

Selected Chapters:
The Responsibility of the Minority
Nazir Magally

Selected Chapters of
The Responsibility of the Minority
האחריות של המיעוט | مسؤولية الأقلية

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Introduction

Everyone has been a minority at some point. Even those who are part of a majority now are liable to find themselves in the minority in the future. It could be at a national level or a state level, it could be as a minority within a majority group, or a minority within a family, a workplace, a neighborhood, a discussion group, a classroom, or in any other framework. Sometimes one may choose to be a minority. But other times you have no control over it. You are born and find yourself in a minority, and begin to pay a price for it, from the moment of birth. The same exact thing can be said about being in a majority.

In wars between majorities and minorities, the loss is inestimable. I think that it is possible to put an end to conflict, to seek different paths. A person who is part of the majority has to imagine himself in the place of someone who is part of a minority, and vice versa. Each of the parties will be able to understand what is gained from the conflict and what is lost from it.

The detailed initiative here is an Arab initiative that, first and foremost, serves the Arab public in Israel. There is no naiveté here, nor is there any attempt to be clever. The source of the initiative lies in a sober vision of the enormous potential embedded in the important status and substantial experience of Arab citizens, as members of a national minority in Israel. They symbolize how the State of Israel has missed its opportunity, on the one hand, and how the Arab people, in general, and the Palestinian people, in particular, have failed to see their own opportunity, on the other hand. They could have constituted a bridge to bring hearts closer, to cross boundaries and build trust. Much time has passed without the Arab public in Israel fulfilling this role. But still, better late than never.

No Israeli citizen knows the Arabs and Arabness as we do — not the Shin Bet, not the Mossad, and not the Military Intelligence Directorate, nor even the

expert journalists specializing in Arab affairs in the Hebrew language media. We are members of the Arab nation. Its language is our mother tongue. We were raised to understand its secrets, to hear its music and its unique nuances. We learned its culture lovingly. We know the legacy it has bequeathed us and are intimately connected to this nation in all strata of our lives. We are conversant with its history, politics, economics, art, theology, folklore, and education. We are also closely aware of its weaknesses, even as we are cognizant of its successes, strengths and the wealth of human resources within it.

At the same time, there are no Arabs in the world who know the Jews and Judaism better than us. There are no Arabs like us who live amongst the Jews, meet with them, study with them, work with them, make friends with them, and quarrel with them. There are no other Arabs who can explain the essence of the Jews and of Judaism derived from the experience that we have. We learn Hebrew and speak it almost like a mother tongue; we know about the Jewish festivals and live them in our daily lives. In our schools, we learn the Bible, the Talmud, and Ethics of the Fathers, as well as Bialik and Tchernichovsky. We know a great deal about Jewish history, and, more than any other Arabs, we have come to recognize Jewish suffering and to understand its sources and the needs to which it gave birth. We have much experience in seeking the trajectory for a solution to the conflict. All this is due to our living our life in Israel — and we do not wish to relinquish our lives here — and due to our being among the cardinal believers in peace between the two peoples. This is why we can serve as a model for a life of coexistence between Jews and Arabs.

To date, there has been no opportunity that has not been lost. All the generations of the leadership of the State of Israel, except for a small minority, have looked upon us as part of the Arab enemy. We have been treated to duress and remoteness, and a mental boundary has been established between us that is hard to overcome. The State of Israel could have been an paradigm for coexistence between Jews and Arabs, based on equality, without

discrimination and racism; it could have prided itself that the Jewish people, who had suffered so much from discrimination and persecution, could show that it had established in Israel an admirable state in which justice, equality, and compassion reigned. But, even during the period of peace agreements, we were shunted aside. In 1993, when Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was on his way to Washington to sign the Oslo Accords, I asked him why, among the 15 members of his entourage, there was not even one Israeli Arab member. Without hesitation, he replied, “Because this is peace between Jewish Israel and the Palestinians.”

The Arabs, including the Palestinians, surprised us by missing opportunities, while constantly transmitting suspicion. At first, the fact that we remained on our home turf was defined as a kind of betrayal of the nation. When we were rediscovered, they wanted to recruit us for a liberation army. Those who sought peace with Israel ignored us and the special status that we could have brought to the peace talks. When they got to know us more closely, our difference or our unique quality was not acknowledged for many years. Their position with regard to Jewish identity was consolidated only in relation to the conflict and its ramifications. In their view, the Jew is a soldier in a conquering army who oppresses the Palestinian, and abuses people — children and helpless civilians. He is racist, a thief, stingy, exploitative, evasive, and many other stereotypical derogatory epithets. They do not know the good Jew, the human, generous, honest one — the one we know. When you watch the television series Ramadan, and see how the Jew is portrayed, one feels repugnance. In series like these, the Jew is always aggressive, a swindler, a backstabber. During the month of Ramadan in 2020, a series was broadcast in the Arab world called “Mother of Aharon” that purported to portray Jews who were living in the Gulf States on the eve of the establishment of the State of Israel. Even before the first episode was aired, hundreds of writers from all over the Arab world attacked the series and accused the MBC network of promoting normalization with Israel. I wondered to myself how it was possible that even talking about

a normal Jewish family had become a crime. When I saw all 30 of the episodes of the series, I couldn't believe my eyes and ears. Not only was this not a series about normalization, but the reverse was true. The Jews were portrayed as evil. The best of them, the mother of Aharon herself, and Masouda, the Rabbi's wife and her daughter, Rachel, converted to Islam. A considerable portion of the intellectuals in the Arab world had allowed themselves to judge a series without seeing it at all, nor did they bother to apologize to their own public. How was this possible? Only because it was about Jews.

But we too, the Arab citizens of Israel, did not bother to understand the potential in our special status. In the Arab sphere, we sometimes became part of internal conflicts and we made many enemies. Some of our politicians demanded and accepted money from all kinds of countries and organizations and rich Arabs, when we all know that money is not given without expecting something in return. When the peace talks between Israel and the Arab countries began, we adopted antagonistic positions. When Sadat came to Israel, we joined those opposing the visit and called him a traitor, even though, thanks to his visit and the peace agreement, many of us were able to go on trips to Egypt, which we very much loved to do. We behaved just like that towards King Hussein, and in time, we flocked to visit Jordan. Even Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas were not absolved in our eyes and many of our leaders attacked — and continue to attack — them and accuse them of surrender and obsequiousness towards Israel. When the borders between us and some Arab states opened up, we traveled there with authentic Israeli audacity, as well as a large smattering of arrogance and a condescending attitude to our hosts.

In terms of Israel, we were dragged into the hostility that was prepared for us. We fostered a policy of reacting rather than a policy of initiative. We missed out on opportunities. We feared drawing close to the "other". We encouraged hypocrisy and duplicitous behavior. In many areas, we missed the train of progress. We ignored positive things and emphasized the negative. We

demand our democratic rights in Israel — and this is justified and important — but we ourselves, as a society are far from being democratic. We do not conduct ourselves in a democratic manner — neither at home in relation to our children or our wives, nor at school at the level of the principal’s attitude to teachers, or the teacher’s attitude to the pupils, and not in prayer locations either. We demand the right to equality, but we ourselves are not an egalitarian society. We have a policy of discrimination towards women and towards any internal minority. We fight any racism towards us as Arabs — and rightly so—but in our own vicinity there is a considerable amount of racism of Muslims towards Christians or Druze, and vice versa, of a large clan towards a small clan, of urban Arabs towards rural Arabs or Bedouin. We cry out to heaven against Jewish racism towards us, we harp on the surveys that show how much the Jews do not like us, and we do not ask ourselves how much we hate the Jews.

The multi-channeled missed opportunity is not unavoidable. We have the ability to change — and better late than never. If this is not of prime importance for our leaders, it should be a priority for us, women and men of our people, opinion-makers and intellectuals. The truth is that Arab leaders are beginning to show interest. The Palestinian leadership has made large strides in this direction. In Israel, too, there is beginning to be a change in trajectory. But the main task in this matter must lie with us, the general public, and these ideas must be our strategic goals. This is our responsibility — the responsibility of the minority.

Chapter One | **The Responsibility of the Minority: My Personal Story**

a. The First Lesson I Learned

The first lesson I learned as a member of a minority actually occurred in the eastern neighborhood of Nazareth. One day, as I was going home from school, I encountered a group of neighborhood kids. One of them instigated artificial tension between us, and that could have made the situation deteriorate into a general clash, as it often happens with us. Fortunately for me, it was an afternoon in the month of Ramadan, when we believed that we ought to behave with patience and tolerance. We were all fasting. We all knew that it was forbidden to fight. I reminded them of the Islamic commandment for those days, and we managed not to spill blood.

That wasn't the first incident, nor the last. Even as a child you shoulder the burden of adult problems. I understood that being a minority, even within your own people, implies a serious blow against our sense of security. There were then a small number of refugee families who had been displaced or had fled from their homes during the Nakba, long before I was born. My father had fled from his home in Beisan (Beit Shean today) to Jordan with his whole family and his clan. From their point of view, this was a move of a few hundred meters, from west of the river to its east. From our point of view, it was a fatal blow to a whole people. That is why it is called the Nakba (catastrophe). A national disaster. After two months, Father fled from Jordan and returned to Beisan. In a moment of anger, in front of a few friends in a coffee shop in the town of Irbid in Jordan, he had dared to criticize the kingdom and was arrested for that. He managed to get away from the police and to cross the river before they could catch him. He got back to Beit Shean and found that his house had been occupied. He tried to get it back, begged, pleaded and even offered to buy the place from the Jewish residents, but to no avail. The Israeli authorities told him to get used to the new reality that was being created in

Israel. They directed him to Nazareth or back to Jordan. Father rented a small 2-roomed rooftop apartment in the eastern neighborhood of Nazareth, and there it was that I was born as were nine of my brothers, year after year, until we were orphaned. The humiliation of being refugees and its ramifications were remembered by my father until his dying day; he died a young man of only 54.

After Father's death, Mother took over the reins of the family, and in time my brother Samir, who is four years older than me, took responsibility over the family. Mother was born in Al-Midan, in the very heart of Damascus, a very beautiful, pleasant woman, a seamstress for bridal and women's clothing. The women of the neighborhood called her the beautiful daughter of A-Sham (the French dubbed the area Levant). Everyone loved the food and sweet things that Mother made. I do not remember even one day when there were no guests in our home. She also breastfed the neighbors' babies so that each of us, in turn, had brothers and sisters who had shared our mother's milk. Islam recognizes this kind of brotherhood and forbids marriage with those who have shared the same breast milk. In this way, my mother managed to earn a slightly different status than other refugees in the neighborhood, who suffered from discrimination on the part of the established families. But, discrimination did not pass us, her children, by. Even neighbors who had benefited from her breast milk did not always help her refugee children, even though they were our milk siblings. It is hard to forget the fear we frequently felt in our games, weddings, and other events that included many participants. Sometimes we were subjected to really violent attacks, and we always had to find the strength that would shore us up against the neighborhood children.

Father invested much more than he could afford in our education. He did not do this because of his feelings as a refugee, nor because of our absorption problems in the neighborhood, but rather because he himself was illiterate and had suffered greatly because of that. Mother, also illiterate, was very

supportive. Both of them insisted that all the boys of the family would study at the prestigious Terra Sancta School, and that all the girls would attend the Franciscan school for girls. At both schools the tuition was high. I was the only one of the boys who met the challenge and completed his studies at that school. My sisters also completed the demanding studies at the Franciscan school, while my brothers moved to state schools. My success at school soon became a secret weapon among the children of my age, and my status improved. Eventually, many years before I became acquainted with Jewish history, I learned an important lesson: success, excellence, the solidarity of the minority boys and girls, are invaluable tools for survival. I did not know then that that was my first lesson in Judaism, and I did not then realize that it was a recipe for both jealousy and hatred. That is a lesson one learns physically, and the scars leave their marks on the soul for many years.

Of course, it is hard to cope with the suffering involved in a relationship of this type. So anyone who survives it successfully is resilient. It can be said, with certainty, that coping with suffering nurtures a survival instinct, increases the ability to cope, and opens up options for making changes and adaptations. There is no choice, you must succeed.

At school, too, I was in the minority. Terra Sancta is an educational institution belonging to the Latin Church. Most of the pupils and the teachers were Christians. In general, the Christians were an overwhelming majority in the city and had a high moral profile in the school too. There were no conflicts based on ethnicity. Teachers and pupils included us. They did not bother us. They were not condescending. They did not hurt our feelings. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the fact that the customs and ways of the majority during festivals, daily prayers, special events, in symbols, in routine visits to the adjacent church, left the minorities on the margins, as second-class pupils. As Muslims, we were exempt from studying religion and prayers, but I was one of the few Muslims who chose to stay in the classroom during Christian religious

studies. I wanted to know and understand. So that no one would think that I was a sycophant, I stayed in the classroom without asking questions, and I did not pray out loud. I simply sat there, listened, and moved on to the next class in which I did participate as a regular student. There were consequences: my Christian friends in the class viewed me as a different Muslim. I was, in a way, one of them. The relationships were very good. Almost everyone visited me at home and I visited their homes. Nonetheless, there were many moments of loneliness.

My challenge was to excel. I did this in three ways. First, I worked hard to maintain my place among those at the top of the class. Second, I tried to become prominent in cultural activities outside of the school curriculum. I became friendly with a group of students who acted in the school play, and the first play that I participated in was “Joan of Arc”. Third, I worked on the weekends so that I could be considered one of the rich students who could afford to buy himself a half-portion of falafel every day.

My decision to work came to me on one of the frosty days in the eighth grade. My shoes were broken and my feet were frozen. We did not know what a coat or hat was. My ears were swollen with the cold. I started to cry in the street, and when I got to the school gates, I didn’t go inside. Instead, I turned right, in the direction of the well. I went to find a job. I went into the Almascovia restaurant in the Russian building that was then becoming the police and the military administration building, and in which later all the government offices were located — the magistrate’s court, and the population bureau of the Ministry of the Interior, as well as the post office and income tax authority.

Most of the clerks and workers were Jewish. The owner of the restaurant, Ramez Newisar, took pity on the poor child who had turned up there unexpectedly and gave me a job on the spot. I started by washing dishes, and later supplied the offices with food orders.

The restaurant customers were military officers, policemen, and security officials, tax officials, population registry clerks, and most importantly, they provided licenses to leave the city. All Arab Israelis who worked outside the city or studied at the university, or needed treatment at the hospital, had to show a license from the army. To this day, I remember the long lines, the shouting and the quarreling and the nervous tension. I used to serve coffee to the officials in charge, sometimes a few times a day, and I was a witness to the great suffering of many of the people who visited the place. I saw much condescension and abusive behavior, but the boss's instructions were clear and unequivocal: "We are here to make a living; we must not interfere in any way."

That was my first encounter with Jews. It was my first big lesson as a member of the Arab minority in relation to the Jewish majority.

A child who works in a restaurant is not a member of the upper class. You are just someone who serves coffee, tea, sandwiches, or a plate of hummus. And you have to do it correctly. Cleanly, without spilling even a drop of water. You have to bring the drinks, hot and speedily. You have to follow orders, not to forget the orders, to be neat, to smile a lot, to be polite, to accept anger and capriciousness from the customers. As one who was studying at the Christian school and needed the money, I was able to deal with this successfully. It was not easy. But I coped with this trial. As I became more experienced, the boss promoted me and even dared to rely on me and to leave me alone in the restaurant many hours a day. He even gave me more hours during the holidays and allowed me to work in the afternoons after school.

Over the years, I got to know a wide variety of Jews: policemen who arrested me for vagrancy; customers who had me work on the shutters in their homes; airport security workers; men who came to hear my lecture at a Jerusalem synagogue or at the police academy in Shfaram; soldiers at the checkpoint at the entrance to Bir Zeit; a patient hospitalized in the same room as my mother in the hospital in Nazareth; protesters calling out that Nazareth residents should

leave the country for Arab countries; Holocaust survivors who joined the Arab Initiative to visit Auschwitz together in the framework of the course on Jewish history; lecturers who taught me journalism at Zionist Organization of America House in Tel Aviv, and students I taught at Ben-Gurion University together with my friend and colleague Prof. Dan Brown; my friends in the Communist Party in Givatayim and Kibbutz Yad Hana; my colleagues at Shaharit; partners from Ofra and Tekoa; my editors and managers in the television and radio programs I presented and the many assistants — technicians, photographers, sound engineers — in those programs. These are people from the political left and right, from politics, and from society, cold- and warm-hearted; rude and pleasant; hostile and friendly, supported and undermining. Jews of all kinds — just like the Arabs.

My extensive experience has led me to an unambiguous conclusion: despite all the deficiencies of discriminatory policy, despite the suffering from the many ramifications of our lives, and despite the numerous impediments that are placed in our paths, we can change our situation for the better. The way to do this is bound up with us, and is not solely dependent on the majority. If we have the sense to take our fate into our own hands and not to wait until it is given to us, we can fundamentally change our situation for the better. Moreover, there is no one other than us, Israeli Arabs, who can prove that we can live together and even contribute to the advancement of peace between our country and our people. Although we are a minority within a Jewish majority, and despite the laws and the regime, and the symbols and the means and the huge power of the majority, we have the potential, the tools and the ability to influence our situation and to change it. In my opinion, we also have the responsibility — the responsibility of the minority.

Yes, the minority also has to take responsibility, and, in my opinion, not much less than the majority and perhaps even more. Sometimes, the behavior of the minority dictates that of the majority, just as the behavior of the majority often

dictates that of the minority, for better or for worse. This is true wherever there is a majority and a minority, everywhere in the world. I am one of those people who believe in the right of a person to live a full life of satisfaction and self-realization with an obligation to the future generations. The responsibility of the minority to itself and to the majority is, in my opinion, part of a general obligation that we must fulfill.

b. From Europe to Syria and Beyond

It is hard to find a country in the world that does not have a national minority. Nevertheless, in recent years, the level of risk to minorities has increased everywhere on the planet. In Europe, a minority is viewed as an existential threat. Extreme forces conduct a harsh, violent struggle in order to get rid of minorities, and enjoy broad support from the general public. Neo-Nazis have become a political force increasing with dizzying speed and are cause for concern. The Hitlerite slogans that were previously used against Jews and other minorities are being heard again against Muslims, Arabs, Blacks, and other minorities. The comparison with the Nazi horrors is not unrealistic. Many fear genocide, not only deportation.

Not all the Europeans who express understanding about the struggle against the minorities are racist and neo-Nazis. They simply see the minority as a threat to their country, their achievements, their culture, their polity, their values, and the rule of law. A considerable proportion of them are not hostile to minorities and would even prefer to include them, but they feel threatened. And among the reasons for this is the behavior of the minority itself and of its political-social-religious leadership.

Nonetheless, there is great potential in Europe for minorities to be included. The level of civilization that developed there after the Nazi era, the guilt feelings about the brutal imperialist rule of some European states over other

peoples, the rise of laws and customs of human rights, the exhaustion after two world wars and several other smaller wars, the desire and vital need for peace — all these open up huge opportunities for minorities to integrate into Western countries. The responsibility that falls on the shoulders of the minority is to prove that it is indeed possible to live together.

If a minority attempts to impose its customs on the majority, if the minority does not respect the values and norms of the majority, or, to put it another way, if the guests disrupt the lifestyle of the locals, they only concede to the extremists who wish to harm the minority and to all those who identify with them.

And if a minority becomes a victim of the majority in Europe, majorities in developing countries would rush to adopt the same policy, and even employ other dimensions of aggression and horror. There human rights are meaningless. There the laws do not protect the oppressed. What has been going on in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, India, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and some African countries validates this fear. Millions of helpless people are expelled; minorities or members of “other” communities are subject to pogroms and horrific crimes. The developed world has not succeeded in preventing this violence. To the contrary, in many cases the wars of the most powerful actors in the world are transferred to and flow into those very areas. In many cases, in our Middle Eastern region, the local people become the cannon fodder of the new age of wars.

c. Mutual Suspicion

With regard to us, the Arabs of Israel, we are not a minority that moved into the home of the majority. In contrast to other cases, we are the indigenous people. We were born here. For hundreds and thousands of years we were part of the majority, and suddenly, under tragic circumstances, we became a minority.

We did not initiate the process whereby we eventually became a minority. But the result is undeniable and we can do nothing now except grapple with it. In my opinion, despite all the problems and difficulties, the way we live as a minority in Israel could be a prime example of how a minority influences the majority all over the world. This is not only due to the sharp paradoxes that we bear. We are an Arab minority which is part of the enormous majority in the Arab region of the Middle East, and we are governed by a Jewish majority which is a national minority in the region. The backdrop to this is that the ruling Jewish majority experienced great suffering as a minority, subject to the oppression of the majority in many countries of the world over the course of history, including discrimination, harassment, racism, murderous persecution, and expulsion for centuries. Arab countries also took part in hatred of Jews, but this is dwarfed in comparison to the suffering of Jews in Europe, where the nations descended to the lowest levels and attempted to exterminate the Jewish people.

It seems that this is a very complex situation that is almost irresolvable. The Jewish-Arab or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as it is called, makes it even more complicated. As a result of this conflict, many families have lost their beloved children, many have suffered pain and disabilities, and even more people have lost their lands, their homes, their property, and their memories. Human dignity has been trampled. Many among us are ruled by anger, terror, and desire for revenge. The longer the conflict lasts, and the longer that many benefit from it and earn money and prestige from it, the further away the political solution that could put an end to the conflict seems. Many people have already lost hope that there will ever be an end to it. Every negative event in relation to this conflict casts a shadow and harms the relationships between Jews and Arabs within Israel. Instead of these relationships being a positive example for all nations, they have become fragile relations that shatter under the simplest tests.

The Arab minority feels threatened by the Jewish majority. The Nakba has become a living, unforgettable memory. Although there is no longer military rule, its spirit and methods of action remain strongly present: the fixation about the Jewishness of the state, the Nation-State Law in its current version, as well as dozens of other laws, expropriation of land, restrictions on building, and destruction of houses, police behavior that discriminates between Arab and Jew and that has brought about the killing of almost 60 of our people since the year 2000. Almost every area of our lives is ruled by discrimination, from the government allocation per Jewish child in contrast to the allocation per Arab child, through the discrimination in court opinions to the delegitimization of the Arab political leadership, including consistent incitement against Arabs by the Prime Minister and some of his ministers. Unfortunately, this is only a partial list.

The Jewish majority treats Arabs in general as a permanent threat and considers Arab Israelis to be one monolithic bloc, a fifth column. In the eyes of the Jewish majority, the Arab political leadership is a group of extremists, many of whom support terrorism. The attitude of the Jewish majority is that the moment Israel weakens, the Arabs will try to destroy it from within, and that as long as Arabs do not serve in the Israel Defense Forces, they cannot be trusted. The moment the Arabs in Israel defined themselves as Palestinians they could not be partners in the national consensus on the important matters that concern Israel's existence and the way it conducts itself. In the view of the Israeli majority, the Arabs deny the ideology of the State of Israel, are hostile to Zionism, undermine the Jewish character of the State, and oppose the Jewish and Zionist narrative about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by adopting the Palestinian narrative. Therefore, suspicion of Arabs is accepted with understanding by many of the Jewish leaders — and discrimination against them can easily be justified.

One should not generalize, but it seems to me that a considerable proportion

of Jews subscribe to these feelings and beliefs. When they are confronted and asked to try and change their attitude, they say, “I won’t change until the other side changes.”

I am writing for both Jews and Arabs who have the strength and the power to abandon these limitations and to think differently. I propose a different look at the reality, a look at facets that politicians deliberately conceal and ignore. I believe that the overwhelming majority of the public has the potential to really make a change. But, in particular, I want to appeal to the Arab side to examine its role in the overall picture. I truly believe that the majority is responsible for the majority, and the minority is responsible for the minority. Therefore, I will focus on my national problem — that is what responsibility is — the responsibility of the minority.

d. S-C-A-R-E-D

Responsibility is the value that we want to inculcate in our children so as to ensure their success in life, and so that they will be able to survive life in the shadow of the dangers and challenges that accompany us. Parents are pleased to discover that their children know how to take responsibility for their deeds and do not rush to blame others for their mistakes. Managers know that their employees who take responsibility for their actions will be more likely to succeed in their jobs than those who shirk responsibility. This is also true of clerks, businessmen, philosophers, religious people, sports coaches, teachers, and other managerial roles. For some reason, politicians tend to shrug off responsibility. Not all, but certainly most of them.

In the Palestinian Nakba, our leaders knew how to blame Zionism, imperialism, the Arab reaction, and the whole world. But they did not speak about our own role and our own contribution to the failure that brought a national catastrophe upon us. The same thing occurred with regard to the Naksa — the defeat in

the Six Day War. This same trend is continuing in many other spheres on the national level. Consider the speeches of Arab representatives on the eve of the Nakba in which they explained the Arab rejection of the UN partition plan. These are revealing speeches replete with convincing explanations, written and delivered with passion, and sometimes also integrity. But the final result was the utter defeat that brought about the dispersion of Palestinian society, a defeat our people suffered and continue to suffer. Few people learned from this experience and were able to admit that this was a strategic mistake. More than once, our leaders, senior and junior ones, great and small, have repeated the same speeches with the same explanations in almost identical wording. We are always in the right, while others are always to blame. We have invented expressions to declare victory even when we are losing. We celebrate victory over a heap of ruins without batting an eyelid.

It is easy, attractive, and convincing, but ultimately it is destructive. And it helps the group that caused the injustice. If we are really interested in serving our people and defending our interests, we must accept responsibility for our deeds and examine ourselves honestly and transparently. We must admit — first and foremost to ourselves — our mistakes and then think of a remedy, and even more importantly, learn how to avoid repeating the same mistakes.

These principles are valid for every community, group, people, nation, band, in every place and at all times. They are doubly valid for a minority struggling for its rights, and even for its very existence. Here, no mistakes should be made. If you were mistaken, at least do not repeat your error. A hostile attitude to the national majority with which you are dealing, and adhering to a policy of harsh criticism and threats, simply invites more blows and more defeats, and makes the possibility for reconciliation more unlikely.

It is very easy for me, as an Arab, to complain about the Jewish majority. After all, we are talking about the facts in research papers and surveys that

show that the Arab minority in Israel has been suffering from discrimination, racism, and an existential threat during all the years the State has been in existence. Even Israeli prime ministers and presidents have criticized the way this was handled. The obvious result has been to blame the majority. Naturally, the majority was not going to accept the blame, and it became defensive and tried to justify its actions. This is how the policy of discrimination changed from something that one is ashamed of to something that is hardened and defended. It is much harder to complain about your own self, your own nation, your own leadership. We think — and this is mistaken and foolish — that patriotism means vigorously defending your positions, those of your leaders and overwhelmingly supporting your own narrative almost blindly. But true patriotism is to know when to criticize your own perspective, to point out your own mistakes and to seek solutions in a groundbreaking way.

It is permitted to criticize the Other, but that is not difficult. I prefer to focus on fixing things and cleaning up one's own mess. I prefer to help others so that they will help me, rather than to defeat them and to coerce them either by force or by means of the law. How does one do that? First, it is best to learn to know the Other, to become acquainted with him for his own sake. Second, one should behave modestly, not arrogantly or condescendingly. One should speak the truth. One should open the gates of one's own experience so that they can learn about you. One should pursue excellence in all actions and behave with courage. But, in our circumstances, we are often s-c-a-r-e-d!

Chapter Three | Israeli Arabs - an Integral Part of the State of Israel

a. **Our Demand to be Citizens**

Whether Jewish and Arab extremists like it or not, Israeli Arabs are an integral part of the State of Israel. This is a fact, not a slogan. We stayed here under horrible conditions, while most of our people, including our entire leadership, left voluntarily or forcibly. We who stayed here fought with all our might in order to survive. We were born here. We have no other homeland, nor do we want one. We are part of the scenic backdrop and of the land. We were an integral part of its builders, of its foundations, and we were partners in turning it into a modern state. We have always played a prominent role that cannot be ignored, in all spheres of life in this country. We have become part of its successes. A long time before the events of the Arab Spring, we chose to be citizens of Israel. We think like Israelis and behave like Israelis, and that, sometimes, has a negative effect on our standing with our brothers in the Arab world. Israeliness has become part of our mindset, not only our citizenship.

This is not easy, but it is our reality. Many Jews and many Arabs do not like this fact, especially politicians. But their opposition does not take away one iota from the fact that we are here. In the Arab world we were at first considered to be traitors because we stayed in our homeland. The Israeli government, likewise, considered us a security risk and even a fifth column, even though we were almost the only segment of our people who accepted the United Nations Partition Plan.

Among our people, there also developed a nationalist stream that attempted to separate us from the Zionist state and adopted a separatist position. The government made sure to cut them off from public life when they outlawed the El-Ard (Land) movement. One stream of political Islam also took this approach, and it too encountered suppressive action on the part of the

Israeli government when the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement was outlawed and its leader, Sheik Raed Salah, was repeatedly imprisoned. But the spirit of these tracks is still alive and well, because thought and belief cannot be prevented by suppression. Nonetheless, the majority of the Arab population does not endorse the positions of this track and vigorously argues against it.

Those who do accept this position claim that the State forced citizenship on us, while those who defend the position of the State of Israel say that the State gave Arab Israelis citizenship little by little, because values of liberalism and democracy overcame security considerations.

The fact is that everyone overlooks the considerable contribution made by Arab Israelis to the stabilizing of their status as citizens. Nobody gave us or forced citizenship upon us. We chose it. We fought to obtain citizenship. The government made many attempts to minimize the number of Arab residents entitled to citizenship. In response, the Arabs in Nazareth, Haifa, Jaffa, Acre, Kfar Yasif, Kfar Biana, Umm-El-Fahm, and elsewhere came out in large numbers to demonstrate in favor of citizenship. This struggle caused the debates on the Citizenship Law in the Knesset to last for four years.

This is how Sarah Ozacky-Lazar describes the situation:

The Citizenship Law: In the debates about the Law, which lasted for four years, it became apparent that there was a notable difference in the perception of citizenship between the Jews and the Arabs. The Arabs viewed this as a natural right, that was just and should be taken for granted due to their being indigenous people, for themselves, their children and residents, in other words in terms of jus soli (land law). They demanded to receive their citizenship unconditionally and unreservedly, and did not express any opposition to accepting Israeli citizenship. The Jews, on the other hand, perceived the granting of

citizenship in terms of *jus sanguinis* (blood law), in other words anyone born to Jewish parents, regardless of where in the world he was born was entitled to Israeli citizenship. Amnon Rubinstein explained the extreme adoption of *jus sanguinis* in the Israeli Citizenship Law as stemming from “the emotional, irrational load that guided the formulators of the law.” The State of Israel’s first Citizenship Law (1950) stated that there were five options for receiving citizenship: initial registration in Israel; by birth; by aliyah; by marriage; by naturalization. The relevant option for Arabs who had remained in the State was the first one: the registration that was conducted on November 8, 1948. However, this registration did not include the Negev, parts of the western Galilee, and the area known as the Arab Triangle; indeed many of the Arabs were unaware of it and at the time did not understand its importance with regard to the future State, whose borders had not been finalized. Thousands returned to the borders of the State after the armistice agreements were signed, either officially through family unification or by infiltrating into their villages and houses. Thus the situation was created whereby some one hundred thousand people who were effectively present in the State of Israel could obtain citizenship only by means of the fifth clause — naturalization. This clause mandated the submission of a formal request and the fulfillment of several criteria, one of which was some knowledge of the Hebrew language. The main problem in this process was that it was entirely dependent on the arbitrary decision of the Minister of the Interior, because the law stated that the minister would grant the request “if he saw fit”, and only after the person requesting the citizenship declared loyalty to the State of Israel. Arab Members of Knesset objected to the law. Member of Knesset Tawfik Toubi of the Maki (Communist) party interpreted this as a desire to “foster the policy of discrimination and inequity conducted by the Military Government against Arab residents,” while Rustum Bastouni, Member of Knesset for Mapam, stated that “this

law cannot negate our right to be citizens in our country, in which we were born and on whose land we have lived for generations and shall continue to do so.” The Minister of Justice, at the time, Pinchas Rosen, and the Minister of the Interior, Moshe Haim Shapira, expressed views in this spirit during the Knesset debates, and Rosen even went further, saying, “They want citizenship not only for its own sake but also as a passport, a green light to breach of trust with the State, for citizens are permitted to come and go from the borders of the State and nobody can stop them.” In the end, the law was passed in 1952, and included the article on naturalization and corrections with regard to the residents of the Arab Triangle who were annexed to the State of Israel as well as others who returned after 1950.

As a national minority, we did all we could in order to fend off the plots and ploys that were constructed against our presence here. The fear of expulsion was a nightmare day and night, and has still not passed. Nonetheless, over all the years of the existence of the State of Israel, we have avoided political violence, and have expressed our protest against the policy of discrimination, dispossession from our lands, the transfer plans, and the police oppression, in legal and non-violent ways. This does not include a few cases in which stones were thrown, and rarer cases of terrorist activity, which young Arabs enlisted in and which brought about the deaths of women, children, and the elderly — innocent citizens, Jews and Arabs alike.

b. The Conflict as a Temporary Situation

Many studies conducted in Israel have asserted that the Israeli conquest in 1967 and the encounter with the Palestinians in the occupied territories brought about “Palestinization” of our national identity. This is an erroneous conclusion. Palestinianism never left us; it is deep within us, in our blood and DNA. We are part of the Palestinian people, the sons and daughters of

the Palestinians are our family. We did not want our encounter with them to be through the occupation of Arab land, but we always desired to meet with them. When this encounter became possible, it was not only we who were influenced by our brothers in the territories; they were influenced by us too. We needed some of the beautiful values of family and compassion that they had maintained, and they were influenced by us on the subject of coexistence.

They learned from us that the Jews are not only soldiers whom you meet on the battlefield, not only the detested occupiers, not only oppressors, but also doctors in hospitals and local clinics, lecturers and university students, colleagues in the workplace, and also people of peace and human rights. Our experience with the Jews is a source of inspiration for paradigmatic change, and not only with regard to political positions. None of this overcomes our distress and revulsion at the policy of racial discrimination against us.

In 1975, several meetings were held between the Arab leadership in Israel and the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat. The participants in these were Tawfik Toubi, Emil Habibi, and Tawfik Ziad. One of the main subjects discussed was the Arab Israeli request for Arafat to stop recruiting young Arab Israelis to the PLO organizations. They explained to him that we had chosen, of our own free will, the path of non-violent political struggle, with the aim of equal rights and for the sake of the peace that would be a blessing for both peoples. They did not hesitate to condemn actions against both Jews and Arabs. The next generation of leaders also acted in this way. MK Ayman Odeh called for excluding children, women, old people, and all innocent people from terrorist activities on both sides. Former MK Mohammad Barakeh even went to the Gaza Strip and delivered a speech against deeds like that.

Most of the Arab public came out against those activities. When a few young Arab Israelis participated in terrorist activity, the Arab public always responded by denouncing those acts with strong condemnations.

This topic, like many others connected to the loyalty of Arab citizens, came up for discussion among the Arab public and its politicians. Certain leaders, especially in recent years, exploited the negative attitude of the government towards the Arab population in order to excuse their separatist discourse and attacked anyone who dared to think differently. Israeli-ization, assimilation, integration, became curses in the eyes of these politicians. Some political wheeler-dealers in the Arab parties as well as the talkback groups and the army of court journalists, attacked anyone who dared to use the language of integration. Their main explanation for their position was that Israeli-ization would replace Palestinianization.

But this claim is based on a weak national affiliation and will not be able to stand the test of time. Only someone with flimsy self-confidence fears losing his national affiliation in an encounter with other nationalities. We Arab Israelis are Palestinians because every one of us is part of the Palestinian family, in Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and all over the world. Some of them live in refugee camps, some in villas, and others in rented apartments. They are all our first-, second-, or third-degree relatives, they are members of our people, who we must love. Our people is part of the great Arab nation and we have an affinity for its illustrious culture and pride in its contribution to humanity.

I personally have almost no relatives in Israel. All the members of my father's family, including uncles, grandmother, and three sisters live in Jordan today, most of them in UNRWA refugee camps. All my relatives on my mother's side live in Syria and Jordan. I am very attached to them, love them, feel their suffering, rejoice in their celebrations, wish them all the best, hope for their welfare and success. I will not rest or be silent until I see them enjoying lives of freedom and independence.

This should not clash with our Israeli side. Anyone who attributes a

contradiction or a clash in our complex affinities, is making his reckoning based on a desire to perpetuate the conflict. But whoever thinks in terms of peace, will soon understand that this conflict is a temporary matter. A day will come when both peoples have brave leaders with a vision, who will say that the great price we have paid is enough, and that we must put an end to the conflict and make peace.

c. A Double Interest in Peace

But just before that historic moment that will undoubtedly arrive, it is worth looking at what has happened to us, to all of us, Arabs and Jews, in the wars that took place here. In the Second Lebanese War, Hezbollah missiles struck northern Israeli cities, both Jewish and Arab — Nazareth, Haifa, Majd Al Krum, Ebalin, and others. Of the 39 people killed in Israel, 18 were Arabs. Israel's missiles fell on hundreds of Lebanese villages, including those where my relatives live. In Operation Protective Edge, the Gazan organizations fired 4,594 rockets and mortar shells at Israel. One of them hit the Bedouin population near Dimona, and killed Alouj Odeh, aged 32, and injured four members of his family. Israel attacked 6,231 targets in the Gaza Strip, in which 10,590 people were injured and 4,024 of the targets were razed to the ground. Among the victims in the northern Gaza Strip were four of Alouj Odeh's family members. In the war that followed that one, in 2021, 12 Israeli citizens were killed, among whom were two Arab citizens, a father and daughter, when a missile fired from Gaza fell on their house in Lod.

It is customary to say that we find ourselves between the hammer and the anvil. But we can look at this picture from a different angle. We, more than any other party, are doubly aware of the need to bring this terrible suffering to an end. Every victim on our side and on the other side is dear to us. You will not hear us say, "Let's attack them with all our might," because one way or another we pay the price. Therefore, peace between our people and our country is of

paramount importance. Given this, it is possible to understand how important our status is as Israelis and as Palestinians at one and the same time, and to understand that we will also enjoy the fruits of peace doubly.

The problem is that, to date, we have not found among us enough leaders to properly express this interest or to take advantage of our societal wisdom. Conversely, we have many leaders who are able to initiate artificial, false separatism. When Avigdor Lieberman promulgated his plan for an exchange of populations, in which he proposed to transfer the towns in the Arab Triangle to a future Palestinian state in exchange for annexing the settlements on the West Bank, a huge outcry ensued. It is well-known that this is not a realistic plan, and nobody in the security apparatus would support it. It would make Highway 6 into an international border with the Palestinian state. But from the moment that the administration of the US President Donald Trump adopted this idea and included it in his Deal of the Century, who in Israel would dare to oppose it? That was when the towns in the Triangle began to feel fear. Even if the plan does not mention transfer but rather border changes only, when every citizen wants to protect his home and his lands, the Arabs of the Triangle resolutely refuse to accept it. The local leaders, mayors, academics and other public leaders appealed to the leaders of Israeli political parties to oppose this article in the deal, and organized themselves to demonstrate against the plan.

d. The Israeli Mindset

Here we must ask the question: Why do Arab Israelis not want to be part of a Palestinian state? We are talking about the same people and the same homes in the same localities. What makes them be so resolutely opposed to disengaging from their Israeli citizenship? And how do they explain the fact that in the national demonstration that took place in Baqa Al-Gharbiyye against disengaging from Israeli citizenship, a Palestinian flag was hoisted? The answer to this question is well-known in Arab society, but our leaders do

not talk about it much. The truth is that our lives as citizens of the State of Israel are better and safer than in any of the Arab countries, despite the racist policy of discrimination of the State and despite the hostility towards us amongst the Jewish majority. For several years now, the Israeli economy has been considered one of the 25 strongest economies in the world. This is according to the most widespread indicator measuring economic strength, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, which varies between 41 and 42 thousand dollars. Because of the institutionalized discrimination, the GDP for Arabs is lower at 22 thousand dollars. But if you look at what is happening in the Palestinian Authority, you note that there the GDP per capita is only \$4,400.

In Israel, 9% of workers are employed in high tech. For Arab Israelis that number is approximately 3.5%. Unemployment in Israel before Covid-19 dropped to 3%, while it was 11.5% for Arab citizens. From another point of view, education in Israel is of a very high level, and Arabs benefit from this too, not as much as Jews, but still much more than in Middle Eastern countries and in the world in general. National Insurance in Israel covers most needs, while this almost does not exist in the countries of the region. Health insurance in Israel is considered one of the most advanced in the world, despite internal critiques over its considerable shortcomings. For all the defects in Israeli politics and the pernicious incitement against Arabs, led by Prime Minister Netanyahu himself, there is still freedom of association and freedom of expression in Israel. The protection of those rights is not perfect for Arab citizens, but at least it exists.

The quality of life is considered the main reason why the Arabs of the “Triangle” and all the Israeli Arabs are not willing to renounce their Israeli citizenship. But there are also other reasons. Israeli Arabs have become Israeli in their mindset, and have become different from their Palestinian brothers.

I feel that it is necessary for me to emphasize that I do not think we are better than our compatriots in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, or the Palestinian diaspora. On the contrary. They are better than us according to many parameters, especially in

maintaining traditional values, such as honoring parents and old people, in general. They know how to look after the family, foster kindness, innocence and modesty, and they do not glorify Israeli impudence, which has also infected us. Israeli Arabs often spend time in Ramallah, and in the neighboring new city Al-Rawabi, modeled on the city of Modiin, and also in Bir Zeit, Bethlehem, Nablus, Jericho, Hebron, and Jenin. An Arab girl feels safer in Ramallah than in Nazareth, Jaffa, Jerusalem, or Netanya. Approximately, 10,000 Israeli Arabs study at Palestinian universities. In October 2019, the scores of these students in the Ministry of Health compulsory examinations for doctors were higher than those of students who had studied in Italy, Ukraine, Russia, and Spain. The Israeli Arab believers fill the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the churches in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Palestinian laborers who work in Israel under disgraceful conditions are an important labor force that contributes significantly to the building of the country.

In spite of the occupation and the closure, our Palestinian people are leaders in many achievements in science. In Bir Zeit there is a pharmaceutical factory that exports its products to Germany; the An-Najah hospital in Nablus, the first university hospital in the Occupied Territories, with 800 beds, is highly regarded — it was established by an Arab doctor from Israel, Prof. Haj-Yahia, a heart surgeon of international repute, who did his residency in heart and chest surgery at Sheba Hospital in Israel. Haj-Yahia has had an international career due to the hundreds of operations and transplants he did at the Bristol Hospital in England, where he treated VIPs from Riyadh to Johannesburg — and operated on a rabbi. Prof. Haj-Yahia says of himself, “I am very Israeli, without Israeli audacity and lack of manners.”

The Arabs in Israel are considered Palestinian in genetic terms. The Palestinian people is their people. But this does not mean that they should renounce their Israeli citizenship, their Israeli mindset, or the Israeli lifestyle. It is simply not an option.

e. National Service

So why aren't these things spoke about openly? Because there is a price to be paid for confession:

First, politicians, wheeler-dealers, and even certain academics are not willing to see anything in Israel as positive. Sometimes they are even prepared to lie, to roll their eyes, and to squirm, just so as not to acknowledge the facts as they are. This trend affects our culture and morality and the future generation. Personally I have no difficulty in pointing out the many negative things in the State of Israel in general and the discriminatory attitude to Arabs in particular, but, at the same time, because of my integrity and my obligation to the truth, I have no problem pointing out the good and nice things too.

Second, there is real fear of the national obligation that is widespread in Israel: military or national service. The Jewish majority does not let up on us about this, and our leaders do not have enough courage to grapple with the problem. They make do with the assertion that our refusal stems from a political and values-driven position not to serve in an army of occupation, and that our rights should not be bound up with any military service. They also note the justified fact that military service has not aided our Druze or Bedouin brothers to improve their lives, and that the attitude to them is still not equal.

It is important to straighten these things out, in such a way that our position as a minority becomes more understandable — and perhaps more acceptable. Service should not be bound up with rights and vice versa. But military service for Arab young men and women is not a subject for discussion, because the IDF itself is not interested in recruiting them, and Israeli society — both Jewish and Arab — is not yet ready for it. The proportion of young people of military enlistment age who are Arab is 22% today. I have difficulty in thinking of ten Jews who would be willing to accept Arabs as 22% of soldiers. But even if we could find ten like that, as a society we would have to know and to accept that it is not morally correct to ask young Arabs to

enlist in compulsory service in the IDF, when they would have to face the dilemma of fighting against their people and their relatives.

On the other hand, national service is something else, and we need courageous leaders to teach this subject in depth and to make the appropriate decisions. This could be civilian service under the joint responsibility of the Arab leadership and a civilian government entity. Together they would be able to determine the kind of service and its goal. This kind of service, in which our children would volunteer for the sake of our society — or our neighbors in Jewish cities — would be healthy; our children need this culturally and morally. A person who volunteers in society fosters affinity towards it. From a societal point of view, service of this kind is likely to be beneficial as part of the war against the criminal violence that is a threat to the fabric of our society.

Another facet is that our children would be able to study at universities from the age of 20-21 instead of 18-19 as it is today. After civilian service they would be more prepared for studies and would be able to undertake them together with Jewish students of the same age and not older, as it is at present.

There is already active volunteerism in the Arab sector. The Islamic movement and the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality organize a variety of activities. Volunteering has become compulsory in schools, and many associations initiate their own activities. Furthermore, and this is an open secret, thousands of young Arabs have enrolled in civic service on their own initiative, and there is always a long waiting list of young people eager to get an opportunity. That is to say, the young people are voting with their feet and do not accept the position of the leadership which has objected to the idea of civilian service for many years. So, why is it so difficult to organize this activity as one bloc in an organized, official way?

We must send the correct messages - the ones that faithfully express the interests of our public and the Jewish majority. This is part of the responsibility of the minority.

Summary | **A Time for Hope**

The Arab minority in Israel has come a long way and accumulated a vast amount of experience that could constitute an example, for the whole world, of how a minority could and should behave towards a majority. Moreover, under conditions of a violent national conflict that has been going on for decades, the attempt becomes an instructive lesson in human relations.

This is about a minority that is part of a people that has a long-standing, bitter conflict with its State. During this conflict, not a day goes by without someone being a victim, either on the Arab side or the Jewish side, or on both sides together. Nevertheless, this minority has defined its own clear boundaries, which are the secret of its survival and success. On the one hand, it has preserved its national affiliation to its people (Palestinians) with love and pride. On the other hand, it has created for itself a unique identity, linked to the State of Israel whose citizenship it desires and has chosen. This minority has ensured that, instead of clashes between its affiliation and various identities, and instead of emphasizing the disparity between the sides and increasing the conflict, bridges will be built. This minority is loyal to its people and to its state, and lives in the hope that, one day, peace will come to both of them.

After decades in which the Arab minority in Israel has demonstrated a steady resilience in the face of the suffering caused by the policy of discrimination and oppression, through wars, hostile actions, hatred, and incitement, we must take a step forward and become an active minority. The Arab minority in Israel must act according to its agenda, take responsibility, and influence politicians in the State on behalf of both sides of the conflict for the purpose of fashioning a better future in Israel.

I am not sure that Arab initiatives of this kind would be well received by the Israeli Jewish leadership nor by the Israeli Jewish population. Suspicion and

disbelief still rule. The 2019 study by the Israel Democracy Institute draws a very bleak picture. It turns out that 50% of the Jews still oppose having Arab political parties join the coalition, although this is down from 66% in 2017 — marking a significant improvement. A majority of Jews (57%) and Arabs (63%) agree that the likelihood for Jews and for Arabs to succeed in the State of Israel is not equal. Furthermore, 75% of the Arab public mentioned that even if an Arab is found to be more suited to studies or to a job, a Jewish candidate applying for the same role would obtain it. This is borne out in the answers to the question posed to Jewish interviewees only: Should more Arabs be appointed to senior positions in the State? Nearly two-thirds (64%) answered in the negative.

The study indicates that in our region we do not have the best conditions of fondness, to put it mildly: 47% of Jews think that it is better for Jews and Arabs to be separate from each other, as opposed to just 17% of the Arabs (81% of Arabs prefer Jews and Arabs not to be separate). The desire of the Jewish public to be segregated from the Arab public is also exemplified in the fact that 43% of the Jews think that Arabs should be allowed to purchase land only in Arab neighborhoods and localities, whereas 22% said that Arabs should not be permitted to buy land in Israel. Similarly, while 39% of Jews point to the lack of cooperation of the Arab leadership with the legal authorities as the main explanation for the high level of crime in Israeli Arab society, 38% of Israeli Arabs blame the low investment in crime prevention on the part of the State and the police force.

The 2019 national security indicator of the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv indicates that the attitude of large sections of the Jewish public towards the Arab minority is negative, and there has even been a worrying escalation in the response to the question “What is your view of Israeli Arab citizens?” As in previous studies, it became apparent that according to 2019-2020 data, the attitude of a large part of the Jewish public to the Arab minority was one of “trust but verify.” There was an average increase from 41% in 2015, to

45% in 2018, and to 54% in 2019. In response to the question “What is your view of Israeli Arab citizens,” 54% said that they should be respected but treated with suspicion, while 25% replied that Arab citizens of Israel are potential enemies (3% even stated that they should be expelled from Israel in the near future). Only 21% of Jewish responders viewed us as citizens in every sense.

Nonetheless, the same study revealed that 69% of those surveyed said that the government ought to invest equally in Arab and Jewish localities.

In 2021 there was a reversal in the political arena in Israel, not only in the replacement of Benjamin Netanyahu by his protégé Naftali Bennett. The reversal was that the Islamic Movement’s political party Ra’am joined the coalition for the first time in the history of the State. For more than 73 years, Israeli Jewish politicians did not accept elected Arab figures as legitimate representatives in the Knesset. They were perceived as hostile entities. Sometimes, we must admit that this was our own fault, due to our combative, antagonistic discourse. We did not always know how to emphasize the difference between the legitimate struggle for our rights and the hostile discourse that recruited people against us more than for us. Jewish politics also did not know how to treat us with generosity. Instead of understanding and acceptance, it forced the Arab political parties to the sidelines and refused to recognize their rights. Mapai operated according to Ben Gurion’s slogan, “without Herut and Maki,” where the communist Maki party represented a considerable part, and even sometimes the majority, of Palestinian citizens. And when the Likud party came to power in 1977, the ostracism of Arab politicians continued. It was then that the right-wing coined the slogan, “on crucial subjects, there must be a Jewish majority in the Knesset, not including Arabs.”

During the elections of 17 March 2015, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appeared in a get-out-the-vote video in which he warned, “Arab voters are flooding the polling stations in large numbers,” financed by hostile elements

from abroad. When he won the election, Netanyahu continued this method of expression. Its most extreme moment was in the passage of the Nation-State Law that further diminished the status of Arab citizens and the Arabic language. It increased the alienation and hatred between the two sides.

But that very same Netanyahu needed the votes of the Arab members of Knesset so he changed his attitude. Suddenly, they became legitimate. He appealed to the Arab political parties, including the Joint List, to vote for his candidate for State Comptroller, Matanyahu Englman. Afterwards he entered into coalition negotiations with MK Mansour Abbas, the leader of Ra'am about joining the coalition. Abbas had transformed this negotiation into the highlight of his election campaign when he split from the Joint List. He won four seats (167,000 votes), while the Joint List won six seats (212,000 votes). Ra'am's achievement stemmed from one source: a considerable proportion of the public that believes in partnership voted for him. The public believed in his ideological position that Arab politics in Israel must become an influential factor, not only for integration into Israeli society but also as partners in running the country.

In the end, Abbas did not support Netanyahu but joined the coalition led by Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett. The agreement with the United Arab List differs from the other coalition agreements because the party will not be part of the government, but only part of the coalition. According to the agreement, Ra'am is obligated to government decisions and to the coalition management, to support motions in the Knesset, and to support the passage of the State budget. Ra'am received the portfolios of Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Chairman of the Knesset Committee on Internal Affairs, Deputy Speaker of the Knesset, and Chairman of the Committee on Arab Society Affairs. It was further determined in the agreement that the parties will act to approve a new five-year plan for the Arab sector at a cost of 30 billion shekels, and an additional five-year plan to eradicate crime and violence in the Arab sector for

the sum of 2.5 billion shekels. Similarly, the government promised to adopt a plan for transport in the Arab sector and finance it at the sum of an additional two billion shekels. The agreement promised an additional hundred million shekels over five years for projects in Arab localities.

From the political point of view, the agreement could be criticized for not including other things important for Arab society, such as peace and a change in attitude towards the Palestinian people, and because it also lacks a commitment to change the Nation-State Law, and does not have any arrangement on the subject of demolition of houses, and more. But, there is no doubt that the agreement has brought about a reversal in the State's basic attitude to Arab citizenry. It is important to note that there was an unwritten agreement between Lapid and all members of the Joint List that it would not help the Likud's attempts to bring down the new government. Under the provisions of the agreement, the Joint List's Members of Knesset remained outside the plenum of the Knesset during the voting on the formation of the new government. If the Likud had had a majority they would have remained outside, thereby saving the Bennett-Lapid government. Only when it was clear that the Likud did not have a majority did they come into the plenum and voted against the coalition. In other words, despite the Joint List's negative attitude to Abbas, they were, in effect, his partners in this motion and in the new government.

This is the dawn of a new era. The Arabs are partners, even if they are not all on the same page. Of course, this is only the beginning. This can and should advance and develop into greater dimensions. But it could also unravel. It depends on the level of success of the joint attempt on the part of both the Jews and the Arabs. Given the bleak, fragile condition of Israeli politics, the new government is liable to disappoint at some point in its incumbency and to give Abbas and the population which supports him a ringing slap in the face. And it is possible that Abbas, despite all his good intentions, might fail in

running the new policy or there might be someone who brings him down — either from the Arab or the Jewish side.

But let us not be pessimistic. The principle is already clear: no more marginalization. Today, the Arabs are at the heart of political action in the State, and for that a citation of honor must be conferred on MK Abbas and his party. Now is the time to make progress and improve; they deserve public support. And instead of condemning and impeding, the Joint List must join forces and find a way to renew its partnership with Ra'am. If they are in this partnership together, these two parties will be able to achieve more.

At the same time, we must adopt a new trajectory in the public sphere too. My proposal calls upon the minority to take the lead in instituting changes in Arab society in Israel and not to wait for compensation. I know that this is not customary in our region, but it is a carefully considered proposal that stems from the belief that our two peoples have paid a high enough price in the conflict, in which egoism and winning zero-sum games have been paramount. This is an initiative that stems from a desire to bequeath something positive to the future generations, instead of leaving them a legacy of more tears and bereavements and hatred and wars. This is an initiative that demands that we seek every route to change the current paths of action and attempt to introduce different kind of relationships between us: relationships of understanding, respect, and cooperation. This is an initiative whose goal is to alter the conflict and its ramifications into an arena with potential and opportunity.

Our two peoples deserve this change. I look at my children and grandchildren. I see the spark, the light, the desire for life, the creative fervor and intelligence that burns in them, their successes and brilliance. I want to leave them a legacy of hope for a better life.

سحرية
Shaharit

שַׁחְרִית

יוצרים מחנה משותף