

Correspondence

Palestinian Refugees

TO THE EDITORS:

I would like to correct a series of inaccuracies in Arlene Kushner's article, "The UN's Palestinian Refugee Problem" (*AZURE* 22, Autumn 2005). The first concerns UNRWA's mandate. By stating that UNRWA operates "outside the norms accepted by the international community," Kushner distorts the basic facts regarding UNRWA's creation and its fifty-plus years of operation. Surprisingly, she also gets the basic concepts (UNRWA's mandate concerns "Palestine refugees," not "Palestinian refugees") and nomenclature (UNRWA is advised by an Advisory Commission rather than by an "Advisory Committee") wrong.

Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict, UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) was established by UN General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV) of December 8, 1949 to carry out direct relief and works programs for Palestine refugees. Since that time, in the absence of a solution to the Palestine refugee problem, the General Assembly has repeatedly renewed UNRWA's mandate, recently extending it until June 30, 2008.

Indeed, contrary to Kushner's assertion, it is the international community which originally determined the parameters of UNRWA's operations, and which continues to support such operations to this day.

Kushner goes on to fault UNRWA for never having "sought to promote resettlement" for Palestinian refugees, and for its failure to solve the refugee problem. A woeful and seemingly willful misunderstanding of UNRWA's mandate is at work here. From the outset, UNRWA's mandate was strictly limited to the delivery of humanitarian services, and then moved progressively into basic and preparatory education, and health and relief assistance. Since 1991, UNRWA's activities include an award-winning micro-finance and micro-enterprise program, which has disbursed more than 95,000 loans valued at \$98.6 million. Issues such as the promotion of resettlement and the resolution of the refugee problem clearly do not fall within this mandate; they are political rather than humanitarian in nature, and can only be addressed by political decision-making among the parties involved. As is well known, the solution to the refugee question is one of the "final-status issues" to be

addressed by the parties to the conflict in the course of comprehensive peace negotiations.

Moreover, though earlier criticizing UNRWA for operating outside international agreements, Kushner soon switches tracks and faults UNRWA for continuing to provide services to Palestinian refugees as per successive UN resolutions that extended its mandate. UNRWA, as a UN organization, is directly governed by the General Assembly, and must act in compliance with its resolutions.

But it is not UNRWA's continued adherence to its mandate that is the real source of Kushner's ire. Rather, it is the issue of the Palestinian refugees' "right of return." Kushner accuses UNRWA of gearing its "entire efforts" towards an unrealistic right of return, that is, repatriation to Israel. Yet she begins this argument with a claim that is simply false: UNRWA never sponsored bus tours for Deheishe camp residents to their pre-1948 villages.

Next, Kushner focuses on the UNRWA register of refugees, condemning such registration as instilling a sense of impermanency, and nurturing a "narrative of loss." Yet, it is the right not just of Palestinian refugees, but of refugees everywhere, to possess formal registration of their full identity, including their place of origin.

Failing to prove the merit of such accusations, Kushner switches tactics

again, this time to "terrorism." Citing a series of agency "links" to terrorist activity that have clearly been disproved, Kushner concludes that UNRWA is "afraid or unwilling to interfere with terrorist activity in its camps." But UNRWA has no mandate to administer refugee camps. It simply provides services for the refugees who live there, as well as for those refugees who live outside the camps. The security and policing of refugee camps is the sole responsibility of the host country or occupying power.

UNRWA has, nonetheless, added unarmed guards in vulnerable areas as an adjunct to requests for increased police protection inside, and near to, refugee camps. Furthermore, for the past five years, UNRWA has operated a U.S.-funded program in the West Bank and Gaza, staffed by 14 internationals who regularly visit UNRWA installations to ensure that they are not being used for improper purposes.

Kushner insinuates that UNRWA does not wish to see or does not care if its facilities are misused by militants. This is not true: Thanks to the respect UNRWA enjoys from the local population, there have been very few incidents of this sort. In those rare instances of misuse, UNRWA protested in the strongest possible terms to the Palestinian Authority, just as it protested every time the Israeli army commandeered UNRWA facilities

during its military operations to use them as detention or interrogation centers.

Finally, UNRWA funds do not “sometimes end up serving the goals of Palestinian terror.” This very serious and damaging accusation has been thoroughly disproved by the numerous audits and evaluations to which the agency is subjected, *inter alia* by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). Indeed, UNRWA scrupulously respects the provisions enacted 30 years ago by the U.S. Congress precisely on this issue.

In addition, Kushner unfavorably compares UNRWA with UNHCR, holding UNHCR aloft as the UN agency with “the far more successful strategy for dealing with refugees.” Yet, the present leadership of UNRWA—both its commissioner-general, Karen AbuZayd, and its deputy-commissioner, Filippo Grandi—are refugee affairs experts, with long and distinguished records of service at UNHCR. Collectively, they have directed successful operations assisting Ugandan, Ethiopian, Chadian, and Liberian refugees, as well as coordinating the Namibian return of apartheid-era refugees and the South African repatriation effort, among others.

Again, it is not UNRWA’s operations (or “strategy”) that displeases Kushner, but rather its mandate.

UNHCR is mandated to offer refugees three options: Local integration, resettlement in third countries, or return to their home countries. Such choices are not feasible in the Palestinian context, since the first two options are unacceptable to the refugees and their host countries, while the third is consistently rejected by the State of Israel. Crucially, Kushner fails to mention that any one of these options must be accepted voluntarily by the refugees under UNHCR’s care, a principle shared by UNRWA’s mandate.

Kushner states, “one might rightfully wonder what positive value UNRWA’s continued existence may serve.” She could easily obtain answers from the Palestinian Authority, the government of Israel, and the international community. In a meeting with UNRWA’s commissioner-general last August, President Mahmoud Abbas voiced the PA’s strong support for UNRWA’s continued role. Also, a recent letter from Israel’s permanent representative to the UN stated: “Israel appreciates and reaffirms its support for the humanitarian work being carried out by the UNRWA.” And a statement by the UK government on behalf of the European Union noted that until a final-status agreement in line with relevant UN resolutions is reached, “the services provided by UNRWA remain essential to ensure a

decent life to Palestinian refugees in the Middle East.”

Kushner concludes her article with the allegation that “UNRWA has failed the Palestinian refugees.” But perhaps she should speak with the refugees themselves, who have directly benefited from the services UNRWA provides. Such services have enabled the vast majority of them to become self-sufficient and productive. Only a third actually live in camps, and far from sitting around waiting for handouts, most refugees are fully engaged in the economic life of the society they live in. UNRWA-educated teachers, doctors, engineers, and social workers have made important contributions not only to the refugee community, but to the development of the region as a whole. Indeed, UNRWA’s commitment to the empowerment of Palestinian refugees, and the consistency with which it delivers its services, is well known. Removing UNRWA from the scene would not cause the refugee problem to disappear, but instead would significantly *increase* the suffering and hardship they endure.

The UN resolution establishing UNRWA recognized the need for humanitarian relief to Palestine refugees not only to prevent “conditions of starvation and distress,” but also to “further conditions of peace and stability.” During a period of

instability and change, UNRWA is confident it has fulfilled this role and remains a force for good.

Gina Benevento

Chief, UNRWA Public
Information Office
Gaza City

TO THE EDITORS:

Arlene Kushner’s important article misses one vital fact: UNRWA was established not to direct relief and works programs for “the Palestinian Arab refugees.” Actually, in the December 1949 General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV), which established UNRWA, and from which Kushner quotes, the object of that agency’s assistance is an entity referred to as “Palestine refugees” and not “Palestinian refugees.” Indeed, a visit to the UNRWA website will confirm this nuance. In other words, Jews, Christians, and Muslims could have applied for aid. The definition was not one predicated on a religious or ethnic identity but was geographically based. Since the original intent of the definition was geographical, a Jew expelled from his home during the War of Independence and who lost his livelihood should have been qualified for assistance.

Indeed, for several years, Israeli citizens were considered candidates for UNRWA care. These were the

Jews who became refugees after Arab forces overran Jerusalem's Old City and smaller agricultural communities such as Atarot, Neveh Yaakov, Bet Ha'arava, and the four Gush Etzion kibbutzim. In a communication dated October 6, 2003, B. Scott Custer Jr., chief of the international law division of UNRWA (Gaza), informed me that in 1950, 17,000 "internally displaced Jews coming from original mandate Palestine" (as he defined them) who resided in Israel were provided support from the agency. In July 1952, Israel assumed responsibility for 19,000 "refugees," which included 3,000 Jews, and UNRWA ceased its operations inside Israel.

Yisrael Medad
Shiloh

ARLENE KUSHNER RESPONDS:

In the course of my research on UNRWA these past three years and more, I have observed a tendency among its spokespersons of absolving their organization of all responsibility for problems connected with its policies and operations. Gina Benevento's letter reflects this thinking. Employing a familiar mantra, she claims the agency serves a purely humanitarian function and is both outside of the fray of politics and absolved of accountability with regard to terrorism within the camps. In making her case

she fundamentally misrepresents the manner in which UNRWA operates and ignores documentation I have provided.

She says, first, "it is the international community which originally determined the parameters of UNRWA's operations." And then, more astonishingly: "UNRWA, as a UN organization, is directly governed by the General Assembly." In point of fact, quite the reverse is true. UNRWA, within the family of agencies functioning under the UN umbrella, has a marked and extraordinary degree of autonomy; the agency's own literature acknowledges this. While UNHCR is bound by the definitions and strictures of the Convention on Refugees, UNRWA is not. The international community did no more than set broad guidelines when establishing UNRWA, and the General Assembly does not do much more than receive, pro forma, an annual report from the commissioner-general and every so often renew its mandate. There is no serious oversight; UNRWA has, to a considerable degree, been granted the latitude to establish its own policies and modes of operation. Therein lies the heart of the problem.

Benevento states, "From the outset, UNRWA's mandate was strictly limited to the delivery of humanitarian services, and then moved progressively into basic and preparatory

education, and health and relief assistance.” This is true, as far as it goes, which is not nearly far enough: In subordinating its humanitarian role to a political agenda, UNRWA has blithely moved *beyond* its presumed mandate limitations.

Nowhere is this more glaringly the case than with regard to its highly political promotion of the ostensible right of return. Although UNRWA predicates its operation on this political premise, there is no such right in international law. In my essay, I refer to the fact that the registration numbers assigned to the refugees include codes for the village they came from. Benevento attempts to make the case that such registration codes reflect no more than the basic right of all refugees “to possess formal registration of their full identity.” For her the registration is simply a universally identified humanitarian act. In reality, a great deal more is involved.

Let me move past my earlier citation of BADIL, the Palestinian NGO advocating the right of return. Attached to family registration cards are extensive documents containing information about property left behind over 55 years ago. UNRWA is currently involved in the “Palestine Refugee Records Project” operating out of its Jordan field office. The goal of this project, to be completed in

2006, is the digital scanning of all of these documents in order to preserve them and make them readily accessible. Not remotely concerned with issues of immediate relief, education, or health care, this project is blatantly political in intent. What is more, while UNRWA complains of deficits with regard to its ability to provide necessary humanitarian services, it has done fundraising for the records project and as of mid-2004 confirmed international pledges of \$6.7 million.

This brings us to the basic question of how UNRWA has chosen to define its refugees. UNRWA claims—that claim can be found on its website—that its definition is “operational.” Were that legitimately the case, those no longer requiring assistance would be removed from the rolls. In reality, however, refugees who acquire citizenship—whether in Jordan or the U.S. or Canada or elsewhere—and receive services and protection from the new state, are still kept on the UNRWA rolls. This can only be justified from a political perspective.

UNRWA has done more than merely allow such persons to remain on its rolls. At one point in its history it *added* persons to its rolls for reasons not humanitarian. When UNRWA began, it included in its definition a clause that read: “and took refuge

in 1948 in one of the countries where UNRWA provides relief.” In 1994, however, UNRWA dropped that clause, and persons who had not qualified for registration previously were suddenly allowed to register. According to Ingrid Bassner Jaradat, director of BADIL, this change was implemented with the expectation that UNRWA’s registration would one day serve as a major resource for determining refugee status.

Benevento says that I have falsely claimed that UNRWA sponsored bus tours from the Deheishe camp to visit pre-1948 villages. I never claimed this. There is more than adequate documentation of the fact that the bus tours did run from the camp; my information is that this occurred with the knowledge and sanction of UNRWA officials. These tours, in any event, are only one example of the myriad instances of programming within the camps that deliver a consistent “pro-return” message to the residents; textbooks within UNRWA schools even feature maps with Israel eliminated.

Benevento counters that residents, were they to be settled outside of Israel, would have to opt for this voluntarily. I suggest that, after 55 years of being fed a consistently “pro-return” line, they are not altogether clear on the alternatives that might be

available to them and the ramifications of actually returning. In instances where Israel has sought to provide permanent housing for the refugees in Gaza or Samaria, UNRWA has actively lobbied against this. Thus has the agency worked against reasonable settlement of the refugee issue.

Regarding terrorism within UNRWA, Benevento says that when its facilities have been “misused by militants” (note the avoidance of the word “terrorists”), UNRWA has “protested in the strongest possible terms to the Palestinian Authority, just as it protested every time the Israeli army commandeered UNRWA facilities during its military operations.” This statement is outrageous on at least two counts. The first is the parallel it draws between defensive measures by the Israel Defense Forces in the face of terrorist attacks and the actions of the terrorists themselves.

Second is the assumption that “the militants” are coming into the camps—by implication into the midst of an innocent and vulnerable refugee population—from the outside. The lie is put to this familiar UNRWA mantra by the overwhelming evidence (some provided in my essay) that the refugee population is particularly fertile ground for radicalism and that many of the terrorists are refugees, including in some

instances employees of UNRWA, who are themselves refugees. How can one talk about infiltration by outside “militants” when it is a matter of record that Hamas affiliated persons ran away with the elections in the UNRWA teachers’ union in Gaza? And why does Benevento neglect to address the instance I cited of a Hamas rally on the grounds of an UNRWA school in the Jabalya camp in Gaza, attended by the staff and administration, where one teacher, on behalf of the staff, publicly praised students who become suicide bombers?

Many weapons and weapons factories have been uncovered in the camps, and recruitment of suicide bombers is done in the camps. This would not be possible without the implicit sanction of the local population.

As to my “damaging accusation” that funds may end up helping terrorists, it is from a report of the U.S. Government Accountability Office that I learned that UNRWA has never once cut off funds to a registered recipient because of involvement with terrorism. This cannot be the case because there has never been a necessity to do so. It seems that UNRWA keeps no records on the terrorist involvement of recipients and asks no questions. But then, UNRWA, with its “hear no evil, see no evil” policy, indeed will, knowingly or not, award

assistance to some tainted by terrorist associations. There is no way adequately to track where UNRWA money goes under these circumstances, and yet Benevento would have us believe that 14 staff internationals visiting UNRWA installations are able to do so.

UNRWA, deeply in denial, is clearly not going to clean up its own act. It was not my intent to suggest that UNRWA has done no good humanitarian work; indeed it has. But this in no way implies that it is the agency best equipped to continue this work. Donor funds now used to sustain the refugees in indefinite limbo would be far better spent in service of finding permanent solutions for them—a mission in which UNHCR has a sterling record.

I thank Yisrael Medad for his enlightening information. If anything, it adds strength to arguments that Muslim Arab nations should have properly tended to the resettlement of Muslim Arab Palestinians (who constituted the vast majority of those who lost their homes during the war), just as Israel tended to the resettlement of Jewish persons displaced by the war.

In any event, as there has been no UNRWA activity on behalf of any but Arab Palestinians for 54 years, and because UNRWA is devoted exclusively

to this population, the import of my essay stands, as I am sure Medad would agree.

Biblical Archaeology

TO THE EDITORS:

In "Facts Underground" (AZURE 22, Autumn 2005), David Hazony describes Eilat Mazar's excavation as dealing a "death-blow to the revisionist camp (of historical and biblical scholarship), whose entire theory is predicated on the absence of evidence in Jerusalem from this period" (parentheses mine). Although I am not mentioned in the article, I can apparently be identified as one of the "revisionists."

But the claim that Mazar's excavation refutes my understanding of Palestine's history and its relationship to the biblical narrative makes me doubt that Mazar has read what she apparently believes she has refuted. This is surprising and unfortunate, as I have described Jerusalem from the Late Bronze Age and continuing during the eleventh to ninth century B.C.E. as a regional market center, which dominated the Ayalon Valley (*Early History of the Israelite People*, 1992). On the basis of the very limited

archaeological evidence that Mazar has published to support her "revision" of Jerusalem's history, my 1992 historical sketch of Jerusalem during this period seems apparently confirmed by her excavations.

The additional claim that the entire theoretical basis of my historical work is centered in issues of Jerusalem's archaeology is also quite a distortion. My work has generally dealt with the continuity of settlement patterns throughout greater Palestine since the Early Bronze Age and the regional differences in settlement patterns and agriculture during the Late Bronze and Iron II periods. The history and ideology of population transfers and the effect on ethnicity which political policies of deportation and resettlement had on the region from the Assyrian to the Persian periods has also been central in the development of my historical reconstruction, as has been the pervasive role that the theological and mythic motif of exile plays in biblical literature from Genesis to II Kings. My understanding of David, which seems to be of such great concern to Mazar and other archaeologists, has for the most part been related to the literary figure in biblical story and song, particularly as it is related to this region's intellectual history. It hardly relates to the

kinds of things archaeologists usually have expertise in.

Apart from the question of Hazony's understanding of my work (or of any other scholars implied by the term "revisionists"), Herzog, Finkelstein, and Silberman's understanding of Jerusalem's archaeological remains and history also seems poorly understood—particularly in the very inadequate effort to state clearly why these scholars question the historicity of the Bible's stories about Saul, David, and Solomon. As Mazar is an archaeologist and the building uncovered apparently more than the ordinary, I would have preferred to read about what has been found and about how the field of archaeology has been changed by the work being undertaken. It is a great shame to see tabloid journalism dominate the early reports of what appears to be a very important excavation. What archaeological reasons does she have for suggesting the building may be a palace? Do associated finds suggest anything about the function of this large building or help date it? What does she have for dating the building? Which of the competing pottery chronologies is she following? Is the tenth century merely one possible dating among many, or is it the most likely dating of the building? How large is the margin of error in her dating? How early, for example, in the

eleventh century could the building have originated?

References to biblical interpretation also seem arbitrary and not well thought out. If Mazar depends on biblical texts and their interpretation for her understanding of this archaeological site, I would like to hear more about this aspect of her deliberations and the reasons for her judgments. I find no detailed description of "David's palace" in II Samuel 5:6-10. The text cannot be reasonably described as a detailed description of any of David's building projects. Nor can the text reasonably be thought to offer clarity regarding the site's geographic orientation. It is a very brief story—one of three conquest stories of Jerusalem—which is dominated by the literary trope of David's hatred for the lame and blind and their banishment from the temple. I cannot imagine it helpful to an archaeologist. That this biblical tale is claimed to be the reason that Mazar sought and received permission to dig should be of interest to an investigative reporter interested in the licensing of archaeological excavations, but hardly to anyone who seriously cares about the history of this city.

Thomas L. Thompson
University of Copenhagen
Copenhagen

DAVID HAZONY RESPONDS:

Scholars convinced that texts are to be read “subversively,” which is to say in conscious rejection of their simple meaning, often end up weaving tapestries of meaning that offer far more insight into their own beliefs, fears, or agendas than into the text they are reading. So it is with the Bible; and so it is, apparently, with my article.

I did not mention Thomas L. Thompson in my article because—oddly enough—I was not addressing his work. I was talking about archaeologists. It is they who have made a serious claim regarding the absence of significant archaeological evidence from tenth-century Jerusalem in order to argue it was not a serious city in Solomon’s time; and it is their theory which Mazar’s new discovery has overturned.

Who is Thompson, then, and why does he feel criticized? He is one of the leading scholars in what is known as the Copenhagen School, a group of biblical researchers who for years have been advocating a far more radical revisionism than anything produced by Israel Finkelstein or his peers in the archaeology department at Tel-Aviv University. As Thompson wrote in his 1999 book *The Mythic Past*, “Today we no longer have a history of Israel.... There never was a ‘United Monarchy’ in history and it is meaningless to speak of pre-exilic prophets

and their writings.... We can now say with considerable confidence that the Bible is not a history of anyone’s past.”

There are good reasons why this school has been far less influential than Finkelstein and his colleagues—and why I did not give them much attention in my article. The problem is not that they are not archaeologists (which, I insist, is no crime), but that they tend to distort or dismiss archaeological evidence when it does not suit their needs. Such was the case when, in 1993, archaeologists discovered the first-ever ancient reference to King David, on an inscription found at Tel Dan—the same phrase, *beit David*, the house of David, which appears in the Bible in numerous locations. Archaeologists familiar with ancient Israel, Finkelstein included, concede that we now have proof of a dynasty founded by a king named David. But the Copenhagen scholars, with Thompson at their lead, insist the inscription can be read in many ways, including a “Temple of Dwd” or a “House of the beloved”—or that perhaps it is even a forgery. Thompson’s book, subtitled *Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel*, offers an extensive list of recommended reading, but leaves off of it nearly every major work of biblical archaeology written in the last thirty years. Why? Perhaps because when he wrote the book, and

no less so today, few if any major archaeologists endorsed his views.

Nor is this simply a disagreement among competing schools: The Copenhagen Bible scholars have their view, the archaeologists theirs. The Copenhagen School is the direct descendant of an approach advocated in the nineteenth century by Julius Wellhausen, which was based on two problematic assumptions: (i) That the Bible offers little in the way of actual history—that it is, as he put it, just a “glorified mirage”; and (ii) that one can nonetheless read between the lines of the text to draw conclusions about what “really” happened during the biblical period.

The first claim was discredited by the emergence of biblical archaeology in the twentieth century, which found vast amounts of corroborative evidence—from inscriptions to primitive settlements to entire cities—which affirmed the biblical accounts of an Israelite kingdom beginning around the time of Joshua and continuing until its destruction in 586 B.C.E. The second claim is problematic for other reasons. Counter-history, or the attempt to guess at what kind of events or political calculations led to the creation of a fictional work based mainly on reading the text itself, can be creative, exciting, and entertaining, and opens

the possibility of endless academic agitation. Yet such readings are highly speculative.

Thus, if we had no archaeological evidence whatsoever, we would use extreme caution in accepting their historical estimations. But we do have evidence, and lots of it, such that the work of the Copenhagen scholars often seems highly tendentious, at times even manipulative.

Indeed, some of these scholars have drawn political conclusions. Keith W. Whitelam, for example, in his *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (which, by the way, *does* make Thompson’s recommended list) complains that “The struggle for ‘the permission to narrate’ a modern Palestinian narrative, a struggle carried on by... [Edward] Said, among many others, has failed to retrieve the ancient past from the stranglehold of the West and Israel.... In order to give voice to an alternative Palestinian past, to a post-colonial, contrapuntal reading of the ancient Palestinian past, it is vital to construct a rhetoric of Palestinian history.”

On the question of whether the Bible’s depiction of David’s palace is sufficiently detailed to be useful in archaeological research, the answer seems straightforward. If Mazar was able to dig into the ground and find

an enormous tenth-century B.C.E. construction based largely on clues from the biblical text, then ipso facto the Bible was a useful, even indispensable, tool—just as it has been when scholars have discovered cities like Hazor and Megiddo based on similarly brief texts. Methodologically she is following the classical path of biblical archaeology, which led to thousands of other discoveries.

We can only hope that her success will inspire others to follow in her path.

Soul of Fire

TO THE EDITORS:

In reading Ethan Dor-Shav's "Soul of Fire: A Theory of Biblical Man" (AZURE 22, Autumn 2005), I marveled at the author's ability to weave biblical verses into a metaphysical tapestry. It was refreshing to read that we no longer trail the Greeks in their claim for originality in developing a theory of the cosmos. Indeed, many Jewish writers have attempted to discover physics in the Bible, including Samuel Ibn Tibon in his little known book *Ma'amar Yikavu Hamayim*.

While Dor-Shav presents much evidence to support the notion that

the term *nefesh* reflects the element of water in the ancient cosmic theory, there are instances where the term *nefesh* may not be clearly understood as water. The word *nefesh* as it is understood in related languages (Akkadian *napisu*, Aramaic *nafsha* and Arabic *nafs*) refers to the throat or the upper part of the respiratory system in the body.

In the following two cases it is hard to accept the word *nefesh* as water: "The waters compassed me about, even to the *soul*: The depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head" (Jonah 2: 6); and "Save me, O God, for the waters are come unto my *soul*. I sink in deep mire where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me" (Psalms 69:2-3). Considering the redundancy in the verses, the word *nefesh* clearly reflects a term other than water, supporting the notion that *nefesh* is not to be exclusively equated with the element of water.

Finally, Dor-Shav's discussion of Sheol rightly points out that it is a place assumed to be everyone's last station. But the contention that it is either cold or warm is hardly supported by the verses he adduces.

Bentsi Cohen
New York

ETHAN DOR-SHAV RESPONDS:

The fact that *nefesh* is the animative faculty of human existence, and therefore related to the Water element (the animative power in the cosmos) should hardly be read as equating *nefesh* with H₂O. They are, obviously, two separate phenomena of creation. Water is water. You can drink it. *Nefesh* is a life force. Yet both share in the connection to flow, movement, and time.

Indeed, rather than contradicting the cosmic connection, both verses Bentsi Cohen quotes strongly reinforce it, since it is not a coincidence that both are so strongly water-related. Just as one never finds *neshama* verses in the context of water, only of fire and light, so one is bound to find *nefesh* verses in the context of deep waters and the abyss. The verses in Jonah and Psalms play on this theme by describing water encompassing the prophet or psalmist almost to the point of taking his life-force (or, indeed, of assimilating it).

Since this is not the place to elaborate upon the etymological comparisons with Akkadian and Arabic, I will only repeat a point I made in the article: *Nefesh* is intrinsically related to one's blood flow. The throat is thus *nefesh* related because it is the precise point where this life was considered

to leave the body during the act of slaughter. For instance, *dam hanefesh*, the blood of life, must be collected from a sacrificial animal directly from the cut throat.

Peace Now

TO THE EDITORS:

In "Jews and the Challenge of Sovereignty" (AZURE 23, Winter 2006), Michael B. Oren misrepresents Shalom Achshav's policies. First, Shalom Achshav (Peace Now) advocates peace negotiations with Israel's Arab neighbors as a way to supplement Israeli security, not to replace the Israel Defense Forces. It is not a pacifist group. It does not recoil from the appropriate use of arms. The founders of the organization came from the ranks of the IDF, and its current leaders do reserve duty. Shalom Achshav recognizes that there are times when Israel needs to defend itself militarily.

Second, contrary to Oren, Shalom Achshav has not advocated "a mediated solution in which Israeli sovereignty would dissolve into a borderless New Middle East." Quite the opposite. Shalom Achshav has supported peace negotiations with

Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and the Palestinians in part because resolving territorial disputes helps to delineate recognized borders for the Jewish state and makes Israel easier to defend. It is the perpetuation of Israel's occupation over the Green Line that has blurred dividing lines and left Israel without

recognized, sovereign borders for so many years.

Debra DeLee

President and CEO, Americans
for Peace Now
Washington, D.C.

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