

We Have Sinned and Have Been Disloyal: What Now?

David Harel and Baruch Ovadia

Yom Kippur is a time for self-examination, which can lead to true repentance and the opportunity to wipe the slate and start anew. Each one of us does his or her own personal inner-soul-searching. But who will do this for the nation? Such a process must be transparent; it must be conducted publicly, openly and courageously by us citizens, because the responsibility for our country is ours, not just that of our leaders.

The term "Jewish State" appears five times in Israel's founding document, the Declaration of Independence. While "democracy" is not mentioned therein, the spirit of democracy remains ever-present in the Declaration, as it speaks of justice, peace, equality and freedom. The Declaration of Independence is not just a vision, but a decree that is meant to guide us. But do we in fact behave in accordance with it?

A look around us proves that we have sinned, by being disloyal to the underlying value that defines us, pulling out the rug, so to speak, from under its feet. In spite of the good, the comfort, and the joy that we find in the State of Israel, it also embodies deeply rooted flaws. The country does not subsist in accordance with Jewish values, as expected of it, and has not lived up to the democratic ideal.

Proper countries are defined by borders separating them from their neighbors – borders that are widely accepted by the citizens of the country and are the result of international agreement. Israel's Eastern border does not meet this requirement.

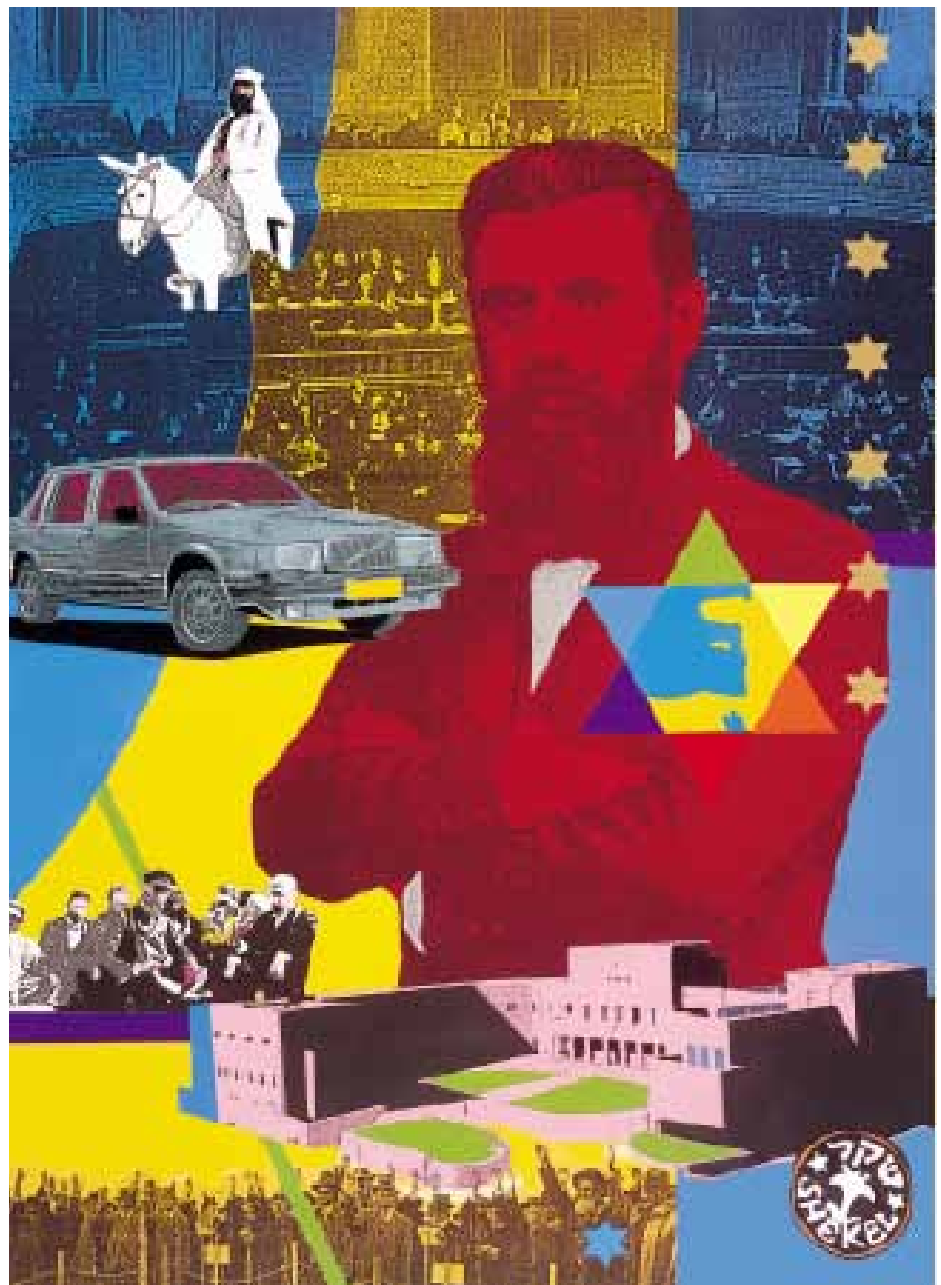
The democratic system of most Western countries is rooted in a constitution, which limits the possibility of constitutional violations of the fundamental principles of democracy. We do not have a constitution, and the fate of the Israeli democracy is thus subject to the whims of temporary and passing leaderships.

Is our country democratic? Well, on the one hand we occupy many, many people (2.6 million Palestinians in the West Bank) - men, women and children who are not Jewish and do not accept us or our country. They live under military rule with no political rights and have no citizenship or sovereign state of their own, and no border separating them from us.

Can democracy tolerate collective exclusion on national and ethnic grounds, or does this constitute a fatal flaw in democracy? The answer is obvious. Looking inside the boundaries of the "Green Line" reveals what appears to be a democratic system. We have a legislative body and a government, courts and elections, a state comptroller and an ombudsman. But the essence of democracy entails equal rights, respect and dignity, and freedom for all people. In practice, we know all too well that these principles are far from being realized in our country. There

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David Tartakover, 1988

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is no point in discussing the disastrous trend of anti-democratic legislation, about which many (including the undersigned) have written, yelled out, and warned against.

In the name of democracy, right-wing voices call for the annexation of the West Bank and the granting of political rights to all Palestinians living there. If we do this, in a short time there will no longer be a Jewish majority in Israel (about 6 million Palestinians: 2.6 million in the West Bank, 1.7 million citizens of Israel and another 1.7 million in the Gaza Strip; as opposed to 5.7 million Jews in Israel). But will these rights really be granted in practice? The Jewish people's nation-state can only prosper, retaining its independence and sovereignty, where there is a Jewish majority.

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Plato would have already proven that the adjectives "Jewish" and "democratic" cannot coexist

around here, if we continue to control and rule what we conquered in 1967. As long as this situation remains, the fate of our "state" also remains unclear, since the borders of the entity called "Israel" have not been fixed or agreed upon for some 45 years, despite the decisions of UN bodies. The opposition and animosity that this causes threatens the country's very existence.

Our self-examination on the eve of Yom Kippur is thus clear: If we desire an Israel in its original format, we must do something before we lose the ability to change the course of history. Our recommendation is that each and every one of us firmly pledge, after thinking, pondering, debating and agonizing, to show up at the polls when the time comes and vote for a party of his/her choice, that will have the ability to uphold a Jewish and democratic Israel, and one that is substantial enough to play a role in forming our next leadership. There are enough level-headed citizens who by the simple act of showing up and voting, one of the fundamental rights of the individual, can bring about radical change in our nation's situation. This is the most significant change that Yom Kippur can bring in its aftermath.