

**"Israel and the World
at the Dawn of 2005"
Report of a Listening Post
held on 13th January**



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

The experiences brought in the first session can be grouped around two broad themes:

1. The theme of the tsunami, both literally and figuratively: the feeling of being swept up and drowned in noise and powerful forces of unidentifiable origin, a kind of "divine terrorism". The perceived weakness of local structures, whether religious, political or national leads to the feeling of exposure, lack of differentiation and a lack of protection. Nothing is unequivocal: neither scientific progress nor a "return to the primitive" offers a clear solution to the prevention of disaster.

2. The assimilation into larger structures and groups leads to a fear of losing one's individual identity and to different ways of coping. One stance is to retreat into an isolated "island", "doing one's own thing". Another is oppositionalism and negativism ("refusers"), whether to political decisions, like the disengagement plan, or to the participation in the global listening post, or to the hegemony of the Bush-Blair leadership. A third possibility is to find a unique individual way of contributing to the larger structure, as in "Ask what you can do for the world."

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

Analysis:

A dominant feeling was the continuing sense of being overwhelmed and compliant, and yet seeking for a way to assert our individuality. For example, members were resentful towards the conveners' leadership in the way the global listening post had usurped our usual At-Ptah forum. On the other hand, at one point in the session, the group attacked the conveners for being too preoccupied in taking notes to be connected to the group, thus voicing a desire for a stronger, more nurturing leadership. Another topic of discussion was the attention given by the local media to the relatively few Israeli casualties of the tsunami. Some felt the attention was disproportionate; others felt this was a way to assert our collective togetherness within the erasing magnitude of the event.

A further variation on the theme of our antagonism towards Europe emerged through reference to Amos Elon's book *German Requiem* which traces Jewish attempts at integration into German society before the rise of Hitler. The compliant German Jews' efforts were shattered during the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. On the other hand, there was scepticism concerning the effectiveness and power of any kind of dialogue and collaboration. This was explored on several levels: in the room, where statements of mutual understanding were counteracted by evidence of aggression and antagonism; in

Israeli society and politics, as in the confrontational stances around the disengagement plan; or in global attempts at dialogue, such as the meeting of Jewish and Moslem religious leaders in Belgium which claimed to have achieved miraculous mutual understanding. It was noted that this meeting was held in a Christian country but in the absence of any Christian leaders, and on the backdrop of vocal battles between other religious leaders in the world on the religious meaning of the tsunami. In this connection, a powerful image was brought in of the Ethiopian priests in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, who, excluded by the Christian authorities from having any territory inside the church, sit on the roof with cupped ears, hoping to hear the talk inside.

Hypothesis 1:

There is a constant oscillation between the search for a large, nurturing, unifying, containing, safety-promoting body, and resistance and aversion to such a possibility, arising from the disillusionment and disappointment with such bodies - religions and their representatives, governments and super-powers - which lie, appropriate and abuse, and whose ability to promote any kind of dialogue is limited. This oscillation is exacerbated by the disappearance of clear-cut binarism on all levels of existence. The paranoid-schizoid defenses (splitting and projection) are no longer effective. Is this an entrance to a more depressive position (Requiem)?

Hypothesis 2:

In times of such fears of erasure and annihilation - physical, psychic and societal - the individual strives to maintain his or her unique identity. Should one resist, stand up and be counted, or become a recluse?

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