

## A Fairy Tale

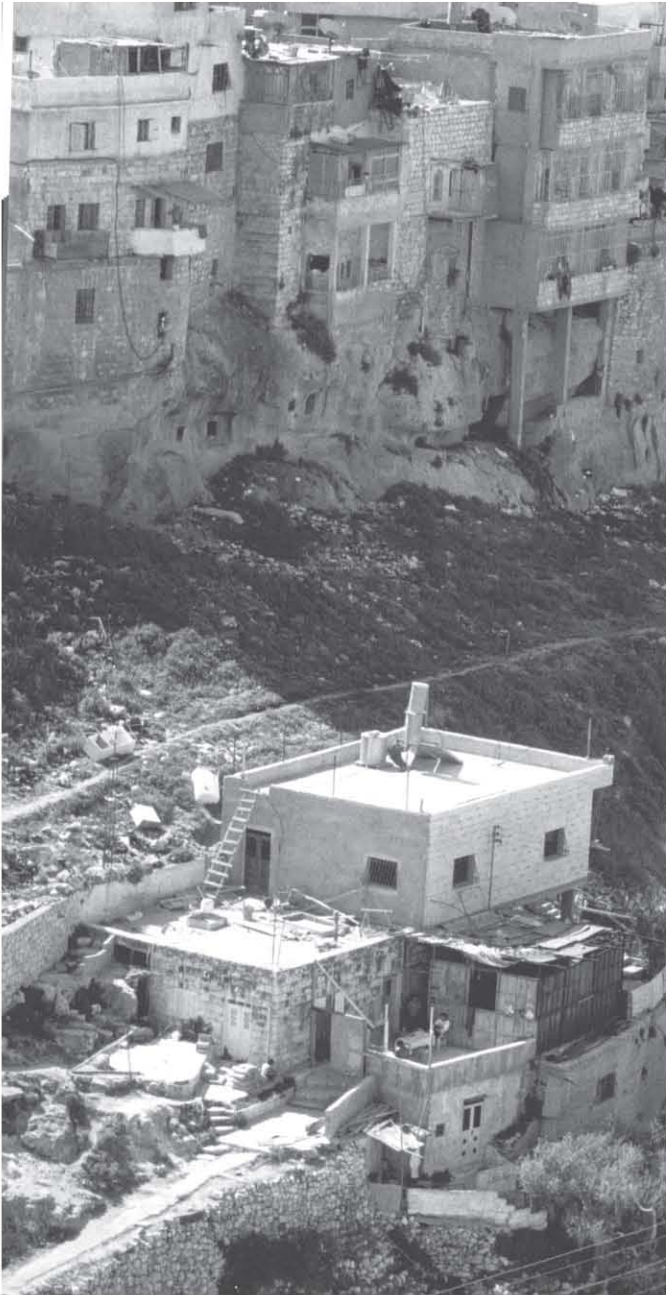
Uri Avnery –  
an Else-Lasker-Schüler-  
Gesellschaft Exclusive

*"If you want, it is no fairy tale!"*

Theodor Herzl, founder of Zionism,

*"You don't want? Forget it!"*

Hebrew graffiti with Herzl's picture in Tel Aviv



In the Year 2015/ 5776.

It has happened.

In a solemn ceremony, on a stage bedecked with Israeli and Palestinian flags, the peace treaty between Israel and Palestine has been signed.

Negotiations did not take long. The essential elements of the treaty had been known for a long time. The document held no real surprises.

Israel agreed to recognize the State of Palestine. The border between the two states was based on the so-called Green Line (the pre-1967 line), but both parties agreed on a limited exchange of territory. About 5% of the West Bank, including several "settlement blocs", were joined to Israel, in exchange for an equivalent area alongside the Gaza Strip. Both sides expressed the wish to keep the border open for the movement of people and goods.

In Jerusalem, the Arab neighborhoods, including al-Haram al-Sharif (the Temple Mount) became part of Palestine, while Jewish neighborhoods and the Western Wall stayed in Israel. The two halves of Jerusalem remained physically united under a joint municipal authority, with equal representation.

Israel agreed to remove all settlements from the territory of Palestine.

On the refugee problem, a complex solution was found. A Committee of Truth and Reconciliation (CTR) was set up to investigate the events of 1948 and 1967 which led to the displacement of the refugees. Both sides agreed to abide by its findings. The CTR was composed of respected Israeli, Palestinian and international historians.

Israel recognized in principle the Right of Return, but both sides agreed that only a limited and mutually agreed-upon number would be enabled to return to Israeli territory, while all the others would be compensated and settled in the State of Palestine or elsewhere, according to their wishes, with international assistance.

Another committee was appointed to see to a just distribution of the water resources, and especially to the large-scale desalination of sea water, with international help, for the benefit of both sides.

After the Presidents of Israel and Palestine shook hands, all present shared in a minute of silence, in memory of all those who died in the generations-old conflict.

The secretary of the Arab League declared the treaty to be in conformity with the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, and confirmed that all member states of the League would establish normal relations with Israel.

THE HISTORIC event was preceded by far-reaching changes on both sides.

After a long and painful rift, the new Palestinian President had succeeded in uniting the warring Palestinian factions in a rejuvenated PLO and a Provisional Government of Palestine. After some recriminations, both Hamas and Fatah supported the treaty.

In Israel, a charismatic new leader, who enjoyed much public respect, had succeeded in alerting public opinion to the dangers of the ongoing state of war in a region full of missiles and weapons of mass destruction. His new party, which attracted not only leaders and members from all the discredited old parties, but also a whole generation of young people who entered politics to bring about a change, had won a resounding election victory. The peace movement, which had long been dormant, played a major role in this upheaval.

When the two new Presidents shook hands, the whole world heaved a sigh of relief.

BUT THE signing of the document by the politicians was only the beginning of the struggle. As everybody knew, a decisive confrontation between the Israeli government and the settlers was looming.

The settlers and their allies had spent years preparing for this test. Supported by major elements of the army and the various ministries, they had access to large resources of arms and money. Many of them were determined to wage a civil war, if it came to it.

However, when the clash came, it was much less dramatic than had been feared. As agreed with the Palestinians, the settlers were allowed a year to leave voluntarily in return for very generous compensation. After initial hesitation, about half of the settlers accepted the offer and actually left the occupied territories. The rest were demoralized by the solid support of the great majority of the Israeli public for the peace treaty.

In the end, actual fighting was sporadic. In the hour of crisis, Israeli democracy stood the test and the army remained solidly loyal to the government, despite the efforts the settlers had been making for years to infiltrate the officers' corps.

THE COMPARATIVE ease with which both governments overcame the often violent opposition in their respective countries was also due to the active support of the international community.

Many commentators doubted whether the peace treaty would have been possible without the profound change of US policy in the Middle East. After the 2012 elections, the President announced that America's basic interests demanded an even-handed approach in order to overcome the hatred millions of Muslims felt for America. "We shall support both Israel and Palestine in their valiant quest for peace," he declared. The pro-Israel lobby did not dare oppose this, sensing the fundamental change in American public opinion and fearing an anti-Semitic backlash.

Europe followed suit, as always.

IN ISRAEL, the public was quick to realize the practical benefits of peace. New joint Israeli-Arab ventures attracted large foreign investments. Following the earlier peace treaty with Syria, Israeli entrepreneurs were already busy in Damascus, making lucrative deals in a Syrian economy that was springing to new life. The Syrians, by the way, allowed the Israeli wine industry on the Golan Heights to continue operating. "*Let's go and eat Hummus in Damascus*" became an Israeli slogan. And indeed, Israelis crowded the famous bazaars of that ancient city, turning the trip to the Syrian capital into an exciting experience.

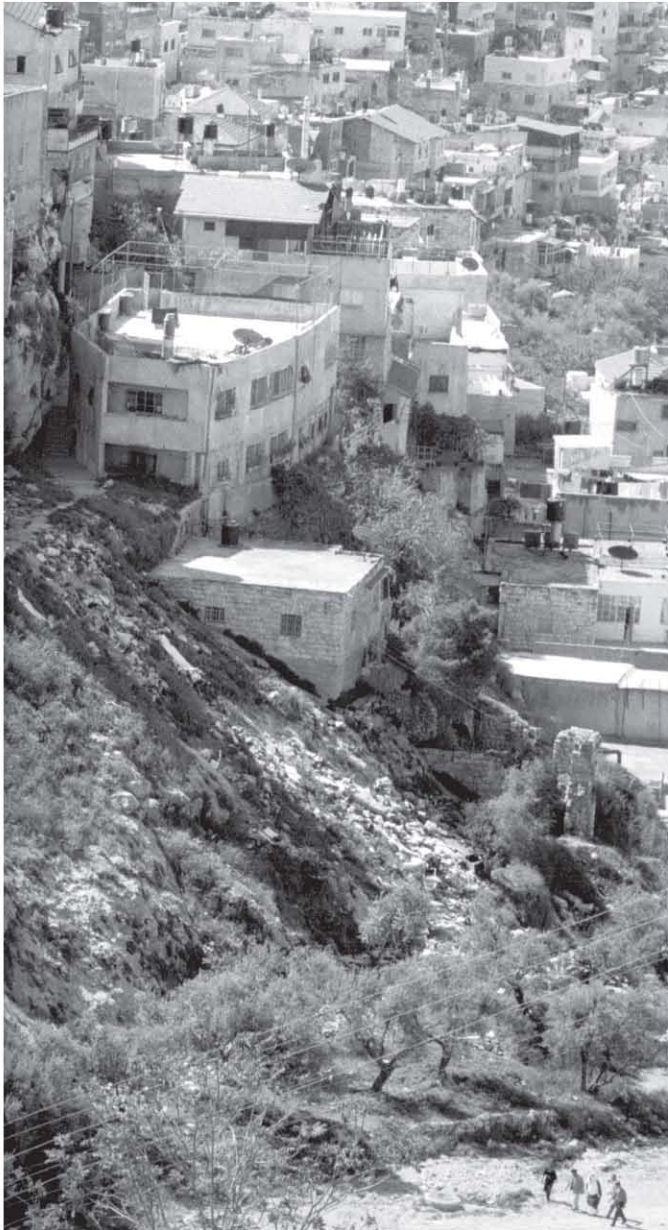
While Arab businessmen were filling the hotels in Tel Aviv, looking for joint ventures, their Israeli counterparts were flocking to Riyadh, Baghdad, Doha and Dubai. Stories of their successes filled the television news programs and eclipsed the sight of settlers trying to repeat the scenes of the Gaza "disengagement" ten years earlier.

Owing to their position between Israel and the Arab world, Palestinians became sought-after middlemen. Former inmates of Israeli prisons, speaking excellent Hebrew, were especially successful in creating business connections. So were Arab citizens of Israel, with their intimate knowledge of Israeli political and economic processes. Their standard of living rose steeply to about that of Jewish Israelis. Their birthrate fell, as is usual with increased prosperity.

In this atmosphere, the return of several thousand Palestinian refugees to Israel passed almost without comment. Since the rapid growth of the Israeli economy had attracted many Jews from abroad, the "demographic balance" hardly changed.

Politicians and economists on both sides started to raise the idea of a "Middle Eastern Union", a political, economic and security organization on the lines of the European Union. Others were talking of a confederation of Israel, Palestine and Jordan, perhaps also including Lebanon, where Hizbullah was by now a well established government party.





THE ISRAELI army remained a powerful instrument for protecting the state. But as in the US and Western Europe, the best and the brightest were drawn to high-tech, science and business. Soon the old conflict was seen as a thing of the past.

In the end, the old adage that “peace is not made between governments but between peoples” was prove once more. Human relations, economic interests and the passage of time completed the process that started with the formal peace treaty.