



ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee
of Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

Events...

Sunday September 7, 8pm

The BAYT Bet El Twinning/Israel Action Committee and Canadian Friends of Bar Ilan University sponsor a lecture by **Professor Gerald Steinberg** on "**Paying for the Propaganda War Against Israel: Europe, Canada and Jewish Organisations**" at BAYT.

Commentary...

Three Guys, a Trailer and Israel's Survival By Caroline Glick

The Olmert-Livni-Barak government is apparently maneuvering to stand down on Iran, and they'd like the US to be blamed for their timidity. A careful reading of a bizarre article in Sunday's edition of Ha'aretz brings this point home clearly.

The report details Israel's recent agreement with the US to deploy the X-Band high powered early warning radar system in Israel. The system will be manned by a team of three US military personnel from a trailer somewhere in the Negev.

The US's willingness to deploy the system is largely the consequence of ardent lobbying efforts by US Congressman Mark Kirk. Kirk's successful push for the deployment of the X-Band system in Israel is a great boon for the country's defensive capabilities. The X-Band system can detect incoming missiles from 500-600 miles. Currently, Israel's early warning system is only able to detect missiles from 100 miles out. The earlier detection capacity means that in the event of an Iranian attack, Israel's Arrow missiles will be able to intercept and destroy incoming missiles before they reach Israeli territory and so even their debris will fall outside the country.

BUT ACCORDING to unnamed Israeli "defense officials" who spoke with Ha'aretz, the price that Israel will be forced to pay for this increased defensive capacity is prohibitive. Those "defense officials" claim that the US forced Israel to agree that in exchange for the X-Band system, Israel will not attack Iran either preemptively or retroactively without US permission, because were Israel to attack Iran, the three American guys and their trailer could become a target for an Iranian missile.

If Ha'aretz and the "defense officials" are right, then that means that Defense Minister Ehud Barak - who concluded the deal with US Defense Secretary Robert Gates during his visit to Washington last month - agreed to concede Israel's right to take whatever action it deems necessary to prevent its national destruction. Barak conceded Israel's right to prevent its own annihilation in exchange for three guys and a trailer and the capacity to live with a greater sense of security under Iranian nuclear threat. This sense of security will last for as long as Iran doesn't develop satellite-based warheads or for as long as Iran doesn't prove the X-Band radar or the Arrow 3 missiles incapable of actually intercepting incoming nuclear warheads.

Since Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and all their colleagues in the government have been silent on the deal, it can be

ד"ר assumed that they back Barak's move. So again, acting on the authority of the entire Kadima-Labor-Shas government, according to "defense officials," and Ha'aretz, Barak just agreed to give up Israel's right to attack Iran's nuclear installations. And the Americans made him do it.

THE HA'ARETZ report did not include any mention of attempts to verify the "defense officials" claims with the Americans. And in a telephone interview with The Jerusalem Post on Sunday night, Kirk vociferously denied their allegations.

"There is no quid pro quo," he said.

"You mean that the US did not say that in exchange for deploying the X-Band system Israel needs to receive US permission to attack Iran?"

"No, the US made no such demand," Kirk said.

"The basic idea is that a US ally getting nuked is a bad thing. The X-Band system increases the likelihood that such an attack would fail," he continued.

Moreover, far from sending a message that the US would work to block an Israeli preemptive attack against Iran, Kirk argued that the deployment of the X-Band system manned by a US crew "will send a message to Iran, that Israel has powerful political support from its ally against any Iranian threat."

Kirk also argued that the US will support a decision by Israel's government to attack Iran. As he put it, "If the Israeli government makes the difficult decision [that it must launch a preemptive attack against Iran], that is when Israel will need its allies the most. And that is when the US will be called in to show what it means to have us as an ally."

So if Kirk - the US official most responsible for the X-Band deal - flatly denies that the US is using the X-Band deployment to prevent Israel from attacking Iran, what were those unidentified "defense officials" who spoke with Ha'aretz trying to achieve by making false allegations against the US? And why did Ha'aretz's reporters not bother to call Kirk or the Pentagon to verify their amazing claims?

Sadly, the answer is clear. Those "defense officials" were carrying out what has become standard practice for Israeli leftists over the past 15 years. They were working to demoralize the Israeli public into believing that it is inevitable that we cannot defeat our enemies or take any effective military steps to protect ourselves from their aggression.

For its part, in its unquestioning reporting of the story, Ha'aretz was doing what the Israeli media - led by Ha'aretz - has been doing since 1993. It was helping leftist politicians demoralize the public into believing that we have no option of defeating our enemies and must therefore simply try to appease them as best we can, hunker down behind high walls and shields, and hope someone else will defend us.

Since the Rabin-Peres government reversed what had been Israeli policy since 1967 and in 1993 decided to embrace the PLO - a terrorist organization dedicated to the destruction of the country - as a peace partner, every single leftist government has claimed that Israel has no ability to defend itself. In 1993, the government embraced the radical Left's unsubstantiated claim that it was Israel's fault the Palestinians wanted to destroy us. And two years after the IDF ended the Palestinian uprising, the government also claimed that the IDF couldn't protect us from Palestinian terror and that Yasser Arafat would do a better job of defending us than our own army.

The media supported their absurd claims and demonized their critics as warmongers, extremists and enemies of peace.

Then there was Barak's disastrous unilateral withdrawal of IDF forces from south Lebanon in May 2000. Barak embraced the factitious claims of the radical anti-Zionist Left that the only reason Hizbullah was attacking Israel was because IDF forces were deployed in south Lebanon. Like the

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radical Left, Barak promised that once Israel withdrew, Hizbullah would disband its army and become just another peaceful political party in Lebanon.

The media, for their part lobbied obsessively for the withdrawal. All withdrawal opponents were demonized as warmongers, extremists and enemies of peace.

Then there was the Palestinian terror war which began in September 2000. For a year and a half, as the Israeli casualty count mounted daily, the Sharon-Peres government told us that we had no military option to defeat the terrorists. The US would abandon us if we attacked the Palestinian Authority and anyway, the IDF was no match for terror cells.

The media for their part pushed the narrative of Israeli helplessness. All proponents of military victory were demonized as warmongers, extremists and enemies of peace.

Despite the IDF's successful defeat of terror forces in Judea and Samaria during and subsequent to Operation Defense Shield in April 2002, it took the leftist politicians and their media flacks no time to reinstate their narrative of Israeli powerlessness. Within weeks of the defeat of the terror forces in Judea and Samaria, the Labor Party, the media and later former prime minister Ariel Sharon argued that Israel could do nothing to defend against Gazan terror and therefore, should simply withdraw its forces and civilians from the Gaza Strip.

And again, those who pointed out that Israel had never really tried to defeat the terror networks in Gaza were silenced. Those who warned that Gaza would become the new south Lebanon were demonized as warmongers and extremists and enemies of peace.

Hizbullah's offensive against Israel in July 2006 was an unwelcome development for the Olmert-Livni-Peretz government and the media. It was the war their opponents had warned would come as a result of ill-conceived Israeli withdrawals. They wanted that war to go away as quickly as possible.

Refusing to fight the war with any determination, they told the public that we had no interest in winning. We didn't want to get bogged down again the Lebanese "mud," they said. There was no "military solution," they pronounced. The US, they lied, opposed an Israeli ground invasion of Lebanon. Only the UN and the Hizbullah-dominated Lebanese military could defend Israel, they claimed.

So they sued for a cease-fire, which as their critics warned, paved the way for Hizbullah's takeover of Lebanon. And the media praised their wisdom and silenced their critics by castigating the latter as warmongers, extremists and enemies of peace.

This then is the historical backdrop against which the government's current attempt to demoralize the public into believing that it is futile to attempt an attack on Iran's nuclear installations is being carried out. But there is a qualitative difference between the government's newest attempt to wriggle out of its responsibility to defend the country and its previous derelictions of duty.

This is the first time that the threat the government seeks to ignore is actually capable of annihilating the country. By claiming again here that the US will abandon us if we attack, the government is telling us that we have no choice other than to live in a world where a regime openly committed to destroying our country and our people has the means to carry out their designs. And in its unquestioning parroting of the government's line, the media is collaborating with this unacceptable state of affairs.

If there was ever a situation requiring the public to take to the streets, this is it.

Since Israel's founding, there has been an unspoken social compact between the public and our government. We all understand that existential threats have to be defeated. We don't discuss these things. We simply trust our governments to protect us.

The Ha'aretz report signals that the current government is breaching this compact by preparing its case for inaction. This situation simply cannot be allowed to stand. And given that we are now in elections season, a public outcry today has the capacity to force our media to cover this story and so compel our politicians to either fulfill their part of the bargain or step down.

While the US is happy to augment our defensive capacity, the Pentagon has been clear that it will not attack Israel's enemies for us. That is our job. And we the Israeli public must compel our leaders to do their job. (Jerusalem Post Aug 25)

My People Love to Have it So By Sarah Honig

I am convinced from the depth of my heart and to the best of my understanding that this disengagement will strengthen Israel in its hold of the areas essential to our existence and will earn us the blessings and esteem of those near and far, will lessen hate, will break boycotts and blockades and will move us forward on the road to peace with the Palestinians and the rest of our neighbors. - Ariel Sharon, October 25, 2004

This rosy prognosis - indeed this prophecy of peace and bliss - was delivered from the Knesset podium in that fateful plenum session in which the then-prime minister, having deviated 180 degrees from the platform on which he was elected and having cynically ignored the party referendum he insisted upon, formally sought parliamentary approval to uproot all 21 Gaza Strip settlements and four in northern Samaria as well.

The latter handful were an arbitrary afterthought, decided upon without any consultation or deliberation and without any perceptible purpose (their land is still under Israeli control), except to signal that nothing is sacrosanct, that the fate imposed on the Gaza settlements is contemplated for their Judea and Samaria counterparts. So much for the spurious notion that Gush Katif was being sacrificed for the sake of territories adjacent to the state's densely-populated soft underbelly.

On this date three sad years ago, the last brave Gaza settlement - Netzarim - was cleansed of its Jews. The next day Samaria's Ganim, Kadim, Sa-Nur and Homesh were all emptied out as well. Sharon was the expulsion's formidable driving force, but his gall and guile wouldn't have sufficed without the connivance of his willing enablers. None of Sharon's self-serving sidekicks had the intestinal fortitude then to dissent and none has since beaten his breast in contrition. They sat, saw, nodded, propagandized for the boss and were duly rewarded with political promotion.

They heard Sharon's declaration of intent on December 18, 2003 at the Herzliya Conference, where he unveiled and rationalized his unilateral retreat scheme: "The purpose of the disengagement plan is to reduce terror as much as possible, and grant Israeli citizens the maximum level of security." They helped peddle palliatives to the anxious populace, guaranteeing that "after disengagement the world will appreciate our goodwill and support us"; "after disengagement all kid gloves will be off"; "after disengagement no terror would be tolerated"; "after disengagement our artillery will pound them for every terrorist mortar shell"; "after disengagement we will have no more obligations to their welfare"; "after disengagement it will be another game with other rules."

ENOUGH TIME has elapsed to evaluate the prophetic assurances tendered so confidently and authoritatively by Sharon and his coterie of unrepentant accomplices, led by flunky Ehud Olmert and his current would-be successor, the holier-than-thou Tzipi Livni. We now know for sure that not one upbeat prediction materialized.

No real surprise here. Enough among us warned in real time of the inevitable catastrophe, but the tendentious press derided us. Though any levelheaded person should have sensibly shared our eminently reasonable doubts, most of the media cheered the disengagement con - some because it suited their agenda and others because of downright cowardice.

Bottom line: Three years on, no sound individual can claim our "hold on vital territory" was strengthened - indeed our very right to exist is challenged as never before. Far from having earned "the blessings and esteem of those near and far," Israel is more of an international pariah than prior to the disengagement, which undercut its claim to any of the Jewish heartland liberated in the 1967 war of self-defense. No boycotts and blockades were lifted, no hate lessened and no peace furthered.

Neither are we even a negligible smidgen more secure. Quite the contrary. Sharon and crew managed to magnify Ehud Barak's Lebanese folly and demonstrate again that whatever terrain Israel relinquishes is destined to become a terror breeding ground. Just as Hizbullah was invigorated and reinforced in the north, so was Hamas in the south. Having learned that terror pays off, Gazans established Hamastan. The same is only a matter of time in Mahmoud Abbas's residue Ramallah-centered bailiwick.

Instead of encouraging moderation, disengagement emboldened fanatic extremists and they arm themselves to the teeth. Not only is Sderot intimidated by Kassams, but Ashkelon has been attacked by Grads and urban centers like Ashdod grow chillingly vulnerable. With this kind of peace, who needs war?

MKs recently voted to commemorate the heritage of the 25 razed

settlements and, with the avid endorsement of the state comptroller, the Knesset State Control Committee voted to set up a state commission of inquiry into the scandalous fact that most of the 10,000 expellees are still in a very sorry state. But their plight is certainly not the result of shortcomings in the welfare and social work sphere. They are the direct victims of a much deeper malaise which affects not only them. It imperils each and every Israeli.

INSTEAD OF focusing on the failure to resettle the evicted settlers, there should be a state inquiry into the process that allowed the disastrous disengagement to ever be marketed and foisted on the gullible citizenry. If the malfeasance isn't exposed, we're liable for more of the awful same. Disengagement's central deception cost the entire Israeli collective the strategic deterrent indispensable to its survival, and it chipped away at the state's Zionist ideological underpinnings. It substantially and indisputably weakened the country.

To avoid sequel grandiose diversions from and cover-ups of personal/political corruption, there must be no suppression of what spurred disengagement, of how policy-makers fell down on the job, how the judiciary rubber-stamped injustice and countenanced special semi-martial night courts which jailed demonstrating juveniles with outrageous disproportionality, of how democracy's watchdogs and civil libertarians stayed dutifully silent. It would be enlightening to discover how the IDF, police and intelligence services were suborned into submission and collusion in a mass demonization campaign against the political opposition (to the point of disseminating calumnies about plotted coups d'etat).

But perhaps the reluctance to delve into dereliction/delinquency inestimably greater and more fundamental than that of the Second Lebanon War resides deeper in our psyche. By now, most Israelis, including plenty who compulsively persist in deluding themselves, sense that any probe into the fiasco that was disengagement will show that the electorate was hoodwinked by the latter-day likes of biblical fraudsters. Jeremiah (6:14) decried those "who facilely heal the shattering wounds of my people, saying 'peace, peace,' and there is no peace."

But the fault isn't only in disengagement's false prophets but also their credulous clientele - in those who uncritically imbibe lies that are easier to stomach than unpleasant truths and grim killjoy conclusions. "The prophets prophesy falsely and the priests bear rule by their means," Jeremiah reminds us (5:31), but "my people love to have it so." Which leads him painfully to the rhetorical question of "what will you do afterward?" (Jerusalem Post Aug 21)

Dangerous Talks with Syria By Uzi Dayan and Jonathan Spyer

The current indirect talks between Israel and Syria are highly unlikely to result in a peace agreement. The talks, far from playing any positive role for Israel, are mistaken both in terms of our values and in terms of our practical interest. They are being conducted by an irresponsible government with no public mandate, and are already causing real harm. We should be working to isolate the Syrian regime, not rehabilitating it.

From the point of view of values, the government's approach is fundamentally mistaken. The Golan Heights were taken in a just war in 1967, a war which was provoked by an extremist and reckless Ba'athist regime in Damascus. Our presence is both legal and essential. The Golan Heights must be retained under Israeli sovereignty.

The Syrian regime preached the destruction of Israel, and was directly responsible for the deterioration which made the 1967 war inevitable. There is no moral content to the claim by the same regime that its "rights" were violated by defeat in a war which it had actively sought. Independent Syria controlled the Golan Heights for exactly 21 years. Its borders are based not on some ancient patrimony, but rather on the division of the Ottoman Empire by the Western powers after 1918. Syrian rhetoric regarding its connection to this area lacks all content.

Since the indirect talks with Syria are taking place in Turkey, it is worthwhile comparing our willingness to part with the Golan with Turkey's attitude to a parallel border dispute with Syria. The issue of the Hatay province (or Alexandretta, as it is known to the Syrians) was a major point of tension between Damascus and Ankara for the better part of the last half century. This area was ceded to Turkey by French-controlled Syria in 1938. Syria, since gaining independence in 1946, demanded its return. Turkey refused to discuss the matter.

In late 2004, Syria conceded the issue in its entirety, quietly accepting Turkish sovereignty over the Hatay province. Perhaps the government of Ehud

Olmert might learn something from the approach adopted by the Turks when their interests are at stake. Syrian demands, backed up by the regime's active support for organizations engaged in daily acts of violence against Israeli civilians, lack any basis in any coherent system of rights or justice.

From the point of view of our interests, the talks in Turkey are equally perplexing. We have taken an active role in ending the isolation of the hostile regime in Damascus. The price Syria has paid for this assistance has been minimal. There is no direct negotiation taking place in Turkey. Rather, Turkish representatives engage in delivering messages between the delegations. This is to enable Syria to maintain its haughty façade of contemptuously refusing all open contact with Israelis.

In return for receiving messages in an Istanbul hotel, the Assad regime has broken out of the isolation that enveloped it following its suspected involvement in the killing of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. The Syrian leader and his wife have been feted in France. Their proxies now hold effective power in Lebanon. Lucrative economic associations with the EU beckon. All this when Damascus remains a key station on the highway linking Beirut and Teheran which today represents the key threat to both Western and Israeli interests in the region. All this when Syrian support for and hosting of terror groups engaged in violence against Israelis continues apace. All this when Syria's alliance with Iran remains solid as ever, bolstered by Bashar Assad's recent visit to Teheran.

The latest announcement by Assad of possible willingness to host Russian Iskander missiles is a characteristically Syrian response to the lifting of pressure. Those who believe that offering concessions to Syria will induce reasonable behavior fail to understand this regime. It has been given room to maneuver, and it is maneuvering - in a way directly inimical to the interests of Israel and its Western allies.

In September, 2007, Israel succeeded in neutralizing what was apparently a Syrian plutonium reactor, before it began operating. The evidence of the reactor offered mute testimony to Syrian defiance of international law and of its own commitments. However, instead of pursuing this advantage, the government chose to give Assad the diplomatic equivalent of a "get out of jail free" card - in return for nothing and with no agreement on the horizon. The government's actions are devoid of logic.

Commitments to concessions made in Istanbul by an unpopular government without a mandate will become the starting point for future contacts. This too has the potential to cause real damage to our future stance.

In short, instead of isolating the dangerous regime in Damascus, we are helping to rehabilitate it. This is making possible the effective abandonment of the Hariri tribunal, the strengthening of Hizbullah in Lebanon, the rapid forgetting and forgiving of an apparent Syrian nuclear program and the latest outrageous statement by the Syrian leader regarding the possibility of Russian missiles on Syrian soil. A cynical prime minister who has turned the country's vital interests into playthings for his personal political legacy is responsible. It is high time that this dangerous charade be ended.

(Jerusalem Post Aug. 24)

Maj. Gen. (res.) Uzi Dayan, a former head of the National Security Council, is a Likud Knesset candidate. Jonathan Spyer is a Senior Research Fellow at the Global Research in International Affairs Center, IDC, Herzliya.

Ship of Fools By Dan Kosky

When the "Free Gaza" voyage belatedly reached its destination, the fanfare and world attention that its organizers craved was thankfully largely absent. Claims that they had "broken the blockade" were quickly refuted by the Israeli government, which well understood that the voyage had little to do with humanitarian aid and everything to do with publicity. This important lesson must be learned by others, including European governments which are among the donors to the Free Gaza organizers.

There is no doubt that the Free Gaza crossing was nothing more than an expensive publicity stunt. Claims by its organizers of a "humanitarian mission" are refuted by simple logic. The activists estimated that the voyage cost in excess of \$300,000, yet the only genuine humanitarian cargo consisted of several hundred hearing aids. Beyond the possibility that Free Gaza purchased history's most expensive hearing devices, one wonders how much genuine aid could have been purchased at this cost. More worrying, is the moral danger posed by the Free Gaza organization. Theirs is one of the clearest examples of a radical agenda masquerading as human rights.

Free Gaza is a coalition of several groups, including the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), Israel Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHN) and Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR). ISM has a shameful record of placing foreign nationals in danger through encouraging "direct action," most recently as a leading force in the violent protests against the security barrier at Ni'lin. In 2003, ISM's ideology was underscored when terrorists, originating from the UK, used ISM as a cover to attack the Mike's Place bar in Tel Aviv, murdering three people. As part of Free Gaza, ISM attempts to veil its extremism beneath the cause of humanitarian aid.

Less notorious although no less pernicious are the activities of ICAHD. Manipulating the language of human rights to promote a similar ideological agenda, ICAHD refers to Israel as an "apartheid" state and promotes anti-Israel boycotts. ICAHD's director, Jeff Halper has been one of Free Gaza's leading spokesmen.

WORRYINGLY, SEVERAL European governments are hoodwinked by the "humanitarian" agenda of radical NGOs, allocating them significant funds. The European Union, under its Partnership for Peace program, awarded ICAHD a two-year grant of 473,000 euros in 2005, comprising the majority of ICAHD's 2006 annual budget. Recently the Spanish government too deemed ICAHD a worthy recipient of its funds. Meanwhile, another Free Gaza member, PCHR, receives funding from the Danish, Norwegian and Irish governments.

The EU and others argue that their funds are directed to specific projects, rather than organizations in their entirety. But, European government backing affords significant legitimacy to these NGOs and their politicized agendas, in which they too are implicated. The exploits of Free Gaza, Halper and his cohorts come with a European stamp of approval. European governments have, perhaps unwittingly, placed themselves in the midst of a stunt orchestrated by extreme groups and endorsed by Hamas.

The Israeli government commendably recognized the agenda of the Free Gaza organizers and denied them the confrontation which they so desired. European governments must internalize this important lesson. NGOs are guilty of manipulating the rhetoric of human rights, betraying genuine humanitarian principles in the process. Yet the European governments, whose money legitimizes this practice, are also complicit. So long as they continue to support radical NGOs, charades such as Free Gaza will continue.

(Jerusalem Post Aug 27)

The writer is communications director of NGO Monitor.

The Power of Loving-Kindness By Moshe Kempinski

How we see ourselves determines how others end up seeing us. If you believe that you are as insignificant as a grasshopper in someone else's eyes, then you necessarily believe that he can crush and subdue you on a moment's whim.

We live in a world where reality seems to be determined to prove our insignificance. Falling prey to that can prove to be very dangerous. A leadership that loses its sense of self or its vision could lead to disaster anywhere, but much more so here in the spiritual center of the world.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared, following the terrorist bulldozer incidents, that retaining Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel would lead to more terrorism: "Whoever thinks it is possible to live with 270,000 Arabs in Jerusalem must take into account that there will be more bulldozers, more tractors and more cars carrying out attacks." US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice recently told Palestinian officials that she would pressure Israel against initiating any Jewish construction in eastern sections of Jerusalem.

Furthermore, on a different issue, the Israeli cabinet held three separate votes and decided on the release of over 200 prisoners, including two prisoners with "blood on their hands." The "others" include 26 people who were sentenced to terms of 10 to 16 years for attempted murder, like shooting attacks or bombings. According to Olmert, "Releasing prisoners as a gesture does not attest to weakness, but rather is a sign of strength." And Mark Regev, Olmert's spokesman explained, "We want the Palestinians to understand that we want to live with them in peace. We are ready for historic reconciliation."

Is it any wonder, then, that our enemies speak in gloating and glowing terms of their ongoing march towards victory?

This was clearly evident when one saw the glee and posturing of the Palestinians when the terrorists were released. It is also evident when Palestinian spokesmen declare that Jerusalem is not "that important for the

Jews."

The bottom line is that both the Arab world and the world in general can smell weakness and defeatism. They sense that the Israeli leadership see themselves as grasshoppers facing menacing giants. It is that weakness that each of them, for their own reasons, would like to exploit. The Arab world would simply want to destroy Israel in their unfolding violent messianic fervor. The Western world would like to pare Israel down to a more manageable size. A smaller, weaker Israel could be better managed and thereby more easily controlled.

Based on the public Israeli face that the world sees, they are right. Yet, the public, official Israel is not Israel. It lacks the vision, faith and determination of the real Israel. It lacks the hesed and compassion that has characterized Israel from its birth in Abraham's tent. The public face of Israel lacks the courage and sense of sacrifice that has kept this people alive through thousands of years of persecution.

Then where does one find the real Israel?

One had a glimpse of the real Israel in the battlefields of Lebanon. One can be inspired by the vision of the real Israel if one ventures into the settlements of Judea and Samaria, or the farms and villages of what is termed "the periphery" of this country.

Yet, the most powerful component of Israel's survival and power is in the compassion of its people. It is in the quality of hesed, or loving-kindness, that is so clearly juxtaposed with the selfishness of its political leaders.

That, then, is the secret that separates weak men like Prime Minister Olmert from courageous men like Major Ro'i Klein. That is the stuff that makes up the character of the young settlers on the hilltops - so different than the character of "yes-men" like Tzipi Livni and Sha'ul Mofaz. That is the essence of the Divine attribute that runs through the veins of the "real Israel" and that seems to be so lacking in the present leadership of this country.

"Olam chesed yibaneh" - "The foundation of the world is loving-kindness." (Psalms 89:3)

Those who have learned the secret that giving of oneself is the greatest source of inner strength are the ones who will have the courage to build and refashion the world. Those whose focus remains on receiving are doomed to forever live a life victimized by the turns and twists of reality.

"Many are the sorrows of the wicked; but he who trusts HaShem, loving-kindness shall surround him." (Psalms 32:10)

This past week, as I was descending the steps of the Jewish quarter to pray my afternoon prayers at the Western Wall, I heard loud and exuberant singing. The song I heard was called Ivdu Et HaShem Be'simcha, "Serve G-d With Joy". As I turned the corner, I saw many buses parked in the Western Wall plaza, which hid from me the throng of people who were singing with such excitement and passion.

As I entered the Western Wall plaza and walked past the first bus, I saw hundreds of young people singing and dancing. A little less than half of them were in wheelchairs, or on the shoulders or in the arms of the other half of the group. Regardless of the severity of some of the handicaps that were so evident on the bodies of many of these young people, their faces and especially their eyes reflected complete freedom and happiness. Regardless of the physical difficulty that those who were accompanying the more challenged youngsters must have experienced, they seemed to fly above and around the wheelchairs with angelic powers.

These were buses of the Kav Lachaim ("Life Line") organization. The stated goal of the organization is "to help every sick child in Israel recover easily and quickly, and to offer chronically ill children and their parents a broad range of services and activities which include outings, entertainment, books, medical counseling and financial support."

Organizations such as Kav Lachaim dot the landscape of Real Israel. The volunteers of this group and the physically challenged children with them represented the true strength of this country, regardless of their age or their limitations.

These young people have been empowered by loving-kindness and they, as opposed to our leadership, will not see themselves as grasshoppers. These faithful young people, like many others throughout the country, have become giants; and it is before them that the evil designs of our enemies will fail. (IsraelNN.com Aug 27)
