

March 2006

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Elections

In the current state of affairs, if I were the new prime minister, I would invite to my coalition Labour and Shas. Labour agrees with the political worldview and plans; Shas is highly pragmatic, essentially cares for funding their social-welfare initiatives, and would provide the bridge to the Mizrahi ultra-religion, religious, and Massorti sectors.

My hopes for the upcoming elections are:

That Kadima will receive at least 38 seats;

That Labour will receive at least 20 seats;

That Meretz (Civil Rights Party) will receive 6 seats;

That Likud will receive no more than 15 seats;

That Shas will receive no more than 9 seats;

That the Russian Party Israel Our Home, headed by the extreme right winger Ivet Lieberman will receive no more than 9 seats;

That the extreme right wing party National Unity will receive no more than 9 seats.

Trip to Australia and New Zealand

I was invited to deliver lectures in Australia and New Zealand. On my way to Sydney I stopped in Bangkok. Bangkok can be described as colourful, bustling, sunny, oriental with western touches, flavours and twists. Bangkok can also be described as hot, humid, smelly, crowded, polluted and immensely busy.

Some describe Bangkok as the largest parking lot in the world. Sometimes that description had entered my mind. Trip to the airport that optimally would take half hour may take you, on a bad day, close to two hours. So slow you have the urge to get out and walk. Due to heavy traffic, the best way to maneuver in Bangkok is by the Tuk-Tuk, a small vehicle that can enter between cars with sharp turns. This is not for the frail hearted. A few times I thought we are about to crush. Nothing happened. Amazing drivers. After one crazed ride I asked the driver whether it is difficult to drive in Bangkok. He answered with a smile: "Very easy. Didn't you see?". Collecting my breath I continued, asking whether it is risky. "Not at all" was the answer. Drivers

apparently know that the Tuk Tuk might enter into the smallest space and move around.

While the taxis that look like candies, bright and colourful in orange, yellow, green, red, blue, pink, purple, red and blue, and yellow and green, the Tuk Tuks look like army leftovers from the 1940s. While the taxis run on meters (their name is Taxi Meter), the Tuk Tuks operate on bargaining. A typical conversation would go like this:

- "How much does it cost to go to X?"
- "How much you pay"
- "You tell me"
- "300"
- "50"
- "250"
- "40"

We settle on 50.

Or you get an offer: 40 Baht with a stop at a clothing store. Or free ride if you are willing to stop at a jewelry store. Tuk Tuk drivers receive from the shops commission for bringing clients: 2 liter gasoline from clothing stores; 7 ltr from jewelry stores. You can hire a Tuk Tuk for 3 hours shopping with multiple stops for 300 Bahts (\$8), or for free if you know the art of bargaining. The driver will have tea at the shop's expense + gas while you shop.

Usually, countries try to show the tourists the best they have to offer. Not in Bangkok. One of the most popular tours is a canal tour, when you go on a fast (very noisy as the engine is outside), or slow boat and see the way people are living on the Bangkok Chao Phraya River. Their standard of living is somewhat remote from Western standards. I watched the kids jumping into the water, playing. I asked my travel guide about the risks of swimming in such waters. She said "they are used to it". I hope so. Possibly they develop sturdy immunization system.

Thai way of achieving efficiency reminded me of the Turkish: Labour is cheap, hence put 3 to 5 people where in the west organizations put one person. Together, the collective experience and wisdom will achieve some form of efficiency.

If you seek beauty in Bangkok, go to the palace and the countless temples. I'd rather distribute the wealth of those shrines (as well as of European cathedrals) among the poor, but no body asks me.

A visit to the old capital Ayutthaya is worth doing. You can learn a lot about Thai history, culture, religion and wars, see old ruined temples, and touch, feed, and ride elephants.

From Bangkok I flew to Sydney with Thai Air (recommended). Sydney is beautiful and stunning as ever. Always so much to do. I delivered my first lecture "The Big Bangs in Israeli Politics" at the Lowy Institute for International Policy. I spoke of the disengagement from Gaza, and the establishment of "Kadima", explaining why I consider both as vital big bangs in Israeli democracy. I hope to maintain contact with this thriving private institute.

I was told Canberra is boring, planned city. It is, indeed, a planned city, but I found it most pleasant. It has a center, not far from the university. After living in LA I know how to appreciate a city that has one marked center. Nothing is taken for granted. Canberra has all that a small city can offer. It is not as beautiful and interesting as Sydney, but there are not many cities in the world that match Sydney, so the comparison is a bit unfair on the capital. Australian National University (ANU) has a great campus. Literally. Land is not Australia's prime problem. It takes a while to find your way. I felt like in a big maze.

Here I gave three lectures, one per day:

"Liberalism and Multiculturalism" at the Law Faculty;

"*Euthanasia in the Netherlands*" (about my book which carries the same title), at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics Colloquium;

"On Compromise and Coercion" at the Department of Philosophy.

I received some good comments, and the people, generally speaking, were very hospitable and nice. The most popular closing sentence in conversations with service people in Australia and NZ is "no worries". The Australians sometimes add "mate", while Kiwis add "man". Indeed, little worries they have in these two countries.

I met with the Israeli Ambassador to the region, Nati Tamir, who briefed me on Israeli relationships with Australia, New Zealand, Papua-New Guinea and Fiji. By far, Israel's relations with Australia are the best among the four countries.

From Canberra I flew via Sydney to NZ southern island, to Christchurch. The southern island is said to be more beautiful than the northern island. It is less populated (that is, by humans, not sheep) and I could sense a slight envy regarding the "Center", i.e. Auckland. I did not have much time to tour around, and was impressed by the little I saw. I delivered one lecture on Israeli politics, the Big Bangs lecture, and was somewhat surprised to be asked about possible return of Israel to the 1948 borders. Welcome to New Zealand. I dismissed this question as irrelevant, non-issue, not on the agenda

of all Zionist parties in Israel. Rather it is on the agenda of those who wish Israel's demise.

My last stop was Auckland. I delivered three lectures in two days:
"*The Scope of Tolerance*", about my new book, at the Department of Philosophy, University of Auckland;

"Language and Reality at the End of Life", Auckland City Hospital;

"Media Coverage of Terrorism: Problems and Remedies", Department of Political Studies, University of Auckland.

The last lecture attracted media and public attention. Terror is a big issue also in New Zealand. Luckily for them, it is mostly theoretical, and should remain so. Some students with kaffiyas sat in the first rows, to make a point. Two students were quick to unfold a huge banner crying for "Justice for Palestine" and "End the Occupation". Well, I am all in favour of both. I am also in favour of justice, peace and tranquility for Israel. I made all this clear during question time. The post-lecture was as interesting as the lecture, as I was surrounded by 12-15 people with "pressing questions" and ideas. Some wanted to know what do I think about state terrorism (Israel, USA, and the UK are the prime examples), while others complimented me, saying I should be Israel's ambassador to New Zealand. Well, we should first open an embassy there. It was a gross mistake to close the embassy and let Canberra deal with four countries, including New Zealand. New Zealanders, like some European countries, have deep empathy with the underdog. The combination of leaving the stage for Palestinian propaganda, lack of understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, sympathy to the powerless, and the foolish MOSSAD episode put Israel in uneasy position.

Auckland is the Sydney of NZ, without the Opera House and some other minor qualities. It is the center of everything NZ has to offer, but politics. A ferry trip to Devonport is recommended, and so is a trip to the geysers and boiling mud pools of Rotorua. The Pohutu Geyser spurts boiling water and steam high into the air on a regular basis. What I would have liked to do but did not have the time is to visit the Waitangi Treaty House. This is where the Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840 between Maori Chiefs and the British Crown. This Treaty became the basis for life in NZ as we know it today. NZ history, which more or less started when the Zionist immigration to Palestine had started, is very different from the Australian history and the way the British settlers treated the indigenous people of Australia.

People told me about the food quality in New Zealand. Everything they said is right. I was very impressed. Some of the restaurants were truly superb, and the dairy products in the supermarket are as good as in Israel.

The architecture and city planning of Australia and New Zealand sometimes reminded me of Britain, and sometimes of the United States. It seems both great countries have inspired the local decision-makers and planners. Sometimes you find next to the other both styles.

My friends in Baltimore may like to know that the cicadas are alive and deafening New Zealand, and that there is also a town that is called after this nagging fly.

New Zealand inspired me to write the following (sorry, folks, for lack of translation);

זילנד החדשה

אומרים שיש הרבה כבשים בניו זילנד
אכן ראיתי כמה
בכל זאת היא לא סמלה
אלא ציפור בלתי נראית משונה
פרי נקרא על שמה
והם נקראים על שם
משחת נעליים שחורה
סקוטי רמזי ממציאה
אבל אשתו משלנו, בלונדה נאוה.

שישים מליון כבשים לא הולכים ברגל
או שמא כן
אפילו לא אחת על הדגל
לארבעה כוכבים יותר חן
גם יותר מחמישה או ששה
אין לבלבל עם השכנה הגדולה
אותה מכסחים בהנאה הכל שחורים
ברגבי ובכל הזדמנות שנייה
ועל הולנד – אף מלה.

I wish to thank my kind and wonderful hosts: Sally and Bob O'Neill who provided the best possible welcome party to Australia, Cameron Stewart, Shirley and Malcolm Fisher, Tom Campbell, Dean Cocking, Bob Goodin, Nancy and Stuart McMillan, Murray Smith, Stephen Streat, Paul Rishworth, John Bishop and Geoff Kemp.

Profile of Hamas

Can be found at The Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center website
<http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/engsite/html/search.asp?isSearch=yes&isT8=yes&searchText=T86&pid=104&sid=13&preview=>

Sanitizing Hamas

At least for the time-being, there is widespread revulsion at the Hamas victory in Palestinian parliamentary elections and agreement that the United States, Israel and Europe should not be dealing with Hamas or with a Hamas-run government. Hamas has begun taking steps to sanitize its image, even while pursuing a parallel course of terror, in order to gain international acceptability. Hamas has begun making statements to the western press that make it sound moderate but that are directly contradicted by what its officials say in Arabic to their own population, statements that do not hold up under close scrutiny. More importantly, the terrorist networks in Palestine and the Arab world is alive and kicking.

H.R. 4681: Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R), Chair of the Middle East and Central Asia Subcommittee of the Committee on International Relations, and Tom Lantos (D), Ranking Democrat on the Committee, joined by Representatives Eric Cantor, Steve Chabot and Gary Ackerman, have introduced H.R. 4681, the “Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act of 2006” to prevent any aid from being used to prop up Hamas or a government in which Hamas is a participant. Here are the key provisions of the bill:

- It forbids the transfer of any U.S. taxpayer funds the Palestinian Authority unless it can be certified that no ministry, agency or instrumentality of the P.A. is controlled by a terrorist organization and no member of a terrorist organization serves in such ministry, agency or instrumentality. And it forbids such transfer until the P.A. publicly acknowledges Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish State, recommits itself to all prior agreements including the Road Map, purges its security services of terrorists, dismantles the infrastructure of terrorism, and halts all anti-Israel incitement;
- Calls on the President to direct the US Executive Director at each international financial institution of which the U.S. is a member (IMF, World Bank, etc) to use the voice, vote, and influence of the U.S. to prohibit assistance to the PA during any time that the above requirements for certification are not met;
- Declares the P.A. to be a terrorist organization and deems the territory under P.A. control to be a sanctuary for terrorists or terrorist organizations, until the above conditions are met. And it places constraints on U.S. exports to such territory under the Export Administration Act of 1979; U.S. Foreign Assistance Act, and the Foreign Relations Authorization Act (1988 and 1989);
- Bans assistance to any non-governmental organizations in such territory except for humanitarian aid;
- Bans visas for any official of the P.A. to travel to the United States;
- Limits the travel of P.A. officials at the UN to a 25-mile radius;

- Calls for the closure of the all P.A. offices, other than its U.N offices;
- Bans diplomatic contact with any P.A. official that is a member of Hamas.

How you can help: Please contact your Representative in Congress by email by clicking on the [TAKE ACTION NOW](#) link below and ask that he or she sign on to H.R. 4681. Also let Representatives Ros-Lehtinen and Lantos know how much we appreciate their leadership on this issue.

Russia, apparently, is yearning for the good-old Brezhnev days when it played a crucial role in the history of the Middle East and wish to return to the scene. The way to do this is by taking contra-American steps, like erecting relationships with Hamas. Given the alliance between Hamas and the Chechnyan rebels, this move seems imprudent as I am sure Russia will soon realize.

Olmert's Plans

On Friday, March 10, 2006 Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told *Haaretz* that Israel will continue to build in the disputed E-1 zone between Ma'aleh Adumim and Jerusalem, despite American pressure to the contrary. Olmert also said that if he is elected prime minister Israel will set down permanent borders within four years, separating itself from the "decisive majority" of the Palestinian population of the West Bank.

In contrast to the expectations that Olmert will stay silent, continue to blur, and sail away to victory without saying much, Olmert decided to put his cards open before the public, saying explicitly that Gaza First meant Gaza First, and now comes the turn of Judea and Samaria. Israel, if needed, will continue conducting unilateral steps. Olmert, I said, is an astute politician. He chose this candid policy, being aware that the Israeli public, on the whole, understands the need for separation, and for giving parts of Eretz Israel in return for tranquility, if not peace. By this move, Olmert pushes Labour aside, as they don't have anything else to offer in the diplomatic sphere, leaving them only one frontier to attack him: the social-economic frontier. Olmert knows very well that the decisive criterion for election was and remains security. At the same time, this move shows Netanyahu's radicalism and extremism. If you want to be stuck in endless and hopeless fight against terrorism, vote Bibi. But most of the public understands at this point that in order to win tranquility, there is a need to give something in return.

According to Olmert, "It is inconceivable that we should speak of Ma'aleh Adumim as a part of the State of Israel, while leaving it as an island or an isolated enclave. "It's entirely clear that the [territorial] continuity between

Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adumim will be a built-up continuity. This is clear both to the Palestinians and to the Americans. In my view, there is an absolute consensus in Israel on this issue" (Olmert is right about the Israeli consensus; I am not so sure whether he is right also in saying that the issue is clear for the Palestinians. I hope he's right. RCA).

He added that "the course of the fence - which until now has been a security fence - will be in line with the new course of the permanent border. There may be cases in which we move the fence eastward, there may be cases in which we move the fence westward, in line with what we agree upon."

Olmert said his Kadima party, if elected, would move decisively in solidifying "Israel as a Jewish state, one in which there is a solid and stable Jewish majority, a majority which is not in danger." The guiding principle for delineating the permanent borders will be "ingathering [isolated residents of outlying settlements] into large settlement blocs, and thickening these settlement blocs."

"I don't want to get into their precise definitions now, but everyone knows that Gush Etzion will remain within the state of Israel, and the Ariel bloc will remain within the state of Israel, and the Jerusalem Envelope [the city and its environs] will be part of the state, as well as Ma'aleh Adumim."

Olmert refused to specify what a coalition government would look like should he be elected to form the next cabinet. He said he would not disqualify any Jewish Zionist party and that he would not invite an Arab party to the coalition. He also refused to promise that the security portfolio would remain in the hands of Kadima in the next government.

"The only portfolio I will say is definitely staying in Kadima is the education portfolio, and that is following Sharon's promise to appoint Professor Uriel Reichman to Education Minister. If I become prime minister, Reichman will be education minister," Olmert said.

Olmert could not remain silent vis-à-vis his arch-enemy and thus strongly criticized Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu, saying that he had not learned any lessons from the atmosphere of incitement that preceded the assassination of then prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. Olmert's statements followed the publication of an image on Likud's unofficial Website in which the acting prime minister appeared wearing a green cap with the Hamas logo on it. "I thought he would have learned the lesson," Olmert said.

"It gives a signal to vote for the youths from the hilltop youth when the leader of the Likud says that Olmert is Hamas. Hamas is Israel's worst enemy," he said.

Darfur

A most tragic humanitarian crisis continues to escalate in Sudan's western Darfur region. More than 200,000 Sudanese have died and more than 3 million civilians have been uprooted by a violent campaign of ethnic cleansing. Ruthless militias are terrorizing villagers, forcing them off their land, systematically raping women and girls, murdering boys and men, and attacking even the camps on the Sudan/Chad border where they have sought safe haven.

Last July 13th, the American Jewish Congress called on the international community to end these atrocities in the Darfur region. Now AJCongress has joined the *Million Voices for Darfur Campaign*, a coalition of more than 150 faith-based advocacy and humanitarian aid organizations united in a renewed attempt to stop the slaughter by raising the levels of Darfur awareness and advocacy.

The Campaign involves:

1. Collecting and delivering to President Bush one million signatures on postcards, petitions and emails, urging him to support a larger, stronger, multi-national peace force to protect the citizens of Darfur;
2. A monster rally in Washington, DC on April 30th.

On December 2, 1942, American Jewish Congress President Stephen S. Wise wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, asking him to "speak a word which may bring solace and hope to millions of Jews who mourn, and be an expression of the conscience of the American people." Today, we once again ask the President of the United States to act for the conscience of the American people "to bring solace and hope" to the civilians of Darfur. As Elie Weisel has said about Darfur: "What is at stake is our own humanity. We must tell the Sudanese victims that they are no longer alone, that we know what is happening to them. . . ."

Please print the following message

Dear President Bush:

We commend the Administration's actions in brokering a resolution of the north-south conflict, in recognizing the genocide in Darfur, and in sending humanitarian aid to that desperate region.

Now we urge you to use the power of your office to support a stronger multi-national force to protect the civilians of Darfur.

Thank you.

Signature: _____

Name:

Email:

Address

Address

City, State Zip:

PLEASE mail it to:
American Jewish Congress
825 Third Avenue
Suite 1800
New York, NY 10022
Att: Campaign for Darfur

Media Coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The violent reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict exacts a very heavy blood toll from both sides. Since the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000, more than 3,300 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces. In the same period more than 1,000 Israelis have been killed by Palestinians. The way the killings are covered affects media consumers' ability to understand the complexity of the conflict, to interpret its varied contexts and to weigh the factors that contribute to its escalation. The conflict and the current circle of violence cannot be understood without knowing basic facts about reality on both sides. Israeli citizens are exposed to broad and intensive coverage of events in which Israelis are killed by Palestinians. One of the main questions that we seek to investigate here is whether Israeli media consumers receive basic information on killings of Palestinians by Israeli security forces.

Keshev, an Israeli organization that monitors the media, investigated media coverage of such events in December 2005, during which time, according to the major media outlets in Israel, 22 Palestinians were killed. They examined the daily editions of the three major newspapers, *Ha'aretz*, *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Ma'ariv*, and the evening television newscasts on Channels 1, 2 and 10. Within these editions and broadcasts, they studied all items concerning events in which Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces as well as items that dealt with the subject more generally (for example, items that discussed the "liquidations" policy or dealt with the responses of both sides to these events). A total of 135 items were examined.

I am most grateful to Keshev for permission to publish their main findings, *infra*:

In media coverage of events where Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces during December 2005 a number of editing patterns stand out:

- Events that were not defined as "liquidations" were reported just a little more than half as often as "liquidation" events.
- The vast majority of reports were based on the IDF version of events alone. The few cases in which an alternative to the IDF version was presented were events that were not defined as "liquidations". The

alternative versions were reported in relatively marginal places compared with the IDF version.

- A critical discussion of the “liquidations” policy was lacking in the media discourse. Where there was such discussion, it was in most cases merely implied or ambiguous and could be found only deep in news items, in commentaries or in supplements. Critiques of the effectiveness of the “liquidations” policy, or of its legality or morality, appeared in very few places. This, despite the fact that from the news reports it is evident that, even within the security establishment, this is a controversial policy.
- The reports lacked attention to the circumstances and wider context in which violent events occurred. In reports that did refer to the context, it was found that interpretations which presented Israel as responding to Palestinian aggression were put forth by official Israeli sources and by senior commentators. By contrast, alternative interpretations were presented, in most cases, by Palestinians involved in acts of terrorism – which served to undercut the legitimacy of those claims.
- The media discourse almost completely lacked any critical discussion of the term “targeted prevention”, which was adopted widely by four of the six media outlets that were examined. Reports of casualties among passersby during actions that were supposedly “targeted” mostly appeared in the margins of news items or did not appear at all.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that the Israeli media tends to assign minor importance to events in which Palestinians are killed by Israeli security forces. On many such events it does not report at all. When the media does report on these events, in the vast majority of cases its reporting is based on only one version of events—the official version of the security establishment—and significant investigations or alternative accounts are not presented.

Coverage of “liquidation” events is even more problematic. In coverage of these incidents the IDF version of events appears in headlines without qualification. The terminology that is used to describe “liquidation” events is consistent with the viewpoint of the security establishment. There is no critical discussion of the “liquidations” policy itself and its many ramifications. As mentioned above, “liquidation” events are covered at twice the rate as other killing events.

These editing patterns suggest that in its coverage of killings of Palestinians by Israeli security forces, and especially in its coverage of premeditated killings, the media fails to fulfill its main role in a democratic society – to report and critique and to provide the public with a full picture, as much as possible, of the main news events that transpire.

The full report is available on

http://www.keshev.org.il/FileUpload/Keshev_report_200603_English.doc

Anti-Semitic Attacks in France

March 6, 2006/New York City - The American Jewish Congress-Council for World Jewry today issued a protest against the most recent spate of attacks on French Jews.

Over the weekend of March 3-5, Jews were attacked in three separate occasions in the Parisian suburb of Sarcelles.

On Friday afternoon, a local rabbi's 17-year-old son was attacked by two men near the synagogue, and suffered a broken nose and an 18-year-old man was attacked by a group of five men, who insulted him and stole his cell phone. On Saturday night, a 28-year-old man wearing a kippah was verbally and physically abused by four men and suffered a dislocated shoulder. Arrests were made in the last attack.

"Council leaders visited Sarcelles just over a year ago and learned first hand of the threats the Jewish community there faces every day," said Chairman Jack Rosen. "There is a large concrete barrier protecting the community center and barbed wire fences surrounding the community Jewish school."

"For months we've been warning that the situation of French Jewry remained dire. Others were lulled into complacency by the drop in attacks on Jews in 2005 as compared to 2004 combined with a new frankness on the part of top French government officials in acknowledging anti-Semitism. The fact is that despite progress made, the basic problem is getting worse."

Two French political leaders, who may be in the running for their respective party's presidential nominations, both denounced the new attacks. Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy announced he was dispatching police reinforcements to Sarcelles. Dominique Strauss-Kahn, a former finance minister and parliamentary deputy from Sarcelles, said, "Anti-Semitism is on the rise in our country and it would be wrong to not want to see this."

Genes, Politics, and Academic Freedom

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,6903,605798,00.html>

Journal axes gene research on Jews and Palestinians

Robin McKie, science editor
Sunday November 25, 2001
The Observer

A keynote research paper showing that Middle Eastern Jews and Palestinians are genetically almost identical has been pulled from a leading journal.

Academics who have already received copies of Human Immunology have been urged to rip out the offending pages and throw them away.

Such a drastic act of self-censorship is unprecedented in research publishing and has created widespread disquiet, generating fears that it may involve the suppression of scientific work that questions Biblical dogma.

'I have authored several hundred scientific papers, some for Nature and Science, and this has never happened to me before,' said the article's lead author, Spanish geneticist Professor Antonio Arnaiz-Villena, of Complutense University in Madrid. 'I am stunned.'

British geneticist Sir Walter Bodmer added: 'If the journal didn't like the paper, they shouldn't have published it in the first place. Why wait until it has appeared before acting like this?'

The journal's editor, Nicole Sucio-Foca, of Columbia University, New York, claims the article provoked such a welter of complaints over its extreme political writing that she was forced to repudiate it. The article has been removed from Human Immunology's website, while letters have been written to libraries and universities throughout the world asking them to ignore or 'preferably to physically remove the relevant pages'. Arnaiz-Villena has been sacked from the journal's editorial board.

Dolly Tyan, president of the American Society of Histocompatibility and Immunogenetics, which runs the journal, told subscribers that the society is 'offended and embarrassed'.

The paper, 'The Origin of Palestinians and their Genetic Relatedness with other Mediterranean Populations', involved studying genetic variations in immune system genes among people in the Middle East.

In common with earlier studies, the team found no data to support the idea that Jewish people were genetically distinct from other people in the region. In doing so, the team's research challenges claims that Jews are a special, chosen people and that Judaism can only be inherited.

Jews and Palestinians in the Middle East share a very similar gene pool and must be considered closely related and not genetically separate, the authors state. Rivalry between the two races is therefore based 'in cultural and religious, but not in genetic differences', they conclude.

But the journal, having accepted the paper earlier this year, now claims the article was politically biased and was written using 'inappropriate' remarks about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Its editor told the journal Nature last

week that she was threatened by mass resignations from members if she did not retract the article.

Arnaiz-Villena says he has not seen a single one of the accusations made against him, despite being promised the opportunity to look at the letters sent to the journal.

He accepts he used terms in the article that laid him open to criticism. There is one reference to Jewish 'colonists' living in the Gaza strip, and another that refers to Palestinian people living in 'concentration' camps.

'Perhaps I should have used the words settlers instead of colonists, but really, what is the difference?' he said.

'And clearly, I should have said refugee, not concentration, camps, but given that I was referring to settlements outside of Israel - in Syria and Lebanon - that scarcely makes me anti-Jewish. References to the history of the region, the ones that are supposed to be politically offensive, were taken from the Encyclopaedia Britannica, and other text books.'

In the wake of the journal's actions, and claims of mass protests about the article, several scientists have now written to the society to support Arnaiz-Villena and to protest about their heavy-handedness.

One of them said: 'If Arnaiz-Villena had found evidence that Jewish people were genetically very special, instead of ordinary, you can be sure no one would have objected to the phrases he used in his article. This is a very sad business.'

Multiculturalism in Canada

In this era of sensitivity to cultural rituals that do not always conform to liberal standards, the Canadian Supreme Court has recently decided for multiculturalism. G and his father B are orthodox Sikhs. G believes that his religion requires him to wear a kirpan at all times; a kirpan is a religious object that resembles a dagger and must be made of metal. In 2001, G accidentally dropped the kirpan he was wearing under his clothes in the yard of the school he was attending. The school board sent G's parents a letter in which, as a reasonable accommodation, it authorized their son to wear his kirpan to school provided that he complied with certain conditions to ensure that it was sealed inside his clothing. G and his parents agreed to this arrangement. The governing board of the school refused to ratify the agreement on the basis that wearing a kirpan at the school violated art. 5 of the school's *Code de vie* (code of conduct), which prohibited the carrying of weapons. The school board's council of commissioners upheld that decision and notified G and his parents that a symbolic kirpan in the form of a pendant or one in another form made of a material rendering it harmless would be

acceptable in the place of a real kirpan. B then filed in the Superior Court a motion for a declaratory judgment to the effect that the council of commissioners' decision was of no force or effect. The Superior Court granted the motion, declared the decision to be null, and authorized G to wear his kirpan under certain conditions. The Court of Appeal set aside the Superior Court's judgment. After deciding that the applicable standard of view was reasonableness *simpliciter*, the Court of Appeal restored the council of commissioners' decision. It concluded that the decision in question infringed G's freedom of religion under s. 2(a) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (*Canadian Charter*) and s. 3 of Quebec's *Charter of human rights and freedoms* (*Quebec Charter*), but that the infringement was justified for the purposes of s. 1 of the *Canadian Charter* and s. 9.1 of the *Quebec Charter*.

See <http://www.lexum.umontreal.ca/csc-scc/en/rec/html/2006scc006.wpd.html>

Physician-Assisted Suicide in Oregon

In the first report on assisted suicide since the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the landmark Oregon law, there was little change in the number of terminally ill patients who asked their doctors for a lethal dose of medication.

The Supreme Court ruled in January that the Bush administration improperly threatened to use a federal drug law against Oregon doctors who prescribe lethal doses of medicine to dying patients who request it. The ruling affirmed that states have the authority to regulate medical treatment of the terminally ill and could turn Oregon's unique law into a national model.

The annual report, released on March 9, 2006, showed 38 people in 2005 ended their lives under the Oregon Death with Dignity Act, which went into effect in 1998. It was nearly the same number as 2004, when 37 people asked their physicians for a lethal prescription.

A total of 246 people - mostly cancer patients - have chosen assisted suicide over the past eight years, according to the Oregon Department of Human Services.

"Once again, our report shows little change in the demographics and characteristics among those who are using this law," said Dr. Mel Kohn, state epidemiologist. He noted the total number of deaths under the law reflects a small portion of the average 31,000 annual deaths in Oregon. The state report showed the median age of those choosing assisted suicide was 70.

Patients who suffer from incurable diseases repeatedly cite the loss of control over their bodies as a major concern leading to a request for a lethal

prescription, according to the report. They also cite decreasing ability to participate in activities that make life enjoyable and the loss of dignity.

Most were dying of cancer, and nearly all the rest were dying of Lou Gehrig's disease or AIDS, according to the report.

At least six other states have proposed, or are considering, some form of an assisted suicide law, with bills currently in the legislatures of California and Vermont. There are reasonably good chances for the law to pass in Vermont. As for California, the Governor does not support such legislation. The public is more supportive.

A field Poll released on March 15, 2006 indicates large majority of Californians supports giving the terminally ill an option of receiving life-ending medication. Seventy percent of all adults and 69 percent of registered voters said they believe incurably ill patients have the right to ask for and receive life-ending medication (source: "ERGO news List" right-to-die@lists.opn.org of March 15, 2006).

A smaller majority said they support allowing the terminally ill to get a lethal prescription that they could administer themselves.

"Generally speaking, Californians tend to be more open to allowing an individual to make a decision rather than having something prohibited through government fiat," said poll director Mark DiCamillo. He noted that the Field Poll has measured California attitudes toward euthanasia eight times in the past 27 years and found consistent support beginning in 1979, when 64 percent favored the idea.

The most recent poll, conducted over the two-week period ending Feb. 26, found strong support among virtually all political, ethnic and social groups -- including people who identified themselves as members of major religious organizations.

For full results and graphics go to

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2006/03/15/BAGOIHO9A21.DTL>

<http://field.com/fieldpollonline/subscribers/RLS2155.pdf>

The full 2005 report on the Oregon physician-assisted suicide law can be read at

<http://egov.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/pas/docs/year8.pdf>

Those interested in an article I published in 2000 about Oregon are welcomed to contact me for a copy.

Tabloid Format

In the past I voiced my opinion in favour of the tabloid format, saying that this is mainly because it is much readers' friendly compared to the cumbersome broadsheet format that makes your hands stretch and the papers scramble.

More evidence was brought to show that newspaper readers like smaller formats. And while the large circulation increases reported by downsized newspapers tend to disappear over time, those newspapers that utilize format change as part of a wider commercial strategy can see gains in reader loyalty and advertising yield.

Format change was never going to be a panacea but it is proving to be a worthwhile move, in terms of raising reader satisfaction and providing a foundation for other editorial and commercial developments, said Jim Chisholm, Strategy Advisor to the World Association of Newspapers, speaking to an audience of senior American newspaper executives on February 22, 2006.

Among those newspapers that aggressively promote the change, circulation patterns are remarkably consistent. Shortly after the smaller editions are launched, circulations rise between 10 percent and 15 percent. But after a year, few titles are showing circulation gains. The end result is, at best, a one percent growth, or for many, stable sales. Many publishers, having been faced with declines, regard this as success enough for their efforts, said Mr Chisholm.

"What is encouraging is the bi-products of the activity", said Mr Chisholm. For example, one newspaper in Sweden invited readers to use their mobile telephones to order free subscription trials of the new tabloid version: 40,000 people took up the offer and 10,000 subsequently subscribed.

Most significant is the number of publishers who have reported that the greatest value was the encouragement of innovation in the newsroom.

"As one publisher said: 'It's not enough to only change the format, readers expect the newspaper to be new, so the content needs to be refreshing as well,' Mr Chisholm recounted. "Changing your format does not solve everything; you also have to take the editorial content into consideration to satisfy your readers and advertisers."

This view was also true in the advertising department, where training on price maintenance and demonstration of value, regardless of size, was seen as essential.

Many newspapers chose the format change as the time to move from column centimetre-based pricing to fixed-size, modular pricing. This has proved to be very successful, with publishers able to retain prices, while newsprint consumption has fallen.

Research shows that a tabloid page advertisement is equally as effective as a broadsheet page.

Speaking at the Newspaper Association of America conference in Orlando, Florida, Mr Chisholm concluded: "On balance, smaller formats are a good idea. Readers undoubtedly prefer them, and any notion that size somehow is a badge of quality or status is demonstrably a myth. While few newspapers are showing material circulation benefits, the anticipated problems in advertising yields and prices have been overcome, and many newspapers are benefiting from improvements in content, and reduced costs."

Mr Chisholm is scheduled to speak at the WAN World Newspaper Advertising Conference & Expo in Paris on Friday: full conference details at <http://www.wan-press.org/paris2006>

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Ordering Pizza in 2010

The future, possibly, might be as shown on <http://www.aclu.org/pizza/images/screen.swf>

Food for thought.

Book

I recently read and enjoyed Nicholas Evans' novel *The Smoke Jumper*. In quite a few places Evans touched my heart. It is a good read when you travel, or before going to sleep. But beware: It might keep you alert and fully awake. I warmly recommend.

With my very best wishes,

Rafi

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