DANCE POEM

(after Nietzsche)

"lasten wie ein Alp" -Marx

Since Mathew fell and Mabel danced the open earth upon his grave in place, amazed us that we did not look askance and darkly understood, I never felt released from Death (though Him in war refused last week to serve and practically felt good) for I could neither dance nor weep when Mabel moved to underlying tones by us unheard and even as she danced it rained.

Still tears
came often to my eyes, yet did not flow
until today when scholar
shedding his Apollo mask
in Zorba danced for death
a rhythm livelier than those he knew
while in my seat I kept
convulsive harmony of spoken starts
—"I never danced for you
I never danced for you"—
and there at last with Mathew
gathered weightless in my heart
I freely wept.

Amos Kenan

A Letter To Yassir Arafat*

Greetings Enemy!

Pay attention to what I am about to say. I say that you are an enemy, yet I say to you "Shalom." The fact that I am engaged in war with you does not mean that I don't hope for the day when there will be peace between us. It is not my intention to reiterate all the history, all the mutual claims, and all the details involved in the Jewish-Arab dispute. I want to concern myself with the present, only with the present, and of course with the future:

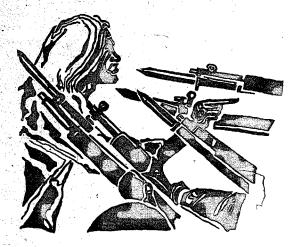
The situation as of today is that Israel does not recognize a Palestinian entity. You don't recognize an Israeli entity. You have traveled a long road since Shukari, Now you are careful. You don't speak of throwing the Jews into the sea. You speak of liquidating the Zionist State of Israel, and of establishing a secular, democratic Palestinian State in which Jews, Moslems, and Christians will live in peace and brotherhood.

But you have two languages, two worlds of terminology, which you radiate in different directions. When you speak of political realization of your nationalistic essence, you speak of a "Palestinian Nation." You claim that the principle of self-determination is applicable to you, according to which every human group has the right to define itself. Since you decided that you are a nation, the world must recognize you and respect your wishes as a nation.

In spite of this the principle of self and national determination disappears when speaking about the political future of the Land of Israel. Since you don't want to apply this principle to us, since you refuse to recognize the State of Israel as a sovereign expression of our national independence, you forfeit your own national self-determination. As a result, it seems that in the rosy future some kind of Palestinian State will arise in which there will be not two residing nations, but rather the members of three religions. Suddenly, we who have a national state have changed into members of a religious sect. And you who are still without a state appear as the representatives of the Moslem population of Palestine in the State of the rosy future.

^{*}This article originally appeared in January, 1970, in the Israeli Newspaper, Yediot Acharonot. It is reprinted here with the permission of the author. The English translation is by Steven Brown.

I don't think you are so stupid. The contradiction can't possibly escape your eyes. This contradiction has a clear propaganda goal: to create a new image for the Palestinian movement, (the world remembers Shukari), and at the same time to artfully distort your aspiration to dominate another nation. From this point of view, that of the desire to dominate another people, your kind reasons are not a bit different from those of the Movement for Greater Israel. Even your styles



are similar. The Movement for Greater Israel eliminates any possibility that the Arabs are human beings. And so that movement provides the Arabs with the rights of citizenship, freedom of religion, cultural autonomy, and all the other appearing rights given to a man because he is a man. But they don't promise them the status of a human group with the right of self-determination. The minute difference between the two of you is that you intend a state in which two nations will live under Arab rule, while the people of the Movement for Greater Israel intend the same thing under Jewish rule. You and I both know that in a bi-national or multinational state there is a ruling people and a subordinate people. When you accuse me of the desire to create a 'racist' state, you simply mean a national state like all other states in the world. For all nation-states in the world are inhabited by one people; a people living in its land, neither ruling nor being subordinate. Your refusal to recognize us as something other than the representatives of a religious sect is surprisingly similar to the refusal of the Israeli government to recognize a specific Palestinian nation, something other than an undefined portion of the Arab nation. Also your generosity expressed in readiness to absorb into your state what you term "the Jewish Arabs" in addition to those who lived here until a certain date which you fixed, and your willingness to see the rest of the Israelis emigrate to countries abroad is strangely-similar to that position of the Israeli Government which would prefer to see the Palestinian refugees emigrate to Arab lands (except for those called 'Israeli 'Arabs', whose membership is also arbitrarily fixed according to a date from the time of their residence in Israel to some other time fixed by us). Thus, instead of one man giving his fellow the right of self-determination, we take for ourselves, each one of us, the arbitrary right to fix his own definition regardless of his fellow man and according to conditions which are convenient for us.

I don't want to begin an evaluation of your true intentions, just as I have no intention of doing that in regard to my own government. I just want to concern myself with the realistic aspect of the phenomenon. It seems to me that there is no chance in the near or distant future that Israel will take a position which would recognize the fact, which cries out to heaven, of a Palestinian entity. Similarly, there is no prospect, even with the help of camouflage uniforms and battle appearances directed at television cameras, to deny the existence of Israel. One must have great faith to believe that he could deny the existence of a mighty Israel, which expresses itself in technological, social, and economic superiority, by withdrawing a piece of an Israeli plane from one's jacket pocket or pants in front of a smiling camera. But politically minded people are not believers. Politically minded men change beliefs in the same way they change their expressions in front of a camera. You don't believe in an Israeli entity any more than Galili2 believes in a Palestinian entity. You are both of the opinion that at present it is politically convenient to hold your views. I think both of you are naive, and that most political people in the world, if they are not revolutionaries, are naive; they are naive in regard to the existent order of things and in regard to a faith which tends to hide the clearest things from the eyes of the world.

Every national dispute in the modern period has classic stages on both sides. There is a stage in which the subordinate nation claims an independent existence, and in which the other side denies this right. The French denied the reality of the Algerian nation, for example. There is a stage in which the subordinate people is willing to be satisfied with self-rule, whereas the ruling nation isn't even willing to permit this. The phenomenon of the gap between the demands of one side and what the other side is ready to agree to later is almost humorous. The moment that the ruler agrees to self rule, the subordinate people demands independence. As soon as the ruler finally agrees to mutual talks, the ruled people thwart every effort at exchange of views. An intermediate stage also exists in which the ruler finds a convenient entity which it cultivates, and just when it is ready for negotiations with that group, a bloody battle breaks out between the movement for national liberation and the body with which the foreign ruler was ready to speak. These things are ancient. The classic stage exists in which the generals announce to the government that they possess a magic remedy for getting rid of the terror and with another small addition to the budget, more emergency powers, another increase in armed forces, the whole problem will be solved by

¹The Movement for Greater Israel is an Israeli organization which advocates possession and settlement of the conquered territories—ed.

military means. We went through all this ourselves with the British; there is nothing new in it. This game is starting to become loathesome; it is beginning to come to an end. You and I both know that extreme and confuted positions such as these can be upheld for only a certain amount of time. There must come a moment of sobering. We shall have to admit to a Palestinian existence, and you shall have to enter into negotiations with Israel.

If you were shrewd, you could seize the Israeli Government's playing cards. If the Israeli government were smart, it could seize your cards. But both of you are mediocre statesmen lacking imagination and inspiration. Neither one of you is a markedly authentic expression of the true feeling of national independence. Both of you possess sources of power and financial backing; you both have influence; you are both in debt to somebody. "Al Fatach" is no more a revolutionary expression than "Mapai" or "Mahatzal." "Al Fatach" is a typically conventional, bourgeois national movement; and in the world in which we live, "Al Fatach" is appropriate for the opposing side, and for all the sides. I have no great respect for the Palestinian vision-a provincial vision, retarded in comparison to the historical development of fortified human beings into mighty and separate blocks. The Zionist vision is no more attuned to the times than yours. We are both late. We are both engaged in activities with the attitude of "what does it matter." And this is our fate, the fate of small nations: to engage in anachronisms which will forever maintain the fact of our being small and unimportant. But you are still incapable of understanding this, for you still have not obtained the doubtful satisfaction of being a customs inspector in a Palestinian uniform, neither have you received Palestinian money notes printed in Britain, nor have you heard the Palestine Orchestra playing the Palestine National Anthem upon receiving the ambassador from the Pepper Coast. What can I do? May you enjoy it, you deserve such satisfaction!

Since you are not shrewd, I have no doubt that you won't be willing to admit to any existence except if you have no choice. The same thing may be said for my side. But don't worry, it'll come. The first buds are appearing on both sides. When "Al Fatach" claims via its spokesman that "we will not agree to freeing the kidnapped watchman from Metulla without direct negotiations with Israel", it means that it demands recognition from our side. This is a bit funny, because we have here a kind of triangle: we demand that the Arab States recognize us and don't get the recognition; you demand recognition and don't obtain it. If the Arab States would extend to us, what you wish we would give you, it would finally be possible to speak about peace. Somebody has to be first.

When I read again your announcement in which you "look forward to the Avien Conference", two interpretations of your meaning are not possible. The Avien Conference was the one in which all the revolutionary representatives of Algeria at long last met with representatives of the French Government to put an end to the whole matter. You can't wait for an "Avien Conference" and at the same time deny my existence. The question, of course, is who will be the first with enough courage to retreat from an uncompromising tactical position to a more realistic stand.

There is no choice. It is impossible to banish Israel, even if she is called all sorts of convenient derogatory terms such as the "Zionist State." You can not get rid of her, not only because she is an existing fact, but also because she is a legitimate expression of the historical aspirations of the Jewish people for national liberation. It is impossible to abolish a liberation movement which is so strong and decisive—not by hollow words, nor by the use of force. They tried to do this from the days of Titus and Nebuchadnezzar up until Hitler. And there is no choice but to recognize a Palestinian entity. It is impossible to banish the Palestinians to the desert, and it won't help.

We are waiting for the Avien Conference!

Your friend, Amos Kenan

