

# Speaking about Settlements

## A dialogue between a leftist and a settler

Dana Alexander and Adam Tzachi

**“I know, the encounter with someone different from me is scary and painful, but it also spurs growth and strength.”**

# Foreword

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## **Dana** Why and how was this dialogue born?

The dialogue between Adam and me was born out of our acquaintance as Shahrarit Fellows, a group of people from very diverse spheres of Israeli society that seeks to create a discourse and a politics of the common good. My interest in having a dialogue about the settlements actually stemmed from an understanding that the attitude toward settlements has become one of the clearest indicators of the division between “right” and “left” in Israel. This is an entrenched and inflexible factional division that impedes any progress toward a politics of the common good on a broad national scale, beyond the local and specific. The question of how the conflict with the Palestinians can and should be resolved is met with no small amount of perplexity in both camps, and it is a question that, of course, calls for dialogue with the Palestinians, beyond our internal dialogue. But the division of opinions on the question of settlements is clear: it is rare to find someone on the left who has a positive view of the settlements, or someone on the right who views the settlements as a historical mistake for which we are all paying dearly.

Adam was a natural choice as a partner in dialogue. On other issues that divide Israeli society - the attitude toward religion, socio-economic policy, ethnic division - we seem to have a broad base of shared values. Adam is religious, I’m secular; he’s Mizrahi, I’m Ashkenazi; he lives in the settlement of Gush Etzion, I live in Tel Aviv; he lacks financial capital, I have capital that gives me financial security. Despite these “contrasts” in our identities, I sensed that we share a broad base of common values, that we both support the humanist values of openness, pluralism, love of humanity, and concern for the other, and that in a different reality, absent the occupation or settlements, we could have belonged to the same camp.

For me, then, the aim of the dialogue was to understand the division between us in depth. At what point do our initial, value-driven assumptions diverge to the extent that we adopt such opposing stances on settlements? Or do our different positions stem from differing interpretations of reality? My hope was that exposing the gaps between those assumptions would generate broader insights about this division in Israeli society and ways of addressing it. I belong to the camp that views ending the occupation and reaching an agreement with the Palestinians as a necessary condition for the continued existence of a healthy and functioning Israeli state and society. My point of departure was that until my camp finds a way to hold a conversation with the right about this stumbling block - the settlements -

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the likelihood of any widespread political willingness to pursue a peace agreement developing here will remain nonexistent. It was clear to both of us that this was a conversation between two private individuals, and that neither of us are “official” representatives of his or her camp. At the same time, it seems that in terms of our attitudes toward settlements, we are sufficiently representative for this dialogue to have wider significance.

**Adam** Within the pack of identities I carry on my back, there is also the geographical identity: I live in a settlement called Tekoa, located east of the Green Line. I have never attributed much significance to this identity - why ascribe meaning, in terms of identity, to a place of residence? In contrast to ethnic, religious, and familial identity, geographical identity is easy and simple to change. Presumably, I could also live in Jerusalem (were it not for the painful memories it has for me), Tel Aviv (were it not that the rent is unaffordable for me), or the Galilee (were it not for the great distance from the places where I work and create). I am not among the major ideologues of the settlements, nor was I born there. To my mind, I simply ended up in a place of stunning beauty, sufficiently isolated but also not too far from the city, a community to which I belong while also maintaining my autonomous boundaries, a place with a mixed religious and secular population, and which has plenty of room for hybridity and creativity. For most of my life, I did not feel that my personal situation was political. Its significance for others in Israel was, of course, political, but my focus and motivation were personal rather than political. Nevertheless, I somehow found myself in the position of spokesperson for the Gush Etzion Council; editor of a local Gush Etzion newspaper; media consultant, for a certain period, for settlement organizations in Judea and Samaria; a writer for the monthly *Nekuda*; infiltrator into Gush Katif to join with the residents during the final moments before their expulsion; and author of a satirical series of episodes, a comical web series, and a synopsis for a television series on life in settlements. While my inner life revolved around the humanities - comparative literature (master's degree) and cinema (doctorate) - in practice, I found myself waiting behind a Palestinian vehicle at the Mazmuriya Checkpoint, apprehensively looking out of my caravan window at the barbed wire behind which lies the Arab village of Tuqua, or participating in the funeral of a local girl who was stabbed to death by a Palestinian terrorist. In short, while my consciousness maintained the detached serenity of the personal, a significant portion of my life in practice was rocked by the roller coaster of the political.

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# The Dialogue

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Therefore, when Dana Alexander, a friend and fellow Shahrut Fellow, suggested, in her words, that we “jointly write something about the occupation... develop a common language to discuss it... an Ashkenazi human rights activist from Tel Aviv and a religious Mizrahi settler from Tekoa discussing the occupation,” I felt that this was an opportunity to try to become better acquainted with these unspoken places within myself. To understand which ideological, emotional, intellectual, and class-related worlds create the personal-political tension in which I live. The dialogue framework seemed very appropriate to me: instead of a formal essay that declares itself hermetically sealed and internally coherent across its elements - a dynamic, open dialogue that, because it is not required to formulate a final, cohesive position, allows for the inclusion of more elements of the personal, and is therefore more real and honest. But above all - it is an unmediated encounter with a seemingly opposing point of view to my own, a struggle with a voice in Israeli society that incessantly criticizes me harshly, that seeks to shake up my moral outlook, that points an accusatory finger at me. I know the encounter with someone different from me is frightening and painful, but it also fosters growth and strength.

## 1

Shalom Adam,  
I'm happy and excited to open our dialogue. A dialogue about settlements.

**So am I. And alongside happiness about the dialogue, I also feel sadness in anticipation of engaging in this complex and painful issue.**

Before diving into this dialogue, there are a few preliminary questions about it that I will try to address. Then I'll turn to the matter itself.

Why specifically the settlements? Because it seems that in Israel, the attitude toward the settlements has become perhaps the most prominent indicator of the division between left and right. The question of how the conflict with the Palestinians can and should be resolved seems to meet with no small amount of perplexity in both camps. Admittedly, it is a discussion that calls for dialogue with the Palestinians, rather than only internal dialogue among ourselves. But it is probably rare to find someone on the left who has a positive view of the settlements, or someone on the right who views the settlements as a historical mistake for which we are all paying dearly.

**Is the issue of the settlements indeed the most prominent indicator of the right/left division? I'm not sure. In any event, the question “why**

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specifically the settlements” interests me in relation to you - why is this issue specifically in your blood? It’s clear why it is significant to me - I live in a settlement. Therefore, this is a discussion about my home, my community, the society in which I live. And the discussion conceals a looming threat named evacuation, transfer, expulsion, or whatever you call it.

We have to put the asymmetry between us on the table:

From your point of view, this is a moral cause you have joined on behalf of an “other” who is not present. From my point of view, this is first of all an existential matter - my life in its present form - and only after that is this a moral discussion along the lines you’ve set. It is impossible to ignore the tremendous impact of the existential matter on my moral outlook, just as it is impossible to ignore the impact of your life in a different community, with its unique values, on your moral outlook.

And why did I invite you in particular, Adam, to conduct this dialogue? Because it seems that on other issues dividing Israeli society, we actually have a very broad base of shared values. On the basis of our acquaintance, I can say that I do not suspect you of racism or a sense of superiority over Palestinians. I see you as an empathic person who can step outside of himself and see things from points of view other than his own, and as someone who, like me, basically believes in the

humanist values of openness, pluralism, love for all of humanity, and concern for the other. You are religious, I am secular; you are Mizrahi, I am Ashkenazi; you live in Tekoa, which is in Gush Etzion, I live in Tel Aviv. Despite these “contrasts” in our identities, I sense that we share a broad base of common values; that in a different reality, we could have belonged to the same political camp.

I agree with most of what you say, but as to the final comment - could we indeed belong to the same political camp? It seems to me that this is a one-sided invitation.: You’re inviting me to belong to the liberal camp, and rightly so: I share many values with it. But can I invite you to belong to the other camp to which I belong? The national, traditional-religious camp, whose roots in this place go back thousands of years? I have a feeling that this point is central to our discussion: whereas I feel like a (inadequate, torn) citizen of both worlds - the national and the humanist, the religious and the secular, the Mizrahi [Eastern] and the Western, the local and the global - it seems to me that you are a citizen of one world, and are therefore surprised by the dual value system that you identify in me.

It seems to me that, as in the theory of relativity, our space and time are intertwined. One who lives in the “vastness of space” - a citizen of the world - usually lives the small form of time, the present. And one who lives in the “smallness

of space” - nationalists, or those who remain here for lack of choice - usually lives more of the “vastness of time” and are connected to the past through tradition, national memory, or myth. The world that invites me to live in a settlement is a world whose roots touch upon the Jewish myth. On this basis one can find many reasons why the settlements are a moral and security-oriented endeavor.

So basically, the aim of this dialogue, from my perspective, is to try to understand our disagreement over the settlements in depth. At what point do our initial, value-driven assumptions diverge to the extent that we adopt different stances on the settlements? Or do our different positions stem from differing interpretations of reality? This is the place that I hope very much we can uncover through the dialogue between us, so that perhaps from it, we can derive broader insights about this dispute in Israeli society generally. It is clear to me, and I assume to you as well, that neither one of us “represents” the archetype of his or her camp - not I of the “Tel Aviv left” nor you of the “settlers.” And yet it seems that in terms of our attitudes toward settlements, we are actually quite representative. For my part, I have an outlook that seems to faithfully represent the “left’s” outlook on settlements (I place “left” in quotation marks because I don’t wish to engage in defining it at the moment). The settlement enterprise, in my view, symbolizes the dark side

of the Zionist enterprise: a drive to take over territory, consciously disregarding those who are there, their needs, and their ties to this territory.

To me, this is a generalization. You cannot attribute the entire settlement enterprise to “a drive to take over.” The territory was captured during a war that began with Jordanian aggression. Countless political attempts were made to grant the Palestinians a state of their own in these territories, and time after time, they failed because of the Palestinians’ uncompromising position. Alternatively, there are those who view settlement in Judea and Samaria as a security imperative - and this is not “a drive to take over.”

Is there a conscious disregard for those who are there? Here, too, a more complex position than “yes” or “no” is necessary. There have been various developments since ’67, periods of greater and lesser government sensitivity to the Palestinian population. In addition, there are areas in which the disregard for Palestinians’ needs and for their ties to the territory prevails, and there are areas in which their needs and ties to the land are distinctly recognized. Moreover, it is clear that there are insensitive officials and others with a more humanist approach.

And to reconcile this takeover with a moral self-image, we employ two parallel approaches to Arab children: first, a classical colonialist one

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(and here, the fact that the Zionist movement is a Western national movement that reached the East is a central part of the story) - to regard the natives as primitive, inferior to us, as willing to accept our lordship and even thank us for saving them from themselves and leading them toward progress (this is roughly what Gadi Taub recently wrote in Haaretz); second - to turn the natives into violent enemies who wish to annihilate us. **We did not turn them into violent enemies. The Arab-Jewish conflict also existed in various forms before Zionism, and at its root, is religious. In addition, these approaches are, as you wrote, linked to the Zionist project, so this is not necessarily a discussion about settlements.**

That is, the very fact of their (sometimes violent) resistance to our control becomes a justification for continuing our (always violent) takeover. **Again, I feel that you are presenting reality as black and white. In my view, their resistance is sometimes violent (and sometimes very violent), and our conduct is also sometimes violent (and sometimes very violent).**

(And the recent case of Ahd Tamimi is an excellent illustration of this attitude - an unarmed woman confronting armed soldiers in the front yard of her home is seen as a dangerous enemy who must be held in detention, while her light coloring and Western attire make it difficult to cloak her in the image of the primitive Palestinian). That is, we cast Palestinians as an inferior, submissive

people and simultaneously as a bitter, determined enemy that must be forcefully subdued - only in this way can we justify our continued settlement in the territories at the expense of the Palestinians and our continued control over their fate. This does not relate to the settlers. **This relates to certain outlooks of certain Israelis. In my view, actually, more so the sort who live to the west of the Green Line. Generally, it seems to me that those whose lives are disconnected from the Palestinians view them as monsters living across the borders. Those who live next to them see all sorts of sides to them: work-weary laborers, rather prosaic villagers, stone-throwing shababniks [from shabab, Arabic for "youth"] who think nothing of the consequences, terrorists interested in killing, peace seekers who ask not to be identified for fear of the Palestinian Authority, and many others.**

I am familiar with the argument that settlement in the territories is merely the continuation of Zionism, and no different fundamentally from what the Zionists did before (and after) the establishment of the state. So if it was morally justifiable to settle the land and take places that had been settled by Arabs, as part of the establishment of the state, then it is also justifiable to do so today, as part of the maintenance of the state, particularly in the case of territories that have far more religious and historical significance than those within the Green Line. **No one is establishing new**



settlements today, neither beyond the Green Line nor within the Green Line. The argument about “continuing Zionism” or “land of our forefathers” related to the actual period of settlement [beyond the Green Line] and supported the establishment of new settlements, but we are two generations past that. A third and a fourth generation have grown up on this land. The discussion needs to focus on the present, not the past.

So yes, there is a clear similarity, and there is no doubt that the establishment of the state entailed the commission of atrocities that, at least in my view, were not necessary for the state’s establishment, and certainly the moral justification for establishing the state did not justify them. But in my view, the more significant difference is what happened afterwards. After all the horrors of the Nakba, the Arabs who remained within the borders of the state were recognized - at the declarative and formal level - as equal citizens. Clearly there was a vast gap between the declarative level and the reality of life, and, although it has decreased over the years, it remains huge. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference between the recognition of Palestinians in Israel as equal citizens and the non-recognition of Palestinian residents of the territories as having the right to participate in determining their fate. This is the vast difference between a flawed (even very flawed) democracy and a military regime compounded by conditions of apartheid (separate, and unequal legal systems for two groups living in the same space).

Right. It is terrible that the Palestinians are living under military rule and being deprived of democratic rights. And this is a distortion that must be corrected. How do we do this? This is a difficult question. Because there is an abyss on both sides: a Palestinian state embodies the potential of an existential threat, and a state of all its citizens embodies an existential threat, albeit of another kind. So, at the moment, it is a truly intractable problem that might not be resolved in the coming decades. When will it be resolved? Maybe when both peoples recover from their difficult traumas, then it will be possible to take a step forward. Maybe when the Palestinian leadership recognizes the State of Israel as a Jewish state. In the meantime, it is clear to me that we can greatly ease the lives of Palestinians even without fundamentally changing the situation. There are countless “small” solutions.

So basically, what is important for me to hear from you, Adam, is how, from your perspective, you view the situation I described, and how you resolve the settlement enterprise with your value system. And, of course, anything else you want to react to in this long megillah [saga] I wrote.

I started answering this question in the body of the text. In any event, I am waiting for the direct question, without sub-texts or sublimations: “How is it possible that you, Adam, are a full partner to the injustice of the oppression of the Palestinian people?”

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## 2

At the end of the first part of this dialogue you threw down the gauntlet - and I'm taking up the challenge. Yes, that is the question. You phrased it more bluntly and blatantly than I dared. What is your attitude toward this question? Is it just a question that you put in my mouth, waiting for me to ask it, or is it a question that you identify with, that maybe you even ask yourself and try to answer?

I wrote the question ironically, reflecting your way of looking at me. I wanted to expose the accusation I feel you making, which I'm more comfortable addressing directly.

I identify three parts to this question: "the injustice of the oppression of the Palestinian people" - this describes the state of occupation (in my words), the control over another people (perhaps in your words). A "full partner" - this part refers to responsibility for the situation. "How is it possible" - this is the questioning part, which seeks an explanation or justification. If there is some sort of indictment here (and I understand that in this dialogue you feel like the accused, with me in the role of the accuser, or as I would prefer to think, the investigator who is trying to understand) - then we have the deed, the person responsible, and the explanation. So, let's start with a description of the deed.

Whether you're accusing me or you're an investigator trying to understand my position, it's important to clarify that, from your perspective, I'm in an inferior position in this text - the point of departure, the "I" of the dialogue, is you, whereas I am the "other." The object of the investigation is the accused; he is what is to be understood through your perspective. If this is a dialogue between two subjects, then it has to be based on values we both agree on, which means, in my view, that you are not "an investigator seeking to understand," but rather Dana, who is interested in a dialogue.

"Oppression of the Palestinian people"- I understand that this is a phrase you are putting in my mouth, and that you would not describe the occupation this way. Right. But despite differences in phrasing, I conclude from what you wrote that you do recognize the severe moral injustice of the current situation. So, in this context, it seems to me that we do not disagree, which is not surprising. Your words identify both the injustice and the moral duty to correct it. To whom does this duty apply?

To Israeli society as a whole, including me.

This brings me to the second part of the question, namely, responsibility: a "full partner."

I am a full partner, and you, too, are a full partner (I do not necessarily mean you specifically, but

Israeli society as a whole). The story begins in 1948, not 1967. There is a cost to correcting injustice, and if you want to pay it fully, it begins long before Israeli society is willing and able to pay.

I must say that I do not see any acknowledgement of responsibility, on your part personally, or collectively on the part of the settlers or Israel generally, in what you wrote. Before going into detail, I want to say that not taking responsibility for the situation in the territories, and even worse, assigning it to others (usually the Palestinians), is a position I see as very characteristic of the Israeli mainstream - in politics, the media, daily discourse - and not only on the right. This is Ehud Barak's decisive contribution ("no partner") to the Israeli approach to the conflict, and it has done more harm, in my view, than any statement or action by a politician on the right (well, from my perspective, Ehud Barak is on the right in every sense). And for this reason, I am especially interested in analyzing and understanding how you uphold an approach that effectively absolves us of responsibility for the moral injustice taking place in the territories (and therefore for its correction as well).

First, I dispute your one-sided definition of the moral injustice. From your perspective, as I understand it, the Palestinians are solely victims and bear no responsibility whatsoever for their fate, whereas the State of Israel and the settlers are the perpetrators of injustice. From my perspective,

both sides bear responsibility for the situation, and at this time, mostly the Palestinians.

Your question sharpens a general question I have about your position. When Jews pray and confess, "ashamnu, bagadnu" ["we have been guilty, we have betrayed" (Yom Kippur prayer)], they beat their own chests, not others' chests. One is obligated to do a personal soul searching. But in this discussion, and in the familiar stance of the left, the confession takes place while beating on someone else - "you have been guilty, you have betrayed..." What moral podium are you standing on when you accuse me of relinquishing responsibility for the "moral injustice"? And wouldn't it be appropriate to have this conversation include those areas in which you're guilty?

I want to address the ways in which, as I see it, you absolve yourself, and us Israelis, of responsibility.

### 1

Presenting the situation as a symmetric conflict: In my view, this is a distinctly asymmetric situation, with one people exerting control over another, and an occupying state denying the rights of the inhabitants of a territory it has occupied. On the one hand, you are familiar with the situation. And on the other, you again present the situation as a symmetrical conflict. In your words: "The Arab-Jewish conflict also existed in various forms before Zionism, and at its root, is religious." This

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doesn't mean that the conflict is symmetric, but that it has much deeper roots, and that one cannot separate the situation from its wider context. Both sides have traumas from which they must "heal"; both sides employ violence. You offer various historical interpretations in response to the question of who is at "fault" for creating the situation. I, of course, dispute your interpretations, as you anticipated, but that is not relevant for our purposes. I really have trouble understanding – and would be pleased if you would explain – how a situation involving a ruling state and a civilian population that is being controlled and denied basic democratic rights can be presented as a symmetric "conflict," with the responsibility for its existence and for seeking its resolution evenly distributed between the sides (let alone – primarily on the side that is ruled over)? I didn't write that there is symmetry, but that there are two sides that employ violence. By the same token, I have trouble understanding how you manage to see the conflict so one-sidedly and simplistically, as good and bad, ignorant and enlightened, strong and weak, victims and perpetrators of injustice. Israel chooses to continue its rule, which it has the power to relinquish. The Palestinians do not choose to continue being ruled over, and they do not have the power to stop being ruled over (they can only try to resist, which they do). They don't have the power to stop being ruled over? Here's a suggestion: accept any of the various peace proposals that have constantly been offered to them over the past three decades; they can

abandon their eternal aspiration to expel the Jews from Palestine, which the Palestinians consider their home only, and they can relinquish the right of return. And isn't the role of the settlements in perpetuating the situation obvious? The very existence of the settlements, for which clearly only Israel is responsible, is a core obstacle, if not the main obstacle, to ending the rule over the Palestinians. Again, I'm not getting into the question of a solution – how it would be done – but in terms of the question of who holds the keys to a solution, and the responsibility to use them, isn't it clear that the control, and therefore the responsibility, lies mainly with Israel?

In my religious language (which is, specifically, shaped by the thinking of Rabbi Kook and his disciples), the settlements are a central part of the return of the Jewish people to its land after thousands of years of exile, and therefore, their purpose is not the oppression of Palestinians, but rather a renewed and redemptive connection between the people and the land. In a non-religious language, the core reason is security: The Palestinians threaten the existence of the State of Israel, and clearly a Palestinian state would be a huge strategic threat to Israel, especially given the current state of the surrounding Arab world. Morally, these territories were under the control of the Jordanian custodian, and we captured them after Jordan launched a war, so there is no moral problem in terms of control over the territory. The moral problem is that Palestinian individuals do not have citizens' rights in Israel, and this

deserves discussion.

But what's important in my view is the perspective from which we see things, and what creates this perspective. From my point of view, your perspective is very "top-down," coming from an Archimedean point, as if it is outside the story and able to compare Israelis and Palestinians. To my mind, this is not a neutral view. It is based on your life experiences, on the place from which you came. My perspective is lower, and does indeed look from "us" to "them." What formed my perspective?

Let's start with the family angle. My father is the grandson of immigrants from Yemen who lived in the village of Silwan [Siloam] in East Jerusalem. Not by choice, incidentally: Had they been given an option of living in North Tel Aviv, they would not have refused. My grandfather served in Lehi, [Lohamei Herut Israel ("the Stern Gang")] and Etzel [Irgun Tzva'i Leumi ("the Irgun")], and as an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) commander, and during the Six Day War, he took part in the liberation of the Old City. His brother was killed during the 1948 fighting in Gezer. On my mother's side - immigrants from Turkey who lived in Jaffa and later in Bat Yam - the family members served in the Haganah and Palmach. I was born to a father who had been through the Yom Kippur War. His brother served in the Shin Bet, and another brother fought in the Battle of Sultan Yaakov. I grew up in Jerusalem under the shadow of the brutal attacks of the Second Intifada. Many people in the sector I belong to were killed during that time. My wife's

uncle, a hematologist, was killed by a Palestinian bullet on his way home to Karmeit Tzur. Her father was wounded by terrorist gunfire on his way home. The world in which I grew up is in a state of war between us and them. Maybe this personal life story can help you understand why the world of the settlements is part of my life. The value systems that emerge from a familial life story such as mine and from one such as yours are naturally different and sometimes contradictory, but they do not cancel each other out. Is your reading of the situation "objective" while mine is "subjective"?

Let's turn to the economic situation. My parents' families arrived in the country without anything, literally. One grandfather worked as a knife grinder and the other as a dockworker at the Tel Aviv port. There is no great wealth hidden in our family. After (and before) I married, I had to get by without support. I could not rent an apartment in Jerusalem. But in the settlements, I could get a caravan for NIS 800 per month. To live in Dimona / Yerucham / Sderot? Out of the question. I do not want to go backwards. I do not want to live in block housing near a grimy shopping center from the 1960s.

Now in terms of ideology. My parents became religious when I was six. They joined the national-religious stream of Mercaz Harav Yeshiva. My elementary school, high school, and yeshiva studies all instilled in me and my friends a

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religious value system in which the Land of Israel is ours, a land we have returned to after thousands of years. This is a pinnacle of redemption, a divine gift that must be seized with both hands. We were raised on the argument posed by Rashi [Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040-1105], namely, that the Torah opens with the Book of Genesis so that “should the peoples of the world say to Israel, You are robbers, because you took by force the lands of the seven nations of Canaan, Israel may reply to them, All the earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it and gave it to whom He pleased. When He willed He gave it to them, and when He willed He took it from them and gave it to us.”

Now a question about your language, which is seemingly “cleaner.” At the time, I asked you about the evacuation from Gush Katif, and how your humanist outlook reconciled it. Your answer was that you were not sorry it happened, because in your view, it was equivalent to the evacuation of the estate holder’s villa in South Africa’s apartheid regime, a Marxist class revolution of sorts in which the good guys, the lower class, finally won. In my view, your answer reflects the one language you speak and its inability to see the “other” who is completely different from you, whose self-narrative is different from yours: a return to the land, revival of the wilderness, and finally, eviction from home. You disagree with this story? That’s okay. But your lack of emotional identification attests to an inability

to maintain two perspectives simultaneously, to see the viewpoint of your ultimate other, who is not the Palestinian but the settler. I presume that your decision to empathize with only one type of “other” is linked to your life experiences.

## 2

Depoliticization: Your description of the situation in the territories depoliticizes it. It omits power relations while looking at traumas (a psychologistic discourse is essentially non-political). Adding the psychological dimension does not mean depoliticizing; it means understanding the basis and foundation of the political. I presented my view of the Israeli narrative regarding the Palestinians, and in response you claim that there are only “certain outlooks of certain Israelis,” and that the settlers actually have a more complex and varied view of Palestinians than do Israelis who live within the Green Line. Of course, these things are not mutually exclusive: You can have a national narrative that serves political goals, and this doesn’t prevent people from having all sorts of different approaches to day-to-day life. Dismantling the political discourse on settlements into a psychologistic discourse of individual people is, in my view, a way of relinquishing collective responsibility, ignoring power relations, and shifting the entire discussion to matters of day-to-day life. Depoliticizing the situation makes it possible to entrench the political relations of ruler and ruled that frame the daily lives of Israelis and Palestinians in the territories. First,

this is a psychological discourse of collectives, not individuals. Second, I view reality through the major power relations, through the media, through academia, through politics, through the law; I view reality through the physical world surrounding me, through the people I meet. And through these, I find that traumas shape the social relations that generate the political reality.

### 3

Focusing on the present: You look at the settlements as a done deal. A third and a fourth generation have already grown up there, and therefore the question of the settlements' moral justification is already "outdated": "The discussion needs to focus on the present, not the past." So first of all, factually, the settlement ideology is still actively being used to take possession of land and deny it to Arabs, both beyond the Green Line and within it (mainly in the Negev these days), so the question is not at all outdated. But the attempt to present the dispute about the settlements' very existence as a thing of the past seems to me like another way of thwarting discussion on the morality of settlements, thus also avoiding the related question of responsibility. **And to me this seems like a humanist stance: Anyone living on the land should not be removed from it. If you want to look to the past to see who was right, then we can juxtapose 10 generations of Palestinians with the biblical ties between the people of Israel and its land. What is the difference between going back 10 generations or 100 generations in terms**

of historical justice? And if we're deciding to evict the "perpetrators of injustice" for the sake of pure justice, then eviction should apply to all the cases of immoral land ownership - Bedouins, kibbutzniks, Palestinians, wealthy homeowners in Katamon and Jaffa. And please start early, at least from the beginning of the Zionist enterprise. None of this is relevant, and therefore I suggest focusing on the present. A fourth generation has been born in the settlements. **We cannot turn back time in the name of absolute justice.** By the way, there is also some inconsistency in your approach to time. You have no problem digging into the past in order to cast blame on the Palestinians for the situation; and when you describe your world, you also speak of a connection to "a past of many years through tradition, through national memory, through myth." Yet on the matter of settlements - a story of only a few decades - you do not look back, but instead focus on the future.

### 4

No solution: Another way of avoiding responsibility is by describing our rule over the Palestinians as some sort of fate, with no solution in the foreseeable future. And if there is no solution, then no one is responsible for pursuing a solution either. **Your solution is solely at my expense. I want a solution in which you take at least as much risk as I do. And because there is no such thing, it is absolutely clear to me that your position stems in part from the fact that you do not pay a price. The same holds morally: You put the blame on**

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me. And I put it back on you because you belong to the Jewish nation, which is at least as responsible as I am for the pain on the Palestinian side. (And where does this certainty about the future come from? I have no certainty about the future. I have a great deal of concern about magic solutions after all the blood spilled here since Oslo. According to you, a Palestinian state inherently embodies the potential of an existential threat, as does a state of all its citizens; and an apartheid state - which already exists in the present - doesn't? No.) After all, any solution would involve concessions primarily on our side, the ruling side that benefits from the current situation, and would certainly come at a painful cost for the settlers. The comforting knowledge that there is no solution frees us from responsibility and justifies accepting the present situation, in which we are not the victim. You write "we" but you actually mean me. That is, this is the stance of the Israeli left: "We" are responsible for the situation, so "we" will pay the price - dismantling the settlements. If you are responsible for the situation, then you're invited to return Sheikh Munis [part of present-day Tel Aviv] to its original owners. Having come to terms with the situation, one can look for "interim solutions" and "ease" life for Palestinians. Their status - being ruled over, inferior, and dependent on our humanitarian mercy - is a given; it is not questioned and no remedy is sought for it. I support as many solutions as possible that will benefit the Palestinians. I oppose a grand revolution, which would certainly lead to long-term bloodshed. And

in considering directions for a solution, then in my view, the direction should be toward one large Jewish state that would have to address the demographic threat inherent in granting Palestinians equal rights. So, on the question of our participation as Israelis, and yours specifically as a settler, in the moral injustice taking place in the territories - we have a serious disagreement. My position is that as the ruling party and the side that established the settlements that make it so hard to correct the injustice, we bear the main responsibility. As I wrote, those expected to pay the price are not the "Israelis" but the settlers, including me. Not the exclusive responsibility, but definitely the main responsibility. The keys, as noted, are in our hands and in Palestinian hands. You, however, use various rhetorical methods to avoid recognizing this responsibility, and I tried to unpick your position and examine the different justifications. I invite you to address these justifications as I presented them, to agree with the way I presented your position or to disagree, clarify, or correct it.

The question of responsibility is critical in my view, and it also relates to a question you asked me: Why is the issue of settlements so significant for me? The answer lies in the realm of responsibility. I am on the Israeli side. For all the cosmopolitanism you ascribe me, I am not from the UN. I am Israeli, I choose to live here out of identification and connection with this place and with the story of the Jewish people, to whom I belong, and out



of a deep sense that this is my home. Precisely because of this, I feel complicit in the terrible injustice of the occupation for which my country is responsible, and I feel a duty to do what I can to help remedy the situation. There is a great deal of injustice and suffering around the world, and here as well. But the violent, continuing rule over the Palestinians, with no end in sight, and all the harsh daily injustices it entails, is an injustice for which we are distinctly responsible. It is precisely my strong feeling of belonging to this collective, named the State of Israel, that gives rise to my sense of responsibility, a responsibility from which I cannot escape unless I physically extricate myself from here. I do not want to take that step, but I understand those who do. The sense of complicity is very hard to bear, particularly when the overall atmosphere is one of denial and acceptance of both the situation and its indefinite continuation.

When I read your remarks and look at things from your point of view, leaving the country really does seem inviting, both emotionally and logically. It would be very unfortunate because, in my view, the left, even the radical left, is a necessary part of the overall tapestry of democratic forces here. Just as I cannot live in a homogenous community, I would find national homogeneity very hard. To a large extent, I need the left, just as in my view, the left, to a large extent, needs the right-wing forces that protect it.

The settlements, as well as their residents and what they symbolize in Israeli politics (living proof

of our power, territorial control, and supremacy, with any concessions seen as submission and weakness ... and also: willingness to put oneself at risk for the common good, the Zionist connection to the land, a renewed Land-of-Israel-based Judaism), ...constitute the main obstacle to reaching an agreement with the Palestinians to end the occupation, and this obstacle is solely our responsibility. Therefore, while the issue of settlements is not an existential one for me as it is for you, it is certainly in my blood. The injustice of the occupation overshadows any meaningful ethical consideration of the inner workings of Israeli society if we, as a society and state, continue to deny an entire society living alongside us the basic option of controlling its fate. How principled people such as yourself live with this dissonance and explain it to themselves is a major riddle for me, one that demands to be solved.

Palestinian society wants me to disappear from this space. During the Second Intifada, Palestinian society demonstrated its capacity to attack my society very viciously, using incomprehensible murderous violence against civilians, the elderly, women, and children. It proved that the moment it had control over its fate, it would try to destroy me. Therefore, my democracy is defensive, preventing the Palestinians from controlling their own fate. At the same time, let's count the peace agreements that never reached fruition because of Palestinian opposition.

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So now I reach the third part of my opening question, that is, the explanation, or justification, for accepting this situation. You paint a picture in which I have a one-dimensional, coherent identity, belonging entirely to the liberal, secular, cosmopolitan, humanist camp, and I only speak the language of this camp; on the other hand, you live with multiple identities, belonging to the same camp as I do but simultaneously to another one: “to a world that is religious, traditional, with very deep historical roots that reach the depths of the Jewish myth and the breadth of the Jewish people.” This duality creates inevitable “contradictions and paradoxes.”

Let me adopt the language metaphor. First, I must say that I envy your bilingualism. It adds tremendous richness to your world, which I wish I had. It would make me very happy to speak this traditional language as well, to have access to this vast world of human and Jewish wisdom, built over the generations. So, while I do not speak the language, I certainly recognize it and its great value.

But a person can be bilingual, or even multilingual, without the various languages clashing. **I disagree. Some languages are incompatible.** One language does not cancel the other; a multitude of languages only expands cognitive and expressive capabilities. That’s why I think you’re making life too easy for yourself when you say that you belong to two camps, speak two languages, and therefore live

in a complex world of contradictions. Doesn’t the traditional-religious language also embody values deemed “liberal,” such as respect for others, concern for their well-being, and recognition of their equality? **Absolutely. As well as values such as “an eye for an eye” or “show them no mercy” [Deuteronomy 7:2], or Maimonides’s Laws of Kings and Wars, which clash with liberal values.** You know as well as anyone that the traditional-religious language can be used to justify a very wide range of principled positions, including positions consistent with liberal values, even if the source for their justification differs. **There are all sorts of religious sub-languages. Some are liberal, some are fundamentalist. I grew up with the traditional-Mizrahi, Yemeni and Iraqi, religious language, which was not at all liberal, and, on the other side, with the Ashkenazi-religious language of yeshivas associated with Rabbi Kook, which can also be incompatible with the liberal worldview.** So, I do not see how your belonging to a traditional-religious world dictates moral justification for the settlements, given the heavy moral cost of perpetuating control over another people. Alongside the injustice caused by the presence of settlements under Israeli sovereignty (preventing an end to the occupation and creating an apartheid regime in the territories), what moral duty emerges in light of religion or tradition? **What emerges, in my opinion, is “Love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” [Leviticus 19:34]. But I also think immediately of the definition**

of a *ger toshav* [“resident stranger” – a Talmudic term for a non-Jew living in the historical Land of Israel], which applies to a Gentile who accepts Jewish governance in the Land of Israel.

I actually think – and I’m interested in your opinion on this – that ruling over another people is a distinctly anti-Jewish position. Judaism contains a vast range of different streams, many of which contradict each other. So, one may conclude that Judaism completely rejects control over another people, and one may also interpret Jewish texts as advocating control over hostile peoples. In any event, the religious issue of relevance to settlements is the return of the people of Israel to its biblical land, not its control over the Palestinians.

Regarding the national justification – this is not solely the domain of traditional-religious Jews (look at Zionism generally); in fact, it is a source of internal tension within Western liberal discourse. In general, your binary representation of the two worlds to which you belong – “the national and the humanist, the religious and the secular, the Mizrahi [Eastern] and the Western, the local and the global” – seems to me misleading and fundamentally flawed. To be precise, clearly there are hybrid middle grounds, but there are certainly areas where the division is binary. At least for me.

Each of these pairs represents not a dichotomy, but continuity. They are not composed of opposing poles, but rather of different dimensions of human existence that have always – and especially among Jews, it seems to me – coexisted and interacted. You ask if you can invite me into your world. So, thank

you, yes, but, in fact, I’m already there in many ways. As you already know, my world is not devoid of national affiliation, deep local connection, or appreciation of the holy and sublime. I would be interested in hearing what appreciation of the holy and sublime means. “And regardless of my heritage, I live here in the East. So in short, the answer based on identity did not satisfy me” So, in short, the answer based on identity did not satisfy me.

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I’ll open the next part of the dialogue with a few details about my personal story, in answer to your questions in this context. [The summary was shortened in editing: My mother’s family came from Poland, survived the Holocaust, and reached Israel in 1948 – two parents and two children who arrived destitute, lived with other families in an abandoned Arab house in Haifa’s “Lower City,” and managed to survive financially thanks to reparations from Germany and hard work whenever available. On my father’s side – a Berlin family that fled Nazi Germany for South Africa, where my father grew up. My father arrived in Israel as a young man, on a rather incidental stop in the course of his wanderings while seeking work as an architect. I was born in Tel Aviv, but spent most of my childhood in the United States, after my family moved there for my father’s doctoral studies and stayed. I returned to Israel in my early 20s, out of a sense that this is my home and that this is where I want to raise

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children who feel a natural connection to the place. I live in Tel Aviv in an apartment I own.]

Too bad this summary was shortened. This is precisely the point I was trying to make: that your standards of justice stem from your life story. Just like mine.

So, I hope this answers your question about my connection to the country. I come from a family of refugees and immigrants, severed from any place or tradition, who feel foreign everywhere. I long for a place that I could wholeheartedly call home, where I would feel at home and care about it and its future. This would not be a religious affiliation, and not quite a national affiliation, but simply a feeling of belonging and home, that I know I wouldn't feel anywhere else in the world. A feeling that my story is here, and that I am a clear product of the Jewish story.

Your economic stability, and the geographical area where you live as a consequence of the way your life has played out, have a bearing on your political position. I therefore come back to the point that your moral claims toward me are, to a large extent, an outcome of class privilege. If I were a Tel Aviv native, with all the accompanying symbolic and actual capital and surrounding social fabric, clearly my perspective on the challenges facing the State of Israel would be completely different. You wanted me to elaborate on "appreciation of the holy and sublime." I'm not sure what to say exactly, except that the rationalist worldview of

the Enlightenment seems flawed and inadequate to me, as well as arrogant. It is clear to me that there are forces in this world far greater than us, forces of creation and destruction, which we do not and cannot understand. This place of not knowing, of wonder, of humility, is what offers an opening to the holy and sublime - the holiness of what is greater than us and beyond our comprehension. Being, as I said, severed from any tradition, I don't have a name for this place or associate any texts with it, but I fully respect those who do, and it seems completely natural to me. More natural and appropriate than denying its existence.

So, what happens when the holy and sublime that others adhere to as part of a long-standing religious tradition clash with the fundamental values of your worldview? What happens when the sense of sanctity associated with the biblical setting of Shiloh clashes with the reality in which an Israeli presence in Shiloh undermines Palestinian liberties? What happens when the deeply rooted, centuries-old myth about Rachel Imenu [Our Mother Rachel] encounters Rachel's Tomb alongside armored military vehicles near Beit Jala? When David, escaping to southern Mount Hebron to flee King Saul, encounters Khirbet Susiya? What is a Jew who grew up with a sense of this land's sanctity to do when he sees an elderly Palestinian at a checkpoint, opening his trunk to a young soldier, and waiting to be cleared for passage? And what is the solution

to the clash between the dreams surrounding the Temple Mount, including longing for the Foundation Stone, and the golden-capped Dome of the Rock?

I don't know either.

But this conflict cannot be dismissed. It's a narrative one can argue with but cannot ignore - according to which the establishment of the State of Israel is the happy ending to thousands of years of exile and destruction. A miraculous redemption that occurred after all hope was lost, literally. Accordingly, the settlement in Judea and Samaria is the end of the story, the fulfillment of the divine promise to the people. This is a collective memory by which people live, and also die. In my view, this is the basis of the conflict. Does every settler live it on a daily basis? No. But neither does the Israeli live the longing for Zion, and yet it largely shapes his life.

Now for the non-ideological part. As I wrote, the settlements were established on an ideological basis, which clashed with the human rights of Palestinians. But this is a conflict between the language of human rights and the religious language (albeit a specific religious stream). Even today, there are settlements (usually small ones, and, of course, outposts) where the ideological religious motive is central. But since the end of the Second Intifada, many settlements have become home to new residents who are not overtly ideological. Beyond the ties to ancestral lands

and beyond the calling to settle in the periphery, the bourgeois settler seeks a home with a view, near the city, at an affordable price. Using my settlement as a case study: Tekoa was built in the late 1970s out of Zionist and spiritual Jewish motives. The founders were immigrants from Russia, the United States, and France, alongside people such as Rabbi Menachem Froman, Rabbi Dov Singer, and Malka Piotrkowski. The ideological elements were practical Zionism alongside religious Zionism. A later wave consisted of "better housing" seekers, primarily Mizrahim from the Katamonim and Gilo neighborhoods [in Jerusalem], for whom the settlement offered low-cost housing at a higher standard of living, along with a heterogeneous population. Families stopped arriving in the early 2000s, and some abandoned the settlement - because of the Second Intifada - and then bourgeois settlers started arriving. One example is the Tekoa neighborhood known as "the Givat Shmuel of Tekoa," which includes financially stable, well-to-do residents who have built nice villas at a relatively low cost. Within this continuum, I find myself in a complex position: I arrived in 2002, bolstered by an ideological religious and Zionist background, driven by an intuitive sense of a special bond with this land, part of a social fabric consisting of friends and acquaintances who resided and studied there, and assisted by the local welfare policy (a few hundred shekels per month for a caravan adjacent to a fence bordering the Arab village of Tuqua).

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In my opinion, the process I described has reduced (but not eliminated) the ideological element of the settlements, from something like 80% to 20%. The welfare policy that allowed financially disadvantaged classes to live there has also diminished (rents in Tekoa are now comparable to Jerusalem rents, and, of course, the admissions committees in many settlements have denied those who really need assistance). What remain are the security motive and bourgeois motivation. In terms of the security motive, I number among those who believe that settlements along the confrontation line indeed protect central Israel. How much? How well can it defend itself without the settlements? To what extent can instability in countries across the border affect Israel if it withdraws from Judea and Samaria? I'm not an expert on the matter, and it seems to me that even the experts are not completely objective, but my impression and understanding are that control of this area is essential to Israel's security. I assume that the current government also views the settlements as essential for security, and therefore allocates them many resources. Now to the matter of the bourgeois lifestyle, which is certainly a negative factor on the settlements' moral balance sheet (because it relies on national resources). At this point, because the ideological element has declined, and perhaps the security aspect as well, but it would be neither moral nor practical to evict half a million residents from their homes, then the moral aspect of the settlements should be reinforced in relation to other residents of Israel,

by increasing the welfare element. That is, if the settlements were to open their gates and offer a more comfortable lifestyle to underprivileged communities, this would provide moral redress (of course, this applies to Israeli society, not to the moral position vis-à-vis Palestinians). This is happening, of course, in places such as Maale Adummim or Ariel, and should also happen in other settlements, by categorically abolishing admissions committees and inviting underprivileged population groups. Would they come to the settlements? I am doubtful.

And now I return to the dialogue. I will divide it into issues that emerged from the first round.

### **Framework of the dialogue**

You accused me of having pretenses of objectivity. You told your personal story, and the extent to which it is (painfully) intertwined with the conflict with Palestinians. And, of course, this life story shapes your perspective, including on settlements. Just as my life story shapes my perspective. I make no claims of objectivity, and one of the important things for me in this dialogue is precisely to bring to the surface those elements of our different life stories that shape our attitude toward the settlements. This is not a pretense at objectivity, but a way of stepping back analytically so as to look at the differences between us without remaining fully entrenched in my story. Your history, as you related it (and unfortunately it was shortened in editing...),

reinforced my opinion that one's political outlook is almost necessarily the outcome of one's life story. You can do exactly the same, if you choose. The reason I take this analytical distance relates to my motives for having this dialogue, as I explained in the previous paragraph: There is a very difficult political reality here that requires resolution (it seems to me that we agree on this). How can it be resolved? Who is responsible for resolving it? What type of resolution is possible? Answering these questions requires us to look beyond stories and narratives. We have to understand where these stories can intersect, and where they cannot, what normative assumptions underpin them, and how different or similar they are. If it all comes down to each person's personal story and resulting perspective, then we reach a form of passivity: I remain bound by my story, and my perspective, without pretenses of asserting what is right or not right, and you do the same.... Then others will decide. Those who do have pretenses of knowing.

Why "pretenses of knowing"? Israeli society decides how to deal with the conflict. Through a democratic vote and public discourse. It is deciding to refrain from major, dangerous solutions. I assume that this collective decision stems, first of all, from personal stories, which ultimately merge into one big national story.

I'm not there, and it seems to me that neither are you, so the personal story and personal perspective are not everything. We are trying to move beyond

them and bridge different stories, to formulate a broader moral position that will convince others as well - since there is a common issue that requires resolution. This is actually the story of the common good, isn't it?

I have much less of a political consciousness than you. True, my life has political significance. But what interests me is playing music, writing, researching, raising a family, meeting people. I do not believe in my ability to influence the big story (the reasons for this can be found in the "Zu Artzeinu" [This is Our Land] protests that I participated in during the 1990s, when I was trampled by horses or painfully hosed by police, and certainly in the struggle against disengagement [from Gaza]), and in general, I have quite despaired of how the "major things" are handled in the state. My brief acquaintance with local and national politics left me with feelings of hostility and mistrust toward the system. I therefore prefer my immediate surroundings. As Voltaire's Candide said, at the conclusion of his journey (quoting from memory, no doubt incorrectly), we should each cultivate our own garden as best we can.

And it seems to me that the entire essence of a moral position is to strive for a broader perspective, beyond my particular position, my story, and my wants and needs. This is my starting point for entering into a dialogue with you. When you say, for example, that "those who paid the price

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[for Oslo] were mainly people from the group I belong to,” you are completely ignoring the price that others are paying for the current situation (namely, the occupation), which Oslo was an (failed or partial) attempt to remedy. The number of (civilian, non-combatant) victims, physically and materially (and in terms of freedom, dignity, livelihood, etc., etc.) on the Palestinian side has been consistently higher, both before and since Oslo, than the number of Israeli victims, settlers or others. Not to mention generations who have grown up in the shadow of occupation, military force, humiliation, restrictions on movement and livelihood, etc., etc.

I’m not ignoring them, but the boundaries between my identity and other identities are clear to me. I emphasize and recognize their pain, and it truly saddens me. It’s terrible that this is how they live. At the same time, my perspective remains loyal to my people, and feels far more concern for it than for Palestinian society.

So, if everyone adheres solely to their own story, then we are also left with everyone focusing only on the injustice done to them, or to those near them, and I don’t see how such an approach can bring us to a place of resolution. You invite me to see your perspective and to recognize how your life story, which is different from mine, has shaped it. I accept this invitation, and I see. Are you also willing to take this step, to step out of your story and see the situation from the Palestinian

perspective? If so, I don’t think you’ll be able to keep making statements such as the one I quoted earlier, since it requires adhering to the Israeli-Jewish perspective. **Are you actually claiming that it’s impossible to have a broader perspective, but still remain true to your identity?** Among Israelis, those paying the highest price for the conflict, as civilians, are no doubt the settlers (and perhaps also Jerusalemites). But those paying an even steeper price are the Palestinians. **Who, as a society, are opposed to my nationality, and certainly to the fundamental values of my identity. Their struggle for freedom is my existential threat. I am reminded of a verse by Leonard Cohen: “And what can I tell you, my brother, my killer.”**

Later I will also address the price that my group – Israelis saddled with the responsibility for something they fiercely oppose – also pays. Are you able to see this price as well? **To be honest, before the dialogue with you – no. You’ve certainly helped me understand the price your group is paying. And it is high. So apparently, we arrive at a zero-sum game. Either your group pays the price of having its values trampled, or my group pays the price of having its values trampled (and being evicted from our homes). At its basis, this is the rift between a Jewish State of Israel and a democratic State of Israel.**

You referred to the fact that I wasn’t sorry about the evacuation of Gush Katif. I’ll try to explain. The context of things affects the level of my emotional



identification (I think this holds for anyone - I wouldn't believe someone who says it doesn't). When the main slogan of Gush Katif evacuees (and their supporters) was "A Jew does not expel a Jew" (that is, a Jew expelling an Arab is okay... **Your interpretation is wrong. The idea behind the slogan was that throughout Jewish history, Gentiles have expelled Jews, and we've become used to this. So, it is inconceivable that a Jew would take a Gentile's position and expel Jews**), ... then yes, it really doesn't inspire identification for me, but the opposite. The settlement in Gush Katif was accompanied by an ideology and practice of dominance, as reflected in the slogan, and the evacuation of that settlement, which had been a source of severe injustice toward Palestinians (many of them refugees and descendants of refugees who had already paid a heavy price for the state's establishment) did not sadden me (the circumstances in which it took place did). **Here you have it. You are explicitly unable to step out of your perspective, which is exactly what you asked me to do.... There is a different story from yours here, and not only are you unable to see it, you don't even demonstrate empathy for the suffering.**

Beyond that, there's another matter, which I mentioned in the previous round. When sorrow for another's hardship is accompanied by a sense of guilt or responsibility for the injustice, then it hits me much harder. So, as I wrote, I feel much more outrage over the injustice of the occupation than over other injustices, because

I feel responsible for it. (Incidentally, it is not only for the injustice of the occupation - I feel a shared responsibility for everything my state does, which includes many injustices besides the occupation. I have devoted my entire professional life to struggling against these injustices. If I didn't feel complicit and responsible, I would probably be working on other things.) So, when I hear about a Palestinian boy being injured or killed, shot by soldiers from my country, it provokes other emotions, beyond sorrow for the loss of children's lives in other horrible circumstances (accidents, wars, disease, etc.), feelings of anger and guilt and powerlessness. This relates not to identification with the victim, but actually with the perpetrator. When it comes to an injury that is not an act of fate, but, instead, the result of a human / institutional / state action for which I share responsibility, it greatly intensifies my emotional reaction. Again, I do not think this is unique to me. **Like you, I too feel great sorrow and guilt when I hear about a Palestinian boy injured or killed by soldiers' gunfire. At the same time, I have other feelings, too. One of these is anger at Palestinian society for educating its children to die as shaheeds [martyrs]. On this point you are consistent in not addressing the Palestinians' responsibility for the situation. The second is a sort of internal turning of my back on the state, a sense of "them" and not "me." In this sense, I am slightly less Zionist than you (I can trace this back to the Hardali [nationalist Haredi] aspect of my past, to demonstrations in**

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which we were viciously beaten by police, to the disengagement [from Gaza], to the destruction of the Amuna outpost). I admire you and envy your absolute commitment, your sense of responsibility and the fact that you act on it.

In any event, a complex worldview could also take into account your state's injustice toward the residents of Gush Katif, largely Mizrahim from the lower classes, sent by the state to this strip of land and exiled from their homes a few years later. The weak ones among them completely fell apart in terms of family, mentally, financially.

I think that the way people are able to detach emotionally from such acts of violence, when they feel connected to the perpetrator and therefore complicit in the offense, is by detaching emotionally from the victims - by dehumanizing them. **May I apply this sentence to your attitude toward Gush Katif? Or perhaps toward settlers killed in acts of terror?** This was one of the things that most shocked me in one of the military campaigns in Gaza (Cast Lead?), when my son was in nursery school and there were constant reports about children being killed in Gaza. One day I came to pick him up, and the issue came up in conversation among a few parents. One mother said (after expressing doubt about the reported number of Gazan children killed), "These are children of terrorists." This was a nursery school in central Tel Aviv, okay? Not in some extremist settlement. **This is what I was saying. I think that**

such views are heard less often in an "extremist settlement." The psychological mechanisms that allow the mother of a young child to transform the other - even an innocent young child like her own - into a demon whose annihilation doesn't raise any problems - these frighten me the most, and the ideology that encourages them, even more so. For all the things that you can rightly say about the arrogant left and its refusal to understand the story of the other (right-wing, religious, settler, whoever), you won't find this ideology. On the right, unfortunately, you often hear it voiced about Arabs, and it is met with unforgivable forgiveness.

**I agree with you.**

### **Responsibility**

It's become clear that I regard responsibility as a central issue, and I sense that I'm not making any progress on it in this dialogue. I feel like I'm mainly encountering pushback on your part, and I'm still trying to unpack this issue.

**I'd like to place a question of responsibility in your court: Do you recognize a responsibility, even a partial one, on the part of the Israeli left, especially in light of the Oslo Accords, for the Palestinian reaction - the terrorist attacks of the 1990s? After all, relations between Israelis and Palestinians were much better before the Accords. Do you recognize the responsibility of the "peace camp" for the thousands of weapons that were transferred to the Palestinian Authority**

and used to murder Jews? The leftist camp (at least part of it, I believe) acted out of good intentions. But it is not taking responsibility for the terrible consequences. And without taking responsibility, trust cannot be built.

You recognize the moral injustice of continuing to rule over the Palestinians, and the responsibility of Israeli society as a whole to correct this. So, on this we agree. Let's set aside the question of whether or not the settlers have an increased responsibility, by choice, for perpetuating the occupation. (Economic constraints change the picture, and I am aware that many settlers were driven by economic constraints. I also understand that your motives were mixed.) Because there are now so many settlers who were born into the reality of the settlements, or became part of it due to economic constraints and the state's encouragement, this question is no longer very relevant. I completely agree with you that all of Israeli society participates in the injustice of the occupation, and that the responsibility for correcting it falls on all of us.

I now notice that every time the issue of responsibility arises, you take it to two places: fault (which relates to the past), and price (which relates to the future). I, on the other hand, am trying to focus on control (which relates to the present). Perhaps if we unpack these concepts and examine how they relate to responsibility, we will be able to reach an agreement on the issue. I'm going to try now.

If we translate responsibility as fault, then we do end up looking mainly to the past, trying to determine who is more at fault for the situation, with the degree of fault determining the degree of responsibility. This is a legal, or moral, in which the responsibility for rectification is a form of punishment, or obligatory compensation, in light of one's guilt. I don't think that such an outlook on responsibility leads us anywhere. In part, because it is very hard to agree on the extent of each side's guilt. And also, because each "side" is a complex, diverse collective, with internal power dynamics, and when we speak about relations between two collectives that have been continuing and developing over decades - when and how do we examine guilt? (And who examines?) I think we can agree that various parties on both sides made many mistakes, or, to frame it more positively, both sides acted out of a survival instinct and on the basis of their interpretation of reality and the constraints it imposes on them, in light of their beliefs, and the like. In short, assigning guilt seems like a dead end to me, and I suggest we abandon this approach. (This is also my answer to your argument about Palestinian responsibility - every claim you present can be countered, from the Palestinian perspective, with claims against Israel. And so on and so on.) By the way, just as you suggest regarding the settlements - they are a done deal, and the question of their justification is no longer relevant. Rather than looking back, let's look at the present. Can you agree with me that we should put aside the question of fault,

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in addressing the question of responsibility for correcting the situation? **I certainly accept this approach in principle, with a reservation: It is necessary to remember the past in order to draw lessons about better conduct.**

Regarding the question of price. You say that all of Israeli society is responsible (I agree), and therefore everyone should be willing to pay the price. And then you also raise the price: “The story begins in 1948, not 1967. There is a cost to correcting injustice, and if you want to pay it fully, it begins long before Israeli society is willing and able to pay.” So first, I want to limit the discussion, once again, to the contours of 1967. I reiterate what I wrote in a previous round - there is no doubt that the injustice committed against the Palestinians in 1948 was tremendous, and I think that part of it might have been prevented. However, the Palestinians in Israel are living not under a military government, but under a democratic regime. Admittedly, it is flawed, and, undoubtedly, they are discriminated against in many areas - but even so. There is a great deal that must be remedied in relation to the state’s Arab citizens, especially in the area of land and the living space they are given, and the remedy must take place through existing democratic mechanisms. But still, this situation is fundamentally different from Israel’s control over the West Bank (Gaza is a different story, which we’ll set aside for now), which is a military regime in every sense, supplemented by the denial of basic rights and a great deal of violence of every sort.

That is the injustice that this dialogue addresses. **So far, I’m completely with you.** And correcting it requires a remedy at the level of the regime that applies to the territories beyond the Green Line. Such a remedy can, in principle, also spill over into the 1948 borders (for example, if agreement is reached on a limited right of return to areas within Israel, or on granting all Palestinians Israeli citizenship). But this - and not the abolition of the state - is the remedy we’re discussing.

So, does the fact, on which we agree, that all of Israeli society is responsible for the injustice and its correction mean that the cost of correction must be split equally among all Israelis? In principle, in terms of the doctrine of justice - yes, but in reality, this is not possible. And then the significance of insisting on this condition is that Israeli society will never be prepared to resolve the situation, because it will never be possible to split the costs equally. **I argue that the solution proposed by the left - dismantling the settlements (directly or indirectly) - is not the best solution, but rather the best solution for the group to which they belong: That group loses nothing and gains everything. The one who pays the price is the ultimate “other” toward whom there is not a smidgen of empathy (as your remarks about regarding Gush Katif illustrated). I argue that these are the real motives for that solution, which is both dangerous, in terms of security, and immoral, in terms of humanity. To what is this analogous? Let’s say we discover that**

roof tiles emit toxic fumes, and therefore all the tiled roofs in the country must be destroyed and replaced with new roofs from different material. Those people who built tiled roofs or moved into existing homes with tiled roofs are no guiltier than those living in homes with other types of roofs. But in practice, the brunt of the cost for remedying the situation will be borne by the residents of homes with tiled roofs. It may be possible to adopt measures that distribute the burden, such as reparations, universal taxes, and the like, but ultimately, those paying the most (not necessarily financially - but by being inconvenienced, having to relocate temporarily while the roof is replaced, etc.) will be the residents of homes with tiled roofs. Just as those who pay the highest price for illnesses are the ill themselves, even if all medical care is free. For the sake of comparison, let's take the issue of economic policy, an issue in which I am in a position of relative power. I support a far more socialist economic policy than that of the past thirty years. In elections, I vote accordingly (to the extent that such an option exists), and I take other measures to promote economic and social rights. If we ever achieve the government I want, one that would implement such a policy, then yes, I would be willing to pay the price. I support a substantial inheritance tax, even though one day, as the daughter of parents who will leave me an inheritance, such a tax would mean a loss for me. **First, I admire your willingness to sacrifice personally for the sake of a moral principle. Second, you cannot**

**compare the personal sacrifice of an inheritance tax with a sacrifice that involves the destruction of entire communities - a simultaneously human and national catastrophe. Third, and this is the main point - your remarks would be relevant if I believed that withdrawal from Judea and Samaria could improve the situation for Israel and the Palestinians. Then it would be a question of the extent of my altruism, of paying the cost of losing the communal life and the place that I love. But in principle, there would certainly be something to discuss. In my view, however, it's a recipe for disaster.**

Because remedying the injustice of ruling over the Palestinians involves some form of change to the regime, and, in actuality, in the territories beyond the Green Line, then nearly every solution means that those living beyond the Green Line will pay a higher price than those who do not. Is this in itself a reason to avoid implementing the remedy, when the implications are that those who continue to pay the price for the current situation will primarily be the Palestinians (and Israelis like myself who oppose the continuing rule over the Palestinians in our name)? **As I wrote several times, I believe that we adopt certain stances, certainly politically, as a result of our psychology. Therefore, I believe that the tendency to favor a solution that involves dismantling the settlements is directly linked to the fact that the price will be paid primarily by the settlers. As a purely thinking exercise: What if the solution were to evacuate**

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Tel Aviv? What would your position be? All of Tel Aviv, from north to south. The places of your childhood, your memories. See how easy it is to speak practically about transfer, when it involves the “other” that you like less. Under the solution you propose (a large Jewish state and equal rights for Palestinians), settlers would not pay a higher price. But is this a good enough reason to prefer that solution? What about the price Palestinians would pay for that solution, as opposed to others? What about the price the state would pay for that solution relative to others? **These questions apply to the solution you propose as well: What about the price Israel would pay for the existence of a Palestinian state? What about the price half a million settlers would pay?** In short, seeking to distribute the costs of a solution equitably across Israeli society is a valid consideration, but making it the exclusive and decisive consideration for determining what will or will not be a solution, and what the best solution is, while ignoring the heavy prices that other sectors pay for the existing situation, means adopting a very narrow sectorial outlook, one that is certainly inconsistent with the broader perspective of the collective good (or “common good”). **It’s becoming clear to me why the Palestinians still aren’t part of Shaharit’s discussion on the “common good”: because Palestinian society has elements of belonging to Israeli society, and elements of absolute, violent resistance to Israeli society. So, it’s very problematic to adopt a “common good” position toward someone who is, nationally at least, also**

an enemy. As for your sector, it’s a little funny and a little blind to expect me to agree to a “common good” in which I lose my basic belongingness - community and space - and you lose nothing. If anything, the solution should involve me conceding something to you, and you conceding something to me. **How does a two-state solution concede anything to me?** It’s clear to me that every possible effort must be made to compensate those who have to pay the most for a solution (for example, in a two-state solution - with one homeland - to allow those settlers who aren’t interested in remaining in their place of residence under Palestinian sovereignty to relocate to within Israel and receive appropriate compensation that will make the move feasible... **I’m amazed that you view this solution as moral. For all intents and purposes, you’re effectively proposing an expulsion, or bloodshed. I’ll expand on this later,** ...and to distribute the price as much as possible among all citizens (through taxation, for example). But there are some things (such as leaving one’s home) that cannot be financially compensated. Having “an equal price paid by everybody” as a threshold condition for any solution seems to me equivalent to ruling out any solution (that is, once again, the Palestinians would continue to pay the price for the current situation). The argument that equal responsibility (among all Israeli citizens) for the injustice translates into an equal price that everyone must pay for any solution creates a false equation. Responsibility is not equivalent to price. Can you agree with me on that? **I agree**

that the price doesn't have to be identical for everyone. I'm still convinced that your camp's choice of a solution, as you [individually] present it, stems from the fact that "you" [collectively] pay the lowest price, whereas the group to which "you" [collectively] have the least empathy pays the highest price. This is not coincidental, yet you still haven't refuted my position. And above all - you're proposing a very dangerous solution.

And another point regarding price and responsibility. I don't understand your definition of the collective, of "us," and what part you assign me (or "my group" as you call it - that is, Tel Aviv leftists who in your view do not pay any price for any situation) in this collective. When you claim that I assign the price and the guilt completely to your group, without conducting any moral reckoning of my guilt and the price I must pay, then you are removing me from the collective, or refusing to see the price I'm paying for the current situation and the moral reckoning I'm conducting, as part of the collective. After all, if I weren't part of the collective to which you also belong, then I'd be equally concerned about what's happening in the territories and what's happening in Syria. I'd feel very sad about the injustices and human suffering, and that's it. But this is not the situation, as I've already explained. I feel guilty and responsible for the injustices caused by my state, by the armed forces of my state, by the policy of my government (which I didn't choose, of course). This collective responsibility exacts a steep price from me, which

I feel you don't recognize at all. I cannot raise my son with a sense of "team spirit" [ge'avat yehida - literally, "pride in the unit" (military jargon)], a sense of fully belonging, when my state is doing things that cause me to feel such shame and guilt. Such a basic, and human, sense of belonging and identification and pride in my collective is denied to me, and I am denied the ability to educate my son to feel it. So, the occupation and the settlements policy, which form a central and salient aspect of it, exact a steep price from me and my group precisely because we are part of the collective and identify with it (without even addressing the security costs and threat of terror, to which my group is also exposed, and which I believe are closely linked to the occupation - more on this later). But then you remove me from this collective when you say that I don't engage in a moral reckoning (because you don't see a moral reckoning with my collective as my personal moral reckoning), and that I only place demands on your group when it comes to paying the price for resolving the situation. If you see me as part of your collective, then recognize the steep price I'm paying for my responsibility and participation in the occupation, and effectively the settlements, which go completely against my moral worldview. You cannot view me as part of the state solely for the sake of bearing the responsibility, morally and materially, without recognizing the price I'm paying for that responsibility. **You're right, and, in fact, this dialogue with you has, for the first time, made clear to me the price your group**

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pays. I was not aware of this before, and now I understand. On this point, I feel that I understood something very significant. And I'm sorry for you. Truly.

And now, regarding control. My argument is that at present, most of the responsibility lies with us - the Israelis - because most of the control is in our hands. True, the Palestinians can (to some extent) control the leadership they choose, the means of resistance they choose, the nature of their international contacts, the conditions they bring to the negotiating table (to the extent there is one), and so on. But ultimately, it is Israel's decision whether to maintain the current situation (control over the Palestinians), or to pursue some sort of agreement, which will inevitably involve Israel conceding some of the control and supremacy it enjoys today. Regardless of the degree of each side's guilt, it is our excessive control, at present, that places the bulk of responsibility on our shoulders. Israel is the one with the power to decide whether to continue ruling over the Palestinians by force, or to shift to a dialogue with them in an effort to reach an agreement involving concessions on its part (what's known as the "peace process" - a completely eroded term). Of the question of how the Palestinians would respond to such a shift in Israel's position is their responsibility. But the initiative is our responsibility. To invoke another metaphor: Right now, Israel is in the role of the prison warden, regardless of the offenses committed by the prisoner. Israel is the one

that can decide whether to continue holding the Palestinians prisoner, or to initiate release proceedings. If it decides to initiate release proceedings, then the question of their conduct and the outcomes would, of course, also fall to the Palestinians. But they are not the ones who can initiate the process of their release. If you see things differently, and you think that the responsibility lies mainly with the Palestinians, or equally with both sides, then I would be happy to hear what steps you think the Palestinians can take today to rectify the situation.

Can Israel unilaterally launch release proceedings? Gaza provides a case study: Israel decided to stop ruling over the Gazans and disengage from them unilaterally. The results are known. Release proceedings also depend on the prisoner, not only on the prison warden. Israel would be glad to release the Palestinians and be released from the burden of occupation. It tried to do so during the 1990s and early 2000s. But the prisoners have been consistently uncooperative. They have a national struggle of their own. The steps that Palestinians can take to bring about a resolution are, first, to renounce terrorism - as long as Israelis perceive an existential, or even security, threat, they will refuse to take risks - then to abandon the dream of a return and to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. It is pretty clear to me that if the Palestinians were to take these steps, the situation on the ground would shift substantially in their favor.



I'll try again to clarify the change I'm talking about, which needs to take place to begin the process of resolution, and which is mainly Israel's responsibility: a transition from Israel accepting the current situation as unresolvable (the occupation as a continuous, permanent war of no choice), to a position that recognizes that the current situation cannot and should not continue, and that a process of dialogue with the Palestinians must begin,...Tell me, haven't there been a few such attempts? Madrid, Oslo, Hebron, Wye, Sharm el-Sheikh, Clinton, Olmert... out of a recognition of them as fundamentally equal, not out of a position of superiority and supremacy, and out of a recognition that the process, if successful, will require Israel to cede some of the control it currently has over the Palestinians. At a very basic level, this would mean transforming from a state that pursues control into a state that pursues peace. If such a process develops, then how long it takes, how the Palestinians respond to such a shift in Israel's position, and how it concludes - all these are questions to which no one has the answer yet, and clearly in such a process the two sides are mutually responsible (and so is the international community). **In what way is your proposal fundamentally different from previous attempts to reach peace agreements? In general, I noticed that you're ignoring the peace agreements since the 1990s. It is clear that their failure - in which the Palestinians played a very significant part - has a bearing on the current state of the process.**

I'd like to hear your views on my effort to unpack the concept of responsibility, and where you agree or disagree.

**I agree that Israel, being in control, has a responsibility to improve conditions for the Palestinians to the extent possible, while preserving our security. I have no doubt that there are countless ways to do so, on a practical, daily basis. To make their lives easier. To make where they live much better. The problem inherent in a "complete resolution" of the situation is that it's a zero-sum game, because we have two clashing national outlooks. Therefore, instead of talking about the responsibility for a "complete resolution" of the situation, we should talk about responsibility for a "possible resolution."**

### **Justification for the settlements**

As I wrote above, I don't know whether pursuing this issue is worthwhile. I'll address the things you wrote in this context, but one of the conclusions I've already reached from this dialogue is that the question of whether building the settlements was justified or not is a one that we probably won't agree on, and that trying to answer it is probably not very useful, since they are a done deal. But I do have to revisit your claim that this question relates only to the past. I wish that were true, but it isn't. The State of Israel continues to build settlements, and not of the sort that are really necessary for housing, but of the sort whose purpose is to Judaize the land. It does

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this within the Green Line, in the Negev (Hiran, to be built in place of Umm al-Hiran, which is being demolished, is a well-known example, and there are lesser-known examples as well). Beyond the Green Line, this is taking place through unspoken support for private initiatives - ignoring the creation of unauthorized outposts, because of which Palestinians are being denied access to their lands, and later these outposts even receive infrastructure support. (Amira Hess wrote about this a few days ago in relation to the northern part of the Jordan Valley, but it is not new; it has been happening for years, ever since the establishment of new “official” settlements became a flashpoint in the international arena.) So, the settlements ideology - seizing territory in order to reduce the Arab presence - is still alive and kicking (and supported by the government), but these days, it’s operating under different (mainly international) constraints and in other ways. For this reason, it is still worth discussing the morality (and perhaps also the wisdom) of this ideology, in terms of the present and not only as a historical discussion.

In any event, here are my responses to your remarks in this context:

The religious justification - You’re right that the purpose of the settlements, from a theological perspective, is a “renewed and redemptive connection between the people and the land” as part of the “return to Zion.” I fully recognize the value of the religious language, its antiquity, and

the fact that large segments of my people, and the neighboring peoples, share this language. I also agree completely that the religious language can serve as an opening for dialogue with the Palestinians, and I know of, and welcome, initiatives where this is actually happening. I think that they have a great deal of potential (although as far as I know, these initiatives have very limited numbers of participants).

The question I’m posing about the religious justification is: At what cost? After all, the price of “the return of the people of Israel to its biblical land” is, in practice, control over the Palestinians. Because - it can’t be helped - they are here. So does this renewed connection between the people and the land justify all the means? What are the red lines, in your view, or the transgressions that must not be committed in realizing this goal? Is somebody in the religious Zionist leadership making sure to clarify or discuss these red lines? **Of course, there are red lines. Many rabbis from the liberal religious community have outlined them. Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, or Rabbi Yaakov Madan, or Rabbi Cherlow, for example. Certainly, the late Rabbi Menachem Froman. Even the late Hanan Porat. In fact, many conservative rabbis would also delineate clear boundaries for moral, humane conduct toward Palestinians. What are these lines precisely? This requires going into detail beyond the scope of this dialogue, and, of course, research would be necessary.** And to what extent does religious justification recognize the existence

of the “others” who, from their perspective, also have valid claims to the land? If the starting and concluding points of the religious discourse on the land is “it’s all ours,” then how do you deal morally (in religious or other terms) with a reality in which the land is also inhabited by non-Jews? I tend to think that the religious approach to this question is as varied as the secular approach. Can, and how does, a religious language recognize others’ rights to the land, from their own perspective? You mentioned that the various languages are not necessarily compatible, and that they might contradict one another. So, what do you, as a person who lives both languages – the religious Jewish one, and the liberal one that recognizes others’ rights – do with this contradiction? What position does it lead you to?

First of all, to sorrow for the Palestinians. And to a life that embodies contradiction.

Regarding the religious language as a sole justification for living in the settlements: It is hard to isolate this element because it contains a religious-mythological foundation, alongside the perception of a security imperative and the matter of personal suitability. And, of course, there is the immorality of dismantling the settlements. If there were no threat to security, and wonderful solutions were found for all the settlers, then would the “land of our forefathers” [i.e., the historical religious claim] be a sufficient argument to counter others’ rights to the land? I tend to think that for

me, and for many others, the answer is no. After all, the entire [historical] Land of Israel stretches well beyond here, and neither I – nor many others – have any interest in ruling over populations in Syria or Jordan. At the same time, there are quite a few settlers for whom the religious foundation, by itself, would be sufficient reason to live in the settlements. Not out of malice – they are very moral people, in my personal experience – but out of a worldview that differs from yours.

The security justification – You write that “the Palestinians threaten the existence of the State of Israel, and clearly a Palestinian state would be a huge strategic threat to Israel.” I assume that this justification also relates to the religious justification you mentioned, namely a “war of necessity, to save lives [pikuach nefesh].” The claim of a Palestinian threat to Israel’s existence is not self-evident, as you present it, but a matter of dispute. If the thrust of Palestinian opposition currently stems (and has stemmed for several decades now, since the Palestinian leadership recognized Israel within the 1967 borders) not from the fact of Israel’s existence, but from the continuing occupation and settlements and from the denial of political self-determination and basic rights – then the existence of a Palestinian state is actually likely to reduce the threat to Israel’s existence and the security of its residents. Especially if there were to emerge some sort of confederative arrangement, in which the two states were interdependent, and then the

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Palestinians would also “defend” Israel against foreign attacks because both states and their populations would be very intertwined. Certainly, at the international level (which is also very significant in terms of the state’s security and existential stability), the distinction between opposition to the state’s very existence and opposition to its military and civilian control over the territories is a critical one: internationally, Palestinian opposition to the occupation is seen as legitimate, whereas Palestinian opposition to Israel’s very existence is not. So, we are divided, I assume, in our interpretations of reality in this respect. But I would like to hear this from you directly: In your view, is the Palestinian position primarily opposed to Israel’s existence, regardless of its borders, rather than to the occupation per se? **Yes. Have the Palestinians relinquished the right of return? Are they willing to accept the definition of Israel as a Jewish state? My presumption is that their national outlook rejects our existence as a Jewish state.** Do you think that the establishment of a Palestinian state, on the basis of some type of agreed-upon arrangement (presumably, such a state would not have a military capability anywhere near Israel’s **What does that matter? Does it have to have a military capability identical to Israel’s to pose an existential threat? Did the terrorists of the Second Intifada, who did so much harm to Israeli society, have a military capability identical to Israel’s? And in general, how can you know what military capability a Palestinian state would have? Who would supervise relations between Iran**

**and the Palestinians? The UN?)** would exacerbate Palestinian opposition relative to today? **Under present conditions - certainly.** Do you not see any potentially positive security aspects in reaching an agreement with the Palestinians that offers them a state? **Unequivocally: No.**

By the way, since the settlements themselves are clearly a security burden, rather than a security asset (that’s obvious, right? Protecting the Israeli civilian population requires a huge military investment that could have been directed to other military purposes, defensive ones, were it not for the settlements) - then if their security justification is linked to the threat a Palestinian state would pose, what this actually means is that the purpose of the settlements, in terms of security, is to create facts on the ground that would prevent the possibility of an Israeli withdrawal from the territories and the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. This is what the left has been arguing over the years (I mean the left that opposed the settlements, not the “left” of the Labor Party, which participated fully in the settlement enterprise), and the state has been denying. **Could be. I’m not an expert on this. Another possibility is that their purpose, in terms of security, is to create a permanent military presence within an area that could easily turn into an existential threat to Israel, even without the establishment of a Palestinian state.**

The moral justification - You say that there is no

moral problem with the settlements because the Jordanians started the war, and that the only moral problem is that Palestinians have no civil rights in Israel. So, first of all, this is not the language of morality, but of international law. Believe me, that arena is not conducive for justifying the settlements. In terms of international law, imposing a decades-long military rule over a civilian population poses problems beyond the denial of civil rights. And there is a special problem with the settlements, in light of the explicit international legal prohibition against an occupying state transferring its civilian population to occupied territory (and the purpose of this prohibition is precisely to prevent the long-term perpetuation of an occupation and the denial of the original population's rights, particularly their land and resource rights). So international law certainly does not provide moral legitimacy for the occupation or the settlements. If we return to the language of morality, the rights being denied the Palestinians as a result of the occupation are not only civil rights in some state (Israel or a Palestinian one) ... **I support granting the Palestinians civil rights, as equals in the State of Israel, when this becomes possible, ...**but also the right to political self-determination, the very same right by which Israel was established for the Jews. **You cannot detach everything from context. The [1947 UN] Partition Plan proposed an Arab state alongside a Jewish state. The Jews agreed. Its rejection by the Arab leadership and the war that the Arabs launched in its aftermath**

**led to the establishment of the State of Israel, and to the annexation of Judea and Samaria by the Jordanians. During the Six-Day War, Israel tried to avoid confrontation with the Jordanians, but they preferred to enter the war. So, the "right to political self-determination," which in itself is understandable and clear, becomes complicated.** After all, Jews enjoy civil rights in other countries; Israel is not necessary for this purpose (unless you justify the state only as a historical solution for Jewish refugees, which I presume you do not, and, in any event, this does not require the establishment of settlements). So you have yet to provide a moral justification for the settlements, and it's possible that there is none, **The moral position that you are examining, in terms of the establishment of the settlements, relates to the liberal humanist morality of human rights, whereas the moral position that actually led to the establishment of the settlements relates to religious moral law, "divine law," as termed in some of the yeshivas I've known and that the essence of the justification from your perspective, in the moral sphere, is in fact religious. If so, then I come back to the question I asked about the limits of religious justification: What are the moral limitations on actualizing the religious justification for the settlements? If we ignore the overlap between morality and religious law, and refer to the morality of human rights, then retrospectively, it's possible that the most significant justification is the security factor (as "defensive democracy"), whereas the religious**

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justification serves as a supportive ideological construct.

All this relates to the past establishment of the settlements. Today, with a third and a fourth generation residing in the settlements, the moral justification is that they have half a million inhabitants, and therefore the most moral thing to do is to let them continue living there. Dismantling the settlements is an immoral concept, a population transfer for all intents and purposes. Like Gush Katif, by the way.

The economic justification - No doubt the settlements, especially those close to urban centers or central Israel, constituted an attractive and practical residential solution for people with limited means. This is, of course, the result of a deliberate government policy. Someone - I think it was Danny Gottwein, but am not sure - said that rather than abandoning the welfare state, Israel simply transferred it to the territories. Governments that implemented a neo-liberal policy for all intents and purposes, privatizing everything they could, established a model welfare state in the territories, with massive government intervention in the economy. I have no grievances with those who took advantage of this policy, but it certainly does not justify the settlements in terms of the state or the general interest. Those resources that the state invested in subsidizing the settlements (including lands, infrastructures, and the social services now available there), and in encouraging people to move there, could have

been invested in a welfare state policy, in land and housing and other areas within the Green Line. So, the economic reason is only valid at the individual level, not at the state level or in terms of the general interest. I agree.

### **The solution**

The truth is that I hadn't planned to talk about solutions as part of this dialogue, because solutions have to be discussed primarily with the Palestinian side. But apparently, it's inevitable, and since you address this issue, then so will I.

You presuppose that my solution is to evict you from home, and that I see this as some sort of magic fix that will solve all the problems. I do think that there are some approaches with the potential to advance us toward a remedy, and that we have a duty to examine them seriously and purposefully. And, of course, I think that we have a huge responsibility to invest in finding a solution, rather than shirking responsibility and remaining in the position of the eternal victim.

You refer to the solution of a Palestinian state as an existential threat. I addressed the security aspect of this position earlier. But since you also referred to the solution of "a state of all its citizens" an existential threat, I assume that by "existential threat" you mean not only a threat to physical existence but also to the very idea of a Jewish state. If you see an apartheid state as the actualization of the idea of a Jewish state, ...Heaven forbid ...

rather than as an existential threat to this idea ... Moral corruption is indeed an existential threat to the continued existence of the Jewish state, and has led to national destruction in the past, ... then this certainly reveals a clear point of dispute between us. Because from my perspective, an apartheid state (where there is an ethnic division into superior and inferior citizens) fails to meet the conceptual definition of a Jewish state, and is certainly neither a democratic nor a moral state. And it was not worth all the blood shed for it. That is, the threat of an apartheid state is, from my perspective, completely an existential threat, just like a state of all its citizens. Because a Jewish state, from my perspective (and it seems to me this is a fairly widespread perception, not necessarily only among the left), is not merely a state in which Jews can exist securely. It also has a moral dimension. I would like to hear what you think about this. Do we live in an apartheid state? The fundamental assumption of apartheid is that there is a superior race and an inferior one, and that they must be separated. The fact that Israeli Arabs live in the State of Israel, that there is no separation between them and Jews, proves that the state does not regard Arabs as an inferior race. (Of course, individuals might have racist views, but these are also directed at various ethnic groups within society, including my ethnic subgroup.) As such, what is the significance of the separation between settlers and Palestinians in Judea and Samaria? Here's an original idea: the security threat, which manifests from time to time

in mass attacks, attacks against individuals, or the murder of entire families in their own homes. When there is peace, Inshallah, will Arabs live in settlements and settlers in Arab villages? It seems to me that both groups wish to preserve a relatively homogenous society, not necessarily for racist motives as much as cultural differences. Any group with clear cultural characteristics prefers to preserve its boundaries (that's the reality, although I personally do not relate to it, and I'm much happier in heterogeneous groups).

In any case, my position is that Palestinians deserve full equality of rights. At the same time, this should be a gradual, cautious change in light of the bloodied history (and hopefully not the future) of both peoples.

So, my solution is actually not the dismantlement of the settlements ... Wonderful! ... and here I agree with you that the question of the settlements' morality is becoming less relevant. I think that dismantling the settlements is not practical, certainly not under the current political constellation, which is not expected to change substantially in the near future. I also think (hold on to your hat) that such a solution would not be moral at this stage, especially for settlers who did not make an ideological choice (whether because they were born there or arrived as children, or because they moved to a settlement mainly for financial reasons at the state's urging). Truly wonderful!!! I accept the moral principle

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that one does not correct an injustice with an injustice, when it can be avoided (regarding Gaza, I don't think it could have been avoided, given geographic and demographic statistics; regarding the West Bank, it can). This principle, by the way, is based on liberal, individualist moral logic ... True, ... not on collective logic, which is important to note. If one takes the approach of collective justification for the settlements (and any justification based on a historical or religious right is collective), then this logic applies not only retrospectively in establishing the right, but also prospectively, for the sake of correcting injustice. So, it is actually on the basis of liberal morality that I support a confederative solution, with the establishment of a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders and the Palestinians being granted political self-determination as well as basic human rights; but the settlers, many of whom are not directly responsible for the injustices caused by the settlement enterprise, could remain in their homes and continue in their settlements. I'm not suggesting that we use the rest of this dialogue to discuss that solution; I'm sure we both have a lot to say about it (and no - I'm answering preemptively - I do not think that it is a magic fix or perfect solution, but "only" that it is the most just and practical solution available, and far preferable to maintaining the status quo). But it was important for me to say that this is the solution I support, rather than the dismantlement of the settlements.

This is a somewhat funny solution. I don't know

any settlers who would remain in their homes if they were to come under the rule of the Palestinian Authority. It's a life-threatening situation, if not suicidal. You underestimate the intensity of the conflict. I don't want to imagine what would happen to Jews who remain under the rule of the Palestinian Authority. Not to mention what would happen if Israel were to launch a violent operation against Gaza, for example, and the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria had easily available victims for revenge. This is a de facto expulsion of the entire settlements' population, excluding total lunatics (who could be total idealists). I'm not saying that this would create another round of the 1929 riots, because I really don't think that anyone would stay. So, I am saying that we come back to the dismantlement of the settlements and establishment of a Palestinian state.

As for your proposed solution: "In my view the direction should be toward one large Jewish state that would have to address the demographic threat inherent in granting Palestinians equal rights." This is a much better solution than maintenance of the status quo. But I want to understand what you mean by this solution, and how serious you are about it. How do you deal with the "demographic threat"? We remember where we were in 1948, when we also faced a demographic threat, and we coped with it, and apparently, we have to keep coping with it. The challenge hasn't ended. Therefore: 1. We don't make any sudden, radical change that can lead to disaster. We work toward



it slowly and sensibly; 2. We strongly encourage immigration - most of the Jewish people still live in the Diaspora; 3. We [Jews] create large families. Of course, this is not mandatory. Only if you want a moral solution.

Can the state be Jewish and democratic, if it does not have a Jewish majority? How? Then we maintain a Jewish majority. And how do you justify denying the Palestinians a state? I don't justify it. But all the possible solutions include a serious downside. I offer a solution that I consider the least bad, and the least dangerous. By the way, it's really too bad that there's no Palestinian representative in our conversation, so that we could ask him if you are representing his interests effectively. It's possible that if you don't do the ethnic equivalent of "mansplaining" things to him, he might say that he prefers to live the comfortable life of a citizen with equal rights in the State of Israel, far more than to live in a Palestinian state. I'd like to hear why you think this solution is preferable to a confederation. A confederation offers a way of dealing with the "demographic threat" because the citizens of each state would vote for their state's parliamentary body, regardless of their place of residence (not that there aren't other problems, but the demographic problem is a very serious challenge if you want to keep the state Jewish and democratic, and this solution offers a remedy). It seems to me that the solution I proposed reconciles the different value systems that I live by. On the one hand, it grants full civil

rights to Palestinians and doesn't evict settlers from their homes (it's moral in liberal terms), and on the other hand, it preserves national Jewish identity by not relinquishing the biblical land (religiously moral), and, in my view, it poses a far more palatable security threat. In contrast, the confederative solution effectively evicts Jews from their homes (it's immoral in liberal terms), parts with land that has theological and narrative significance (religiously immoral), and, in my view, endangers Israel's security a thousand-fold compared to Gaza (promotes insecurity). These prices would thwart the (very understandable) liberal dream of granting the Palestinians a state of their own. By the way, you wouldn't be rid of the demographic threat, which would continue to simmer beneath the surface in the Jewish state.

# Insights

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**Adam** My main impression from this dialogue is a painful sense of failure. Not an incidental failure of misunderstanding, of entrenched, ego-driven positions, of unwillingness to meet the other halfway, but the inherent failure of the dialogical tool, which produced the opposite of the result I wanted. I thought that through this dialogue I would converse with the leftist elements of myself, with the humanity-loving parts, with the ever-present desire to escape the charged atmosphere here, in this place of bloodshed and pain. Through dialogue, I wanted to leave the settlements and enter the Promised Land. To silence the constant cries of the gun, the fence, the kippa, the checkpoint, the caravan, and to speak in place of them.

And yet I found my fingers flying across the keyboard to lay out the justification for the settlements, carrying the weight of the nation, diving into the depths of the Jewish myth to extract all manner of justifications, confirming conservative positions, struggling to justify, evading guilt, truly acting as a representative of the national religious sector for the glory of the State of Israel. I had no choice: Dana attacked, I had to respond. Dana wondered, I had to justify. Dana was angry, I had to explain. Dana declared, I had to assert. And to stay firm. I agreed to be the subject of a study, and my opinions were indeed studied in depth, answers gleaned, everything justiciable, spelled out, laid bare, no corners unexamined, the science having done its part with what was once magic. The dialogue required us to roleplay left versus right, and I responded. The performativity that determines what is “right” unraveled and disrupted the balance of a genuine, internal, and more interesting roleplay, of being both, of being in a place that is neither left nor right, of being both left and right, of being human, of evading the definitions that those around us are always seeking. For this reason, I feel that I was trapped by a dialogue greater than me. It turns out that the initial juxtaposition of opposites, as Dana formulated it (settler/Tel Avivian, man/woman, Mizrahi/Ashkenazi, etc.) is the beginning and end of the rift, in which I am required to lose and part with predetermined personal traits, transferring responsibility for them to the other.

After this deadening dialogue (deadenning in the sense of still picture, forever frozen) has concluded, I hope I’ll find a new way to bring back the primordial, the unknown, the deliberately blurred, as a political act that counters the oppositional dialogue. In the meantime, I will take comfort in the fact that perhaps this effort at dialogue will convey something about the nature of Israeli discourse and practice, in which there are only two sides, and you must, absolutely must, take a position, which will always be framed as a counter-position to your

partner in dialogue. I wish we could learn not to take stances. To sit without talking. To be silent, for a little while, together. To remember that we are not ideologies, we are human beings.

**Having said all that, here are some impressions that emerged while writing.**

1

I was sorry to discover that the paragraph I wrote at the start of the dialogue summed up most of the dynamics that followed: “It seems to me that this is a one-sided invitation: You’re inviting me to belong to the liberal camp, and rightly so: I share many values with it. But can I invite you to belong to the other camp to which I belong? The national, traditional-religious camp, whose roots in this place go back thousands of years? I have a feeling that this point is central to our discussion: Whereas I feel like an (absent, torn) citizen of both worlds - the national and the humanist, the religious and the secular, the Mizrahi [Eastern] and the Western, the local and the global - it seems to me that you are a citizen of one world, and are therefore surprised by the dual value system that you identify in me.”

When we speak about the common good, we might imagine movement - from opposing poles toward a midpoint. As a religious nationalist, I feel that my (years-long) effort to speak both the religious and the secular languages is not met with a counter-effort (at least not on Dana’s part) to speak both languages. My impression

is that Dana was and remains immersed in the language of secular liberalism, and therefore during the course of this dialogue, she didn’t lose any sense of belonging in terms of her mother tongue. On top of that, I felt that the religious language I used was translated into a secular mindset and therefore lost some of its validity as an independent viewpoint.

2

Alongside the religious-secular language that characterized this dialogue, we had a juxtaposition of other languages: Dana’s analytical-legal conceptual world, which I felt is based on many years of study and familiarity with the field, versus my world, which was more emotional and intuitive, very personal, formulated more in terms of images and memories and less by means of normative definitions of law and order.

3

I was surprised to discover how the same facts, which seem like observable reality to both of us, are in practice very subjective interpretations, dictated by our points of view and motivating us in opposite directions. I was able, perhaps for the first time, to understand the pain felt by the Israeli left, the feelings of despair, which I had previously seen as mainly a threat. They

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still constitute a threat, but I understand and empathize with the point of view. In this context, it also hurt me to discover how hard it is for someone sitting in a Tel Aviv apartment to understand the perspective of people who live just a few kilometers to the east and have a different value system. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to sense empathy for my point of view, for the group to which I belong, on Dana's part. I felt that Dana was often entrenched in a position of blaming the "settlers" and that this position made it very difficult to focus on the common good.

4

The dialogue repeatedly made clear to me that the best way to deal with the painful, emotional, and absurd reality in which we live actually lies in collectively and simultaneously maintaining diverse, conflicting positions. The dominance of one ideology, whether right wing or left wing, poses a real danger in my view. This complex and impossible apparatus known as the State of Israel has a fundamental need for clashing positions in order to exist.

5

During the dialogue I was watching the series Fauda. Looking through Dana's eyes, I experienced the Palestinian pain presented in the series as linked to my presence on this land. I suddenly had to face and acknowledge the suffering to which I'm contributing as both a settler and an Israeli. I noticed once again how easy it is to look

away, and how hard it is to focus on that pain.

6

Dana repeatedly strove toward a solution. As if it's possible to take a specific series of measures that will result in healing and recovery. I am convinced that there are no solutions, but only a long path composed of a nearly infinite sequence of tiny changes. An abrupt change would result in severe shock waves. We cannot redirect the course of the river, but we can make it less threatening: building bridges over it, offering to divide it into new tributaries, to plant fruit trees around it.

7

I was surprised to discover that in contrast to the prevailing stigma, according to which the religious right represents the idealist and the Tel Aviv left represents the hedonist, it is actually Dana who devotes a significant portion of her life to moral activism, driven by a strong internal desire to fix the world. It's a desire that sparks envy, and an internal drive that sparks wonder.

8

I realized that despite thinking I had come a long way ideologically, within the religious-national community, I still rely on the language and worldview with which I grew up.

9

As someone with a background in cinema, I know that we identify with the viewpoint presented by the camera. The illusion of perspective leads us to believe that the world operates only one way. Our dialogue confirmed this perception: Our points of view, constructed by the circumstances of our lives, produce our different worldviews. Dana and I come from completely different worlds, which generated different attitudes and values. I am of the opinion that we must accept this. Attempts to establish an autonomous position, detached from one's particular experience and heritage, produce hollow people.

**Dana** From my perspective, the dialogue achieved its purpose. Through a process that was at times excruciating and emotional, it exposed and clarified the starting points that divide us and their origins. I will first discuss insights in this regard, as well as thoughts about what can be done with these insights. In addition, the dialogue generated insights about dialogue itself as a tool for promoting the common good: For what is it useful? What are its limitations? What are the conditions for it to take place? I will address these insights toward the end.

**Insights about different assumptions regarding settlements**

The dialogue between us revealed different assumptions at two levels - first, assumptions regarding factual reality, and second, differences in our moral systems.

**Initial assumptions about reality**

The main gap that emerged between us, in terms of how we view the reality around us, related to the Palestinians, their attitudes, and the threat they pose to the state.

As Adam wrote about the Palestinians: "My presumption is that their national

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outlook rejects our existence as a Jewish state.” In his view, the Palestinians are opposed not to the occupation beyond the 1967 borders, but to the state’s very existence. He finds proof for this view in the Palestinians’ persistent rejection of Israel’s sincere peace proposals. The outcome of the disengagement - which Adam interprets as an end to Israeli control over Gazans - reinforces his position. As a result, Adam sees no positive potential in reaching an agreement with the Palestinians. Under existing conditions, the current situation is the best possibility in terms of Israel’s security. When might a change take place, in his view? When the Palestinians abandon terrorism, relinquish the right of return, and recognize the Jewish character of the state.

I interpret reality very differently. My presumption is that, like the rest of humanity, most Palestinians want to live regular lives with some degree of material security, political independence, and control over their lives. The change Adam wishes to see in the Palestinian leadership’s position already took place, when the PLO recognized Israel within the 1967 borders (which also meant relinquishing the right of return to lands within these borders) and shifted from armed struggle to the path of diplomatic negotiations (the Oslo process). Regarding what happened subsequently, during and after the Oslo process - many words have been spilled and opinions remain divided. Just as I understand the position Adam represents (which is apparently the position of most Jewish Israelis), I also understand the Palestinian perspective - which includes Israel’s constantly strengthening and expanding settlement enterprise, even while conducting diplomatic negotiations, alongside the Israeli rhetoric about an eternal Israeli presence in Judea and Samaria - as indicating Israel’s lack of willingness to concede its foothold in these parts of the homeland for the sake of a peace agreement and the establishment of a Palestinian state. (Israel’s unilateral disengagement from Gaza, in the absence of an agreement, is not an example of such willingness.) So, from my point of view, both sides have adopted an understandable and supportable “no partner” position. From each side’s perspective, the other side understands only power, and only through power and violence - using the means available to each side - will it be possible to make it surrender and relinquish its full-fledged national ambitions, which come at the expense of the other side.

This gulf between our initial assumptions about the Palestinians’ attitudes and intentions poses a very significant obstacle, perhaps the most significant one. It impedes our ability to conduct a fruitful dialogue on resolving the conflict within Israeli society. And assuming that Adam’s outlook, that is, a complete lack of trust in the Palestinians, is more representative than mine, and it certainly is the one promoted by the long-governing right, then, of course, it impedes any chance of progress toward

an agreement with the Palestinians. Indeed, the implication of that outlook is that there is no trust or interest in such an agreement on the Israeli side. This is a self-fulfilling prophecy: Because we do not believe that the Palestinians are interested in a peace agreement with Israel, then we also have no interest in reaching an agreement with them.

It is essential that my camp understand the depth of mistrust of Palestinians on the Israeli side, and the centrality of this obstacle. Although I had been aware of its existence, hearing it explained so unequivocally by Adam certainly enhanced my understanding. The dialogue with Adam also helped me understand the extent to which our different life experiences shape our interpretation of reality. Adam's direct, personal familiarity with many victims of the conflict on the Israeli side (both in wars and in terrorist strikes) is much deeper than mine. Conversely, my familiarity with Palestinians, citizens of Israel as well as residents of the territories, as ideological partners and personal friends whom I fully trust, and consequently my familiarity with their view of the conflict, is much deeper than Adam's.

A change in the Israeli attitude toward Palestinians is a condition for Israeli society to become willing to reach an agreement. But I did not see any genuine desire on Adam's part to have his beliefs regarding the Palestinians refuted. When fear of the price that an agreement with the Palestinians would exact is so great, then the "no partner" position, rejecting the possibility of such an arrangement and holding the Palestinian side responsible for the situation, is a comfortable position that justifies maintaining the status quo. This holds true even when it is understood that, in principle, such an agreement is desirable and the status quo is morally problematic. Under the circumstances, I fear that we, the Israeli left, have very little ability to influence the mainstream Israeli attitude toward Palestinians. It's possible that only the emergence of a "Palestinian Sadat" - who could undermine the widely held Israeli belief that the Palestinians would not accept Israel's existence under any circumstances - might bring about a change. This is certainly a cause for pessimism over the possibility that Israeli society might become willing to reach an agreement in the absence of outside coercion.

### **Different assumptions stemming from different value systems**

The dialogue also revealed gaps between our value systems, resulting in different attitudes toward the settlements. But even before addressing these gaps, let me say that they seem more bridgeable than the one I discussed above, regarding interpretations of reality.

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### The religious connection

The religious-national narrative of the return to parts of the land that to which the Jewish people have a legal right plays a central part in Adam's attitude toward the settlement enterprise. That view forms no part of my outlook (although I can understand it), and it creates a significant gap in our positions. But I would not overstate its importance, given that Adam's commitment is actually twofold: He also sees himself as committed to a humanist morality that recognizes and respects the other's rights. When I pressed Adam on the limitations of religious justification (what is permissible in the name of actualizing the Jewish hold throughout the historical Land of Israel), he acknowledged that the main justification in his view is security, and that the religious aspect is only supportive. Adam made it clear that there is no aspiration to seize control over all parts of the historical Land of Israel, and that if he came to believe that there is a solution that does not compromise the state's security, then he would be willing, albeit sadly, to relinquish parts of the homeland. Thus, the religious connection to Judea and Samaria greatly increases the price of parting with them, but it does not constitute an insurmountable obstacle.

### Circles of empathy and loyalty

Adam made it clear that he fully recognizes the suffering of the Palestinians, but that the boundaries between them and him remain intact, and his concern for his own people is greater. This is an ethical system that prioritizes internal, tribal loyalty (or at least places it on equal footing with general principles of morality). My ethical system differs, and the dialogue with Adam helped me clarify the difference. It is not a matter of communal versus universal ethics, as my ethical system, too, derives from my belonging to a collective, but in a different way. My identification with the state is what makes me feel responsible for the injustice that my state is perpetuating against the Palestinians. This is not because their suffering is greater or because I have more empathy toward them (as Adam mistakenly assumed), but because I prioritize loyalty to the moral principles by which I am bound over internal communal loyalty. That is, the difference between us lies not in my feeling more empathy than Adam for the Palestinians' suffering, but in my feeling a greater sense of responsibility than he does for the injustice committed against them.

So, this is another difference that emerged from our dialogue: Adam identifies less with what his state is doing (and therefore feels less responsible for it) than I do. My collective identification (and resulting sense of responsibility) is directed toward the state, whereas, for Adam, it is directed more toward the Jewish people, if I understood correctly. I was surprised by the extent of Adam's non-



identification with the state and the army, and by the resulting absence of a sense of responsibility. Adam stated that the evacuation of Gush Katif intensified his lack of identification, and our dialogue helped me understand how deeply Adam's camp felt that the state had betrayed the residents of Gush Katif. I wonder to what extent Adam's emotional detachment from what his state and army are doing to the Palestinians in his name stems from the fact that the victims are not part of his tribe (that is, a question of identifying with the victims, or of empathy), and to what extent the detachment stems from the fact that he does not really identify with the state/army and doesn't feel that their actions represent him (that is, a question of identifying with the offenders, or of responsibility).

In any case, these gaps in our level of empathy and object of loyalty seem bridgeable rather than chasmic to me. Our dialogue was very helpful for me, and I think for Adam too, in understanding the other's perspective at the emotional level as well. The gaps surrounding the question of responsibility, on the other hand, seem more problematic to me.

### Responsibility

An interesting finding that emerged from the dialogue was our different attitudes toward the question of responsibility: Who is responsible for the moral injustice represented by the occupation and who is responsible for correcting it? While for me the key to this question lies in the present - who has more control over the current situation and its perpetuation (the answer being the government in Israel and the Israeli public that elects it), Adam kept looking to the past - to the question of fault (his answer being that the Palestinians were at fault for the situation), and to the future - to the question of the price (his answer being that any agreement depends on the consent of settlers who would bear most of the cost). Eventually we agreed that there was little point in addressing or trying to agree on the question of "fault," or the moral justification for settlements (which, of course, relates to interpretations of reality), and that this does not determine the question of responsibility in the present. But on the question of price, and its impact on the matter of responsibility for resolving the situation, we apparently remained divided.

### Prices and decisions

Adam is convinced that the main reason the left wants to dismantle the settlements (or allow them to remain but under Palestinian sovereignty, which for Adam is equivalent to dismantlement) is that it would not be paying the price. And because economic considerations, and decisions made under economic constraints (generated by the state), were most significant in creating the settlement

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enterprise, the class differences between those advocating dismantlement of the settlements - who did not face such constraints - and those who would pay the price for their dismantlement only exacerbate the injustice of this solution.

While for Adam the current situation (settlements and control over the Palestinians) is a given, and he focuses on the future cost of changing this situation, I also look at the price being paid in the present for the current situation. The ones bearing the brunt of this cost are, of course, the Palestinians. Adam is aware of this, although it seems to me that he doesn't attribute the same weight to this price that I do. Perhaps because he feels less empathy for those who do not number among his people, perhaps because he does not feel responsible for this injustice, perhaps because he feels that the Palestinians are at fault for their situation, and perhaps because of a combination of these three factors (all of which came up during the dialogue).

But in addition to the Palestinians, there is the price paid by Israelis like me, who bear responsibility for the injustice committed in their name without their consent, and whose ability to identify with our state and educate our children to do so is severely impaired as a consequence. Adam revealed that thanks to the dialogue, he was able to see the price that Israelis opposed to the occupation pay for the current situation. But it seems that, in his eyes, this pricing is still dwarfed by the price settlers would have to pay for an agreement that alters sovereignty in the territories.

It turns out that each of us has a very ambivalent attitude toward the state: on the one hand, identification (which for me leads to a heavy sense of responsibility, and for Adam to a sense of mutual commitment), and on the other hand, betrayal (for Adam - as a consequence of the disengagement, and in conceiving of any future shift in the state's position on the settlements; for me, it is an ongoing betrayal by the state of the humanitarian values it purports to uphold, and a betrayal of me as its citizen and unwilling partner to its needs). Each of us is holding one end of a rope that the state purports to hold at both ends, and if it loosens its hold at one end, for the sake of reinforcing its hold over the other, then one of us will see this action as a betrayal. This is a tragic situation, in which the state has created two deeply rooted, yet conflicting, commitments - a commitment to democracy, equality, human dignity, and the universal humanitarian value system, on the one hand, and a commitment to control and settle a tract of land already settled by another people, on the other hand. Ultimately, the state will have to make a decision, as it cannot continue holding both ends of the rope forever. In fact, in recent decades, a decision has already been taking shape,

in favor of the second commitment. If he and like-minded others conclude that this is a final and irrevocable decision, then we will not be able to see any future for our children here, which from my perspective is a terrible conclusion (and if I understood correctly, this outcome would also deeply sadden Adam). If, in the future, the state was to opt for an agreement with the Palestinians so as to rid itself of the injustice and moral corruption of extended rule over another people, then the settlers would, rightly, feel betrayed by the state that had sent them. That is, the settlement enterprise has created a zero-sum game, in which any decision in favor of one commitment would inevitably create a sense of defeat, and betrayal by the state, among those who identify with the other commitment. This is probably the saddest insight I derived from our dialogue.

The main difference between us, therefore, lies not in our moral systems, but in our positioning within the reality created by forces greater than us: the prices each of us pays in the current situation and will pay if it changes. It seems to me that the key to finding a path to the “common good” under these circumstances lies in reducing the gap between our different interpretations of reality. As long as one holds onto the position that Palestinians are an eternal enemy who will not accept Israel’s existence under any circumstances, then one can justify the continuing rule over them and resolve the contradiction between this rule and universal moral values - because war, by its nature, is a zero-sum struggle, and this is a struggle we must win. This is, of course, a comfortable belief in that it justifies maintaining the status quo and avoids the need to bear the costs of changing it. In order for cracks to form in this belief (as long as no “Palestinian Sadat” appears on the scene), it probably needs to become less comfortable - that is, that the costs of maintaining the status quo would have to be recognized.

The price that Palestinians are paying is not part of our equation. It remains for us to address the price that the state and Israeli society are paying. The international boycott movement (which is actually a Palestinian movement of non-violent resistance - and therefore so threatening) is one way of highlighting the international and economic price paid by the state, and which is likely to increase if the movement grows stronger. Much has been said about the moral corruption resulting from ruling over the Palestinians, particularly the effect on young soldiers who control the lives of a civilian population, and apparently this price isn’t seen as too threatening either. Is there a way to explain the price of losing an entire portion of Israeli society, of its loss of identification with the state and faith in its future? This question remains open, in my view.

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## Insights on dialogue

### The expected value of dialogue

What can we expect from a dialogue? If the dialogue between Adam and me is an indication, then dialogue can lead to two types of significant insights: For each side, it clarifies its own positions and the justifications for them, thereby also clarifying the differences between the sides. In addition, it fosters in-depth understanding of the other side's positions, conceptualization of reality, and narrative. Both these types of insights are, in my view, essential to any discussion about the common good. What really stood out in this specific dialogue is the insights it generated on the question of costs, a question that seems critical in trying to make progress toward the common good. Understanding the prices that different groups pay for the current situation and would pay for potential changes - as determined by their different positions in the social-economic-political reality - is critical. To a large extent, our beliefs about reality serve the reality we wish to see, and this was very evident here, on both sides. Therefore, if we are comfortable with the present reality and consider it preferable to any alternative, then we have no reason to change the beliefs we hold that justify it, or to believe in the possibility of a different reality. It seems to me that understanding the prices other groups are paying for the current reality - prices that may eventually affect us too - is necessary for the formation of cracks in our beliefs about reality. Of course, this holds in the other direction as well: Understanding the prices that another group would pay for changing the current reality is necessary for determining what change is possible, how to minimize the cost of change, and the type of change in which that group can be enlisted.

None of this means that dialogue will necessarily foster progress toward a common good. There may be a situation - and the settlements may be such a situation - in which the gaps between different groups' positions, and between the prices that each is paying for the status quo versus what it would pay for change, are simply too great to allow any agreement on the need for change and the nature of the change needed. Dialogue can assist in reaching an understanding that this is the situation. Then we are left with a power struggle among the groups and additional influential parties (in this case - the Palestinians, the international community), and the preservation or change of the status quo would be determined not by agreements on the common good, but by the balance of power that emerges. Even a belief in the power of dialogue

## Speaking about Settlements | A dialogue between a leftist and a settler

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must, under certain circumstances, be realistic rather than naïve. I admit, regretfully, that the dialogue with Adam did not make me optimistic about the possibility of reaching an internal Israeli understanding on proceeding toward an agreement with the Palestinians.

### The conditions for dialogue

This is not a new observation, but our dialogue did reinforce it: Basic trust between participants - in their good faith, in their sincerity - is a fundamental condition for fruitful dialogue. This is particularly true when the animosity and suspicion between their camps run so deep - as this dialogue revealed. Even though, at the personal level, the relationship between Adam and me is one of trust and mutual respect, he ascribed to me certain attitudes (such as disdain for religion, or a simplistic view of the “good guys” and “bad guys” in this conflict) based solely on my political affiliation. Without a foundation of personal trust, we would not have been able to advance beyond stereotypical perceptions, entrenchment, and defensiveness, or to open up and truly listen to the other’s experience.

### Between the personal and political

The dialogue revealed an interesting tension between the personal dimension - understanding the personal experience of each participant, his or her personal story, and how it affects their respective positions - and the political dimension - which approaches the conflict through the lens of power relations and inter-group control. In the first part of the dialogue, it was very apparent that Adam was pulling toward the personal - and even the psychological, the emotional - while I was pulling toward the political. Similarly, in terms of the resolution required, it’s clear to me that we need to resolve the relations of power and control between Israel and the Palestinians politically, whereas Adam spoke about the quality of relations between people, about improving day-to-day living conditions for Palestinians, and the like. I sensed a substantial (and from his point of view, understandable) aversion on his part to the possibility of changing the power relations, an aversion that may explain the escape to the personal. Adam introduced the issue of power relations from another angle, namely, socio-economic status: From his perspective, the settlements are a factor that somewhat balances what he views as my higher status. Thus, in our relationship, in contrast to relations between Jews and Palestinians, the settlements are a power-balancing factor, which, in his view, also accounts for the left’s opposition to them. That is, there are different axes of power relations at work here, and the question of when to invoke the personal and when to involve the political also depends on the question of which power axis we are observing and our position along this axis.

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Every dialogue takes place within a given set of power relations, which exist between different groups and at different levels, and these have a decisive impact on the course of the dialogue. Who has an interest in preserving or changing these power relations? Who would pay the price for disrupting a given power dynamic and who would not? It seems to me that for a dialogue to touch on the fundamental relations and differences between the parties, it is important to clarify the different axes of power relations and the positions of the participants along these axes - that is, to clarify the interaction between the personal and the political, within that specific dialogue. Having done that, the parties can proceed, knowing which power relations they are addressing. The personal, then, does not serve as a means of escaping questions about power relations, but rather as a means of understanding power relations and their impact on attitudes. This did not mean that one can simplistically reduce attitudes to power relations. Rather, it is important to grant power relations visibility and presence in a dialogue, both as a source of influence and as a focus for potential resolution.

