# Contested Utopia: Study Guide

## Introduction

This book has two purposes:
1) to help readers understand why Israel is the way it is; i.e., to expose the historical and philosophical roots of the various political viewpoints – and concrete institutions – that constitute current reality.
2) to encourage readers to explore and clarify their own assumptions – and dreams – about Israel, in order to participate constructively in the ongoing conversation about what the Jewish state should look like.

This study guide seeks to further both of these purposes, suggesting questions designed to help unpack and understand the context and intentions of the historical texts in the book, and others that aim to stimulate readers to articulate their own personal responses to these texts.

Three themes that run through the book also find expression in these discussion questions:

1) the "utopian dilemma:" what do we *really mean* when we sketch out a utopia? What is its relationship to practical reality? What is the utopian's true goal? entertainment? social criticism? encouragement? full implementation? Thus, some questions seek to help readers dig into these questions for the various utopian visions presented in the book.

2) the tension between utopian and apocalyptic world views. Questions for a number of chapters address this.

2) what happens when utopias collide? How should we deal – both internally/psychologically and politically – with our simultaneous allegiances to utopias that, upon careful examination, may turn out to be mutually exclusive? This theme builds as the various visions are added to the mix in the course of the book.

It will probably become obvious in the course of reading and discussing this book that I (the author), while making my best effort at objective analysis of historical texts and their contexts, have and express a point of view that tends toward the utopian (as opposed to apocalyptic) and liberal, with whiffs of communitarianism and social democracy. I hope that the discussion questions will help readers tease out these prejudices, and feel free to articulate other positions, for which they find support in the texts and background information presented in the book.

As a general pedagogical suggestion, I would have participants read a chapter in advance, perhaps with selected questions from this guide to guide their reading. Their responses can then be reviewed together and discussed (or not). In those chapters containing a major source text, I suggest reading the text passages together in class and responding to them, using the questions in this guide or according to the leader's own guidance.

I would encourage leaders to consult the original source texts, since the book contains only brief excerpts; they could then bring to the group additional excerpts that interest them. However,

alas, except for Herzl's *Altneuland,* which is readily available in English, the others either have not been published in translation (Yavetz, Lewinsky, Lehmann, Satanow), or can be found only in relatively obscure publications (Jabotinsky). Syrkin's socialist Zionist utopia appears in full as an appendix to Marie Syrkin's biography of her father (see bibliography). *Life is with People*, with its description of the shtetl (the communal utopia in chapter 5) is out of print, but available in many libraries.

I suggest that the ultimate "final exam" should be that the participants, or the group as a group, sketch out their own utopian vision that improves upon the one presented in chapter 12. Trying to achieve consensus might be a very instructive enterprise!

## Chapter 1: The Eternal Quest for Utopia

*Folklore (pp. 3-4)*

> *The popular imagination, it seems, has always been fascinated by the prospect of a better place, even as it knew such a place existed only as a fiction—indeed, as a humorous one, making fun of our own difficult lives and of any expectation that they might be different. (p. 4)*

1. From Lucian to Oleanna, the image of precious liquids welling up out of the ground (wine, milk, beer, honey) seems to recur everywhere – even in the Bible: "And in that day / The mountains shall drip with wine, / The hills shall flow with milk…" (Joel 4:18). How would you explain the fascination with this hyperbolic symbol of plenty?

2. The self-mocking utopian fantasy seems a common theme in art about immigration to the Unites States. Why do you think that is? See, for example, Leonard Bernstein and Steven Sondheim's *West Side Story*: "I like to be in America / OK by me in America / Everything free in America;" and "There are no cats in America / And the streets are paved with cheese," in Steven Spielberg and Don Bluth's *An American Tail*.

*Prophecy and Plato (pp. 4-5)*

> *Prophets and philosophers have used the vehicle of utopia—a fictional community, island, state, or planet—in order to criticize the existing social, political, and economic order, and to imagine more perfect arrangements that would allow all members of society to live happy lives. (p. 4)*

3. In Philadelphia, in 1787, leaders of the American colonies gathered to draft a constitution for the new United States, setting forth a plan for as close to an ideal government as they could imagine and agree upon. Was this an exercise in imagining a utopia? In trying to translate a utopia into reality (by means of painful compromises)?

4. What distinguishes the intent of the Constitution from the utopian plan of Plato's *Republic*?

*The Renaissance (pp. 5-7)*

> *These books provided their authors with opportunities to articulate a coherent and convincing hierarchy of values different from the status quo, and to imagine its implementation—and thereby to inspire others to adopt these values and join the effort to apply them.(p. 7)*

5. If utopian fiction can be seen as "an instrument of discreet protest in the hands of intellectuals excluded from the governing elite," (p. 7) does the same description apply to the dystopian fiction that has become so popular in the past century (from *1984* to *The Handmaid's Tale*)? How do the goals and impacts of these two genres differ?

*Socialism (pp. 7-9)*

> *What distinguished many nineteenth-century socialist utopians from their Renaissance forerunners was a focus on practical implementation. (p. 8)*

6. Why do you think socialist community experiments have had such a dismal track record?

7. In your view, which approach to social and economic change is likely to be more productive: investing in small scale local experiments in creating ideal models, that can then be replicated – or militating for large scale systemic restructuring? That is, bottom-up, or top-down? Can you think of historical examples?

*The Future in the Past (p. 10)*

> *Eden, the Greeks' golden age, Solomon's empire, Rousseau's state of nature—the projected perfect future is often a return to an idyllic past. If we could just throw off the accumulated distortions of centuries of sin, or oppression, or mistakes, or divine punishment, we could "renew our days as of old." (p. 10)*

8. In your mind, is there a historical period – in the recent or distant past – that feels like a "better place" than our current reality? What aspects make it better? Could they be brought forward and implemented anew? Could your memory be an idealization?

*The Purpose, Power, and Danger of Utopia (pp. 10-13)*

> *Thus, the "utopian dilemma" is always with us: what do we really mean? How can we preserve utopia's positive function, using the vision of an unattainable ideal society as a vehicle for articulating our value priorities, without losing control and imagining that we really have found the map to no-place? (p. 13)*

9. Writing, later, of his "conversion" to communism in 1931, Arthur Koestler wrote:

*Devotion to pure Utopia, and revolt against a polluted society, are thus the two poles which provide the tension of all militant creeds… To the psychiatrist, both the craving for Utopia and the rebellion against the status quo are symptoms of social maladjustment. To the social reformer, both are symptoms of a healthy rational attitude. The psychiatrist is apt to forget that smooth adjustment to a deformed society creates deformed individuals. The reformer is equally apt to forget that hatred, even of the objectively hateful, does not produce that charity and justice on which a utopian society must be based.* (Richard Grossman, ed. *The God that Failed*. New York: Harper and Row, 1949, p. 16).

Which are you - a psychiatrist or a social reformer? In your experience are "utopian cravings" a pathology or a sign of health?

10. How do you respond to the last two sentences in the paragraph?

*The Tragedy of Icarus (pp. 13-15)*

*Even as the utopian ideal comes to inspire us, to move us to reflect on our reality and to direct our efforts to change it, utopia must necessarily always remain* outopia*, no-place, a guiding ideal that will always lie beyond our reach. It seems that when we refuse to accept utopia's unreachability, when we create systems and wage battles to translate utopian visions into concrete realities, we fall like Icarus. (p. 14)*

11. How do you respond to this assertion by the author? Suggest historical examples or personal experiences to support your view.

## Chapter 2: Paradise Lost, Remembered, Promised

*Eden (pp. 17-20)*

*Even if we cannot aspire to Eden, we can be inspired by its image of perfection, and understand from our experience there the principle of humanity's responsibility for its fate. This concept of human agency is the basis for all utopian dreams and plans. This humanistic view of social change, essential to utopianism, is a central theme in Jewish thought. (p. 20)*

1. Review the Eden story (Gen. 2:8-3:24). What were the differences between life in Eden and life after expulsion? What was lost and what was gained in the transition? Does life in Eden feel utopian to you?

2. This story has been inspiring commentators for centuries. How do you see its message? What was the author (or Author) trying to convey?

3. Why do you think this image of a former, more perfect time in human history is such a universal phenomenon? What need does it fill?

*The Sabbath (PP. 20-1)*

> *It seems reasonable to suggest that the Jews' persistence in keeping their eyes raised to a concrete, geographical utopia has been at least partly based on their experience of the Sabbath as a relatable model of what that better place might be like. (p. 21)*

4. How does your experience of the Sabbath square with the author's suggestion that it represents a taste of utopia? In what way can prohibitions of cooking, traveling, and handling money be seen as utopian? (Interestingly, Genesis specifies that gold was found outside of Eden, not inside – Gen. 2:11). How does the Sabbath commandment (Ex. 20:8-10) resonate with the description of life after expulsion (Gen. 3:17-19)?

5. How do you respond to Ahad Ha'am's aphorism about the Sabbath? Do you think it was valid in the past? Is it valid in our times?

6. How do you respond to the author's suggestion "that the Jews' persistence in keeping their eyes raised to a concrete, geographical utopia has been at least partly based on their experience of the Sabbath as a relatable model of what that better place might be like"?

*The Promised Land (pp. 21-4)*

> *I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Exod. 3:8)*

7. How is it that the Israelites could look back longingly at Egypt, the land in which they had been cruelly enslaved? As a generalization, what in people's present experience influences the objects of their nostalgia? or their utopian desires?

8. How can we explain Moses's hyperbolic descriptions of the Promised Land in his address to the nation? "A good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing form plain and hill, a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing, a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper." (Deut. 8:7-9). Remember, this is the land that the Patriarchs repeatedly left on account of famine…

*The Desert (pp. 24-5)*

> *For the nation in its land, the desert experience was recast as a kind of honeymoon period—a time of pure undistracted faith in which the people were free from the responsibilities and tensions of livelihood and nationhood and enjoyed unlimited divine favor. (p. 25)*

9. David Ben-Gurion wrote: "The further man can distance himself from the artificial life (important as it is) of modern civilization, to stand face to face with wild, primeval nature, as it emerged from the hand of the creator – and in this respect the desert is the

ideal place – the better he can grasp the nature of being and the destiny of mankind on earth." What is it about the desert that moves people to ascribe spiritual significance to experiencing it?

10. How do you respond to the author's suggestion that "these two conceptions of better places—the Promised Land and the wilderness—express a tension between two aspects of Israelite identity: nation and faith" – and that the covenant at Sinai represents the resolution of this tension?

*Envisioning Life in the Good Land (pp, 25-7)*

> *Unlike in the desert wandering, when the Israelites were freed from labor and fed manna and quail by God, in the Promised Land they will have to live a normal life, working for a living, subject to challenges and obligations, even wars. Nonetheless, the Torah's plan for national life in the Promised Land is understood as a utopia. (pp. 26-7)*

11. If all the Torah promised was a "land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 33:3), we could dismiss the Promised Land as a Cockaignian fantasy; however, it promises (conditional on the Israelites' behavior) much more. What are some of the evils and distortions that the Torah envisions correcting in the new society? For example, see Ex. 21:2-11; 22:20; 23:1-3; Lev. 19:9; 19:14.

12. "For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land." (Deut. 15:11) How does the author's utopian interpretation of the Torah square with this verse?

*The Jubilee Year and Cities of Refuge: Utopia and Reality (pp. 27-9)*

> *Meanwhile, from our vantage point, some of the laws—such as for the jubilee year (Lev. 25:1–28) and for the cities of refuge for accidental killers (Num. 35)—seem more like theoretical constructs expressing value priorities than plans for real-life institutions. (p. 27)*

13. Try to come up with workable, twenty-first century institutions that can translate into practice the values implicit in the jubilee year.

14. How have the values embodied in the Torah's cities of refuge found institutional expression in the modern western criminal justice system (if they have)?

*Halakhah – The Way to Utopia? (pp. 29-33)*

> *Living within the halakhah would have meant, then, not merely conforming to a sanctified code of behavior, but also living in awareness of an ultimate end-goal. Recognizing life's messy reality with its constant value conflicts, the halakhah sought to guide the individual and community toward justice, toward responsibility, toward mercy—toward creating a perfect society. (pp. 32-3)*

15. How does the story of King Yannai's trial support the Mishnah's assertion that kings should have judicial immunity? Why did the Jews continue to study this story when there was no Jewish government? What useful ideas might they have found in it?

16. Do you understand Soloveitchik's and Kochan's statements to be consonant or dissonant with each other?

*Are We There Yet? (pp. 33-4)*

> *If the Torah's intention regarding the Sabbath is seen to have been utopian rather than technical, the way would be opened for a creative effort to explore how the values and social criticism expressed by the Sabbath can be institutionalized in the state context. (p. 33)*

17. What values and social criticism can you find in the Torah's Sabbath? What ideas can you suggest for translating these into practical institutions in a Jewish polity in our time?

## Chapter 3: Utopia, Apocalypse, Messiah

*The First Flowering of Our Redemption (p. 35)*

> *Our entire spiritual heritage is presently being absorbed within its source and is reappearing in a new guise, much reduced in material extent but qualitatively very rich and luxuriant and full of vital force. We are called to a new world suffused with the highest light, to an epoch the glory of which will surpass that of all the great ages which have preceded. All of our people believes that we are in the first stage of the Final Redemption. (p. 35; R. Abraham Isaac Hacohen Kook)*

1. Since 1948, many Jews have adopted the custom of adding this blessing to the traditional grace after meals (*birkat hamazon*): "May the Merciful One bless the state of Israel, the first blossoming of our redemption." How do you respond to this custom? Do you see the state as a stage in the messianic process – i.e., something outside the rational cause-and-effect processes of history? Does the creation of the state have, for you, spiritual – or cosmic – meaning? Is it evidence of Divine providence?

*Daniel's Visions (pp. 36-7)*

> *From the issuance of the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the [time of the] anointed leader is seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it will be rebuilt, square and moat, but in a time of distress. And after those sixty-two weeks, the anointed one will disappear and vanish. The army of a leader who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary, but its end will come through a flood. Desolation is decreed until the end of war. (pp. 36-7; Daniel 9:25-6)*

2. Typical of apocalyptic visions, Daniel 9:24-7 is tantalizingly full of detail yet frustratingly devoid of clarity. Generations of commentators have sought to find historical events reflecting this prophecy. Give it a try. The assumption is that this was written sometime in the centuries following the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE, most likely around 200-100 BCE.

*Reading the Map of History (pp. 37-8)*

> *The key difference between prophetic and apocalyptic thinking lies in the understanding of history. For the prophets, history is a work in progress. The covenant is a mechanism that helps us understand it, and so free will plays a key role… For apocalyptic writers, by contrast, history is a script that we are enacting. God knows what will happen, and to those with the gift of prophecy the plan is revealed. Human action affects the playing out of this plan minimally if at all. Prophecy warns what might happen. Apocalyptic understanding knows what must happen. (p. 38)*

3. The tension between the covenantal (conditional) and the apocalyptic (determined) views of history has roots in two different kinds of covenants described in the Bible. For example, compare the expectations that contemporaneous listeners or readers would have taken away from these two sets of examples, in particular with respect to their assigned role in the historical process:
   a. Genesis 17 and 2 Samuel 7:11-16
   …as opposed to…
   b. Deuteronomy 28 and Jeremiah 7

*Utopia and Apocalypse (pp. 39-40)*

> *Beneath the satire of present social failures and seemingly far-fetched images of life in utopia, utopianism is motivated by faith in the human potential to perfect the world. Apocalyptic thinking despairs of human action for the good. It does not offer an ideal vision or a plan for achieving it, for the human role in history is to be strapped to a speeding locomotive, hurtling off a cliff. (p. 39)*

4. How do you see your own place in making of history? In processes of political change, climate change, implementing social justice, reducing violence and poverty in the world – do you see yourself as obligated – and able – to play a meaningful role? Or do you sense that these processes mostly just wash over you or sweep you along?

*Apocalyptic Midrash (pp. 40-2)*

> *R. Eliezer said: if Israel repent, they will be redeemed, as it is written (Jeremiah 3:22): "Turn, back, O rebellious children, / I will heal your afflictions."*
> *R. Joshua said to him: But it has been written (Isaiah 52:3):"For thus said the Lord: / You were sold for no price / And shall be redeemed without money." ". . . sold for no price" refers to idolatry; ". . . redeemed without money" means without repentance and good deeds. . (p. 41; Bab, Talmud Sanhedrin 96-7)*

5. The rabbinical discussions in Tractate Sanhedrin, like that of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua, seem to cluster around two different views of when the Messiah will come: when we most need him – or when we most deserve him. How might these views be seen to be associated with utopian vs. apocalyptic thinking? Which speaks more to you?

*Future Visions (pp. 42-4)*

> *Samuel said: This world differs from [that of ] the days of the Messiah only with respect to servitude to [foreign] powers, as it is written (Deuteronomy 15:11): "For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land." (p. 43; Bab. Talmud Berachot 34b)*

6. Can we speak of a world that is "progressing" in any direction (toward justice, toward disaster, toward democracy, toward equality, toward more conflict), or is the long run really just a steady-state with oscillations here and there?

7. Do you believe that it is possible to look for justice in history? Is there a rational basis for arguing for a covenantal view like that of Jeremiah (e.g., in Jer. 7); i.e., that in the end, polities that rule justly prosper, and oppressors fail? How do you respond to Martin Luther King's famous dictum that "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Who does the bending? Is this statement utopian or apocalyptic?

*Utopus and Messiah (pp. 44-5)*

> *Utopia is something we have to work on; apocalypse is something we have to wait for. Since that utopian work often feels Sisyphean, a slow and painful trek toward a constantly receding horizon, the temptation is great to cast the burden elsewhere, to assume a passive role in history. Jewish messianism can be understood as an uneasy coexistence of these two strands. (p. 45)*

8. The Rambam (Maimonides), in his commentary on the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 10), articulated thirteen principles of faith which have become by themselves a classic Jewish text, part of the standard liturgy (the popular hymn *Yigdal* is a poetic version). The twelfth: "We are to believe as fact that the Messiah will come and not consider him late. If he delays, wait for him; set no time limit for his coming." Utopian or apocalyptic? Why does the Rambam warn us to "set no time limit for his coming?"

*Messianic Impatience (pp. 45-6)*

> *Policy decisions by those who believe they are actors in a drama beyond their control are generally different from the judgments of those who believe they are free to choose among courses of action? (p. 46)*

9. How do you respond to the author's closing assertion? How might this play out in matters of war and peace? Social justice? Climate change?

## Chapter 4: A Torah Society

*Torah and the Utopian Dilemma (pp. 51-2)*

> *Whether modern Jews saw the Torah as divine revelation and commandment, as national epic, or as collective historical memory, they had grown up on its stories, its landscapes, its descriptions of social and religious institutions; they could not avoid seeing the prospect of renewed life in the land through its lens. (p. 52)*

1. Does your own view of the Torah match any of the options in this passage? If not, what is it? How would you say that your expectations of the modern Jewish state are influenced by the Torah?

*Zev Yavetz's Torah Utopia (pp. 52-6)*

> *In the days of the Exile, . . . our nation couldn't rule its members except in matters of the heart. . . . But now that it has regained its sovereignty in all matters, it can establish its rule according to the spirit [of the Torah]. . . . This was a cornerstone of our rabbis' moral teaching . . . : "A person must never separate himself from the community." This served as the basis for building the Torah culture which has now been established in the land of Israel and in the far off colonies. (p. 55; Yavetz,* New from the Not-Old*)*

2. Utopians, as we have seen, tend to see their ideal society as having solved the problems besetting the status quo. Based on Yavetz's utopia, what were some of his concerns/criticisms of Jewish life in his contemporary environment?

3. Can we identify a particular moment in Jewish history as Yavetz's target for restoration? When were the "good old days" to which he seeks to return? How different is his vision from the reality of those days (for example, economic arrangements)?

4. Does Yavetz imagine arriving at utopia via evolution – or revolution?

5. Can we find in Yavetz's vision any indications of the relationship among *halakhah*, governance, and the individual? Is there enforcement, or just general consensus? Who has authority to interpret the Torah? How free is his ideal society? Might there be Jews who reject even the renewed and restored Torah law? If so, what would happen to them?

6. What do you find appealing – or not – about life in Yavetz's utopia?

7. How would King Solomon have felt about Yavetz's Jewish state?

*The Torah State 1: Reviving the Sanhedrin (p. 57)*

> *A reestablished Sanhedrin …would "revive Torah Judaism, and increase its influence not by means of enforcement, fines, and punishments, but by ceaseless broad and deep*

*explanation, by scholarship and education, by exposing all the beauty and the social justice and the holiness and the exaltation found in God's Torah, our written and oral Torah." (p. 57; R. Yehudah Maimon)*

8. What obstacles stand in the way of the vision of the restored Sanhedrin as an authority for all of world Jewry? Do you think it would be a good idea?

*The Torah State 2: The Orthodox Kibbutz (pp. 57-9)*

*Spirituality, halakhah, the holy land, productivity, rootedness, socialism: a Torah utopia, realized. (p. 59)*

9. What mechanism(s) (if any) can allow a community to be both halakhic and democratic?

10. What obstacles stand in the way of an attempt to scale the Orthodox kibbutz model to the state level?

*The Torah State 3: Hebrew Law (pp. 59-62)*

*Moreover, it is certain that preventing discrimination and unfair treatment of Muslims and Christians will serve as a key foundation of the right to a state that we shall be granted. . . . Shall we respond that our holy Torah forbids a Jewish government from granting them freedom of worship and the right to purchase land? I would say that there is no rabbi in Israel with a brain in his head, with common sense, who would . . . claim that that is our obligation according to the holy Torah. (p. 61; Rabbi Isaac Herzog)*

11. What are Jewish values? Are there principles that we can extract from the body of Jewish law and lore and hold up as examples of Jewish values? Can we articulate specifically Jewish values as distinct from other values? If so, can these be separated from religious belief (i.e., divine commandment)? How might they be incorporated in the governance of a democratic state? What conflicts might arise in the attempt?

*Utopia Now – or Apocalypse Later (pp. 62-7)*

*The Jewish people stands outside the framework of the political peoples of the world, and differs essentially from them: the Sovereign of the Jewish people is the Almighty, the Torah is the Law that governs them, and the Holy Land has been at all times destined for the Jewish people. (p. 63; Agudat Israel)*

12. Imagine a conversation between Zev Yavetz and the framers of Agudat Yisrael's guidelines for Israel's constitution.

13. The parable of the two camels/carts: Is it indeed obvious that the Talmudic example is relevant to our situation? What objections/criticisms might be posited? Is the strength of a commitment necessarily a measure of its validity? Consider, for example, religious objections to vaccination; to gender equality…

*The Sabbatical Year (pp. 67-9)*

> *There is something romantic, heartwarming, and inspiring about seeing in the restoration of Jewish sovereignty the renewal of the simple, natural, authentic, agrarian life described in the Torah. But, again, a utopia is not a blueprint. Nor is a sovereign state a halakhic community. (p. 69)*

14. Should a Jewish state seek a national reinterpretation of the sabbatical year – or leave it as a voluntary matter for individuals and/or communities, as a religious observance?

*Apocalypse Now (pp. 69-70)*

> *Agudat Israel's apocalyptic approach dictated passivity: the redemption will come in God's good time; mundane events such as the victories of 1948 and 1967 are mere distractions; if anything, setting up a modern Jewish state is a rebellion, a sin that will delay redemption. Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook's apocalyptic Zionism, on the other hand, interprets the same events differently—as evidence of a redemptive process that has begun and with which Jews must cooperate in order to move it along in accord with God's plan. (p. 70)*

15. What do you think: Is the modern Jewish state a fulfillment of biblical prophecy? Does its creation and survival represent processes that are beyond rational historical interpretation? Are we obligated to apply biblical commandments to our current situation? Are we allowed to do so?

16. A question to keep in mind moving forward: Wherein should lie the Jewishness of the Jewish state, if not in the restoration of the Torah's authority?

## Chapter 5: Holy Community

*The Ideal Jewish Community (pp. 73-4)*

> *Israel is seen as the Jewish supercommunity—where "everybody is Jewish"; where the street (the 'hood) is Jewish; where both the police and the criminals are Jewish; where Jews take care of each other; where everything is closed on Yom Kippur, not Christmas; where even sports heroes and supermodels are Jewish. This experience of a "fully Jewish" existence is seen as therapeutic for those growing up in an open society where Jews are a minority and where "Jewish community" is a pale reflection of what it was a few generations ago. (p. 74)*

Community turns out to be a very slippery concept. Before exploring the utopian image of a Jewish polity as a reconstructed community, it might be helpful and interesting to articulate personal experiences and understandings of community. This is an endless topic, but here are a few questions to focus thinking, keeping in mind that "community"

does not need to be a formal structure self-labeled as a community, but may refer to a variety of assemblies – neighborhood, synagogue, summer camp, commune, tour group, professional organization, volunteer organization, etc.:

1. Do you see yourself as a member of a community (or communities) – or did you in the past? What makes it, in your view, a community? How does it impact your life? What costs and benefits does membership entail for you? Do you find your membership a benefit or a burden? Are you ever disappointed in this community? Why?

2. Consider how your community reflects these dichotomies:
    - physical/geographical vs. virtual
    - homogeneous vs. heterogeneous
    - authoritarian vs. egalitarian
    - inclusive vs. exclusive
    - fleeting vs. long-term
    - central vs. peripheral (in terms of impact on members' lives)
    - oppressive vs. liberating
    - united by belief or ideology vs. united by identity

3. Do you find a sense of community to be lacking in your life? Do you feel nostalgia for some remembered community experience?\

4. Do you associate Israel, either from experience or from imagination, with a communal sense of Jewish belonging?

*Community and Modernity (pp. 74-6)*

*Despite the many benefits of the Enlightenment and the modern state, one doesn't have to be a starry-eyed romantic to sense that something's gained, but something's lost in the transition. Alienation, atomization, anomie, disempowerment, loneliness: these are just some of the terms used to characterize the life of the individual in modern mass society, absent the support and meaning provided by community. (pp. 75-6)*

5. In 2000, sociologist Robert Putnam synthesized a large amount of data on Americans' social life and institutions, and concluded:

    *For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper engagement in the life of their communities, but a few decades ago – silently, without warning – that tide reversed and we were overtaken by a treacherous rip current. Without at first noticing, we have been pulled apart from one another and from our communities over the last third of the century. (Robert Putnam. Bowling Alone. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000, p. 27)*

    To what extent does this reflect your experience? Which way do you see the tide flowing since 2000?

*The Shtetl Remembered (pp. 76-9)*

> *The community, a whole made up of many closely welded parts, is felt as an extension of the family. "My shtetl" means all the Jews who live in it and the bond persists even when members meet in distant lands. . . . (p. 79; Zborowski and Herzog)*

6. Based on Zborowski and Herzog – and other depictions you may have encountered (e,g., *Fiddler on the Roof*) – what are the aspects of shtetl life you find attractive? unattractive? Assuming no oppressive state government, and a reasonable standard of living, would you want to live in a shtetl?

7. What are the similarities and differences between the shtetl community and the Jewish communities with which you are familiar today?

8. If Zborowski and Herzog (among others) can be seen as presenting the shtetl as utopian, what criticisms were implied regarding the mid-twentieth century status quo in Jewish life?

*Reconstructing Community (pp. 79-82)*

> *A new idea [has] developed among Jews disenchanted with the synagogue . . . that it [is] possible, here in the Diaspora, to resurrect in some way the old Jewish idea of community and join together to work, learn, pray, and live. . . . [S]omething new, exciting, and creative is happening—something good. (p. 82;* The Jewish Catalog*)*

9. Why are there no shtetls in America?

10. What aspects of shtetl life could possibly be preserved or reconstructed in a free, individualistic environment? What would be the costs and benefits of such reconstruction?

11. How might liberal and Orthodox movements in Judaism differ in their understanding and implementation of community – that is, how do different attitudes toward *halakhah* give rise to different relationships to community?

12. How do the challenges facing Jewish education differ in a shtetl-like community from those in an open, individualistic social context?

*Intentional Communities (pp. 82-4)*

> *Perhaps a distinction needs to be made between communities that are indeed guided by some sort of articulated vision, and those whose goal is simply withdrawal to a protected place. (p. 83)*

13. Have you ever been involved, personally or vicariously, in an intentional community – from *chavurah* to commune? What did it offer? What did it demand? Why did it succeed – or fail? Would you say it was utopian?

*The Kibbutz (pp. 84-7)*

> *Thus on the soberest survey and on the soberest reflection one can say that, in this one spot in a world of partial failures, we can recognize a non-failure—and such as it is, a signal non-failure. . . . In the spirit of the members of the first Palestinian Communes ideal motives joined hands with the dictates of the hour. (pp. 85-6; Martin Buber)*

14. What factors might explain the long-term survival of the kibbutz, as compared to other attempts at socialistic intentional communities around the world in the past two centuries?

15. And what factors might explain why, despite its success, life in a kibbutz never attracted more than a tiny minority of the population of Israel?

16. Today, some kibbutzim call themselves "renewed kibbutzim," and espouse a largely individualistic, free-market economic structure. It is interesting to conjecture: would Buber have seen this as a form of betrayal, or as a natural and positive stage in the ongoing evolution of the kibbutz?

*Community or State (pp. 87-90)*

> *The problem is a fundamental mismatch between a modern state and a traditional Jewish community. A state is associated with a specific territory, with borders, its authority applying to everyone living within those borders. It is, ipso facto, "a state of all its citizens," regardless of their identities and beliefs. A Jewish community, on the other hand, comprises an assembly of people who identify as Jews, and its authority applies only to them. A Jewish community exists alongside other religious communities, under an overarching state authority. (p. 89)*

17. In examining experiences of community (above), we considered a number of dichotomies that describe communities. If the Jewish polity is envisioned as a utopian Jewish community, how would we locate it along that same set of axes?
    - physical/geographical vs. virtual
    - homogeneous vs. heterogeneous
    - authoritarian vs. egalitarian
    - inclusive vs. exclusive
    - fleeting vs. long-term
    - central vs. peripheral (in terms of impact on members' lives)
    - oppressive vs. liberating
    - united by belief or ideology vs. united by identity

18. What tensions might arise between the vision of Israel as a democratic state and Israel as a Jewish community?

19. What might be the costs and benefits of the state's fostering and encouraging the existence of many semi-autonomous communities (e.g., synagogue-centered communities, kibbutzim, gated suburbs with admissions committees, homogeneous Orthodox – or Palestinian – neighborhoods or villages) within the body politic?

## Chapter 6: A National Home

*The Nation-State of the Jewish People (pp. 91-3)*

> *This recognition by the United Nations of the right of the Jewish people to establish their State is irrevocable. This right is the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State. . .(p. 92; Declaration of Independence)*

1. If community – a familiar and much-used term – can be difficult to define, how much the more so the term "nation." Just about any definition proposed can be challenged by counter-examples. Is the definition cultural? Then what about, say, French citizens for whom French is at best a second language? Is it geographical? Then are Italian-speaking Slovenians members of the Italian – or the Slovenian – nation? Is it religious? Then are Muslim citizens of Israel – the Jewish state - members of the Jewish nation? Is a German Jew a member of two nations – or rather, a member of the German nation who believes in the Jewish religion? How would you define "nation?"

*Jewish Peoplehood (pp. 93-5)*

> *I think the Jewish question is no more a social than a religious one, notwithstanding that it sometimes takes these and other forms. It is a national question, which can only be solved by making it a political world-question to be discussed and controlled by the civilized nations of the world in council. We are a people (Volk)—One people. (p. 94; Theodor Herzl)*

2. How would you answer the question: "Are the Jews a nation or a religion?"

3. Is the answer to this question unique to the Jews? Are there other groups of people in the world characterized by the same type of ambivalent or complex – or covenantal - relationship between different forms of identity?

4. Ahad Ha'am believed that Jews were bound together by a culture that transcended religious belief; that Jewish values and behaviors and symbols are a cultural heritage transmitted from generation to generation, just like other national cultures who may lack a common religion and even a state (e.g., the Italians before their achievement of statehood).

   On the other hand, twentieth century Orthodox Zionist thinker and gadfly, Isaiah Leibowitz, argued that there is no such thing as "Jewish culture." The only thing Moroccan and Polish Jews have in common is religion – they are culturally worlds apart. The Jews have acculturated to many different cultures, speaking different languages,

eating different foods, etc. The only marker that is universal among all Jews is religious belief.

What do you think?

*Nationalism and Utopia (pp. 96-7)*

> *For those who can no longer rely on belonging anywhere else, there is at least one other imagined community to which one can belong: which is permanent, indestructible, and whose membership is certain: . . . "the nation," or the ethnic group, "appears as the ultimate guarantee" when society fails. (p. 96; Hobsbawm and Ketzer)*

5. Is a world made up of homogeneous nation-states (that is, each state is populated by one ethno-cultural group) utopian? dystopian? What would be the costs and benefits? And why, in either case, is it an impossibility?

*Elchanan Lewinsky's Utopia (pp. 97-101)*

> *I couldn't get enough of seeing the life of the Jew on his land. Whole portions of the Bible came alive before me. . . . For the Jews try in everything to imitate the life of their ancestors, in their purity and simplicity, and in addition, they have accepted the power and the glory of modern customs. All the good ascribed in the Bible to their forefathers, and all the beauty, all the practices and customs and practical laws of Europe, are combined together in the life of the Hebrew. (p. 99; Elchanan Lewinsky)*

6. What does Lewinsky's utopia tell us about what bothered him in the Jewish life he saw around him? Why so much emphasis on agriculture, physical strength, and beauty?

7. What is so attractive about being restored to life in biblical times? What doubts or concerns might impede your signing up to live in Lewinsky's utopia?

8. Lewinsky doesn't say much about the gentile inhabitants of the land of Israel; what can we infer from his description of the society?

9. The tone of Yavetz's and Lewinsky's utopias are similarly idyllic. Where are their visions dissonant?

10. Lewinsky, like Herzl after him, believed that in achieving national self-determination, the Jews would join the family of nations as equals, thus putting an end of antisemitism. What do you think?

*The New Man (pp. 102-4)*

> *And the daughters of Israel? They are certainly beautiful; their stature like the date palm, their cheeks pure and ruddy, their figures like sapphire, their curls raven black; and their eyes? God of my father! One would give half the world for those eyes! The daughters of Israel had always been beautiful, but poverty, exile, suffering, false education, and ugly*

*clothes had caused them to wither; now their beauty has been restored. (p. 100; Elchanan Lewinsky)*

11. Among the Zionist pioneers, the idealistic, socialistic women comrades were often crushed to discover that their male colleagues expected them to tend to the kitchen and the laundry while the men sowed and reaped. Cultural Zionists talked a lot about "New Jews," but not "New Jewesses." In general, with the notable exception of Chernyshevsky's Vera, the "new people" were overwhelmingly envisioned as male. it is interesting to consider if this is just a continuation of the ingrained patriarchal worldview – or if it represents a consequence of the idealization and idolization of physical strength, manual labor, and military might. What seems to be behind Lewinsky's vision of utopian Jewish women?

*Old Jews and New Jews (pp. 104-5)*

*The Old Yishuv comprised the Orthodox communities who opposed Zionism (see chapter 5) and any form of modernization. In Zionist eyes, its members were typical Old Jews, characterized by apocalyptic passivity, blind faith, dry ritualism, and economic dependency. (p. 104)*

12. One of the best-known expressions of the conflict between Old and New Jews is the poem by Hebrew poet Shaul Tchernichovsky (1875-1943), "Before the Statue of Apollo" (1899), which concludes thus:

*And I have come to you.*
*I have come to you, before your statue I will bow down,*
*Your statue – symbol of the light in life;*
*I will bow down, I will bend the knee to the good and the exalted,*
*To all that is majestic in the whole universe,*
*To all that is glorious in all the world,*
*To all that is noble in the mysteries of creation.*

*I will bow to life, to power and to beauty,*
*I will bow to all the beautiful treasures*
*That corpse-men, rotten human seed,*
*Rebels against life - stole from my Rock, Shaddai,*
*God of the wondrous desert,*
*God of those who stormed Canaan –*
*Leaving Him shackled in tefillin straps.*

Why such a strong feeling of alienation? Because the New Jews had assimilated to western culture and values? Because they saw the Old Jews as an embarrassment and an obstacle in their effort to "make it" in the modern west? Because New Jews felt guilt over their rejection of the authentic heritage represented by the Old Jews?

13. What is your reaction to the poem? What is your reaction to Old Jews as they are portrayed in the popular press in our day? How are modern Jews – and Americans – influenced by the stereotypes and hidden prejudices of the image of the "new man?"

*Siegfried Lehmann's New Jew (pp. 105-6)*

> *The image cannot yet be compared in its clarity and concreteness to the ideal images projected by educators in other nations; for example, the image of the gentleman in English educational institutions. It may be that some of the lines are still incomplete and blurry. Still, the basic outline is valid for our education, which sees the redemptive act as the creation of a new working man, rooted in the soil of the homeland. (p. 106; Siegfried Lehmann)*

14. From Lehmann's utopian description of New Jews, what did he find wrong with Old Jews? It has been suggested that the enthusiasm for a New Jew was essentially based on the Jews' internalizing anti-semitic stereotypes, and then seeking to re-form the image of the Jew so as to disprove them. What do you think?

*The Jewish National Home (pp. 107-10)*

> *And so, from Lewinsky the utopian novelist to Lehmann the utopian and practical educator, the vision of the New Jews and their national home comprised a number of salient qualities:*
> • *Strength, courage, self-reliance*
> • *Naturalness, directness, unpretentiousness*
> • *Rootedness in the soil of the homeland*
> • *Commitment to physical labor, especially agricultural labor*
> • *Commitment to social justice*
> • *Disdain for bookishness*
> • *Natural connection to Jewish culture; a sense of belonging to the nation. (p. 107)*

In the nation-state of the Jewish people – the Jewish National Home:

15. Should there be a chief rabbi?

16. What should be the rights, individual and collective, of gentile residents?

17. What should be the state's relationship to Jews residing in other states?

18. What should be the procedure for a gentile immigrant who wants to join the Jewish people?

19. Are there values that you hold dear that seem to you to conflict with the vision of a national home?

## Chapter 7: Statehood and Power

*Emergence from Powerlessness (pp. 113-116)*

> *There are times in history when spirit is broken and impotent, and all that counts is power. (p. 114; Emil Fackenheim)*

1. Not by might and not by power, but by My spirit (Zechariah 4:6) has been a Jewish motto for centuries. Over and over the forces of evil were vanquished (according to the Jews' collective memory) not due to the Jews' superior military might, but because "might does not make right," and God's spirit was stronger than Pharaoh, or Amalek, or Haman, or Antiochus – or Richard the Lionhearted. But was this narrative of the victory of spirit over power true? A way to put a positive spin on a terrible reality? Counterproductive? Were Jews who chose martyrdom over enslavement by the Romans – or over baptism by the Crusaders - expressing weakness, or power, or pointless extremism?

   How do you respond to Fackenheim's assertion quoted above?

*Zev Jabotinsky's "Tristan da Runha" (pp. 116-122)*

> *There is nothing which could even remotely be construed a government, either general or municipal. Popular meetings attended by all the male settlers seem to have been a fashion in the middle period of the colony, at the time of Landree's reform activities. But . . . for the last twenty years its life has been developing regularly without breaks or jumps, every today a natural outcome of yesterday, with no problems and no need for assemblies. . . .(pp. 118-9; Zev Jabotinsky)*

2. What perceived ills in the current reality does Jabotinsky's utopia come to criticize?

3. What congruencies and dissonances can be found between Jabotinsky's utopia and the vision of the national home with its New Jews?

4. How to you think Jabotinsky would have responded to the Mishnah (Avot 3:2), "Pray for the welfare of the government, for without the fear of it, everyone would swallow his fellow alive?"

5. What socio-economic critique – and ideal - can you deduce from Joseph Verba's document?

6. Do you see "Tristan da Runha" as utopian – or dystopian? How do you respond to its characterization of human nature? Compare it to Golding's *Lord of the Flies.*

*Judges and Kings (pp. 122-5)*

> *If, after you have entered the land that the Lord your God has assigned to you, and taken possession of it and settled in it, you decide, "I will set a king over me, as do all the nations about me," you shall be free to set a king over yourself, one chosen by the*

*Lord your God. (p. 123; Deut. 17:14)*

7. The full story of Gideon may be found in Judges 6-9; the episode of the "concubine of Gibeah" is recounted in Judges 19-21. They are colorful and dramatic stories with interesting characters. Do you agree with the author's interpretation of them as anti- and pro-monarchical, respectively?

8. Compare the controversy over establishing a monarchy with the debates during the United States' colonial period, over whether and how to unite the thirteen colonies – and in formulating the constitution, the debate over the ideal strength or weakness of the federal government; note that in both cases, while the initial debate was resolved, the underlying tension did not disappear.

*Three Views of a Jewish State, Forbidden, Utilitarian, Essential (pp 125-7)*

*In those days there was no king in Israel, everyone did as he pleased. (124-5; Jud. 21:25)*

9. The Mishnah (Avot 3:2) states: "Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for fear of the government humans would swallow each other alive." How do you see the meaning of the state in general? A necessity, on account of the unruly nature of human nature? An ideal? A temporary scaffold until perfect harmony is achieved?

*The Rabbis' Ideal Kingdom (pp. 127-9)*

*The rabbis said: the Holy One said to Israel, 'My children, I hoped that you would be free of monarchic rule, as it is written (Jer. 2:24) "Like a wild ass used to the desert": just as the wild ass grows up in the desert, with no fear of humanity, so I hoped that you would fear no monarch—but that is not what you wanted.' (p. 128; Deuteronomy Rabbah 8:8)*

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (37-100 CE) was a scion of a priestly family in Jerusalem, but wrote for a Roman audience. In *Against Apion* II, he coined the word "theocracy":
*(17) Some legislators have permitted their governments to be under monarchies, others put them under oligarchies, and others under a republican form; but our legislator [i.e., Moses] had no regard to any of these forms, but he ordained our government to be what… may be termed a theocracy, by ascribing the authority and the power to God.*

The problem is, of course, that even a theocracy needs human rulers to interpret God's word, as Josephus points out:
*(22) And where shall we find a better or more righteous constitution than ours, while this makes us esteem God to be the governor of the universe, and permits the priests in general to be the administrators of the principal affairs, and withal entrusts the government over the other priests to the chief high priest himself!..*

10. Given this fact – that a direct, pure theocracy is impossible (unless God speaks directly to every citizen regularly), why do you think it remained such an important nostalgic utopia for the Jews? What was their experience of kings, Jewish and gentile?

11. But of course, given that very experience of powerlessness in Exile, why did they also envision another nostalgic utopia, a Davidic monarchy?

*A Jewish State? (pp. 129-32)*

> *France is a state and Kentucky is a state. . . . When I speak about a state, I am not . . . actually interested in the exact extent or scope of its independence. I believe that the crucial minimum status of statehood is enough self-rule to administer internal affairs. (p. 131; Zev Jabotinsky)*

12. From the "radicals" of Brit Shalom to mainstream leaders like Ahad Ha'am, Weizmann, Ben Gurion – even Jabotinsky – all looked toward a utopia of a non-state, federated polity. But in the light of the Holocaust, a Jewish polity without an army and full control of immigration (see Fackenheim) suddenly felt irrelevant. With our historical hindsight of 70 years, is it possible to rethink that shift? Or has it been confirmed?

*Ein Breirah (pp. 132-5)*

> *In seeking to build a more decent social and political regime, one that provides all citizens better protection and better life chances, it is important to remember that no institution did it better than the nation-state. . . . [No] international organization . . . is able to replace the state in its most important social and democratic roles: allowing individuals to be self-governing, meeting the political challenge of "no taxation without representation," and developing distributive tools and a social support system for those who need it. (p. 134; Yael Tamir)*

13. In your view, is a sovereign Jewish nation-state in our time…
    - a sacred ideal?
    - a practical necessity?
    - a mistake, an obstacle on the path to a redeemed world?
    - something else?

## Chapter 8: Enlightenment and Normalization

*A State of All its Citizens (pp. 137-8)*

> *The State of Israel will . . . foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex. (p. 138; Declaration of Independence)*

1. In your view, should a gentile be eligible to be prime minister of the Jewish state? What arguments can be brought against your position? How would you place your answer in the context of the dichotomy: nation-state of the Jewish people vs. state of all its citizens?

2. What are the costs and benefits to the Jews of living in a homogeneous Jewish polity, as opposed to living in a cosmopolitan, multicultural society (such as the United States aspires to be)?

*Theodor Herzl's Altneuland (pp. 139-44)*

> *We stand and fall by the principle that whoever has given two years' service to the New Society as prescribed by our rules, and has conducted himself properly, is eligible to membership no matter what his race or creed. . . . Liberality, tolerance, love of mankind. Only then is Zion truly Zion! (p. 141; Theodor Herzl)*

3. Why does Herzl believe that his *The Jewish State* is not utopian?

4. How does Herzl see Old Jews?

5. Imagine a conversation between Lewinsky and Herzl; between Yavetz and Herzl.

6. Do you think Herzl would have assumed that Raschid Bey could be prime minister?

7. How do you imagine him responding to the challenge: "Is the Jewish state the nation-state of the Jewish people or a state of all its citizens?"

*The Empire of Reason (pp. 144-7)*

> *After centuries of cruel discrimination and persecution, the Enlightenment seemed to offer the Jews an ideal future. A strong universalistic, cosmopolitan strand in Enlightenment thought rejected the old divisions and hierarchies based on class and faith. In a society guided by this ideal, Jews could expect to be equal in rights and responsibilities. They would be treated no differently from their fellow citizens—simply like human beings. (p. 145)*

8. On the continuum defining post Enlightenment Judaism, from…
   welcoming "liberation from communal governance as well as from bonds of law and custom and social pressures … perceived as oppressive and backward"
   …to…
   unable to imagine "meaningful, sustainable Jewish existence … not grounded in halakhic authority and community…"
   Where would you place yourself?

*Moses Mendelssohn and the Haskalah (pp. 147-9)*

*And even today, no wiser advice than this can be given to the House of Jacob. Adapt yourselves to the morals and the constitution of the land to which you have been removed; but hold fast to the religion of your fathers too. Bear both burdens as well as you can! . . . (p. 149; Moses Mendelssohn)*

9. In the study guide for chapter 7, a passage from Josephus describes how that Roman era Jewish historian resolved the tension between Jewish identity and Roman citizenship. How is Mendelssohn's analysis similar to or different from Josephus's? How would each of them respond to the vision of a nation-state of the Jewish people?

*Isaac Satanow's Enlightened Kingdom (pp. 149-53)*

*Every man will do what is right in his own eyes—and may, accordingly, freely change religions. . . . And with respect to the welfare of the state, crafts and trade and government, let all the inhabitants of our land be equal; no man shall have preference on account of religion, but men shall advance according to their accomplishments, for we are all the children of one man and one god created us. (p. 150; Isaac Satanow)*

10. What are Satanow's criticisms of the status quo with respect to European political systems? With respect to the Jews – their economy, culture, and education?

11. How does the king's vision of his ideal state compare to that of the founding fathers of the United States (another Enlightenment project, which was being established just as Satanow was writing his book)?

12. Some say that education is a means for cultural continuity, preserving and bringing a culture forward to the next generation; i.e., each generation reproduces itself. Others see education as aiming to achieve an ideal – not what is or was, but what we would like to see. The Enlighteners were in the latter camp. Where are you? Can schools change the social order? Should they?

*Like All the Nations (pp. 153-5)*

*There is a widespread belief that Jewish interests are indeed best served—and Jewish values implemented—in an open, democratic society; and so it follows that the Jewish state itself should be such a society. A state of all its citizens. In such a state, of course, discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, gender, or other characteristics would be unacceptable. (p. 154)*

13. How do you respond to this view as described by the author? How do you think Yavetz and Lewinsky would respond?

14. The challenge of the tension between the enlightened, cosmopolitan state and the national home can be examined through a number of specific questions like those mentioned in this section. What do you think?
    - Must, and can, there be a full separation of religion and state in a Jewish state?

- Should minorities have group rights or only individual rights?
- What degree of minority cultural autonomy (if any) is acceptable?
- If Israel were to be modeled on Vienna—or the United States—what would remain "Jewish" about it?
- Is ethnic or religious segregation in housing or in education allowable? Can "separate but equal" be equal?
- What values should guide the immigration policy of the Jewish state?

## Chapter 9: Promised Borders

*Locating the Land of Milk and Honey (pp. 157-9)*

> *The prophet's spirit does not, like Plato's, believe that he possesses an abstract and general, a timeless concept of truth. . . . He does not confront man with a generally valid image of perfection, with . . . a utopia. Neither has he the choice between his native land and some other country which might be 'more suitable to him.' In his work of realization he is bound to the topos, to this place,to this people. (pp. 157-8; Martin Buber)*

1. Do you have a homeland? What is the meaning, for you, of "homeland? Is the attachment of a community or a nation to a particular geographic area a scaled-up version of an individual's attachment to his or her home, or something else?

2. Here are some diverse text passages dealing with the question of the significance of the land of Israel. Discuss your reactions to some or all of them. In your view, is the holiness of, or collective attachment to a plot of land a social construct, or inherent in the land itself?

   *Midrash Tanhuma, Kedoshim 10*
   *Just as the navel is in the center of a person, so …the land of Israel sits in the middle of the world, and Jerusalem in the middle of the land of Israel, and the Temple in the middle of Jerusalem and the Sanctuary in the middle of the Temple and the Ark in the middle of the Sanctuary, and the foundation stone in front the Ark, and upon it stands the world…*

   *Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), Eretz Yisrael*
   *Eretz Yisrael is not something apart from the soul of the Jewish people; it is no mere national possession, serving as a means of unifying our people and buttressing its material, or even its spiritual survival. Eretz Israel is part of the very essence of our nationhood; it is bound organically to its very life and inner being. Human reason, even at its most sublime, cannot begin to understand the unique holiness of Eretz Yisrael.*

   *A. D. Gordon (1856-1922), "Our Tasks Ahead"*
   *It is life we want, no more and no less than that, our own life feeding on our own vital sources, in the fields and under the skies of our Homeland, a life based on our own physical and mental labors; we want vital energy and spiritual richness from this living source. We come to our Homeland in order to be planted in our natural soil from which*

*we have been uprooted, to strike our roots deep into its life-giving substances, and to stretch out our branches in the sustaining and creating air and sunlight of the Homeland.*

*Saul Tschernichovsky (1875-1943), "A Man is Nothing but…"*
*A man is nothing but a small plot of land,*
*A man is nothing but the image of the landscape of his birthplace,*
*Only what his ear recorded when it was still fresh,*
*Only what his eye took in before it had seen too much,*
*Whatever was encountered on the dew-covered path*
*By the child who tripped over every bump and clod of earth…*

*Simon Dubnow (1860-1941), History of the Jews in Russia and Poland (1920), III 54-55*
*The fate of universal Jewry ought not to be bound up with one single center. We should take into account the historic fact of a multiplicity of centers of which those that have the largest numbers and can boast of the most genuine development of a national Jewish life are entitled to the hegemony of the Jewish people… The Palestinian center may strengthen the national development of the Diaspora, but it does not constitute a conditio sine qua non for its autonomous existence.*

*Torah Borders (pp. 160-2); Two Prophetic Maps (pp. 162-7); Borders at the Height of Empire (pp. 167-8); The Rabbis' Map (pp. 168-170); Defining Palestine (pp. 170-1)*

*From the Psalmist to the medieval Hebrew poets to the modern romantic Zionists, the land itself stood for the longed-for utopia, a place of plenty, peace, and justice. Living in the land would restore and revitalize the Jewish people, as a nation and as a religion. But even though the Jews always knew where Israel was on the globe, it is telling that, other than specific place-references (mainly Jerusalem), the actual geography—and borders—were not part of their vision. The land was an abstract object of longing. (p. 159)*

3. Reviewing the various border descriptions surveyed in the chapter, how would you interpret the 1938 claim of the religious Zionists:
*The people of Israel did not surrender its right to the land of its fathers during thousands of years of exile, and will not now concede even one inch of the Land of Israel. We staunchly declare the eternal, complete and full right of the nation to its homeland within its historic boundaries…*

4. Where, in your view, should we place the "historic boundaries" of the Land of Israel?

*The Ongoing Debate over Partition (pp. 171-5)*

*The people of Israel did not surrender its right to the land of its fathers during thousands of years of exile, and will not now concede even one inch of the Land of Israel. We staunchly declare the eternal, complete and full right of the nation to its homeland within its historic boundaries, and absolutely reject any attempt to agree to the partition of Eretz Israel or to other proposals assaulting our rights. (p. 173; Orthodox Zionist declaration)*

5. How do you see the idea of the partition of Palestine:
   - The Jews' surrender of their natural right to their historic homeland?
   - A remnant of the colonialist mindset?
   - A reasonable attempt at finding a *modus vivendi* between two nationalist movements?
   - All of the above?
   - Something else?

*Mapping Utopia (pp. 175-7)*

> *Many Jews believe that the Jewish people's connection to the Land of Israel is divinely ordained, mystical, undebatable—in which case all of the above considerations may be interesting, but they are trivial. While it is possible to engage in rational debate over whether the partition of Palestine is strategically advisable or demographically problematic, if the bottom line is a divine imperative the violation of which would be a sin, then pragmatic considerations are beside the point. (pp, 176-7)*

6. How do utopian geographic claims meet the visions of Yavetz? Lewinsky? Herzl?

## Chapter 10: A Model of Social Justice

*Jews and Socialism (pp. 179-82)*

> *Since socialism in all its expressions, like the Enlightenment, challenged the old order of social class, hereditary, and clerical hierarchies, it tended to attract Jews, for the Jews had learned that their interests seemed never to be served by that order… And as …with the Enlightenment, so too with socialism did cosmopolitanism pose a central challenge to the Jews hoping to benefit from the promise of liberation. Could one be a loyal Jew and a Marxist? If religion and nationality were vestiges of the old order, must the Jews relinquish theirs in the interest of class solidarity? (p. 181)*

1. From the dawn of the modern period (as we also saw in chapter 8), there has been a strong current in Jewish popular thought that sees the ideal future as a cosmopolitan one, where one universal human identity would replace particularistic religious or national identities – and thus the problem of Jewish persecution and exclusion would be solved systemically. How do you respond to this vision? Is it realistic? Is it worthy? What would be its costs and benefits for the Jews? How has it fared historically? What are the alternatives?

*Romantic Socialist Zionism: Moses Hess (pp. 182-5)*

> *Fortified by its racial instinct and by its cultural and historical mission to unite all humanity in the name of the Eternal Creator, this people has conserved its nationality, in the form of its religion, and united both inseparably with the memories of its ancestral land. (p. 184; Moses Hess)*

2. How do you respond to this assertion by Hess? How do you understand "racial instinct?" "Cultural and historical mission?" How do you understand his assertion of the relationship among nationality, religion, and ancestral land? How do you think Yavetz would respond? Ahad Ha'am? Herzl?

3. In his view of the process of humankind's redemption, where would you place Hess in the debate between Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Eliezer in chapter 3?

4. How do you respond to Hess's argument "from nature" rejecting cosmopolitanism?

*Not Utopia, but Apocalypse (pp. 185-7)*

> *The Zionist component of [Borochov's] vision was not an ideal of return, or a restoration of Jewish independence and pride, but rather just a particular subset—driven by Jewish suffering—of the general processes churning toward revolution. (p. 186)*

5. In 1919 the socialist Zionist workers' party in the Yishuv split in two: a mainstream party based on a worldview rooted in Hess's thought, and a Marxist, cosmopolitan minority for whom the universal world revolution was the highest priority (the precursor of the Israel Communist Party). The latter's members were harshly persecuted, shunned, fired from jobs, etc. Why do you think they were seen as such a threat?

*Hess's Legacy: Nachman Syrkin's Socialist Zionist State (pp. 187-92)*

> *The government of the land will be severely limited in scope, concerned only with regulating the economy. There will be no other governing structures, such as a state. . . . The members have come together to only control the ownership of goods, not to rule over each other; thus, the state becomes superfluous, replaced by the union of free workers. Competition and conflict among individuals will be very rare under conditions of social equality, clear relationships, and free self-determination. Trivial conflicts will be settled through open discussion. More serious acts will have to be treated medically as unfortunate deviations from the healthy and the good. (p. 189; Nachman Syrkin)*

6. What is Jewish in Syrkin's Zionist utopia?

7. How do you respond to Hess's and Syrkin's assumption that "…the Torah and prophets instilled in the Jewish nation a general commitment to justice, a concern for the weak, and a skeptical stance regarding wealth and power?"

8. Why do you think that Syrkin, then Herzl, and then Jabotinsky all explicitly avoided describing their utopias as states?

9. What do you think you would find attractive – and unattractive – about life in Syrkin's utopia?

*"In That Day:" Isaiah's Utopian Vision (pp. 192-7)*

> *Thus he shall judge the poor with equity*
> *And decide with justice for the lowly of the land.*
> *He shall strike down a [wicked ruler] with the rod of his mouth*
> *And slay the wicked with the breath of his lips.*
> *Justice shall be the girdle of his loins,*
> *And faithfulness the girdle of his waist. (p. 193; Isaiah)*

10. For Isaiah's utopia – like Plato's – to be realized, an ideal leader is required. How do we get from here to there? What is our responsibility in the meantime?

11. Do you think that the socialist Zionists' claim to be applying the principles of the biblical prophets holds water? What are the dissonances between their vision and the prophets' vision?

*Aren't We There Yet? (pp. 198-9)*

> *It seems fair to say that if Nachman Syrkin were to come to visit Israel today, he would be thrilled to see a thriving Jewish polity with some impressive social achievements—first and foremost universal health care. And yet, he would surely be disappointed by the yawning chasm between his vision and reality. Israel has been spared none of the ills of modern Western societies, from the existence of both tycoons and slums to the phenomena of ethnic tensions, drug addiction, organized crime, human trafficking, femicide, homelessness, and environmental degradation. He would surely admonish Israel's leaders for failing to implement his economic plan, which was intended to eliminate all of these problems. (p. 199)*

12. Imagine a conversation between Syrkin and Yavetz; between Syrkin and Lewinsky.

13. Syrkin and other socialists assumed that the only way to eliminate economic injustice and exploitation was to establish socialism. Are they right? Is it possible to imagine a capitalist polity characterized by justice, fairness, and the dignity of all? Is meritocracy fair? Can there be a conflict between equality and fairness?

## Chapter 11: Visions in Collision

*A Sociological Perspective: The Four Tribes (pp. 204-214)*

> *The "new Israeli order" is not an apocalyptic prophecy. It is the reality. A reality that can already be seen in the composition of the first-grade classes in the Israeli education system. Today, the first-grade classes are composed of about 38% secular Jews, about 15% national-religious, about one-quarter Arabs, and close to one-quarter charedim*

*[ultra-Orthodox]. . . . A child from Beit El [an Orthodox Zionist settlement in the West Bank], a child from Rahat [a Bedouin town], a child from Herzliya [a mostly secular city] and a child from Beitar Illit [a charedi town]—not only do they not meet each other, but they are educated toward a totally different outlook regarding the basic values and desired character of the State of Israel. . . . (pp. 204-5; Reuven Rivlin)*

1. Let us assume that none of President Rivlin's four tribes has any plans to emigrate or assimilate; let us further assume that none of them has any plans to force any of the others to emigrate or assimilate. In other words, given the continuation of this division of Israeli society into distinct groups defined by belief, identity, and group interests, which of the ten visions listed in the opening of chapter 11 seems to you most fitting to the needs and beliefs of each of these "tribes"? Is there a vision among the ten – or a composite of a few of them – that might be proposed as a consensus utopian goal? Or can you propose a different option? Or does it seem to you impossible to find a sustainable shared vision?

2. If you were president, charged with acting above partisan politics in order to build a shared identity, shared culture, and shared sense of civic belonging among all the citizens of Israel, what types of policies would you initiate toward that end?

*A Topical Perspective: Five Arenas Where Utopias Collide*

*The Sabbath (pp. 216-21)*

*The Sabbath, traditionally seen as a taste of utopia, turns out to be a fraught meeting-place for modern utopian visions. If Israel were a homogeneous traditional community, all of whose members were committed to a halakhic life, there would be consensual adherence to the rabbis' rulings as to how to observe the day. If Israel were an enlightened, cosmopolitan society, characterized by freedom of—and freedom from—religion, Sabbath observance would be a matter of personal choice. In Lewinsky's national home, the Sabbath would be a national institution, a particularly joyous expression of the shared general culture. And using Moses Hess's imagery, we might imagine a socialist Jewish state sanctifying the Sabbath (in some form) as symbolizing the rejection of capitalist materialism. But since Israel is " all of the above" in vision—and "none of the above" in reality—the day of rest is a day of conflict. (p. 217)*

3. One argument sometimes offered against allowing the economy to operate without restriction on the Sabbath, thus leaving Sabbath observance totally a matter of personal choice, is that "personal choice" in such a scenario is really an illusion: it would mean that in a Jewish state, there would be many cultural activities and economic opportunities that would be off-limits to Jews who observe a halakhic Sabbath. Thus, there might be freedom *from* religion – but not freedom *of* religion for those who believe in the obligatory nature of *halakhah*. How would you resolve this dilemma? And what would be the "costs" of your solution in terms of compromises of rights, freedoms, and the Jewishness of the state?

4. Even the United States, with its separation of church and state and its rejection of established religion, has seen many bitter controversies over the years regarding the place of Christian religious symbols in the general culture and the rights of minority religious believers. Try to envision an Israeli Sabbath policy that balances majority culture with minority rights. Keep in mind that a majority of Israeli Jews do not recognize the authority of the *halakhah*…

5. If it were decided that the Sabbath, as a utopian vision, must be an important part of the culture of the Jewish state – but not through halakhic enforcement – how might that utopian vision be translated into some specific laws and institutions?

*The Welfare State (pp. 221-4)*

> *Perhaps Israel's development as a welfare state can be seen not as a conflict but as a confluence of visions. Programs and policies like those mentioned above can be viewed as small steps toward a socialist utopia; but at the same time they seem clearly to be tools for building national solidarity. And as such, they are rational actions by a normal state concerned for stability and economic development. (p. 224)*

12. How do you respond to that claim? Could it be that, indeed, the institutions of the welfare state – and the ideology of mutual responsibility that stands behind them – represent an important point of overlap among the various utopian visions?

13. On the other hand, sometimes the same institution can lend itself to conflicting understandings. For example, already in 1954 Israel introduced maternity leave paid by the National Insurance Institute. This can be seen as a progressive, feminist measure. But it can also be seen as a way to subsidize a higher birth rate for Jewish women (at that time it was rare for Palestinian women to work outside the home). So – is this measure a step on the way to a socialist utopia? Or is it a tool to achieve a nationalist utopia, by encouraging Jewish women to have more babies? Might there not be a conflict between the general welfare of society and the nationalist goal of growing the Jewish population? If you were "the commissioner of future generations" (a government position in Hungary, Singapore, Finland – and in the years 2001-2006, in Israel) what would be your position on maternity leave?

*Immigration (pp. 224-8)*

> *Morally and practically, there appears to be no perfect solution to the immigration crisis. Open borders are not practical; totally impassable borders are cruel. (p. 227)*

14. This section ends with a few open questions. Try to answer them:

> *The question is, should Israel be different from other Western states? The utopian conflict is acute: Should a Jewish national home, nation-state of the Jewish people, be closed to gentile immigration in order to preserve its character and resources? Or, in view of*

*Jewish historical experience, commitment to enlightenment, and the Torah's exhortations, should the Jewish state seek to maximize its role as a haven for refugees?*

15. Which utopian visions does the Law of Return (granting automatic citizenship to an immigrant with at least one Jewish grandparent) represent? And with which does it conflict?

16. Based on your answers to the above questions, suggest guidelines for an Israeli immigration policy.

*Living on the Land (pp. 228-33)*

*There appears to be a conflict between Lewinsky's and Syrkin's utopias: the fulfillment of a romantic agrarian dream is not necessarily consonant with the vision of a society in which rational planning governs the distribution of resources for the good of all. (p. 250)*

And indeed, even Syrkin himself perceives agricultural labor as "happier" than other types of work (p. 188):

*Qualitative differences between types of work will be compensated for quantitatively. For example, an hour and a half of factory work or two hours of menial labor will be accounted as equivalent to one hour of happy agricultural work.* (p. 188)

17. How do you respond to this idealization of agriculture and agrarian life? Do you hear its echoes in the American cultural wars of the 21st century? Do you share the feeling that life "on the land" is somehow healthier and/or more authentic than urban life? What is its attraction? Is there something to it – or is it just romantic nostalgia? Why were so many European and American Jewish immigrants to Israel so captivated by the idea of Jewish farmers (even if they, themselves, opted for urban life)?

18. One of the best known poems (also as a song) of Rachel, the poetess of the pioneers (Rachel Bluwstein, 1890-1931), "To My Land," begins thus:

*I have not sung to you, my land*
*And I have not glorified your name*
*In deeds of heroism,*
*And in the spoil of battles;*
*My hands have only planted a tree*
*On the quiet banks of the Jordan,*
*My feet have only conquered a path*
*Across the fields.*

Consider: what is the relationship between the nationalist and agrarian ideals?

19. The author states):

*And so Israel provides child subsidies and immigrant subsidies, and invests in efforts to attract and support Jewish immigration. As such, it seems that the vision of the national home—and the fear of demographic threats—conflict with the dream of a normal state or a socialist utopia, in which the force driving policymaking would be the maximum good of all citizens, including those of future generations as well. (p. 231)*

How would you suggest this conflict be managed or resolved? What policies should Israel pursue regarding facilitating or impeding population growth? And how should the factor of the larger good of the planet fit into Israeli considerations?

20. The author states:
*Yavetz, Lewinsky, Herzl, and Syrkin all imagined that in the Jewishutopia, a synthesis of Jewish tradition and modern rational governance would yield a society where the public interest was always served and class harmony would prevail. Jabotinsky, on the other hand, believed that the eternal struggle for power would result in an equilibrium of mutual deterrence, leading to a stable and healthy society. (p. 232-3)*

What do you think? What institutional structures should Israel put in place to ameliorate this conflict between private and public interests?

*Israel and the Diaspora (pp. 233-9)*

*The Israel-Diaspora asymmetry can be seen an as expression of a utopian conflict. Should the Jewish nation—in Israel and elsewhere—educate, plan, and build toward a Torah utopia in which all the Jews in the world live in the Land of Israel? Or, in the spirit of Herzl and Lewinsky, should the ideal be more of an equal and synergetic relationship among Jews living in a variety of communities worldwide? (p. 236)*

21. How do you see the proper relationship between Israel and the Diaspora – as parallel equal communities? as a sun with orbiting planets? Is the Diaspora destined to disappear? Is ingathering a valid pre-messianic goal?

22. Is there some kind of "higher moral ground" occupied by Jews who have chosen to immigrate to Israel compared to their Diaspora brothers and sisters? Should the state – and Jewish philanthropy – assist Diaspora Jews who choose to immigrate to Israel (through subsidies, tax breaks etc.)?

23. On what basis do Diaspora Jews have an obligation to support Israel – politically and/or philanthropically? How does that obligation compare to their obligation to support Jews in other Diaspora communities? And what obligation does the Israeli government have to support, educate, or rescue Diaspora Jews?

## Chapter 12: A Utopian Travel Blog

At the beginning of chapter 11 (pp. 203-4) the author gives a summary listing of utopian visions explored in the preceding chapters:

*• The Torah ideal (ca. 1000 bce): Future life in the land, according to Torah law (chapter 2)*
*• The prophets' vision (Isaiah, ca. 700 bce): Restoration of the ideal monarchy (chapter 10)*
*• The Promised Land (Genesis 15:18–21, ca. 1000 bce): Restored ideal borders (chapter 9)*
*• Apocalypse (Book of Daniel, ca. 200 bce): Not utopia, but expectation of the imminent, inevitable end of history (chapter 3)*
*• Anarchy (Zev Jabotinsky, 1925): A nonstate—some form of anarchy, theocracy, confederation (chapter 7)*
*• Community (Mark Zborowsky and Elizabeth Herzog, 1952): The medieval community as an ideal (chapter 5)*
*• A Torah state (Zev Yavetz, 1903): Modernized version of life in the land according to Torah law (chapter 4)*
*• A national home (Elchanan Lewinsky, 1892): Return to organic cultural roots (chapter 6)*
*• A normal state (Theodor Herzl, 1902): An enlightened, modern, cosmopolitan polity (chapter 8)*
*• A socialist society (Nachman Syrkin, 1898): A Jewish polity based on socialist economic principles (chapter 10)*

1. Which components of the utopia described in chapter 12 reflect each of these? Which of them are missing or suppressed? Which seem to be dominant?

2. If utopia is a way to express criticism of the status quo, what are the author's criticisms of Israel – and Jewish life – in the early twenty-first century? How do you respond to them?

3. What aspects of life are not sufficiently described in his account? What internal contradictions or dissonances can you find? What are the most "unrealistic" components?

4. Would you want to live in the author's utopia? Or at least to see it realized? What aspects of it would bother you? What changes would you propose?