



An Organisation for Promoting
Understanding of Society

LISTENING POST

Israel at the Dawn of 2019

PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part, the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experiences in their various social roles, be they: in work, unemployed or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood, 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': the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

The Listening Post took place under the shadow of the upcoming National Elections that are going to take place in April, and shortly after the death of Amos Oz. The discussion in the first part of the evening was dominated by a central polarization: between despair and its manifestations, and the need to recover a sense of purpose and hope. The despair took different forms: incipient old age and Alzheimer, being irrelevant, overcome by indifference, fear of speaking one's mind, rift between the generations, splitting, difficulty of giving up our privileged comfortable life style, and more. The need to recover a sense of purpose arose principally in relation to the formation of a new political party based on the idea of love and sharing, but was supported by a detailed remembrance of Brendan Duddy's work on the Northern Ireland peace process, among others things.

PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

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

From this discussion four themes were chosen for further exploration in smaller groups: Despair and hopelessness vs. love, friendship and change. One of the participants talked about the establishment of a new political party called simply love based on the idea that love is a common denominator regardless of politics, race and gender, in the hope that it will bring back a desire to unify the mosaic of the Israeli society.

Another participant talked about being unable to express her anger when her community rabbi praised on Facebook the good deeds of another rabbi accused

of sexually abusing his pupils, and people 'liked' the post. A third participant talked later about the extent of sexual child abuse and teenage prostitution in religious communities which cannot be discussed because the subject is taboo... The self-imposed silence takes its toll; being silenced impairs the thinking process, eventually causing despair.

Splitting

One participant shared his experience at the memorial ceremony for Amos Oz, an important contemporary novelist. His casket was laid in honor for people to pay their respects in a basement. . The people there were mostly old, including many major writers. It felt like the speaker for "the white tribe" (the Ashkenazi elite), as Oz was called, was dead. A participant shared her estrangement from her son who emigrated, and since then has developed an anti-Zionist stance, this serving as a metaphor of the generational split and the difficulties of inter-generational communication. Someone noted the absence of the new generation of Ofek members and young participants in this session.

Another participant related this to Israel sending military rescue missions to disaster zones, in order to save others' sons, and at the same time sending its own sons to die in wars: we are not able to take care of our children/the next generation.

Are we here to live or to be buried?

A participant shared that when Brendan Duddy was in Israel he asked him what was needed in order to bring peace, and Duddy replied that only when the cup of blood would be full would it will be possible. He, as a private person, brought about change, and he was prepared to endanger his life in order to do so. Another participant associated: What do we endanger besides our sons and grandchildren who go to the army? We have to give up ego parts and resources in order to bring about change.

A UK tourist shared that her mother in law in early stages of dementia is living with her family. She has a grave ready for her at the Mount Olive, in Jerusalem. She could come in a casket (from the UK) or live her best years in Israel. [She said] "I want to give you my recipes, legacy for the next generation. Bring me a piece of paper.... I don't remember what it was about the recipe book"... The member continued: I'm preoccupied that if we are not struck with illness we will live 30 years more and what parts of our mind will stay with us in the next years.

Shifting between languages

One of the characteristics of the session was the shifting between English and Hebrew due to the presence of a UK tourist and two others who feel more fluent in English. The UK tourist shared that this was her first time in Israel in a group of people thinking together, trying to understand what was being said: "My work is with language and being in a situation like this is a bit confusing". During the evening participants shifted between both languages, sometimes wondering why

and how to use them. Someone noted the absence of Arabic as well as the absence of participants of Palestinian origin from the Listening Post session.

PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In Part 3, the participants 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, participants 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 of despair and hopelessness vs. love, friendship and change

Our world has lost its capability to yearn for values and ideals, exhibiting many signs of corruption, and sexual and social perversion. It seems that the world has lost its innocence. In such a world the mere mention of love and friendship in order to bring about social change feels naïve. In such a situation there is only room for despair. This is the social conspiracy, the way society attacks itself in order not to bring about significant change. The discourse on sexual violence and how to be aware of sexual dangers obstructs the possibility of flow, enthusiasm and innocence. The social imperative is to be sophisticated and sarcastic, and this is the way that we preserve destructive despair as a social defence against change and taking action, so that we can protect our comfortable lives.

Analysis of splitting

We send our sons to die and cover it up by saving children in other places. Territorial boundaries are blurred, as is the boundary between truth and lie. Some people consider their home the place where they work, others want to build walls. There is an intergenerational splitting, a splitting between those who feel that the world is open for them and those who are deprived, and between nationalism and citizens of the world. Another splitting is that between the discourses (of politicians) emphasizing the common good when in fact they follow their needs and desires. This splitting becomes the basis for social perversion.

Analysis of "are we here to live or to be buried?"

The theme here was of loss of life, the search for meaning, and the need for connection. Although we have split up into groups, the themes -- hope, despair -- are common to the other groups as well. Collectively, we, the white privileged, are looking for connection and meaning, so the passing down of a recipe is a way to give us meaning in life. There was a strong wish to have a connection and meaningfulness (sic) as we move into next year.

Analysis of shifting between languages

The absence of Arabic from this evening and also from the law (a new law was passed this year stating that Arabic is not an official language anymore, only has a "preferred" status) was noted. Israel's attempt to unify, to create a melting pot, to create a new identity in order to make governing easier, has backfired, as is evidenced by a desire to

reconnect with previous (original) identities. This can be seen as a reaction to the attempt to equalize everybody.

There is a tension between the drive for inclusivity and oneness on which the State of Israel was founded, and the fragmentation into individual identities that don't want to be part of the whole.

Discussion and hypothesis attempts.

It was difficult to formulate clear hypotheses during the evening. Following are the main ideas that were expressed in the discussion:

- We are on the verge of deteriorating into dementia; we think that the recipes from the past could be an antidote and while we do that we forget to dream about the future and to act accordingly.
- We use language to blur the fear we have to openly take a stand because that could endanger our good life.
- There is a split between the boldness of the language of social media and the language that blurs differences.
- We accuse the younger generation, as if the source of evil is in the young, the new, the technology, and while we do that we forget what we have done to others. At one extreme we have dementia, at the other a restless young generation, and we are caught in the middle.

Possible hypothesis: The state of despair and hopelessness brought on by splitting and fragmentation in society, loss of essential values, feeling useless and irrelevant, is counteracted on the one hand by the suggestion that cynicism and indifference are used as a social defence by the “white elite” to resist change and stay in the despair, and on the other by the drive to make connections and create new purpose and hope for the future.

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