

AN OPEN LETTER OF DISTRESS TO MENACHEM BEGIN

This is an open letter for this is not a personal matter nor is it trifling. And it is a letter of distress written in pain.

I hope that not only the echoes of political opposition and anxiety over security reach you (that's the purpose of the news media), but also the recurring waves of deep-seated amazement, bitter disappointment, deceived admiration and the inner crisis of trust. Though many of those close to you, veterans of the national movement, who are unable to rationalize your steps yet commit themselves to silence saying: 'I trust him' --- even so, can't you perceive the trembling in their voices? These vibrations are not carried over the media but a leader such as you records them in your heart. Moreover, deep down, I'm sure you are pleased that there exists such an opposition which conforms to your own doubts and pangs of conscience. Without this opposition surely we would all despair.

Sadat has many Arab states to slow him down on his path to peace (let us suppose his intentions are serious). But where are your brakes? Isn't it clear that there will be friendly pressure to give in further? What was the wisdom of a unanimous government decision; wouldn't it have been better to come to the negotiations with but a bare majority? You should be satisfied with this moment of opposition that we hope will turn into a momentum of salvation to save us all.

Look at it another way. Who's all excited by your moves? --- all whom you loathed, that was even repugnant to you. Isn't this astounding? Aren't you wary of the trumpet blasts from that direction? If they praise you, this then calls for a reappraisal on your part. And when you called the roll of the world's statesmen who agree with your plan I felt uneasy. Uneasy not because of what they have said but what they will be saying, soon, about your obstinacy.

The whispering about the influence of certain medications, though foolish, is a positive sign of good Jews searching even for explanations such as these, for otherwise they can't grasp what is going on. It is a compliment for many good people though shattered still look for such justifications of behavior. It indicates the credit you have with them. For while the news media people pinch themselves to prove it isn't a dream that they're standing but 27 centimetres from Sadat or are strolling through Cairo, there are a good few Jews, dear to you for you are dear to them, who wish they could wake up from a dream, a bad dream.

I would never come to you basing myself on ideological claims which you never adopted - not in the name of Malchut Yisrael from the Euphrates to the Nile as promised to Abraham; not in the name of various solutions to the Arab minority which you do not accept. But I am justified in coming to you in the name of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, in principle and from the point of tactics. And even tact.

Would Jabotinsky have travelled to Ismailia? What?! Perhaps to Cairo and thus paralleling Jerusalem or to a neutral location like Cyprus. But to a place without any trace of the state nature of the visit? I can't see Jabotinsky making an official visit without an Israeli flag flying. This is an insult beyond the necessities of diplomacy. I was filled with shame while listening to the broadcast of your reception. The fellow doesn't go to the airport nor to the helicopter pad or to the car but waits sitting in his chair, restful and expectant...is this the way he was received? There was no Israeli flag in the city or at the hotel, no name at all. But there was all the praise and adulation to the great victor, the crosser of the canal. There is no doubt that Ismailia and the island in the canal were chosen invidiously, as if to provoke: this is the site of their 'victory'. And the truth is we beat them. While we should be dictating terms, it is they who overlord. It's not coincidental but all is carefully thought out. He is the master.

All this really isn't necessary unless...

Unless you accept his fundamental thesis that the very act of speaking with us is a tremendous sacrifice, that it is a high honor he bestows upon us. Though many went wild over this 'recognition', I trust that you, a proud Jew and Israeli, a disciple of the teacher of Hadar, were not filled with joy that Egypt's President is talking with you. I don't hold you responsible for all the lack of dignity that was,

all that grovelling. Is there any organization left which didn't propose an exchange visit? But it was all one-sided as our requests have been answered: 'not yet'. Their's is a logical, dignified and reserved reply. Only we are the thoughtless ones. Couldn't you have provided guidelines for self-respect, patience and the reining in of this untimely exultation? One incident is especially surprising - the visit of our delegation to Sadat's birthplace. What was the purpose? Was this a pilgrimage to a holy shrine? Where was your disapproval, if only for the sake of educational values?

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Up until now, this letter has been bits and pieces, minor issues but all indicative of the diplomatic landslide that your plan appears to be. Rebbe Meir'l of Peremyshlany once said: "In Heaven, I won't be punished for not being our father Abraham but I will be punished for not being Meir'l". You, Menachem Begin, do not deserved to be chastised for not having attained the borders of Malchut Yisrael nor those of King David or even those of Ze'ev Jabotinsky. But why aren't you Menachem Begin? This is the question of the distressed and hurt ones.

It wasn't only Jabotinsky who taught the ABC of "he who claims 'it's all mine' and he who claims 'half is mine', the latter has conceded from the outset". For though you answered well the legal question of the liberated territories when Sadat demanded a complete withdrawal to the 1967 lines, why did you then announce that everything is negotiable, Jerusalem too? Tactically, you lost. No one doubts you'll have to add to the price of peace. Not only Sadat but your friends will demand further yielding.

This was the truth you yourself taught the Alignment daily, week in and week out. This was your basic stand against compromise. O how did you fail here? What will you give - and give you must - over and beyond that which has already been given.

And now to essentials.

The goal is peace. Yet, other pragmatic men have their doubts over the peace offered by someone who was ready to sacrifice one million Egyptian soldiers and now pities the life of one single child. Still others are skeptical over the continuance of his own regime. There are enough doubts so that the full price of Sinai should not have to be paid. But you 'return' all of Sinai. Even if it really does belong to Egypt, and many are critical of Egypt's claim to sovereignty of the area, shouldn't we at least share in the administration of the area? And what of the oil? We'll be the laughing-stock to give up the new wells whose oil could be exported to aid our economy. We strengthen the enemy who will strangle us as Iran now hints. Even the Alignment spoke of dividing Sinai and maintaining a territorial continuum to Sharm E-Sheikh.

We know how far you've gone: settlements already established will be given over to Egyptian control --- an unprecedented act in Zionist history à La Mapai. There is but one term for this: liquidation. The cries of the settlers of Dphira, Yamit and the Golan (the next in line) are justified: "for this we came to Israel, to become citizens of another country?". Such a tragicomedy could not have been conceived by the most pessimistic mind. How could you have thought of such a thing?

This wasn't the sole damage to Zionism in your plan. Let us suppose that the listing of Israel as the conquerors of Judea and Samaria (along with Turkey, Britian and Jordan) was an unfortunate slip of the tongue. But the talk of bilateral settlement is a revolutionary step in Zionism. No! it is counter-revolutionary! Beside the commandment not to sell lands of Eretz Yisrael to the gentiles, Zionism was always unilateral, no matter how discomfoting this sounds to liberal ears. Zionism was discriminative in favor of Jews for otherwise there would be the end of Zionism. If previously there was no Arab 'aliyah', the future potential return of the refugees is horrifying. With their petrodollars they could buy even the Shalom Tower in Tel Aviv. But more than the practical danger, what is involved here is the nullification of the basis of Zionism.

You were premature as regards the PLO. They aren't dead but very much alive. They live in Sadat's heart and in the heart of the Palestinians even if you label them 'Arabs of Eretz Yisrael'. They live even if they may halt their terror. They'll become a political movement akin to our own 'practical Zionism' as soon as they accept your plan for home rule. Now that we've arrived at the high stakes, let us deal with them before it is we who suffer at the stake.

Did you not contemplate, together with your advisors, the concepts of the Saar, Sudetenland (demilitarization!) or the Danzig Corridor? You declare, of course, that the autonomous region won't turn into a Palestinian state. But that is the only development that can result from the situation! It is unavoidable unless you decide on a military invasion which will then be termed 'aggression' and 'intervention' by our friends. The internal police will be like our Mt. Scopus police... and the elected delegates will either be supporters of Arafat or Habash. Even a federation with Jordan won't help. Didn't you hear of the success of the Rejection Front sympathizers in the Hebrew University elections?

Moreover, you'll be forced into a compromise over Jerusalem. They will receive something they never managed to obtain under the Turks, British, Jordanians and even themselves. They will merit a status which only the Mufti, Haj Amin, dreamt of: an Islamic Vatican. Saudia Arabia and Morrocco (why not Pakistan and Yemen) now have a standing in the city. You invented it. This is the internationalization of Jerusalem based on the so-called shared religious character of the 'city of peace'. Wasn't it enough that the Jewish character of the city was not bolstered during your term; that you prevented Chief Rabbi Goren from publishing his book which permits entrance to the Temple Mount; that you allowed Sadat to pray there without mentioning the Jewish character of the site thereby defaulting to Sadat Islam's sole ownership of the area? Nor is this the end of his demands to East Jerusalem but what can you do? The truth is that you are being pressed to yield more. Must you continue to talk on high about the achievement of peace, of success, of...faithfulness to principles?

I'll remind you of a conversation we had on the morrow of the Six Days War when we ascended the Temple Mount. I said: "Do you remember how they forced Jabotinsky to sign the 1922 White Paper?" You replied: "I recall. Rosh Betar regretted it all his life."

But now it's different. They're not forcing you to sign. It is you who wish to affix the signature of the Government of Israel to an undisguised new White Paper. Self-rule for the Arabs of Eretz Yisrael means the repartition of Western Palestine. If this isn't clear to you then something has happened to your faculties of political judgement, once one of the best. It wouldn't be difficult to compose the slashing speech you would have made had the Alignment proposed such a plan. Historically speaking, wouldn't it have been better for the Alignment to have brought forward such a scheme for you mightily to oppose? Was it for this that you were elected? You forced out the British, you forced out Mapai and now you're forcing Zionism, the Jewish people and the settlers out from Judea, Samaria and Sinai.

Levi Eshkol, albeit under duress, set up an expanded state, one that is geopolitically significant. Menachem Begin takes it apart, trims it down to its former unhistorical, unjustified size. True, Lenin yielded up vast territories at Bret-Litvosk but he still had vast tracts. On which 'hinterlands' will we fall back? Both banks of the Kishon and Yarkon? What regime will we have --- a Levantinized Las Vegas with belly-dancing? All this without the historical dimension; no Temple Mount, no oil, no vision. All this for 'peace'?

Why are you doing this? "What happened?", many ask. Many veterans and faithful followers of the national movement, not like your current political partners, have a bitter taste in their mouths and in their hearts. Could anyone have envisioned Begin after the elections implementing the Allon Plan? But oh! this is worse!

Or perhaps you err, made a catastrophic mistake. Or...or shall we say that the entire stream of political Zionism was all wrong. There's no importance to be attached to principles, to declarations. They accomplished much in the practical field and we opposed them. We believed we owned lands which we didn't yet possess and were considered mad. And now? Now we are doing something we never dreamt of: yielding up what we