow citizens, and perhaps even of themselves. The recent reunification of Germany is a case in point. What many in the world celebrate is also feared as the beginning of a new era where the sins of the past might be forgotten and repeated.

My first substantive meeting in Germany came in 1986. During my travel I spent several days with a small group of Christians associated with Pax Christi who had dedicated their lives to remembrance of the Holocaust and atonement for what their own people had done to Jews. It was an amazing time for me, as I had sought contact with Germans to see if the deep, almost unimaginable wound brought forth in the Holocaust could be healed. We spoke for days without once changing the subject from these horrible years and without excusing, explaining away, or in any way minimizing German responsibility for the Holocaust. It was the first time I had contact with Germans who consciously live in the shadow of the Holocaust as a judgement on German history.

On my second trip to Germany in 1990, I was invited to introduce my book, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation,* which had been published in America in 1987. I had discussed the central themes of this book with the Pax Christi group in my earlier visit; the question of remembrance and the need to apply its lessons to the present was received well by the group. I specifically raised the question of the use of Jewish power after the Holocaust, especially in relation to Israel and the Palestinians. Our discussions, as did the book itself, predated the Palestinian uprising, which started in December 1987 and became a full-fledged revolt in 1988. Still, the occupation of Pales-

tine had already taken on a permanence over two decades, with no abatement in sight and, while the brutality seen on television screens around the world during the early days of the uprising were not yet broadcast, the patterns of the Israeli state and their consequences on Jewish history were already becoming evident.

If on the first visit to Germany I left with a feeling of dread, as if the cries of the Holocaust victims continue unanswered, I left the second time with a sense that the dead, while remaining as witnesses, were becoming more distant. The cries of the Jewish dead were no longer alone and the tears of the Palestinian mothers, whose young sons I visited in the hospitals and graveyards, were also present to me. In Germany there was little need to remind me that the scope and ferocity of the assault on Jews was quantitatively and qualitatively different than that which the Palestinians were suffering today. But the connection between the two was of a different order: I had to ask if the victims of the Holocaust would sanction what was happening to the Palestinians or, as relevant, whether I, as heir to that generation of victims and to Jewish history, could sanction their dislocation, beating and death. When I left Germany this time, my sensibility, which in my earlier visit had placed an emphasis on the past to address the present, was shifting to view the past from the contemporary situation. I discussed the Jewish dead, but I could feel that the Palestinian dead were becoming as important to me as a person and as a Jew. In Germany, and I felt this even more keenly in my subsequent visit in 1996, Jews were largely seen as dead and in need of commemoration. For me, however, the overwhelming sense of my people as living – as thriving and, in the case of Palestinians, abusing others – came to the fore.

Between my visits in 1987 and 1996, of course, much had happened. The uprising had come and gone, to be replaced by the Oslo process initiated in 1993. The possibility of a common and ordinary life lived by Jews and Palestinians in some kind of equality was introduced, at least symbolically, by the famous handshake on the White House lawn and dashed by the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin less than two years later. What would have happened if Rabin had lived or Peres had won the political battle to succeed Rabin we do not know. But by the time I travelled to Germany in December of 1997, the map of Oslo was clear. The hope of a just and equitable peace was vanquished; so, too, the building of mutual respect necessary to pursue such a path. Even the possibility of a separation of Jews and Palestinians in two states was no longer tenable. More and more land was within the control of Israel and therefore less land was available for a Palestinian state. The resources that Palestinians needed for their own independence were all to be utilized and controlled by Israel and the settlements, with their military, economic, and transportation infrastructure, made a mockery of any real independence for Palestinians.

As I boarded the plane for Germany in December, I wondered what I would experience this time. The fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the

death camps was behind us and now the fiftieth anniversary of Israel was ahead. The first anniversary had been commemorated as it should have been, but the anniversary ahead was supposed to be a celebration. With the situation in the Middle East as it was, and with the map of Oslo becoming more definitive and ominous, would such a celebration actually take place? Could we celebrate what appeared to be a permanent displacement of the Palestinian people by a state that claimed as its moral and political basis the suffering in Jewish history culminating in the Holocaust? Could the map of Oslo define the boundaries of the Jewish state and, even more important, the boundaries of Jewish destiny? With such a map, how would the victims of the Holocaust be remembered? Recently, Daniel Goldhagen, the Holocaust historian, had been in Germany reminding Germans that it was their "eliminationist anti-Semitism" that had brought about the destruction of Jewish life in Europe. Would he listen to a similar lecture by a Palestinian who accused Jews of pursuing a course of "eliminationist anti-Palestianism"? On the day of my departure, I picked up several newspapers for reading on the transatlantic flight. Pondering my travel schedule, I browsed these papers and came across an article in the *Financial Times* titled "Sharon Plans West Bank Security Ring." Ariel Sharon, of course, is well known as a right-wing Likud party member. He has held a variety of government posts over the years and is famous for his hawkish views on the Israeli military presence in the Middle East and his negative views on Palestinians and Arabs in general. A prime architect of the invasion of Lebanon under the government of Menachem Begin in the 1980's, Sharon is now Minister of Infrastructure under Prime Minister Netanyahu.

What struck me as I looked at the article was the map which accompanied it, as it illustrated the title of the article in a vivid and shocking way. Though the map is of Israel and the West Bank, the focus and detail relates to the West Bank and Sharon's vision of a final settlement with the Palestinians. The West Bank is outlined in dark colours with the proposed areas of Palestinian control in white. The dark within the West Bank is to be controlled by Israel. Two elements stand out immediately. First, the security zones to be controlled by Israel: twenty kilometres to the west of the Jordan river; ten kilometres from the pre-1967 borders of Israel to Palestinian controlled land. These zones spread the length of Israel and the Palestinian areas and are to insure military security from attack by Palestinians into Israel and prevent a consolidation of these Palestinian areas with Jordan. Second, the areas to be controlled by Palestinians: these are found within and sandwiched between the Israeli security zones and are divided between north and south through Israeli control of Jerusalem. With the security zones and the divided Palestinian centres, Palestinian autonomy is thus limited in the most fundamental geographic and political ways. In this map, at least, Palestinian autonomy resembles more an apartheid, a Bantustan-like existence, than any resemblance to a state.

Above the article I jotted notes as to the meaning of this map, at least the nature of its implications. For it became clear to me that if the pre-1967 Israel part of the map was detailed as to Israeli control and the presence of Palestinians, a similar pattern would be discernible. Within the pre-1967 borders of Israel is the remnant of the original Palestinian presence before the establishment of the state, a population that now numbers close to a million Arabs. They too have a certain autonomy within Israel defined as a second-class citizenship. If the difference between autonomy within the West Bank and second-class citizenship within Israel is for the moment bracketed, then the map shows a continuous pattern of Israeli control and Palestinian life lived within the borders of a Jewish state. In fact, just as the Palestinians within the pre-1967 borders of Israel are part of a remnant population displaced and expelled in the formation of Israel, so too is the Palestinian population of the West Bank a remnant population. For if there are almost 2 million Palestinians in these "autonomous" areas, there are several million more Palestinians who are forced to live outside Israel and the West Bank and Gaza. Thus Sharon's map charts the areas where these two remnant population, almost 3 million Palestinians, will live for the foreseeable future. Yet as important as the borders Sharon draws for the Palestinians are the borders he draws for Israel. In his mind the state of Israel is now expanded to the Jordan river. The autonomous areas of Palestinians within and outside the pre-1967 borders of Israel are now within the expanded boundary of the Israeli state.

Sharon's map represents a permanent occupation of the West Bank and, as a final settlement with the Palestinian leadership, legalizes the occupation as the new borders of Israel. In that sense Sharon envisions the permanence of his map as the end of the occupation of the West Bank. In short, Sharon ends the occupation by making the occupation part of state policy, thus legalizing what has been declared illegal by most international political bodies. To understand the situation I wrote the following note to myself: "Palestinians (Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza – though Gaza is not discussed here the implications are obvious) within an expanded Israel just as Palestinians within the pre-1967 borders of Israel but without citizenship." Looking at the map the reality is clear and devastating from an ethical and historical perspective: in fifty years Israel has conquered all of historical Palestine and, because it is unable or unwilling to expel the remnants of the defeated Palestinians, creates areas for this population to live, albeit in a seriously restricted manner. The obvious possibilities of either a Palestinian state with a shared Jerusalem or an integration of Jewish and Palestinian communities, two viable alternatives to this policy of an expanded Israeli state, have been rejected.

Yet even more devastating than the proposed map by Sharon is the inability to dismiss the map as a vision of a right-wing zealot, one unlikely to ever move from fantasy to reality. *In fact, Sharon's map is the map of Israel, is the map of Palestinian existence, as both stand today. To counter Sharon's map is to move from reality to an alter-*

native vision, to reverse the process which has already taken shape. Sharon's map is not a right-wing version of a greater Israel; it is Israel as it has come to be on the fiftieth anniversary of the state. As certain, and equally as devastating, is the realization that many progressive Jews, including those in Peace Now, could agree to this map if it was done peacefully and with the acquiescence of the Palestinian authorities. With minor adjustments and debating point flourishes, Sharon's map is essentially the consensus map of Israel for the twenty-first century.

At the End of Jewish History

My stay in Germany was haunted by these realizations, and the stories I heard about the Nazi past were filtered through this disturbing present. In fact a reversal took hold of me in this journey. In my previous trips to Germany, the past dominated or at least vied with the present; there evolved a dialectical relationship between the past and present, the victims of the Holocaust demanding an accounting, the Holocaust making a moral claim on the present. During this time, however, the past receded as if the claims of the victims for an accounting and a morality were too distant to be heard. Israel was caught up with itself, as if it was on its own and therefore responsible for its actions without any claims to history. The victims of the Holocaust cried out for an accounting on their own without any reference to contemporary Jewry or the state of Israel, and Israel itself could no longer call for support of its policies from any other vantage point than the policies themselves. Even the stories and concerns of Germans about their own history – including the possibility of a revival of anti-Semitism – seemed less about the past than the contradictions in German society experienced today. I realized that the Holocaust could be used by Germans, just as it has been by Jews, to deny the fact that contemporary problems had to be dealt with within their own framework.

One day a friend brought me to the exhibition of models that were being considered for the Holocaust memorial in Berlin, a project that continues to stir tremendous controversy. One model stood out. The memorial consisted of beige walls placed at angles to each other with places to walk between the walls, some light landscaping, and Hebrew lettering on parts of the walls. The Hebrew starts at odd places on the walls and also fades at certain points, as if you are entering through language a world that is ending. Though there are many dimensions and possible interpretations of such a proposed memorial, what struck me is the trace-like vision the architect invoked. We remember this world, the world of the Jews of Europe, where Hebrew was already becoming part of the past for most Jews, but nonetheless defined aspects of their existence whether they were religious or secular in their outlook. The proposed memorial saw the world of European Jewry present only as a reminder that their world had come to an end. European Jewry was now past, at least the history that had evolved over the last thousand years, and the Hebrew that they spoke or once spoke, the Hebrew images they evoked in liturgy and art were also part of the past.

The map of Israel- that is the future of the Jewish state – and the memorial commemorating the lost world of European Jewry forced me to the conclusion that we have come to an end of Jewish history as we have known and inherited it. Jerusalem remembered in prayers, Hebrew chanted in liturgy, the ethical and moral compass of Jewish history, even the ability of Jewish intellectuals to think through the issues of the day, happened somewhere else in time, meant something else, was possible elsewhere, but not here, now, in the present. Jerusalem had moved from a place of redemption to a place of violence, and Hebrew, once the language of the poor, the suffering, and those who struggled for dignity and justice, had become the language of the conqueror and the state. More often than not, Jewish intellectuals are now those who legitimize rather than critique injustice and if they do critique injustice, it is typically the injustice of another group or state rather than of Jewish power and the Jewish state.

What is the road ahead? How do we define Jewishness at the fiftieth anniversary of Israel? Does the map of Israel define the boundaries of Jewish life? When the attempt to reduce the dissonance between the Jewish past and present can no longer be carried out, when the rituals and pronouncements of Jewish leaders either avoid criticism of what has become an expanded Israel or actively conspire to enforce the final dispossession of Palestinians, how is Jewish history to be carried on? In short, how do we live at the end of Jewish history as we have known and inherited it?

These are personal and communal questions of great import. For an entire history, one that stretches back millennia, is being radically challenged and changed. In some ways, certain parts of Jewish history are coming to the forenationalism, militarism and chauvinism, for example. These are hardly unknown in Jewish history, so some may see a continuity. The application by religious and political leaders of certain biblical precepts to the conquest of the land demonstrates this continuity to those who see history, or specifically Jewish history, as bounded by the bible. Unfortunately, this sensibility defines Jewish history and life within almost a genetic inheritance, as if the narration of biblical stories defines the parameters of Jewish thought and action. Jews and the Jewish community are thus defined beforehand, as if their destiny has been determined at the beginning, once and for all.

That elements of Jewish life are contained in the biblical narrative and, of course, in the rabbinical commentaries, is beyond question. That they remain part of Jewish life in the present is also true. But to apply these elements to the contemporary map of Israel is to make a fundamental error, for it is to see history as predetermined, to see the ancient scribes, at least as they recalled and interpreted their history, as foretelling the structures of Jewish life forever, *as if they knew Jewish life would continue on for thousands of years,* as if they wrote and questioned with the future in mind, as if they anticipated modernity and politics and the history of the Jews in Europe, as if they knew of the European Jewish settlements des-

tined to become Israel, as if they anticipated the political career of Ariel Sharon.

In this scenario, those who oppose the map of Israel as it has evolved are prophets, sharing the same outlook and propensities as the ancient prophets portrayed in Scripture. If one aspect of Jewish destiny is the land and violence, another aspect is that there will be Jews who speak to the question of justice with regard to power, including Jewish power. The opposite of Ariel Sharon, for example a person such as Amos Oz, will appear, and the two sides of the tradition will, as they have in the past, vie for supremacy. Perhaps the counter to Sharon in the political realm, a person for whom Oz had tremendous respect, was Yitzhak Rabin, in his last years a supporter of the Oslo process, and so Rabin and Oz could be seen within this opposition to the imposition of unjust power.

Yet here we come up short. Could Oz, who supports the "divorce" of Jews and Palestinians on political and cultural grounds, be the prophetic counter to Sharon, who also supports the same policies, albeit in a more extreme and territorial way? Could Rabin, who initiated the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in 1948 and continued that policy in myriad ways though the years, be the prophetic counter to Sharon, who also participated in the same policies? Even the last years of Rabin are suspect in this regard, for his map of Israel at its fiftieth anniversary is surprisingly similar to Sharon's map. Both Rabin and Sharon – and this is true of Oz as well – accept the permanent displacement of Palestinians and the remnant Palestinian population as acceptable within second-class citizenship and autonomous zones.

If this is what Jewish destiny is as it unfolds, if the struggle between power and the prophetic is narrowed to this sensibility, then one wonders about the future of the Jewish people. If the map of Israel, with minor differences agreed to by Sharon and Rabin (and for that matter Netanyahu and Peace Now), remains for the next hundred years as it is today, then the future is indeed bleak. What it means is that the prophetic has narrowed to a dispute within the accepted framework of victory and subjugation, and the prophetic becomes a matter of political affiliation and rhetoric rather than substantive critique. It also means that the fate of the "other", the one that has been treated unjustly, is peripheral to the discussion between power and the prophet, *as if the victims do not exist, as if the Palestinians have no intrinsic dignity and rights, as if they have no legitimate grievances against the Jewish people, as if they have no claim upon Jews and Jewish history.*

For Jews this "non-existence" of the Palestinians is startling and transformative of the very tradition itself, for it means that the prophetic has assimilated to power and that the discussion revolves around the extent and projection of that power. The reversal is that at least in the modern period the Jewish prophetic tradition was extended as much to the "other" as it was to Jews themselves. In a matter of decades, the great European tradition of concern and activity on behalf of the oppressed has

been transformed to the point where the "other" effectively does not exist at all. Another way of perceiving this shift is to note that Jews had concern for the oppressed when they were themselves oppressed and powerless; a vision of shared, interdependent empowerment was born in these circumstances. When Jews have power and responsibility, those on the other side of that equation disappear, become nuisances and obstacles just as Jews were previously thought to be. This suggests the most obvious point: that the Jewish tradition does not simply unfold with predestined positions of the powerful and the prophetic, but is contextual and ordinary, mirroring peoples and states that have their own particular histories and traditions.

Here the history of the Jews unfolds in a different way. Jewish statehood or, more appropriately, Jews in power over a particular geographic space that includes people other than Jews, is almost unknown in Jewish history, and, when known, of short duration. Certainly in the common era, that is most of Jewish history, and certainly the history that contemporary Jews inherit, power over others is unknown in any organized and independent way. Prophetic thought was internal to the Jewish world and extended outward to the surrounding society and world as critical and transformative ideas and action. That the Jewish state has narrowed the idea of the prophetic is, with hindsight, clear, but its inclusion in the international nation-state system, a system that seems stable and capable of enduring into the foreseeable future, means that the narrowing is permanent and that mainstream Jewish culture and thought will be placed in service to that state. Or at least the boundaries of Jewish culture and thought will be shadowed by the state. Diaspora Jewish thought, religious and secular, that has formed what we know today as Judaism and Jewish life, will either be drawn to, mythicize, or ignore Israel.

What Jewish religious or secular thought today considers at a deep level the ramifications of these new boundaries? Since these boundaries have been erected in our time, and since Jewish critical thought has already noticeably atrophied, can we expect that critical thought will once again reappear? Just the opposite is probable: since the boundaries of religiosity, thought and the state have coalesced in our time, when many diaspora and antistatist elements of Jewish history and tradition remained strong, the victory of the sate and hence the weakening and defeat of these counter-elements will likely accelerate in the near future. Already several generations have been born who do not know of Jewish life without Israel, whose sense of Jewishness is bound up with Israel and who could not imagine life without it. Since both power and the prophetic have been reoriented, these themes within the tradition are either unknown, rejected, or seen as foreign. This process can only continue with time.

Paradoxically, Jewish visibility has increased with this new orientation and will continue to do so in the future. What follows, however, is the diminution of the internal life of Jews and the Jewish community or an increased em-

phasis on internationalization that strengthens itself precisely to keep the haunting images of injustice at bay. At the fiftieth anniversary of Israel, increased pride and assertiveness is accompanied by the collapse of sincere and ethical probings on the central question facing the Jewish people: *the creation of a permanent Palestinian diaspora outside of an expanded Israel and a permanent remnant population within it.*

For every other issue, of course, the ethical can be debated and refined and often is, but the central question is hardly uttered. The continuity of Jewish life needs to be asserted endlessly because of the discontinuity at its very centre. Thus the return to the rabbinic, to the Talmud, to liturgies and to the mystical Kabbalah, so prevalent among orthodox and progressive Jews. The words of justice having been omitted or spoken by these theologians and movements, they move on toward an integrated, meaningful Jewish life. The map of Oslo, the maps of Sharon and Rabin, Netanyahu and Peace Now, the borders of Israel at its fiftieth anniversary are either promoted, accepted, or lamented, but life goes on. Israel is supported, tolerated, or placed on the periphery. Still its borders help define the Jewish world into the future. *We now know it is possible to celebrate Jewish orthodox and progressive renewal at the same time that the ghettoization of the Palestinian is made permanent.*

The Unknown Future

In Germany, on the verge of the fiftieth anniversary of Israel, with the map of Israel as it is and will be, I came full circle. The tension I felt among Germans and within myself a decade earlier, the tension of the suffering of the past and the call to the present, was broken. I decided that the discussion about Jews in Germany is not about Jews, but about Germans and Germany and how they will make their way into the future. The actuality of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust is a symbolic marker, albeit a horrifying one, through which different political and ideological factions within Germany argue their positions. So too in the Jewish world. The boundaries of Israel have expanded through a political and military process that often calls upon the victims of the Holocaust as reminders of the possibility of weakness and disempowerment. But in securing power at the expense of Palestinians and making the dispossession and the remnantization of Palestinians permanent, the victims of the Holocaust are symbolic markers as well. For can the permanent dispossession of a people be called for by the survivors of the Holocaust without limiting their own witness to the pain and suffering they experienced? Even more difficult is the ghettoizaiton of a people in the name of the victims of the Holocaust. At some point, the claim of emergency, the refusal of accountability, the drawing on the sufferings of the past as justification for oppressing another people in the present, becomes empty. The dead are trivialized, not, as was feared by some post-Holocaust commentators, because every people compared their suffering to that of the Jews, but because the deeds of Israel, with the full support of the Jewish establishments in

Europe and America, rendered their memory "usable" in accomplishing the goals all states seek: expansion, hegemony, power.

In using the dead as symbolic markers to avoid the complexity and reality of contemporary life, the end of the era of Auschwitz comes into view. That era was about the victims of Auschwitz and other things as well, a complex intermingling of mourning, true repentance, and calculated manipulation. The mixture could be expected, as remembrance is never pure. One must thus establish a boundary for memory so that the cries of the victims will lose their utility, so that they will not be further soiled by the use of their memory for acts that they cannot control and would find difficult to justify. *The boundaries of Israel are not the boundaries established by the suffering Jews of Europe, nor can they be justified in their name.* To the side of Sharon's map next to my first note I appended this statement: "Let us declare these boundaries as our own, willingly established, sometimes fought against, and permanent, with all the repercussions for Palestinian life and Jewish life as well."

On the fiftieth anniversary of Israel we have come to an end of the era of Auschwitz and with that we have come to the end of a history that was severely wounded in the Holocaust. The responsibility is a joint one and both are, from different vantage points, unforgivable: the German and European responsibility for what was thrust upon us so cruelly; the Jewish responsibility for what we did and refused to do in the emergency years after the Holocaust and what we have done and refused to do after the emergency was over.

With the passage of time and the assumption of responsibility, Jews are now accountable. The ramifications of this responsibility are enormous and yet must be faced soberly. *The end of the era of Auschwitz, signalled by the boundaries of Israel and the memory of the victims of the Holocaust, means that Jewish history – as we have known and inherited it – has a boundary as well. That boundary places Judaism and Jewish life in the past and to carry it on in the present, as if nothing beyond peripheral change has occurred, is to instrumentalize Jewish life as Israel has done to the Holocaust.*

If the borders of the state are the borders of Jewish life, what is the road ahead? Does the end of the era of Auschwitz mean more than the end of conventional Jewish life? Does it mean that those who associate with Jewish life in any of its manifestations blaspheme the depth of suffering and struggle that Jews inherit?

There are Jews who struggle, without any religious affiliation and often without any Jewish articulation, to tend those wounded by Israeli soldiers, to document human rights violations caused by Israeli law and policies, to live among Palestinians *as a sign of solidarity at the end of Jewish history.* One wonders if these Jews, unannounced and unheralded, even vilified, without liturgy or mysticism, carry the Jewish covenant into another geography, unchartered, outside the boundaries set by the state and contemporary

Jewish life. Is theirs a journey of solidarity and mourning, a refusal of boundaries that defy contemporary Jewish life as the true and only heirs of the past? Among these few are children of Holocaust survivors. Do they point to a way of true memorialization and authentic respect for the victims of the Holocaust? Do they honour a past and pave the way for a future that refuses to continue the cycle of violence that ended a history they hold dear?

As I left Germany I thought of these lone individuals and saw in their witness the walls of the memorial proposal in Berlin, with the faded Hebrew lettering, as a sign of the future. A solitude to be sure, leaving behind the known, propelled by the suffering of Jews and Palestinians, and a solidarity with the victims of power regardless of who they are or what their justification is; a future that leaves behind the covenant and the God who is known and used. Will a new covenant and God be discovered in this journey? If Jewish history is at an end, who will remember those who journey toward the "other" *as a sign of fidelity to the history which is drawing to a close?*

Preparing for Shabbat after my return from Germany, these thoughts haunted me. For it was at the time of my first journey to Germany, a decade earlier, that Shabbat had taken on a greater importance for me. For years I hesitated because the words of the prayers held meanings I found difficult to affirm. Nonetheless I found the ceremony itself to be important and thus embarked on a regular observance, one that has become increasingly important to me. Yet I have never found Shabbat to be simply a celebration, a time of joy as it is supposed to be. Rather it is a time of reflection and concentration, a time of beholding, and with family, a time of recognition. This has continued and deepened over the years. In coming to observe Shabbat was I preparing for the end that now is evident?

Perhaps, like those who crossed the boundaries of the state, Shabbbat is my way of focusing on the nest arena of struggle, the integration of the remnant Palestinians into Israel with an equal citizenship and with the same rights and responsibilities. Thus though the external boundaries of the state are in the process of being finalized, internal political, cultural and economic life will be fluid and changing. The incorporation of the "other" into the larger Israel is bound to create pressure and opportunities that are difficult to calculate and control. Could this arena now be the place of the practice of fidelity, where displacement becomes inclusion, and the recognition of a joint history of Jew and Palestinian is boldly asserted? In the long run this means the continual extension of rights until all areas of life are shared between Jews and Palestinians. A binational reality, already existing but not as yet fully actualized, would come into being where both communities recognize one another as worthwhile and contributing to a larger whole. One day the particularities of the Jewish and Palestinian communities might give rise to an identity for both groups that embraces those particularities as it issues into a shared identity that also transcends both. Unless we believe in a genetic propensity for sepa-

rateness, shared geography, conflict and possibility, especially with the boundaries of Israel as they stand today, will inevitably bring this new identity into existence.

The Jewishness experienced there and by extension in the West as well, whatever it might be, will not be the Jewishness that we have inherited. A new history will be born, the contours of which are unknown and will be worked out over the centuries. This new chapter cannot be defined in advance or prepared for, but it must be struggled for in the name of the past, for the principle of justice, and without a desire to preserve what has ended in name and structure. *The fidelity of those Jews who have come into solidarity with the Palestinian people at the end of Jewish history must be a fidelity without desire or plan, without hope of rescuing Judaism or the ethical framework which has promoted their solidarity, without preconceived boundaries, even in opposition to those cast by the state.*

In essence, a new beginning must be struggled for to create a history which may, indeed is likely to, take on a completely different character than is now known to us. The character of Jewish history has always evolved, and though the consternation over the changing definition of who is a Jew as proposed by the orthodox in Israel and opposed by those in the Conservative and Reform communities in America, has been vigorous – with of course a corresponding silence on the central issue facing the Jewish world – the real change in Judaism and Jewish life has already been defined by the oppression of the Palestinian people. When that oppression ends another understanding of Jews and Judaism will evolve, though what relation it will have to previous history remains to be discerned in the future.

For this is where we have arrived on the fiftieth anniversary of statehood. Celebrating within injustice is as futile as mourning what cannot be retrieved. There is a future beyond injustice and mourning, beyond the boundaries of the present. The boundaries of our lives have never been and are not now the boundaries of our destiny. Living at and through the end of Jewish history is a challenge few would choose. And yet the context of fidelity is always bequeathed to a generation rather than chosen. What is done with that inheritance is our choice. In turn that choice helps to narrow or expand the possibility of Jewish life to the generations which follow. To be in solidarity with the Palestinian people on the fiftieth anniversary of Israel is a path of fidelity that one day will give birth to a destiny of justice and dignity for Jews and Palestinians, and leave a Jewishness worth bequeathing to those who come after.