

MOMENT

THE NEW MAGAZINE FOR AMERICA'S JEWS ★ FOUNDED BY LEONARD FEIN AND ELIE WIESEL



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COVER/"Paradise" oil painting by David Sharir. Private collection Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Photograph courtesy of Pucker/Safrai Gallery, Boston.



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One of the more common complaints one hears these days is that we have lost control of our lives, that events, rather than people, are now in charge. A growing sense of futility, and a consequent privatism, subvert the efforts of those who still seek to mobilize people for social purpose.

The trouble, of course — moral considerations aside — is that futility feeds on itself, that subjective gloom creates conditions which are objectively depressing. Caught up in a mood of despair, moved chiefly by inertia, one cannot know whether the effort to intervene, to grab hold of history and turn it in the direction of one's choosing, will be rewarded, or a waste.

I recall a long conversation I once had with David Ben Gurion. I had sought the meeting because of my interest in the Lavon Affair, a major scandal of the day, but the Old Man, as he was called, would have none of that. So, despite the fact that we spoke in Hebrew, and that I tried to make it clear that I knew something about Israel's past, and his own role in that past, he conducted the conversation as if I were a small-town journalist from somewhere in the Middle West. That permitted him the liberty to spend our time together giving me a cram course on Israel's history, and,

once I understood that my specific questions would not be answered, I settled down for the treat of hearing Israel's story from one of its authors.

He began, of course, in 1882. But it was only when he came to describe "the return to the soil" — the movement to create a Jewish agriculture — that he became genuinely animated, and that I came to understand something of the nature of the man. "They came to me," he said, "and they told me, 'Ben Gurion, you're crazy. People will not move from the city to the farm. People move from the farm to the city. To move from the city to the farm is against the facts.' And I said to them," — here B. G. became visibly excited, slamming the table in front of him for emphasis — "to hell with the facts!"

The facts — take your pick — are so unrelievedly ugly that if we cannot work up the energy, the dash, to say "to hell with them," they will smother us. Therefore, a symposium this month on Israel, Palestine, and the PLO. It is simply inadequate, hence unacceptable, to sink into the growing hopelessness so many have come to feel when viewing Israel's future. Obviously, it is exceedingly difficult to write a scenario for the Middle East which has a benign ending. As obviously, just such scenarios are required to sustain us in this difficult time whose end is not yet in view. Nor, as the Ben Gurion vignette shows, is every condemnation of "the facts" an exercise in mere catharsis. Israel's own history shows clearly how will can alter fact. We are no longer satisfied by mystical hope, or by the rhetoric of comfort. It is not the illusion of control that we require, but its reality, and we are, therefore, pleased to provide an array of views which offer plausible directions for Israeli policy and behavior in the months ahead.

We welcome Elie Wiesel back to our pages this month. This magazine was co-founded by him, and, during the early months of our plan-

ning, he was a valued collaborator in the effort. Indeed, in our first issue, he was listed on our masthead as "literary editor," a listing which led would-be authors to inundate him with their manuscripts. In the nature of things, the editorial work can only be done in one place, and we soon found that there was no way in which we could comfortably bridge the Boston-New York gap and involve him organically in our monthly effort. A number of perceptive readers have noticed Wiesel's absence from our recent mastheads, and have inquired about it. The answer is simple: Wiesel has no formal role, either editorial or financial, with MOMENT. He remains what he has been ever since our inception — an adviser, a friend, an occasional contributor, a well-wisher, most of all, a cherished part of MOMENT's past. More than a name, less than a partner.

We had a call the other day from the Mexican National Tourist Council, asking that we help call to the attention of the Jewish public the recent statement by the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations to the effect that our relations with Mexico should now "be fully normalized." After Mexico's vote in support of the General Assembly's condemnation of Zionism, the Mexico Travel Agents Association registered 68,000 cancellations at hotels in Acapulco, and another 60,000 in Mexico City — a remarkable expression of Jewish concern and solidarity. Since that time, however, Mexico has evidently taken significant steps to restore its traditional friendship with Israel and the Jews, leading the President's Conference to say that "we are no longer confronting an adversary, but have regained a friend." Needing all the friends that we can get, we are happy to pass the news along, with special thanks to those whose actions helped bring this unfortunate matter to so successful a conclusion.

— L. F. ★