

**"Israel and the World
at the Dawn of 2012"
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.

Part One: Choosing images representing issues or events that preoccupy the participants.

Participants were invited to identify, in private, issues and events preoccupying them in their various social roles in the community and to pick out an image which represents those issues. Then, they were asked to write a dialogue between themselves and the image each had chosen.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

Part Two: Sharing the images and dialogues

Participants presented their images and their dialogues with them. Others asked clarifying questions and added their associations.

The images were:

1. A bare foot and a fancy woman's high heeled shoe. The dialogue was with the bare foot which, by allusion to a TV series dealing with the history of the Israeli Kibbutz, represented the Kibbutz with the nostalgia for its old values, in comparison with the new individualistic and Nouveau-Riche trends represented by the stilettos of some ostentatiously rich ladies starring in an ongoing TV reality series;
2. A pig. The dialogue was between the rapacious Capitalist with his values of 'people always look after their own' and 'survival of the fittest' and his opponent who tries to rebuke him;

3. A Jewish house with an Israeli flag, Menora, Magen David Stars and bars on the door and window. The dialogue was between someone trying to reach the people inside the house but there was hostility and suspiciousness between them. Those inside the house probably represented orthodox fanatics and people from settlements in the occupied territories and the outdoor one probably represented the secular leftists or less nationalistic Israelis, a woman or Palestinian Arabs. The rift between the two sides seemed unbridgeable;
4. A black goat. At first, the dialogue with the goat can be understood as a dialogue of a modern citizen with an environmental sustainability agent, then it becomes a dialogue between a modern Western person and a religious fundamentalist.

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.

It became clear that the nostalgia for the old socialistic values represented by the Kibbutz is ambivalent: people remember problematic issues about the idealized life in the Kibbutz, such as lack of privacy and the collective pressure on a child to share everything with his friends, "not only the chocolate but also the cow's print on its wrapping". The Kibbutz has become another capitalistic neighbourhood and, paradoxically, only the rich Kibbutzim can afford to keep the old values of collective liability. The young generation, which prefers the more individualistic way of life, is now part of the protest movement, demanding a better quality of life for the middle classes.

The selfish fat pig is repulsive, almost unregulatable, but isn't it the golden calf of modern capitalistic consumer society?

'People always look after their own' turns out also to be the motto of ideological extremists – the fanatic idealists are generally convinced they know the right way for better life and salvation. By their striving to accomplish their good missions they are ready to exclude others, including their own brothers. Their stubborn isolation might easily bring hostility and terror, as we see among fundamentalist Islamists. However, lately we encounter these tendencies also among religious Western Bank settlers and extremist Haredi Orthodox fanatics in Israel.

Those who are fighting for better environmental sustainability and those who fight for better morality might appear as demons of terror, as the black goat might symbolize the sustainable environmental ecology as well as the ascetic religious who are ready to enforce their ideals at any price. It is elusive and annoying that any side of the conflict might seem as the terrorized victim as well as the terrorizing aggressor.

The bare foot transformed into a phallic woman shoe, the neuter pig (also a primitive emblem of the Great Mother), the image of barred house referred to by mistake in the feminine, and the image of the black goat, which was presented as neuter – with no specific sex, raised more associations: of Gilaad Shalit, the Israeli soldier who became a

collective symbol for a mommy-child-soldier in sharp distinction from the former hero fighter image of the Israeli soldier, and of the new political party leader for the coming elections – Yair Lapid, a former TV celebrity with a handsome male look but known as the ‘everyone’s Mummy’ – the same childish superlative as Gilaad Shalit.

The many associations dealing with poverty, femininity and also with milk, which was a central issue in the Israeli protest movement, brought up the idea that there is not enough milk for everybody on earth. Lapid’s surprisingly high popularity was interpreted as sibling protest against the fathers who are failing to fulfill our hopes.

Analysis: There is a lot of confusion here in Israel as well as in other parts of the world: it is not clear whether it is better to go bare foot as in the old Kibbutz or to wear the stiletto heels of the rich Tel-Avivians; to be a capitalist consumer on the rush for success or a lazy Greek who earns enough (at the expense of other Europeans) to live leisurely and enjoy more sex (according to a survey of Durex).

The West Bank settlers who consider themselves as the new Israeli pioneers and declare to be highly moral religious citizens, breed cruel extremists and even some terrorists; on the other side are the Hamas and Jihad religious Muslims who don’t accept Israel and wish to destroy us and to inherit the country, who gain the trust of the majority of the Palestinian people by providing religious frameworks and better social welfare for the poor, but are ready to send their people to kill their brothers and to become Shaheeds by killing innocent citizens in Israel and in many other countries.

Ascetic and modest religious people that once were models for chastity and morality have given rise to the leaders of fundamentalism and terror. The liberal humanistic values of the Western democracies are castrating their power to confront all threats to the freedom and safety in their own countries and also their ability to defend suffering populations under brutal oppression in other countries. Hostility and suspicion make people unsure whether the helper is here to help or has an hidden agenda. This is reminiscent of the principle of enantiodromia – the tendency of things to change into their opposites.

Hypothesis: There is a mature recognition of the complexity of the human experience. It is impossible to split and divide civilizations, communities and sectors as simply good or evil anymore. This means that everyone is accountable and responsible for what is going on in society. But it is a heavy and painful burden to carry, and people miss the less conscious and the dependent condition of the ‘old order’.

This depressive state is stirring new energies and brings rage and passions which run high among young and middle-aged people around the world, looking for alternative and better regimes, but this is experienced by fanatic communities as weakness and deterioration, to which they tend to react violently in a more paranoid way.

Convener: Shmuel Bernstein