



**THE HEBREW REPUBLIC:  
HOW SECULAR DEMOCRACY  
AND GLOBAL ENTERPRISE WILL  
BRING ISRAEL PEACE AT LAST**

**Bernard Avishai**

Harcourt, 2008. 304 pp. \$26.00

ISBN: 978-0151014521

Avishai, among his other credentials, is consulting editor at the *Harvard Business Review*, and has written for the *New Yorker*, and the *New York Review of Books*. A political economist, Avishai moved to Israel after volunteering during the 1967 War, and now resides both in Jerusalem and in Wilnot, New Hampshire. In this controversial book, written from the perspective of the political left, Avishai argues that if Israel is to remain a democracy, it must accord Israeli Arabs full rights as citizens, and at the same time loosen the grip of the Orthodox on the social and religious life of the Jewish state. Avishai deplors the fact that Israeli Arabs are second class citizens, and cites data that show that about half of non-Jewish Israelis age fifteen and over do not have a high school education as compared with one fifth of Jews. But is not the treatment of the Arabs in Israel precautionary, a result of their being a threat to the nation's security? Potential supporters of the Palestinians? Avishai rebuts this argument and presents some fifteen reports from the Shin Bet that inform us that Israeli Arabs are not a threat to Israel but that "ignoring and under-investing in Israeli Arabs is creating a security threat." All of these reports, Avishai notes, have been ignored. It gets worse. Elsewhere, Avishai reveals that in a 2007 poll, 60 percent of Israeli Arabs say

they fear a mass expulsion, and more than 68 percent of Israeli Jews fear a civil uprising by Israel's Arabs. In an interview with an Israeli Arab leader, Avishai is told that "if the government would give us two meters for development, we'd all be volunteering for the army," and "every time there is a suicide bombing I think two things: Thank God my daughter is not among the victims, and I hope there is an Israeli Arab among the victims, so they won't blame my daughter."

Avishai blames this situation on the Jewish nature of the Jewish state, where Jews have exclusive privileges, and non-Jews, such as its Arab population, are reduced to second class citizens. In an age of globalization, whereby Israel plays a major role in the world's economy, it cannot afford to antagonize its economic partners by building settlements in the West Bank, and continuing to mistreat its non-Jewish citizens. His solution would entail the end of special rights for Jews as individuals, and for the disestablishment of the Orthodox rabbinate. He would also put an end to the Law of Return, which contributes to the basic inequity of the system. In its place, Avishai calls for a Hebrew Republic which would privilege

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Jewish national culture by maintaining Hebrew as its official language, focusing on Jewish history in the national school system, and commemorating Jewish holidays as national holidays, among his many other suggestions. His model for this is his native Quebec which was the product of a "Quiet Revolution" wherein a French majority in Quebec, but living on a largely English-speaking continent, celebrated its French culture, fostered its own educational system, and celebrated its religious and secular holidays, while the rest of Canada celebrated its ties to the English crown. Why, asks Avishai, would Israelis today not emulate

such a direction, thus creating a true Federal and democratic society, while at the same time, taking action to preserve their own national culture?

There is a lot more for the reader to think about in this contentious book, including the author's criticism of the role of the Orthodox Jewish establishment in Israel, and the politics of the Settler movement. This is a provocative book with ideas worth considering. JF



**ISRAEL AT SIXTY: AN ORAL HISTORY  
OF A NATION REBORN**

**Deborah Hart Strober and Gerald S. Strober**

John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008. 286 pp. \$35.99

ISBN: 978-0-470-05314-0

*Israel at Sixty: An Oral History of a Nation Reborn* surveys Israeli history as seen by thirty-two interviewees, many of whom have been personally involved in Israeli policy decisions, giving them an intimate knowledge of Israel. The interviewees represent a broad cross-section of Israeli society and include former cabinet aides, Knesset members, university professors, journalists, and Mossad officials. Some Americans were included as well, such as Anti-Defamation League and Christian Evangelical leaders.

The authors explore the everyday life as well as the political landscape of Palestinian Jewish existence in the pre-State era. Some of the interviews highlight historical truths that have sometimes become obscured. In an interview with a former Knesset member, Joseph Matza, we are reminded that, "There are people who will say to me, 'Look Mr. Matza, if not for the Holocaust you couldn't have established the State of Israel.' This is a wrong idea