

**"Israel and the World
at the Dawn of 2010"
Report of a Listening Post
held in January**



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

Most of the associations brought by the participants were on the subject of Israeli-Palestinian conflict and relationship. People were concerned and felt guilty about the violent acts of various Israeli agents in this conflict, some of us trying to compensate by helping and making efforts to maintain dialogue. Despair about the unwillingness of the Palestinians to have a dialogue was expressed by several participants. There were also worries about the survival of Israel in the future. Most of the time left in Part One was dedicated to the expression of worries about the economic crisis and its implications concerning the gaps created among western populations by piggish capitalism. Some participants expressed despair about the inability to achieve real changes in relationships between men and women, among religions and between religious and secular people. There were also some complaints about the bold language of the new generations, the highly influential position of the media in our life and the helplessness (especially of the elder and the weak members of society) in front of the rapidly changing demands of maintaining everyday life.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following four interrelated themes:

In collecting the points that arose from the discussion in Part One, 4 major themes were identified:

1. Violence and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
2. The economic world crisis and its effects.
3. The changing world and unchangeable attitudes.
4. The take-over by religion.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and, developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here the members were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world. Their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them.

Analysis: There were few references in the group to the outside world and at the same time many local occurrences were ignored. The group stayed on the narrow and precarious space between the outside and the inside, stubbornly sticking to the Israeli-Palestinian unmoving conflict. The reference to Dr. Abu Al-Aish from Gaza, the fertility expert, who lost three of his daughters by an Israeli artillery shell in Gaza during 'Operation Cast-Lead', who still lives in Israel and practices in the Sheba Health Center, who is a friend to many Israelis while speaking out against the Israeli occupation, being supported by many Israelis while stirring hostility in others, becomes a tragic metaphor of the complex situation of human beings.

A lot of aggression is stirred up in, and projected into the Middle-East. The Middle-East has become a laboratory of managing conflicts for the Western world. The learning occurs on the boundaries and Israel is on the boundary between East and West.

The global economic crisis confronted us with the piggish greed and power striving of prominent formerly respected leaders of the finance world. It became crystal clear how the strong ones use and abuse the weaker ones in this world. No one can trust a bank or any social security system anymore; even the elderly must take full responsibility for their assets and future. It seems that the widening gaps in a capitalist world of rapid changes increase competition, envy, frustration and consequently aggression and violence in people.

Other themes raised were violence in the streets and in schools, violence between different religions and cultures, violent takeovers by religious extremists. Even when somebody referred to Berlusconi's plots as an easy Italian atmosphere to be envied, it was immediately mentioned that he was struck in his face with a Madonna statue (actually it was reported to be a souvenir replica of Milan's Duomo cathedral) which could seriously injure him.

Symbolically, the takeover by religious people was also experienced in the Ofek retreat: though a representative of a small minority, a moderately religious woman complained about others writing during the Shabbat (Saturday). Some participants said that formerly, when more arrogant religious members of Ofek, all men, demanded to keep the Shabbat, the secular majority complied. It is a worldwide phenomenon that small minorities of religious radicals and fundamentalists act forcefully to gain power and control. Nowadays it seems that religions act more in the service of the Horrible Great Father than in the service of the good and safety providing God.

Some participants stressed their constriction and wish to withdraw to safer, information-proof retreats, others were accusing our society or others of being violent and a few others described their involvement in society by actively helping and trying to influence. Inner contradictions could easily be detected as in the case of a participant who tries to ignore the flood of information and listens to the news 'only' twice a day, or

another, who claims to take a remote-observant position in order not to get furious by the news, and still another who argues that the evil is where there are innocent bystanders; one participant that enthusiastically advocated Capitalism but at the same time complained about the health authorities that charge money from Palestinians hospitalized in Israel; another participant was optimistic and had been making efforts to 'pave roads beyond exclusion' inside and outside of our country but understood his daughter who settled in London after being injured when demonstrating with Israelis and Palestinians against the wall in Bil'in.

It seems that there is no way to disavow aggression, as it was so symbolically demonstrated by the massive mosquito's attack which annoyed the participants in the ILP room located in a pastoral resort in Zichron Yaacov.

Hypothesis: Global and local crises together with the rapid transmission of information by the media massively confront people with the aggressive and destructive potential in everyone – it is part of our nature. This unbearable knowledge is denied by closing up and avoidance, by projecting and accusing others of being aggressive, and by compensation – by trying to balance or disguise it by positive acts and social involvement.

Convener: Shmuel Bernstein