

AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Israel and the World at the Dawn of 2015 Report of a New Year's Listening Post



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 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 interrelated themes:

PART 3--ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION.

REVIEW ALL TOGETHER

Background

The structure of this year's Listening Post meeting was changed significantly to accommodate a much larger number of participants. 24 were expected but 17 attended of whom 11 were Ofek members. For the 1st time in the history of the event in Israel the Ofek management board appointed one of its members to be its referent in the organization and promotion of the event. As it became clear that there would be too many participants for one small group the decision was taken to start all together for the introductory remarks and then split and work in two groups with the board referent Dr. Ronit Kark convening one group and Dr. Joe Djemal the other. The two groups remained apart except for a 15 minute coffee and food break and the 15 minute review of the evening which took place at the end of the evening.

This structure frustrated some of those attending and also led to difficulty integrate the work of the evening. With hindsight a better solution might have allowed working in two groups for the sharing of

preoccupations and the identification of major themes but coming together for the analysis and hypothesis formulations. Israel is again preoccupied with upcoming elections in March. The meeting took place on the evening following a terrorist attack when a Palestinian stabbed 12 Israelis starting in a Tel Aviv bus before being shot in the leg and apprehended. The terror attacks in France against the journalists and Jewish shoppers in a kosher supermarket were also fresh in the minds of the participants. The meeting took place 2 days after the Argentinian special prosecutor was found dead in suspicious circumstances on the day he was to testify to a congressional committee on a terrorist bombing in Buenos Aires at the Jewish Center in 1994 where 85 were killed.

Group 1

Theme 1: Quality of life, loss of personal freedom, social and financial inequalities, the source of authority within societies

There was discussion around the differences in living in different parts of the world. Do we share access to the same media sources, is TV content comparable? Who does in fact have free internet access? How does Boko Haram spread in Africa and ISIS in the Middle East? Classical religion appears to be losing its influence as moderating the growing extremism. What is our biggest threat to society? Israel is number four in the OECD of countries with the largest poor/rich gap. There is a drop in the standard of living for the lower middle class all over the world. How much of the poverty is self-induced with voluntary unemployment in the ultra-orthodox and Arab sectors of Israeli society. Yet the group was reminded that in today's world, access to medicine and education are better than at probably any other time in world history. Social inequality was also noted in the high representation of troubled youth of immigrants from former soviet republics and Ethiopia. Can some of these inequalities be reduced through greater integration within educational structures?

Theme 2: Loss of belonging, identity, solidarity, integration, connection and compassion. Alienation, me-ness, one-ness and emptiness

The theme of belonging came up regarding the two opposite poles that appear to exist in Israeli society. The existence of religious fundamentalist messianic groups versus the rational and pragmatic peace seekers was discussed. In a sense Israel is also following the world trend in increasing fundamentalism where the citizens are becoming more warrior-like. At the same time three million different people can march together to protest terrorism in Paris France. Israel's kibbutz ethos is evaporating and this is contributing to increasing feelings of alienation and fear. Fundamentalism with its one-ness is filling in the gap of not belonging. One participant was very upset that

there were no formal introductions with names of the participants and saw this as increasing the negative feelings around the discussion. Another described living away from Israel for many years and coming back to a different society one far less compassionate and one where each for his own was the predominant ethic. Can increased connection come about with increased integration of special needs children in regular schools? Does the policy of teaching holocaust studies to young people increase connection or increase alienation? Many in Israel were hopeful at the beginning of the Arab Spring that Israel's own integration in the Middle East would be improved though the developments proved the exact opposite.

Theme 3: Corruption, loss of values, lack of courage and breakdown of authority

Corruption of government was discussed in the light of the opening of police investigations into several members of the ruling coalition on charges of corruption and nepotism. One member pointed out that the behavior is not new; it just was not known about. There was discussion about the loss of traditional values of caring for others. Factories are polluting rivers and their owners do not seem to care. One member emotionally described finding a dying cat in the garbage container. Apparently it was run over, picked up from the road and then placed alive in the container. The member took the cat in, to care for it, but it died the following day. What might other members have done being faced with this situation? Exactly one year after former prime minister Ariel Sharon died he was remembered for his courage during the 6 day war. He was also noted for the corruption surrounding his rule. Today's society lacks courage but does contain brutality.

Theme 4: Fear of death, extinction, terror attacks, conspiracy, suicide

Beheadings filmed for the internet. Partisan songs sung in the memorial service for the Jewish victims of the shooting in the kosher supermarket sent shivers down the spine of one of the members. A small number of fanatics use modern technology to publicize and amplify their deeds. A member described having thoughts around the stabbing terror attack on the way to the listening post; imagining being in the bus or being in a bus nearby. The picture of the terrorist posted on the internet resembled pictures posted on dating sites. How easy might it have been to meet him for a date? One member described thinking for the 1st time of the possibility of the demise of Israel. Another thought of the rubbing out of people old and young. One member described being glued to the internet following the death of the Jewish Argentinian special prosecutor feeling that such a thing could happen here. "They have suicided him". Were some of President Clinton's friends in the USA also "suicided"? Do we live in a society which is committing suicide?

One member described feeling orphaned when hearing of the stabbing attack and not having to call and reassure a parent who had recently passed away. Russian tanks have appeared in the Ukraine a reminder of Russian tanks in Prague.

Hypothesis: Israel and Israelis live in a traumatizing and post traumatic society which leads to feelings of alienation, fear, pessimism and an inability to see the unprecedented access to knowledge, food and medicine that characterizes our period in history.

Part of the evidence for this was found also in what was less discussed or avoided. It was noted that in some of the very small groups the terror attack of the same morning did not come up at all. Anti-Semitism as a subject did not come up at all despite referring to the terror attacks in Europe. We see evidence of attempts by different parts of society to use one-ness as a solution seeing the growth in fundamentalism as one example of this. Other examples include the use of social media to foster illusions of togetherness and familiarity. The association of "summer of love" also came up. Can 3 million people marching together in the streets of Paris be the start of a process of positive change?

Group 2

Theme 1: The fear of terror and the esthetics of and fascination with terror

Terror was mentioned as something central; terror in the streets, buses, coffee shops, and prayer houses – synagogues in Israel and across the world (Israel, Australia, France). People walking with knives on the street. Terror of Da'sh (ISIS or ISIL). Terror as being staged with its own rules of esthetics. Dash was mentioned, the appeal the fascination. How young people from around the world are drawn to it. Terror as marketed, sold, and wrapped as a product and a merchandize in the modern world. Solidarity of the world to fight terror and to fight the devil. A sense of uniting against terror. Terror games in Sony play-station. What is the reality and what is the Photoshop picture (non-reality)?

Theme 2: The return of religions as a splitting mechanism

The death of Jesus. New archeological findings showing that Jesus was crucified in a different place. A myth is constructed around religions and places and then that myth becomes reality becomes a narrative. Judah (the Jew) is the best student of Jesus. He is his believer. He tells the story of crucifixion to enlighten the power of Jesus. Islam as a religion, findings regarding a new burial site of Jesus. Islam and terror, a power that draws together or dissolves. The Gospel by Amos Oz (an

Israeli writer). Groups in Europe as losing identity and uniting again around religions.

Theme 3 and some evidence for the following hypothesis:

In the here and now the two groups of Ofek met at the same time and space, but did all their work of the Listening Post separately and did not share it with each another. The two heads of the group – a man and a woman – were not able to unite. The knowledge was kept split. The split enables each one to have a place and a voice, but does not enable the use of full resources and the building of a community.

Hypothesis: The diffusion and dissociation of identities, the need for individuation and for separate spaces and territories, the idealization of personal greed, the need to be right, knowledgeable and good, the loss of belief and the evident splits in society and the community give rise to guilt, to envy, and to a need for clarity, united identify and solidarity. This gives power and gives rise to war, terror and extreme groups as a uniting mechanism for all sides (those who join terror and those who fight and oppose terror). Terror defines and unites us. This fantasy of solidarity, seems to pull every-one together, but eventually brings to further splits, subdivisions, ill-use of resources and disillusion.

There is fear that there will not be place for everybody so it leads to splits- such as the two groups that met for Israel's ILP event.

Conveners: Dr. Joe Djemaldr; Ronit Kark