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*There is a gap of understanding between Jews and Arabs which must be bridged if we are to have peace . . .*

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ON THE NIGHT AFTER CHRISTMAS, 1963, an extraordinary sound pierced the silence of the Arab village of Taibeh, northeast of Tel Aviv in Israel. From the home of one of the village's most respected dignitaries came the loud and lively strains of a Hebrew melody "David, King of Israel . . . is alive and existing . . ." If an Arab strolling by could scarcely believe his ears, it was no less astonishing to most of the 80 Arab and Jewish guests crowded within the home. From the moment the towering young Arab school teacher, son of the host, burst into the Hebrew song, and his Arab friends hesitantly joined in, there was a feeling of warmth and good will indescribably moving to all those present who knew only too well the hatred, wounds and bitterness in the hearts of Arabs and Jews in the Holy Land.

For Nina De-Nur, who was responsible for this unique meeting, that unexpected song meant less than her fervid hope it might also be an omen for the future. It was the future she had talked about in Hebrew and Arabic earlier in the evening when she told the old story of one little boy in Holland, who, by keeping his finger in the dike, had prevented a disastrous flood. Perhaps from a small beginning the development of understanding and friendship among Jews and Arabs in Israel could lead to peace in the Middle East and prevent a world conflagration. She stood there, a woman in her forties, buxom and flamboyant, her face flushed with excitement, introducing people of good will to each other, with formal little Middle Eastern flourishes. The Jews knew her as a third-generation

"sabrah," daughter of the prominent surgeon, Dr. Joseph G. Asherman, and the wife of one of Israel's most famous authors, a survivor of Auschwitz who retained his concentration camp number, Ka-tzetnik 135633, as his pen-name and his pledge to make the world never forget.

The Arabs watched Mrs. De-Nur with reserve, shy about their first social contact with Jews, ears and spirits warily tuned for the faintest false note. Their wives, in Western dress, some holding babies in their arms, sat beside them, but how many worlds apart, one couldn't know. The presence of the women had involved many discussions and was conditioned on a decision to bar all bachelors (with the exception of the young poet, Rashid Hussein, a favored friend of the host's family). Other Arabs who had known Mrs. De-Nur over the past year, listened with respect because they had come to value the conviction that underlies her words: "If I say I have a right to this country because of the dialogue between God and Abraham, then I must accept Ishmael as my brother."

Until a year before, Mrs. De-Nur had never known a Palestinian Arab; until a few years ago, Abdal Aziz Zuabi, 38-year-old deputy mayor of Nazareth, had not known any Jews well, but just as Auschwitz in a sense helped to assure the foundation of the State of Israel, so also Auschwitz had helped to burn a belief into these two Israelis of the need for friendship between their two peoples. Mrs. De-Nur's way is womanly, impulsive, non-political, personal and her dream: an Israeli "peace corps" for Arab villages and establishment of a John F. Kennedy peace center for the Middle East on the Israel-Jordan border in Jerusalem. Zuabi's way is more organized and political, any conflict he may feel between loyalty to the State of Israel and love of his own people has been restrained and submerged in a drive to break down the walls of suspicion and ignorance that stand between Arabs and Jews. To further this end, he toured the United States recently to raise funds for a new school which opened

# Arabs & Jews

**by Judy Stone**



last October, the Givat Haviva Center of Jewish-Arab and Afro-Asian Studies, in the Hadera area north of Tel Aviv, specifically aimed at this goal.

I do not know, nor would I pretend to guess what public opinion they represent in Israel, but through them, I caught a glimpse of the incredible complexity—social, religious, economic, political and psychological—of Arab-Jewish relations in Israel and their present and potential effect on the Middle East.

For centuries, Jews and Arabs had lived peacefully together, the fruits of their learning mutually rewarding during Islam's Golden Age. The seeds of the present conflict were sown by Great Britain during the first World War. In order to win their support, irreconcilable promises were made by the British to both the Jews and Arabs: for the Jews, a return to Palestine as the land from which they had been exiled; and for the Arabs, an appeal to their newly awakened nationalism. The almost total destruction of European Jewry in World War II and the urgency of finding a home for their remnants brought the Palestine issue to the fore at the United Nations, which on November 29, 1947, recommended division of Palestine into three parts: an Arab state, a Jewish state, and an international enclave of Jerusalem.

Supporting the UN's decision, the Jewish community made preparations to put it into effect, but the Arab states were determined to resist. For the next six months, until the end of the British Mandate and the proclamation of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, disturbances grew into open warfare between Arabs and Jews and soon 30,000 Arabs fled the country to other Arab lands, soon to be joined by thousands more. Before they left, Palestine's total Arab population had been 1,300,000. In the territory that was to become Israel, there were 514,000 Jews and 310,000 Arabs. By the time armistice agreements between Israel and Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria were signed in 1949, only 170,000 Arabs were left in Israel, including 30,000 who were refugees within the state. Approximately

three-quarters of a million were in refugee camps along the border, a figure which has since grown to nearly a million. Today, among approximately 2,000,000 Jews in Israel, there are a quarter of a million Arabs, including 40,000 refugees who have re-entered the state under a government plan for reunification of families.

FACED WITH THE DEMANDS of organizing a new state, providing housing and work for the European survivors of concentration camps, coping with the unexpected influx of thousands of Jews from North African countries, preserving the state against infiltration and attack by hostile Arab nations, the young country found it was no simple matter to put into effect her proclamation of independence which guaranteed equal rights for Arab citizens. This guarantee assured their religious and cultural freedom, their own schools, banned discrimination and the expropriation of Arab land except for public purposes and then only with full compensation.

There had been little time to plan a constructive way to solve the economic and cultural problems created by differences between a predominantly patriarchal Arab agricultural society and a Jewish commercial industrial society with a European background and a socialist orientation. Overnight Israel had to deal with security problems among a minority which largely opposed the existence of the State; to integrate into a Zionist nation a large group of its citizens opposed to Zionism, to determine the position of Arab citizens in the police forces and the military, to deal with the intense psychological problems of a defeated and leaderless people in a land where they had once been the majority.

Although Arabs today recognize the improvements in health, welfare and education that the state has brought to them, there is bitterness over the continuation of arbitrary military rule in many of their villages, the confiscation of Arab land without adequate compensation and the resentment that stems from the



breakdown of the old Arab society without the economic and social opportunity for young people to integrate into the new. The continuance of sporadic killings along the border and the refusal of the Arab states to recognize Israel helps to maintain the tensions among her people.

"Do not dwell on the past," say the Arabs and Jews who want to make a fresh start. But the past is not so easily forgotten.

The first time Nina De-Nur felt "Jewish in the painful sense" was when she served during World War II with a Palestinian unit attached to the British Army's auxiliary territorial service in Cairo. One afternoon she saw a film of Bergen Belson, showing the cadavers in the trenches of that concentration camp, the starved and helpless victims, and, as she walked out of the theatre, still quivering with shock, a British serviceman wisecracked that "the Jews are everywhere."

"I took an oath right then," she said, "to fight for the rest of my life against this oldest cancer in humanity. At first it was just to fight against anti-Semitism and then I widened it to include any hate for any group, any generalization. If you're going to try to find any sense at all in the yellow star the Nazis made the Jews sew on, any sense in the killing of six million Jews, it should be found in their legacy that says 'don't do unto others what you don't want them to do to you.' The whole story of Judaism to me means that."

Although she had never known Arabs in Palestine, she became acquainted with many in Egypt and once saved the men in a labor gang from the whip of a brutal British sergeant. "When I think of Egypt," she says, "I cannot think of them as my enemies."

Before leaving the Army, she was taken by a group of Egyptian officers on a trip to Karnak, a village on the Nile, famous for its ruins of ancient Thebes. During that moonlight boat ride, a professor from the Al Azhar University in Cairo, talked to them about the beginnings of civilization. When they landed at Karnak, he took Nina aside and said, "I am a member of the Arab League. After the war is over, you Jews will have an independent nation. It is a historical necessity. And a river of blood will flow between us, that too is historical necessity; but then peace will come because *that* too is historical necessity. I wish us both luck."

When she returned to Palestine in 1946, she was still trying to come to terms with the meaning of the European Holocaust but it remained an intellectual exercise until she discovered a book called *Salamandra* — Salamander, the mythical creature that no fire can destroy. It had been written by a wreck of a man, one of the first concentration camp survivors to arrive in Italy. When he reached a Jewish military unit, he weighed all of 81 pounds, but he refused food, drink or clothes. "Give me pen and paper and a place where I can write" was all he asked for and for two weeks he wrote, indifferent to food or drink, silent, withdrawn, driven to tell the story of Auschwitz and the

destruction that had reached out to every member of his family.

After finishing *Salamandra* in one sitting, Nina walked the streets of Tel Aviv in a daze, with the odd feeling that no Jews had been left alive on earth. She had a premonition that she and the author would meet; and they did, six months later. They were married soon afterward. Not until many years later, after the birth of their two children, did she learn that he had been a Polish poet before the war and that the tragic subjects of his later books *House of Dolls* and *Atrocity*, the story of a girl and boy the Nazis used for their sexual perversions, were his own brother and sister.

Whatever terrible lessons he learned in Auschwitz, they somehow had purged him of hate and convinced him that "hatred is barren." From him, Nina said, she "came to hate hatred, finally, emotionally, rationally and physically."

In 1962, Mrs. De-Nur was appointed administrative director of a government-sponsored project, and shortly thereafter, she met Souad Karaman, a poet and women's editor in charge of the Arabic women's corner on the radio. When she invited Nina to spend the night at her home "that started my travel through Arab land. I just listened, learned and absorbed."

When Mrs. De-Nur addressed the Arab women in their own language on the radio, it was a woman's approach: "A human being grows in our bodies the same way the world over, we women hear the first cry, we women are the first to bewail the premature, unnecessary death of a human being; we women feel with our womb and think with our hearts, perhaps we shall succeed where the men who say they think with their brains have failed."

LATER SHE WAS ASKED to speak in person in Nazareth. As she recalled their common forefather Abraham and the traditions in their country, she saw some women smile, some look suspicious and some "close their eyes tight against me." She realized for the first time that the Jew in Israel is always on test with the Arabs in the same way that the Arabs are always on test with the Jews.

When she had finished speaking, a gnarled and bent old Arab woman of 70 approached her and took her hand and said: "You have a good dream," but then she told Mrs. De-Nur of the reality. She had gone recently from her home in Nazareth to Haifa and forgot to take her military pass. A young Israeli soldier insisted she return to Nazareth in a police car. "Me, an old woman whose grandfather was born in Nazareth, I was so ashamed."

A short time later, Nina and her husband decided to open their home once a week as a meeting place for Jews and Arabs — "with all the implications that the house of Ka-Tzetnik has in Israel." She told the Arabs that she was not to be considered their host, that she would serve them, but that they must be the hosts and open the conversation.

During August, when the informal group adjourned for the summer, Mrs. De-Nur took the opportunity to study a number of Arab villages, going to them for two and three-day visits with ordinary villagers. At Teera, she was told, "We have been waiting for such a message for years, like parched soil praying for the first rain."

When the open house evenings resumed, a series of lectures were given on the Arab village and its changes since the formation of the State, the future of Arab youth and Arab women since the time of the Koran. Robert St. John, author of biographies on Nasser and Ben-Gurion, visited them and pointed out that they were talking too much and doing too little.

At the suggestion of some Arab leaders, including Zuabi, they decided to try to help ease the plight of Arabs who were swarming into the cities from their villages to work as construction laborers. Too far from their homes to return every night, they could find no rooms to rent in the cities.

In a letter to Abba Eban, Deputy Prime Minister, Mrs. De-Nur pointed to the "powder keg to be found behind the traffic lights of Petah Tikva Road, so wide and glossy in its fresh coat of asphalt, in that part of the Hahlat Yitzhak known as the Arab's Maabara" where allegedly some 12,000 Arab laborers live in tin shacks in the open fields amid thorns and rats – not because they prefer this mode of living but because they cannot find a Jewish landlord who is willing to rent them rooms for the good money they are prepared to spend.

When she began investigating the question of living quarters, the man in charge of the Arabic department in the Histadrut, Israel's labor organization, took her to the Hilton hotel, then under construction. As a result of their discussions, the contractor permitted the laborers to sleep there while the building was being constructed. One rainy night, Mrs. De-Nur and her friends took food to the laborers and inevitably the talk returned to the abuses of the military governments in the Arab villages. Later, some of the men called on her for personal assistance and a week following that, a group of 40 appeared at an open house to investigate this phenomenon of friendship.

Meanwhile, Mrs. De-Nur met with Father Paul Gauthier, former professor of theology in Lyon, France, who had come to Israel seven years previously to make three films and who had stayed on in Naza-

reth to help the homeless Arab villagers in the rubble-filled town wracked with postwar tension. He had encouraged the Arabs to accept the concept of a cooperative society, along the lines of the cooperatives in Israel. He established contact between the Ministry of Labor and the Arabs for a cooperative housing project to be financed three-fifths by the government and the Histadrut, and two-fifths by the Arab applicants. In that way, four such cooperatives had helped the Arabs of Nazareth to build homes and learn new crafts.

Père Gauthier at first told Mrs. De-Nur he thought his mission had been accomplished in Israel and that he was planning to move on to Jordan to help the refugees there. When he heard about the Tel Aviv problem, he decided to prolong his stay in Israel in order to help. As a result of their meeting, he wrote to Ebban: "...these problems...are of capital importance not only for the future of the people of our region but for humanity at large, since in this country we find ourselves at one of the crucial junctions where Occident meets Orient in a world Jewish, Christian and Moslem.... Before I leave, at the end of September for our Ecumenic Council where a group of Bishops will have convened by our request to solve the problems concerning the poor and the laborers of the world, I would be happy to meet you with Madam Nina.... That which we shall be able to undertake here under your patronage will not leave the Bishops indifferent, nor will the attitude of the Ecumenic Council regarding the problem of Israel remain the same."

Since that time, the government has announced plans to build hostels throughout the country for Arab laborers, perhaps in response to just such pressure.

In addition to a proposal for hostels, Mrs. De-Nur's letter to Ebban also outlined ideas for the establishment of a committee of jurists, clergymen of all faiths, sociologists, psychologists, Orientalists and educators to deal with sporadic flare-ups in Arab villages, a meeting for editors of all newspapers to initiate weekly columns dealing with Arab affairs, preferably edited by Arabs, and a drive to educate the Jewish community to cease treating and regarding their fellow Arabs as hostages.

She also proposed introduction of a course in Arab schools on Jewish history and culture and in Hebrew schools, courses on Arab traditions, culture and history, "adoption" of Arab villages by crews of volunteer experts including an agronomist, psychologist, engineer, educator and public health man, aimed at teaching and inspiring villagers to help themselves just as Israel is doing now in Asian and African countries. An annual Brotherhood Day was also included among the proposals.



And when a "Brotherhood" night took place in Taibeh, for the first time in an Arab home, on that night after Christmas, it was an occasion to give even skeptics hope. The host, who had been quite reserved and reluctant to offer his home for the occasion, warmed to the spirit of the evening, even dancing the Israeli "hora" with Nina and his wife. As the group departed, he said with tears in his eyes, "tonight I have finally come to really believe there may be peace. I've come back to faith tonight. With God's help, peace will be possible."

"God is important," replied Nina with a Western woman's prerogative of the last word, "but we must also work toward peace ourselves."

AND IT IS in the role of fighter for peace that Abdal Aziz Zuabi also sees himself.

"We have to demolish these walls of nonunderstanding and suspicion in order to bring both peoples to live together, to learn together and to learn how to live together. If this is done, the Arabs of Israel can become a real, living bridge between the Jews in Israel and the Arab peoples outside. This might be one of the keys to peace throughout the world, not only in the Middle East. I don't believe in this period of time that small wars are possible—especially after Cyprus and especially after the fears we have as Arabs and Jews in the Middle East from the nonconventional arms race helped by the major powers in this world that might threaten not only our safety but all the world's safety."

Zuabi, editor of the left-wing Mapam weekly *Al Mirsad* and editorial board member on *New Outlook*, an English language monthly devoted to Arab-Jewish understanding, is a member of one of the largest and oldest Moslem families in Nazareth and has served in the elective post of deputy mayor for the last five years. Many members of his family played a prominent role in the Arab community during the Turkish and British administrations, as they do today in Israel. His cousin, a member of the dominant Mapai party, is Nazareth's mayor. And he is proud of his family's liberal tradition, including the fact that his sister was the first Moslem girl in Nazareth to stop wearing a veil.

Before the war years, he had made one Jewish friend, a girl student he met on the bus. They started discussing the question of whether Shakespeare's Shylock was an anti-Semitic portrait "and we found a common language through Shakespeare." But during the war, an Arab who had Jewish friends was considered a traitor and Zuabi gave very little thought to the subject of Jews. In 1944, he read his first pamphlet—on Auschwitz, and it changed his life.

"I started to think about the problems of people who lived with you. That pamphlet created in me a feeling of the human approach to the Arab-Jewish question and not only the emotional Arab approach. Well, I was a kid and I couldn't do anything about it, but I talked with some friends. They were astonished

at first, but some felt maybe it *was* our destiny to live with each other on an equal basis."

The United Nations partition plan was the only solution for the problem of Palestine, he felt, but when the war of independence erupted, Zuabi felt torn.

"I went through hell during that time," he said. "I felt that it was an aggressive war on the part of the Arab leaders against the independence of Israel as a state. I was against that war, but I didn't want the Arabs to lose and I didn't want the Jews to lose their rights that I believed in. But although many Arabs left, no one in my immediate family did. We believed at the time, and we were right, that the more Arabs who stayed, the more the Jews would respect our rights."

"The problem," Zuabi said, "is to bring Zionism and the Arab national liberation movements on one front to work together without conflicts, to be loyal to their own needs on one hand and to recognize the needs and rights of other people on the other hand. If the progressive face of Zionism should conflict with the progressive part of the Arab liberation movement, it would be for me a bad problem, but I don't believe there is a conflict. Tens of thousands of Arab students outside their own countries might be in contact with us if only we knew how to appeal to them. So far I have only met a few through international meetings and they have found me a loyal Israeli Arab."

To provide an opportunity for young Arabs and Jews to live together—without which no real understanding can ever be developed—was considered of major importance to the founders of the Givat Haviva school. Enrolled in the first class were 26 Arabs, selected from 70 who took the examinations, including three girls—for whom the experience of living under the same roof with even unmarried Moslems was unprecedented—and 20 Jews, mainly *kibbutz* members. All the youths will get scholarships to enable them to complete the two-year courses. So eager were they to get started that classes began even before the two classroom buildings, constructed through a \$50,000 gift from a friendly British Jew, were completed in March.

Within a few short months of their association, both Jewish and Arab students learned a great deal they had not known before. When they first came to the school, some students believed that the best way to fight for Arab rights was through an Arab front, but when they found Jewish classmates no less concerned about the Arab question, they were ashamed and changed their views. Before last year's vote took place in the Knesset on the subject of eliminating the military rule over Arab villages (it failed to pass by a vote of 58 to 57, ironically with two Arab Mapai members swinging the vote against it) some Jewish students went to Jewish towns to paint the streets with the Hebrew words: "Abolish military rule." Several boys were hauled in by the police and when they returned to school, boasted of being arrested on the Arab question. Increasingly, Jewish students invite their Arab friends to their home for the weekend and the invitations are reciprocated.

Since there are now only 140 Arabs among the 14,000 students in Israeli universities, and the cream of the Arab leaders, intellectuals, professionals and writers were among the first to flee the country, the new pilot college conceived of as a teachers' training school, has great importance. Most Arabs cannot attend Hebrew colleges and universities for financial and social reasons. The language itself is not a problem for the Arabs since all young Arabs must study Hebrew and English in school. However, Arabic is only mandatory in the schools located in the 73 *kibbutzim* run by Mapam, the left-wing socialists, which represent only one-third of the *kibbutzim* in Israel.

The aim of the Jewish students at Givat Haviva will be to prepare themselves as teachers of Arabic in order to promote understanding of the Arabs among the Jews. For Arab students, intending to work as teachers or community social service or cultural workers, studying at the Center may be the only opportunity for many to find meaningful occupations without full academic training. The course is designed to answer a generally felt need: in Jewish settlements, for furthering the teaching of Arabic and in Arab villages, for community workers with a higher degree of understanding and efficiency. Eventually, the school hopes to become an accredited college.

But no matter how great the need of the school, its founders are not prepared to appeal to everybody. "We don't want German money," Zuabi has told me. "I have a contact with a German millionaire, but I won't go to Germany."

He recalls how he felt when he saw Auschwitz in Poland in 1962, years after he had read the pamphlet that changed his life. "I did not feel I was an Arab. I did not feel I belonged to a race or a faith or a religion. I felt human. I was naked like those who suffered there."

For the horror of the war years to have been followed by more bloodshed was terrible enough, but the omnipresent threat of still more warfare has to be eliminated.

"Ten miserable years of bloodshed, misunderstanding, suspicion and lack of objective knowledge about each other among Jews and Arabs have caused a deep wound in the body of Israel which should be cured deeply and not by a plaster," he said.

"We have to remove discrimination against the Arabs and we *will* remove it with the help of the majority of Jewish public opinion which stands beside us."

Zuabi believes that Nasser today acts as the controller of other Arab adventurers in Syria, Iraq and Egypt who want to wage war now against Israel. "He

is the brakes to them *now* and I stress *now*. I don't know about the future. He proved that at the Cairo summit conference on the Israeli water plan when other Arab leaders proposed war and he objected to it *now*?"

"This gives me a feeling of relief and anxiety at the same time," Zuabi said. "Anxiety comes from the uniting of the Arab forces and in this case, Israel should do its best to protect its borders. And the relief should be translated into a kind of informal armistice for a period which we can't fix — it may be months and it may be years — during which we Israelis should institute a more practical, peaceful approach to the Palestinian problem."

The key, as Zuabi sees it, would be for Israel to announce her willingness to repatriate a certain number of the refugees, agreed upon by both parties, to the State of Israel, within the terms of a peace treaty (which after all these years, is still unsigned). Such an announcement from Israel could be a first step toward negotiations, and Israel could start by permitting wider implementation of the refugee reunion plan that already exists.

The new government of Premier Levi Eshkol has already made some concessions on the military rule issue by eliminating passes for all Arabs except known security risks. The government has promised to provide a better budget and a five-year plan for development of Arab villages and to stop the discriminatory land policy under which 100,000 acres of Arab land were confiscated for "security" reasons.

As an Arab Israeli, Zuabi does not stop at listing Arab grievances in Israel. He points to the achievements made in health services which have eliminated tuberculosis and reduced infant mortality from 12 per 1000 to 6 per 1000 during fifteen years; in education services, where one can find a school in every Arab village; the national insurance law which applies to Jews and Arabs equally and some development of electricity and water in some Arab villages and a higher standard of living now than ten or twenty years ago.

"And still," Zuabi concludes, "there is a gap of understanding between Jews and Arabs which must be bridged if we are to have peace."

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# PARIS LEARY:

## *Homage to Louis MacNeice*

*For all the religions are alien  
That allege that life is a fiction,  
And when we agree in the denial  
The cock crows in the morning.*

MacNeice

CHILDREN of the 'thirties, never soldiers,  
veterans only of the cold and of casual  
police actions in indifferent jungles,  
we are too young to seize the Republic  
with scars and careers of years in wisdom;  
yet too old for insouciant laughter.

MacNeice is dead, whom I truly mourn  
with no affectation nor exploit  
(like the instant eulogist grown fat on griefs)  
as excuse for a poem praising me.  
This is the time of the death of poets,  
Frost and Cummings, Plath and Roethke — now  
MacNeice, whom the books have always called  
a 'younger poet.' And such he always will be.  
But his friend is an elderly American  
and all the young who walked, our infant decade,  
down Magpie Lane or dawdled in the Broad  
writing social verse or vowing 'not  
to fight for King and Country,' all are silent,  
silent — old or dead: dead in the dust  
of Spitfires, dead of cancer, dead of tumours  
or rumours of heart; or live on, tired  
Senior Common Room Commie bards.  
We honour them in their irrelevance.