From the Editor

In the Beginning

Few friends of Israel have managed to avoid noticing the deepening sense of crisis—political, social and above all, cultural—which has beset the Jewish state over the last three years. The Oslo accords, the accelerating successes of Post-Zionist thought in Israel, the horrifying assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the unprecedented waves of recrimination and hatred which ensued, and now, an election on essential issues which was decided by a hair's breadth—all these have worked to raise unprecedented questions as to the long-term desirability and viability of a unified Jewish polity, and of the Zionist consensus which once supported it.

Remarkably, there has as yet been no comprehensive attempt at understanding the basic concepts and values which have caused the crisis in Jewish nationalism and lie at its root. Faced with the absence of such serious Jewish national and cultural thought capable of interpreting what is happening and pointing to solutions, a group of individuals has formed around the common goal of filling this need. The contents of this publication represent our first efforts in this direction.

The Jewish nation will be faced with decisions of the first order in the years ahead. Opportunities and dangers abound, whether in war or peace. But the direction in which Israel's intelligentsia and its political allies are leading the nation today is unequivocal: They have for years now advocated a worldview which opposes everything hitherto accepted as being the basis of a Jewish state integrally linked to the Jewish people. And their position has gained with every passing year.

The struggle surrounding the promulgation of this worldview and its official adoption in Israel is being conducted in the political, legal and social arenas, but it is clear that at its heart what we are witnessing is a cultural

struggle. On the one side stand those who define themselves as *hatzibur hana'or,* "the enlightened public," and whose aim it is to achieve a state that would be called "democratic and Jewish," but which would have nothing Jewish about it. On the other side are those who are persuaded that the State of Israel and its democracy can only exist if it is a Jewish state.

The fundamental questions involved in this cultural struggle are neither "who is a Jew" nor the nature of Israel's security arrangements, but rather "what is a Jew" and what is a Jewish state in our time. It is a struggle between those for whom the most important issue is the continuing existence of the Jewish nation and state two and three generations from now, and those for whom national identity and continuity are relics of a past best put behind us.

Azure aims to seek out and consolidate a new common denominator among Jews who still believe in the Jewish state. With this, it seeks to form a new consensus capable of refashioning our national goals. Such an effort demands an open and comprehensive cultural discussion which can take place only if it embraces a broad diversity of individuals and opinions, drawn from among all those who are willing and able to assist in the formation of such a joint path. *Azure* will therefore welcome all who are interested in taking part in the discussions and dialogues that will be found on its pages.

On the centenary of the publication of Herzl's *The Jewish State*, and close to fifty years after the founding of the Jewish state in Israel, *Azure* strives to bring new and fresh ideas to the Jewish nation, so as to assist in forging its path for the next century.

Please let us know how our efforts are faring.

Ofir Haivry
Editor-in-Chief
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