

**Flowers of Galilee:
The Collected Essays of Israel Shamir**

Israel Shamir

Tempe, Arizona: Dandelion Books, 2004. 304 pages.

Flowers of Galilee breaks new ground in modern political discourse. This book recommends a democratic one-state solution in all of historical Palestine and the return of the Palestinians to rebuild their villages. The beautiful front cover painting by Suleiman Mansour of Jerusalem lovingly depicts a Palestinian family, children seated on a donkey, walking past a hill covered with olive trees. Similarly, Israel Shamir's essays portray the peaceful, pastoral landscape of the Holy Land and the humanity of its inhabitants, juxtaposed against the ugliness and inhumanity of Jewish racism.

These thought-provoking essays, written in Jaffa during the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2001-02, call for Jews to leave their sense of exclusivity and plead for human equality. The author, a Russian immigrant to Israel in 1969, followed his meditations to their inevitable conclusion, renounced Judaism, and was baptized in the Palestinian Orthodox Christian Church of Jerusalem. A brilliant storyteller with a vast knowledge of history, he discusses current events and their global implications with brutal honesty and tenderness. His clear insights and lyrical use of language to illustrate social, religious, and political complexities make him the Khalil Gibran of our time.

An important chapter, "The Last Action Heroes," memorializes the Spring 2002 siege of Bethlehem. The Israeli army surrounded 40 monks and priests and 200 Palestinians seeking refuge in the Church of Nativity. For a month, "people starved ... Stench of corpses and of infected wounds filled the old church" (p. 63). The UN did nothing, but a few International Solidarity Movement activists from America and Europe, including the author's son, broke the siege. One group distracted the soldiers while the others rushed into the church's gates, brought food and water, and helped negotiate a surrender.

Shamir deconstructs the legal fictions of the state of Israel and the elusive Palestinian state: "Israelis who would like to live in peace with their Palestinian neighbors ... cannot counteract the raw muscle of the American Jewish leadership" (p.179). He further dissects the Jewish Holocaust cult and other Zionist public relations tactics. He exposes the two-state solution as a political bluff, calls on the world to cut off aid to Israel, and admonishes the Muslim world for indulging in usury.

Shamir strives to free Gentiles from both their fear and adoration of Jews. He searches into the material successes of world Jewry, the Jewish rejection of Jesus, and the global applications of Jewish ideology, resulting in the mass immigrations of refugees into Europe from war zones and the destruction of local cultures. The Left and the Right, he believes, are like the two legs of a human being: They must work together to counteract the uprooting and homogenizing forces of the global elite, whom he calls Mammonites.

The author debunks the myth of Islamic terror, pointing to the anti-Gentile polemic embedded in Jewish discourse. He demystifies the threat of “anti-Semitism” as a control mechanism to keep good Jews from confronting those Jewish leaders responsible for promoting war and policies of economic inequality. He points out that the political position of a “moderate” Jew is alarmingly similar to Nazism. Shamir explains “Jewishness” as a destructive concept of “separateness and privilege” based on the “two-tier approach of ingroup–outgroup” (p. 263). He sees Jewish chauvinism as threatening not only Palestinians but the entire world, because of the Jewish control over public opinion and policy. His philosophical analysis of Judeo-American power is illuminating.

Shamir pays tribute to former US Representative Cynthia McKinney, who stands out as a politician who refused to be disloyal to America. Her defeat by Jews who organized Republican voters to vote Democratic in order to unseat her sounded the death knell of American democracy. Jews used black Americans to open the doors to the elite positions formerly held only by white Christians. Once the Jews were in, the author explains, they closed the doors to blacks. Jewish equal rights activists were steered into Zionism and became enemies to those blacks who rejected Jewish supremacy.

The book concludes with the author’s personal peace treaty with the Arabs: “As for me, Syrian children may come and swim in the Sea of Galilee, and children of Palestine are welcome to the amusement parks of Tel Aviv. ... The refugees of Gaza may come back to the fields they owned before 1948, and deal directly with the few old Polish Jews who ‘privatized’ the lands. Keep me out of it.” He tells Sharon: “General, if you want war, please wage it personally” (p. 296).

The author presents a compelling argument to the native Palestinians to accept him as their brother and let him live in their beautiful land as a neighbor, with their permission and blessing. Every chapter maintains an inspiring certainty of humanity’s victory over evil. I would have liked to learn more about his own personal transformation from someone who

watched his Israeli army buddies shoot unarmed prisoners to someone that courageously withstands vilification to champion human rights for all.

Flowers of Galilee is a romantic discourse on Palestine that lacks native Palestinian voices; however, it provides sincere and wise counsel. The author recommends neutralizing the invader through assimilation. He dreams of a world in which the descendants of Jews and Palestinians will be able to live as equals, intermarry, and create a new race of people. Shamir's proposal is consistent with Islamic tradition and is the only viable option for a lasting peace in the Middle East.

Karin M. Friedemann, Editor
World View News Service

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