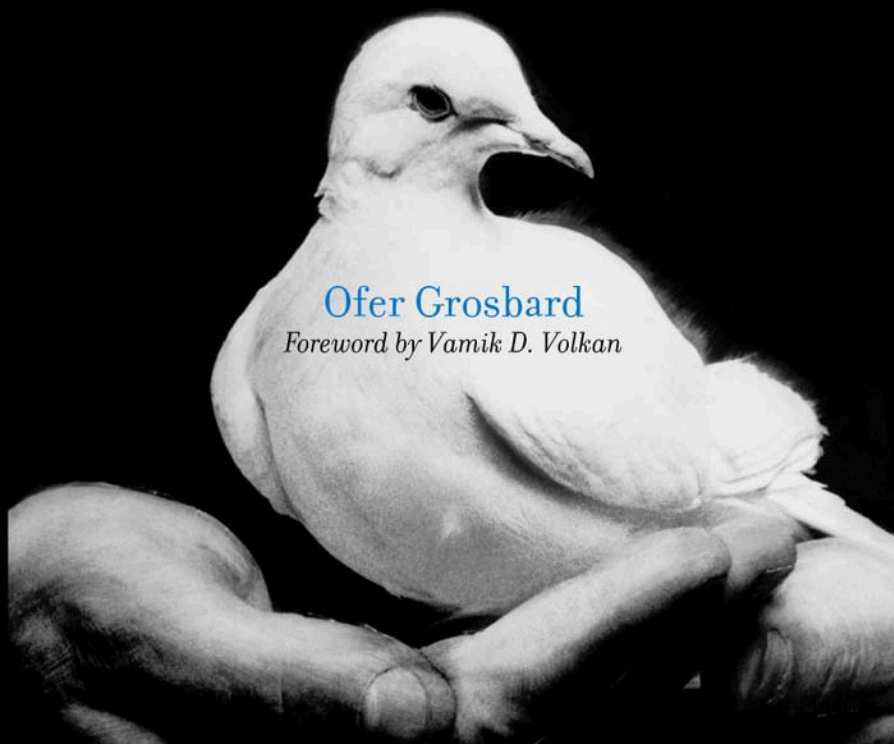


Israel on the Couch

The Psychology of the Peace Process

Ofer Grosbard

Foreword by Vamik D. Volkan



Words of praise for *Israel on the Couch*:

I found your book to be very interesting. It offers important insights into the issues facing Israeli society following the peace process. The psychological analysis you offer leads to several conclusions which could encourage Israeli public opinion to support the peace process, despite possible difficulties.

— Shimon Peres

Your book is a must for the peace negotiators.

— Meir Sheetrit, Member of the Knesset for Likud

Your innovative book sheds light on the Israeli-Arab conflict from a very different angle. The prism through which you view the situation offers a new approach.

— Avraham Burg, Knesset Speaker

I am sure this book will help decision-makers try to understand the other side better.

— Ofir Pines, Chairman of One Israel, Chairman of the Coalition

I was impressed by the book's original and singular approach to the peace process. The use of the analytical tools you suggest could help decision-makers shape better solutions to the components of the conflict.

— Yossi Beilin, Minister of Justice

The material is fascinating and interesting. I thank you for the original thinking. I will do my best to give your ideas resonance.

— Shlomo Ben-Ami, Minister of Internal Security

Such a book makes a singular contribution by highlighting the psychological aspects of the human processes, which we tend to overlook. Undoubtedly, even in the peace process with our neighbors the psychological element is decisive.

— David Levy, Minister of Foreign Affairs

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Israel on the Couch

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in
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Russell Stone, editor

Israel on the Couch

The Psychology of the Peace Process

Ofer Grosbard

with a Foreword by Vamik D. Volkan

State University of New York Press

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In memory of my father
David Grosbard
A member of Etzel's chief command,
Tel Aviv District Commander,
Who taught me to experience our national life
As if it were my own.

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Foreword

On the evening of May 10, 2000, during the fifty-second anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel, a ceremony took place in Jerusalem in the area surrounding Theodor Herzl's tomb. I was an Inaugural Rabin Fellow at the Yitzhak Rabin Center in Tel Aviv at the time, so I had the opportunity to attend this ceremony. The event was presided over by Avraham Burg, then Speaker of the Knesset. I had met Burg at the Knesset just a few days earlier, when both of us participated in a meeting that dealt with the themes of cultural diversity and coexistence. I remember thinking that he was an exciting speaker and I could see that most of the two thousand or so Israelis in attendance were stirred by his remarks. My Israeli friends who accompanied me to Mount Herzl translated Burg's remarks. He was urging his audience to live up to the vision of an idealized Israel where deep and troublesome societal divisions no longer exist.

The assassination of Rabin on November 4, 1995 by Yigal Amir, a Bar Ilan University law student, shocked Israeli society, and left them asking how it was possible for one Israeli to kill another. An Israeli psychoanalyst, Rena Moses-Hrushovski describes in her book *Grief and Grievance*, an Israeli "soul-searching" that took place after the assassination. Israeli intellectuals wondered how they could facilitate the coexistence of different political and religious groups and overcome the destructive splits among Israelis' multiple religious factions and ethnicities. In the long run, however, according to Moses-Hrushovski, this did not occur. At the time of the ceremony, the country still had deep divisions. Burg's address referred to this condition and cried out for a solution.

While I was a Rabin Fellow, my wife and I rented an apartment on the beach in Tel Aviv, a couple of blocks away from the American Embassy. At least four days a week I would take a bus to, and home from, the temporary location

of the Rabin Center near Tel Aviv University. Each bus ride took about half an hour, and each time I observed a variety of Israelis who would, through integration and absorption, create a stable Israeli mosaic. Israel, in fact, has a minister of absorption, who is in charge of efforts to integrate various groups, especially the newcomers such as Russian Jews, into the society. My friend at the University of California, Los Angeles, Peter Loewenberg, an historian as well as a psychoanalyst, writes about “synthetic” nations, such as Brazil, Indonesia, and the United States: People from different cultures and with many variations of religious belief coming together to create a nation-state. Israel too is a “synthetic” nation.

When Burg’s address was finished, twelve Israelis, representing different groups within the country, spoke briefly in front of lit torches and symbolically presented themselves as a unified Israel. A young woman, Oz (Sveta) Tokaev was a member of a group of one million recent “immigrants” from Russia. Zehava Baruch was the spokeswoman for Ethiopians. Boaz Kitain, whose son was killed in a helicopter crash, reminded everyone of grieving parents in a country where young people face real dangers. Two teenagers, one Jewish and one Druze, Ziv Shachar and Daniella Nadim Issa, spoke together, suggesting that Jews and non-Jews can coexist in the state of Israel. Others among the dozen speakers reminded the audience that there were citizens who were directly affected by the Holocaust and citizens who were representatives of women’s rights groups; however, some Moslem Israeli Arabs and ultra-Orthodox movements were not represented. In the excitement of the evening, however, one could visualize an idealized and unified Israel.

As a Turkish-American living in Israel for only four months, it was obviously difficult for me to observe the divisions in Israeli society, especially those pertaining to religious differences—even though I made a specific effort to observe and understand them. During the first month of my stay in Israel, I met the author of *Israel on the Couch*, Ofer Grosbard, who has combined his enthusiasm for the intellectual understanding of the problems of Israeli society with his empathy for all. Whether we had lunch together in an Arab restaurant in Haifa or visited the kibbutz that his father-in-law, a pioneering Zionist, helped to establish decades ago, Grosbard explained to me what kind of societal problems, desires, and conflicts Israelis faced. During our meetings I observed his deep love for Israel, and its people who come from different cultural and religious backgrounds, as well as his concerns about the peace process. I found it very easy, rewarding, and thought-provoking to read Grosbard’s book, and I believe that other readers will also find this book enlightening, even though Grosbard deals with extremely serious issues, painful events, and conflicts.

Grosbard, as a psychologist who has worked with youngsters as well as adults, has been especially interested in family dynamics. Parents can enhance or inhibit the development of their offspring. Grosbard applies his psychologi-

cal insights about family dynamics to his explanation of political processes. He focuses on the divisions in Israeli society, between left and right, secular and Orthodox, and Israeli and Israeli-Arab. He also reminds us that it would be impossible to understand and deal with the divisions in Israel without taking into account how necessary and significant emotions are to human relationships.

At the one-year anniversary of my departure from Tel Aviv, a bomb exploded at a Tel Aviv beach and took many lives. As my wife and I watched the aftermath on television, I could recognize the trees that were in front of our Tel Aviv balcony and the promenade where we took frequent strolls. I was filled with sadness, and felt that saving the peace process would require a small miracle. It is not surprising that the news that we read here in the United States mostly deals with Israel's issues with the Palestine Authority and with its neighboring Arab countries. They also refer to the Israeli-Arab conflict within the general frame of international relations; examining the United States' role in the Middle East, and expressing concerns about the Bush administration's role in putting the peace process back on track. Thus, Grosbard's volume is most timely in reminding us that we also need to be aware of internal conditions in Israel. He gives us an insider's view of divisions within Israel and calls for resolutions, as Burg did at the anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel. In my opinion, what makes this book most enlightening is the fact that Grosbard has a wonderful style that combines the "innocence" and passion of a child with the wisdom and caution of a "wise man" in order to explore the emotional world of the people who call themselves "Israelis."

Vamık D. Volkan, M.D.

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Preface

To understand the journey I took in order to write this book, I must share with the reader some milestones that tie my personal and national life together. I was born in Tel Aviv in 1954, as the youngest of three children. My father immigrated to Israel from Lithuania in 1932 with his family at the age of sixteen. My mother emigrated from Berlin in 1935 with her family when she was eleven. My father joined the anti-British Etzel underground, and eventually became a member of the top command and the commander of the Tel Aviv district. His emotional life to the day he died was indelibly tied to the Herut movement. My mother is a pediatrician and she too has right-wing views; both originally came from religious families. I was sent to the state-religious “Bilu” school, even though we weren’t religious; we traveled on the Sabbath, and I only donned a yarmulke when I went to school. My parents thought a religious education was a good education, and that it was important for me to maintain a connection to tradition and religion. By the time I went to high school I was sent to a secular school. Around the dinner table we heard many stories from my father’s years in the underground, and we took in the atmosphere of the right wing.

In those youthful days I felt like a rightist with all my heart. Today, looking back, I realize there always were cracks in my rightist views, and I expressed them in my rebellion against figures of authority (parents and teachers) and a difficulty to identify with what was offered to me. Since I was the youngest in the family, I may not have been expected to identify with my parents with the same strictness usually required from older siblings, which allowed me more freedom. I went into the army’s Nachal paratroopers unit full of a spirit of volunteerism and a desire to serve in a combat unit.

In those days after the 1973 Yom Kippur War, in talks with comrades in arms while we were stationed in Egypt, my allegiance to the right was shattered. In

the following years I found myself voting more and more toward the left (I voted for Moshe Dayan's Telem), until I was no longer ashamed to vote Labor. My parents, brother, and sister all voted for the right. My family treated me with patience, as the rebellious young child, thinking—well, he'll come to his senses.

My parents encouraged me from a young age to lean toward the natural sciences, which they respected more than the humanities. I always knew I wanted to be an engineer. At the end of my military service I was admitted to the Technion in Haifa and graduated with a degree in computer engineering. During my studies I became interested in psychology, and became more aware of myself and my emotions, to the point that I even dared go to therapy. A friend reminded me years later that I once said, "What, I should go to therapy? What am I, crazy?" I abandoned engineering and started studying psychology and went through the whole course of clinical psychology (B.A., M.A., and internship). I had a tremendous need to understand and know myself, to organize and make sense of myself from within, a need I could not compromise. I sought the emotion, the bond with people and not with machines such as engineering offered me. So the personal development that began with a change of my political views from right to left was later accompanied by a change of profession, from the natural sciences to the social and human sciences.

Indeed, I was less attached than the rest of my family to tradition, to the past, and especially to my parents. I rebelled and sought my way independently. At one point my rebellion was expressed by interrupting my studies and going on a trip around the world with a backpack. What I have noticed again and again with patients in the clinic is that in the course of psychotherapy they move more and more toward the left, and that happened to me as well too.

And then, wonder of wonders, just when I thought I had reached the last stop, I found myself again swinging toward the right to a certain extent. I feel I can understand the right and identify with it. Today I can take a more balanced look at the extremes between which I traveled, and recognize the importance of our religious and national past, like a child who rebelled against his parents with anger and rage, and now, after forming his separate, new and independent identity, is mature enough to go back to them reconciled, not angry, even loving and appreciating what he got from them. We know that from the clinic, too. A rebellious adolescent who prevails and finds his new identity can go back to his parents one day and reconcile with them. Today I have a greater appreciation for the importance of keeping traditions, the past and the roots of our Judaism, to maintain our historic continuity. Erasing the national past, just like erasing one's personal past, certainly causes emotional difficulties that are familiar from the clinic and that I will point out in this book.

Suddenly I understand for the first time the historic process in which my parents rebelled against their parents, abandoned religion, and no longer wanted to be Diaspora Jews; and what that meant (feelings of weakness, low

self-image, and more). Their rebellion allowed the beginning of the journey from religion to state, and our generation continues that rebellion in its search for the kind of state we want to have. Like many adolescents, we are still confused and struggle to define who we are.

Election time is a hard time for me, because that is when I have to choose who is more right, whom I identify with, left or right. It is almost like choosing between one's father and mother. I am aware of the complexity of the continuum from left to right, with the right having a hard time parting with the past and with tradition and marching forward, while the left often severs itself from the sources of its past, and faces other national difficulties (guilt, repression of aggression to the point of being unable to recognize it, etc.).

When I examine myself, as we therapists are supposed to do in the course of our work in order to become aware of ourselves and our relations with our clients, I am aware that I sometimes lean more toward the left, but not to the extent I once did, and also understand that in the emotional development process of growth there is no right or wrong. Left and right are different aspects of a growth and development process that complement each other, and we as a nation must try to reach a balance between them. Therefore, if throughout this book I sound too much like a leftist, it might mean I have fallen into that deep rift that runs through our national body, and that I, just like the reader, should go back and reexamine myself, so as to get that much closer to the desired integration that I am trying to encourage in this book. Here the personal and the national become one, and some people can be expected to turn back to the values of the past and tradition, but this time in a more balanced and integrative way; after the rebellion succeeds, anger subsides, and it becomes possible to reconcile with the past, just as others will move toward Western, secular culture and identify with it. The deep rift in Israeli society is typical of the kind of rifts seen in adolescence, when everything is heated and stormy. Some of us rebel, some do not dare rebel, and some are tired of rebelling and want to go home and reconcile with our parents. Readers will judge for themselves where they are on this path, but we are all somewhere on that unending journey.

Before *Israel on the Couch*, I published *The Arab Within*, which I spent five years writing. That novel allowed me to delve deep into our national experience as only fiction can do, with no boundaries and obstacles, where everything is permissible (just as we ask therapy clients to say anything that comes to mind . . .). Only after the deep dissolution I experienced through literary writing could I go back and pick up the pieces integratively and use the therapeutic tool at my command to promote that holistic insight in this book, which actually brewed in my consciousness for many years. It would not be an overstatement to say, for my entire lifetime.

I greatly benefited from my close relationship with my daughters. The reader will find many examples in this book from parent-child relations. After all, childhood and politics are very similar. They are both so libidinous and

primordial, so split and so entrenched in self-righteousness. Sometimes it seems as if politics is the only game adults have left over from their childhoods.

Another integration I underwent while writing this book is an integration between the world of clinical psychology, which I internalized over my years of study and work as a therapist, and my lifelong political allegiances. My father taught me to experience and live our national life, as I wrote in the dedication, as if it were my personal life. The link between politics and psychology was not obvious from the start. It demanded taking tools from the clinical arena and applying them to something that seemed distant and even its opposite—the political world. It is a fragmented area where each side is sure that only it is right, where one must not express deliberations and weaknesses. I believe strongly in applying clinical tools to politics and hope ardently that we can use those tools to advance our goals as a people. At a certain moment I sensed that “the coin dropped,” and that two of my very deep allegiances, clinical psychology and politics, became condensed into one. I always breathed politics and surely breathed clinical psychology, so why not make them into one? It happened.

As a therapist, I belong to the intersubjective school, which is relatively new in clinical psychology and in psychoanalysis. It is an approach that maintains that both analyst and analysand are partners to the emotional process developing in the clinic, and the therapy cannot succeed unless the therapist is a true and equal partner. I find this approach to be all the more appropriate to conflicts between nations and conflicts between groups, because when you belong to a certain group you need to be aware of yourself and your emotions, and to try to understand how they effect the other group. Without examining what we really feel toward the other group we cannot examine our relationship with it, because we are full partners to the process. That is also the reason I wrote this introduction and told about myself. I have to be aware of myself and of my emotions throughout this process. I am not a neutral observer.

I wish to thank Dr. Rivka Yehoshua, a psychoanalyst and my psychotherapy supervisor. Our conversations over the years about current affairs from a psychological viewpoint stimulated me and deepened my insight into the emotional processes that fuel political processes.

I thank my good friend Dr. Meir Sa'adon, another clinical psychologist, for all those evenings in cafés on Haifa's Mt. Carmel, where he shared with me his sensibilities about discrimination, separateness, identity, and other areas, and helped me expand my horizons and open up to things I was unaware of.

A special thanks to Ika and Adi from Yedioth Ahronoth Books, whom I always found to be warm, calm, and down-to-earth; thanks to Dov, the director, who managed things from above and offered the security of a big Daddy who, even if he is not present at the moment, will be home any minute; thanks to Shirley, who had already given me some very smart words of advice; thanks to Ayelet,

for her sensitive linguistic editing that avoided bruising my ego; thanks to Kuti, who gave me some good tips; and thanks to Zahava, who designed the cover and graphics.

Finally, thanks to my family, my wife Hagar, who allowed me to sit “with crossed legs” (that is what we humorously call my intense preoccupation with writing, which does not yield any income); thanks to Mor and Stav, my daughters, whose contribution I have already noted. And a final thanks to my mother, who although disagreeing with everything in this book and accusing me of being a flaming leftist, helped me economically and enabled me to attend to my writing. Without her, I doubt I could indulge in such a luxury.

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Introduction

The goal of this book is to persuade the reader that the peace process is, fundamentally, an emotional process. Just as in the early days of psychology people needed to be persuaded that therapy helps, so today they need to be convinced that conflicts between nations can be resolved by understanding emotional processes. This book contains practical applications and clear and incisive recommendations that stem from that premise.

The argument that the Israeli-Arab conflict has psychological aspects is self-evident. Every conflict between two parties—a couple, parents and children, friends, and business associates—has emotional aspects, with each side bearing its own anxieties, defenses, and ambitions. This insight has been articulated by many leaders at different times. Issues of building trust, as well as feelings of hurt and insult on the national level, the desire to heal injuries, and the wish to triumph, are important not just existentially but also narcissistically. When we talk about relations between countries we are not talking about emotions and ideas invented specifically for international conflicts, but about human, everyday emotions, which generate the psychological processes in everyone. Therefore, these psychological processes can be addressed with the tools of clinical psychology. We know a lot about defense mechanisms, anxiety, impulses, desires, and so on. We do not need to invent a new psychology for these psychological processes, which have been studied in depth since Sigmund Freud. Therefore, throughout this book I will use tools known from clinical psychology, and bring examples from the clinic, from interpersonal conflicts, and from pathological and normal processes of growth and development, to analyze the peace process.