


ognize and legitimize this is the root cause of the dispute, you will find many opinions regarding the kind of ultimate political settlement that would be achievable, just, and lasting. Having suffered most — in ways that most of us foresaw — from previous “experiments for peace,” we are generally less willing than others to gamble our security or our homes on high-risk gambles whose long-term benefits are far more doubtful than their short-term dangers.

The battle over settlements has exposed the fault lines in classical Zionism. From its inception, Zionism vacillated among its political, social, cultural, and religious foundations. The founding of the state did not, in reality, resolve the long-standing debates among different visions: a political solution to the problem of antisemitism (Herzl), a cultural center to rejuvenate Jewish thought and culture (Ahad Ha’am), an ideal platform for social experimentation (socialist and communist Zionism), a religious-messianic ingathering to repair the ills afflicting Jewish religion (Rabbi Abraham

Isaac Kook). Under domestic and international political pressure, most politicians, as well as many intellectuals, sought the least common denominator: the political state, with its security needs, as the only consensus position. This signals not only a retreat from dreams that were organically connected with the Zionist vision, but also an increasingly bankrupt position in the international arena.

As an academician and a teacher, I dwell a good part of the time in what George Steiner has termed “our homeland, the text.” My professional and much of my religious life is devoted to making sacred texts not just intellectually comprehensible but spiritually meaningful. Using literary tools I have learned from world literature and philosophy, I try to show how Jewish religious texts can be a homeland, in which Jewish personalities can dwell and develop. As a Jewish thinker, I firmly believe that healthy thinking and growth in our intellectual homeland require grounding physically and emotionally in our geographic homeland as well. 

---

## Eyes Wide Open: The Settlements from a (Different) Jewish Perspective

*Ishay Rosen-Zvi*

WHEN I THINK ABOUT Israel’s settlements, two memories come to mind. During a Bnai Akiva (the religious Zionist youth movement) outing to the settlements in the Gaza Strip, I saw a sharp contrast between the overcrowded, miserable neighborhoods of Gaza — set among dozens of roadblocks and army bases — and the blooming lawns and red-roofed houses of the Jewish settlements. But I do not recall any surprise, protest, or even a question from anyone in the youth group (myself included). It was natural for us; we are the masters of the land. It was always thus; we never knew any other reality.

A second memory is from several years later, early 1990s, when I was doing my army service in Samaria, in the context of studying at a Hesder yeshiva. I remember entering Palestinian houses, I remember the Palestinians’ fear, their humiliation, the roadblocks on the highway. One particular image remains etched in my memory: the endless line of Palestinian vehicles, at 5:00 A.M., waiting for the all-powerful Israeli officer to decide who would have the right to use the road, and who would be

turned back. Everything they had — their property, their time, their dignity — was under our control. And zooming by in their cars, with no one obstructing their way, were the settlers.

Here were two adjacent populations, yet so very different: one of citizens with full rights and privileges, and another living under occupation, with neither citizenship nor rights, completely at the mercy of the all-mighty soldier, me. Let us not deceive ourselves: to maintain two populations on the same territory, under two totally separate systems of law, requires the use of massive force. It is this force that I encountered, day after day, at the roadblocks in Samaria. But by then the realization had begun to take hold of me that this was not acceptable; that such blatant and open discrimination between people could not be just and I could not be a part of it.

My American (Jewish) experience also began in connection with the settlements. On my very first Shabbat in the United States, I attended a synagogue that was, coincidentally, making an appeal for one of the settlements.

When I asked why a synagogue was conducting a political fund-raiser, people answered (quite stunned): we are Jews, which means we support Israel, which means aiding in its fight against terror, which means supporting the settlements. This story is actually but one example of what seems to me a complete failure to distinguish, on the part of many American Jews, between support for Israel and support for a specific policy of its government — the distinction between standing by Israel's side and supporting the occupation.


The settlements, in this common narrative, are seen, usually, as the front line in the war against terror. In the best scenario, some people recognize, perhaps, that in the context of a peace agreement, some settlements will need to be dismantled in order to reach a favorable accord. But, even in that scenario, the settlements are seen as an integral part of the support of Israel — plain and simple.

Yet the settlements are not a response to terror nor are they a security against it. They were built before the terror attacks began and existed almost as long as the occupation itself. They remain in place to establish us as the sole rulers of the land and to prevent any future accord.

It is necessary, despite the pain and difficulty involved, to say loudly and clearly: the settlements are wrong not only because they waste billions in state money, or because they subject an entire nation to an irreversible process in which it has no interest, or because they make no political sense, or because they preclude any chance of a future accord. They are entirely wrong, first and foremost, because they create an insufferable moral situation of terrible apartheid rule; because in their wake, virtually every Palestinian village is now sealed off and the Palestinian people have no way to travel anywhere in the occupied

territories. The roads in the territories are, almost without exception, for Jews only, and many of the villages lie directly in the shadow of tank guns. The vast majority of the roadblocks, which turn the lives of every Palestinian — man and woman, young and old — into a living hell, are located within the territories, not between them and the State of Israel. Total curfews are often imposed, and those violating the curfews are all too often shot at. Many of these decrees are a direct result of the placement of settlements that render the Palestinians not one bit of normality that is uncontrolled by tanks, roadblocks, and curfews. The settlements are today the tip of the sword of this terrible and insufferable apartheid.

No one can question the Israeli right and necessity to fight terror. But let us not deceive ourselves. Long before the terror began and security concerns became the ultimate explanation for any action — no matter how cruel or crazy — the discrimination cried out from every corner. One law for the Jews, and a different — entirely different — law for the Palestinians. So it is in the division of water (five times as much for Jews), lands, roads, building permits, and any other possible area. While these facts are not a secret, the occupation has become so natural that it has blinded us all. It has covered our eyes from seeing the injustices and suffering that we have been causing daily for over a generation.

This is an insufferable situation; not only for the Palestinians but also for the soldiers who are ordered to fight against children, women, and old men. It is an insufferable situation for Israelis to become wardens of a prison of enormous proportions. It is an insufferable situation for us as Jews who aspire to establish a state based on principles of justice, not tyranny. 

*Ishay Rosen-Zvi, a Talmud scholar from Tel Aviv University and the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, teaches Talmud at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. He is a member of the Israeli group "Courage to Refuse," whose signers serve in the Israeli defense forces but refuse to serve in the occupied territories. He lived for several years in a settlement in the early 1990s.*

## The Jewish Communities in Gaza: A Jewish Edict of Expulsion

*Rachel Saperstein*

THIS MORNING an earthquake — 5 on the Richter scale — shook Israel. For those of us living in Gush Katif, the bloc of Jewish communities in the Gaza Strip, it was barely a trembler.

Some weeks ago we suffered a 9.5 earthquake. This was not nature speaking but the Government of Israel with its edict of total destruction of our homes and communities.

We, in these thriving farming communities occupying 9 percent of the land in the Gaza Strip, were stunned. We, who have withstood three and a half years of mortar and rocket fire (3,912 projectiles as of this writing), who have seen our friends and neighbors murdered by Arab gunmen (27 civilians and 66 soldiers), who have seen our property destroyed (70 hothouses wrecked, 200 homes and hothous-