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END OF THE IDEOLOGY

An Interview with Shmuel Katz

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This past political week provided striking background for an interview with Shmuel Katz, member of the first Knesset for the Herut party, ideologist of the movement, writer, publicist and the author of the biography of Ze'ev Jabotinsky.

From the television in his room at "Beit HaHorim" of WIZO in North Tel Aviv, the voice of Arik Sharon speaks from the platform of the Knesset on the day of the vote of the disengagement plan. He rests against the back of his chair, slowly wipes the lenses of his spectacles and states with a voice shaking with emotion:

"An era is over. Today, the Likud has come to the end of its road. The end of the era of those who continue the path of Jabotinsky. Somebody should climb the stairs in 'Metzudat Ze'ev' [Likud headquarters] and remove the picture of the Founding Father. To remove it as well from all the offices of the ministers and the office of the prime minister. Until the day that somebody worthy to be called the heir and follower of his way. From now on, there is no tie whatsoever between Ze'ev Jabotinsky and what Arik made from the Likud."

Next month, he will be 90 years old. Health, he says, is reasonably good for his age. "Physical pains don't bother me now. I suffer from the end of the road for Jabotinsky's doctrines. They must now split. They must. Only Uzi Landau, and a small group of members, continue the way of Jabo. They must, after all, save Jabotinsky's way, as everything falls into dust."

Hadar: *They say this evening that we're in a historical hour.*

Katz: Something historical is taking place just before our eyes and everything that the opponents to this disengagement prophesy will take place to my regret. My heart is with the settlers, the heroes of this period, the settlers of this land, the mountains, the desert, the Gaza strip. They should remain strong.

The Arabs, also the Americans and the Europeans, rub their hands with great enjoyment and pleasure when Sharon presents them on a golden platter the first portion from their point of view. But I am mourning and with downcast head on this evening if this would be carried out, and it seems that it will be carried out. The pressure will start to come like a jackhammer. They will press us for retreat in Judea and Samaria as part of a natural progression. The doctrine of stages of the PLO is alive and kicking. In Gaza itself, the war will continue. They will compel us to defend the Negev and Ashkelon and Ashdod. But I'm an optimistic Jew; it's clear to me that something still will cause this to go to blazes.

Hadar: *Doesn't Sharon understand that this is reality?*

Katz: I remember in the days of Weizmann they asked me about his weakness before the Arabs and the British, "Doesn't he read the reality of the first partition in 1937 correctly?" Sharon understands well enough what the reality is and here is the Labor party and part of the Likud which still argues, in their Chutzpah, that he is the heir of Jabotinsky. With upraised heads and with chillul HaShem, they are working together.

Hadar: *The prime minister, who is being photographed under the picture of Jabotinsky, he is no longer his heir?*

Katz: My young man, it is simply the desecration of the name, "chillul HaShem". It is spitting into the face of Jabotinsky and I really pray that a number of proud Jews will enter into the Metzudah and remove his photographs. After all, these people are castrating its path. What is the connection now between the Likud and Jabotinsky? What's the connection? All is dust. Sharon wants to be considered the one who continues the path of Jabotinsky. He deceives people around him that Jabotinsky would not have acted differently because of these pressures. The feeble connection that remains between the Likud and Jabotinsky's doctrine weakens progressively. The only thing left is the iron wall, the article that he wrote in 1923 foreseeing the future.

I do not know what happened to Tzpi Livni. After all, her father, my friend and comrade in the command of Etzel, Eitan Livni, is certainly turning in his grave. Bless Uzi Landau. He, and his brave comrades, have to break away and establish a true Jabotinsky movement, to save the Land from these terrible, threatening ideas.

We need to start everything anew. To prepare the hearts, to renew and be renewed in the doctrine of the head of Betar, to open the youth clubs, to reach the universities, to build a healthy, continuing generation for Jabotinsky.

The split, of course, is painful. It will hurt for a number of years. But it is compelled by reality unless Sharon will give up. I do not find anything wrong in the split in Likud. After all, the movement went off track some years ago. Landau, of course, does indeed lack the charisma which is needed in order to call himself a national leader but he is fortifying himself as an ideologue. Sharon succeeded to tear apart the backbone of the party.

I hope that somebody will still one of these days raise the flag of Jabotinsky. Somebody will definitely rise I believe. After all, something that is worse than already happened will not happen again.

Hadar: *And what about Moshe Feiglin?*

Katz: Until he will acquire enough influence, we will still have to wait many years, like we waited 29 years before the rise of Menachem Begin – not that I want to make any comparison between them.

Hadar: *Do you believe that Sharon wants to get out of Gaza to retain Judea and Samaria?*

Katz: I know that tremendous pressure will be exerted on us, particularly by the Americans. If Bush will be elected again a second time, he will not take pity on us. No, and no. He and the Europeans will press until we shriek and insist on the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Hadar: *You never reconciled yourself with the possibility that it would be established?*

Katz: And I will never reconcile myself to it. It's clear to me from my knowledge of the Arabs still from the '20s and the '30s that they will not be capable in the coming years of starting a state of their own. If I was in their place, I would now have helped Sharon in the abundance of his historical errors which he is about to make.

Hadar: *Those that are near to Sharon are trying to spread the message that those who physically oppose the disengagement will be arrested. Do you think they will establish mass arrest camps?*

Katz: If masses of opponents will be arrested, there certainly will be also camps in which they would be kept. But I don't believe we will reach the point of civil war. I only hope that there won't be mass arrests. If something like that would occur in reality, it will already be a reality of "tohu v'bohu" – chaos.

Hadar: *You know already for years the way in which Sharon thinks and his behavior. Do you feel that he betrayed you?*

Katz: The poor Arik did not betray me, or you, but himself. He bought with both hands the peace doctrine of Mitna. When I had in 1977 the big debate with Begin after Camp David, there stood with me 200 members of the Merkaz that wished to halt Begin from making peace with the Egyptians – this cold peace. Many of them abstained and the rest were afraid to vote with me. Begin announced that if I win in this debate he will immediately resign. And that worked very effectively on the members in the small Merkaz of those days.

Arik, who in those days was minister of agriculture, grabbed me by my sleeve before I went on the platform and whispered, "Mr. Katz, the main thing is that you should defend the settlements. Remember this." What Sharon does these days is complete nonsense. One cannot assign to this a rational reason besides Sharon's deep belief that he has an iron agreement with the Americans. And I am happy to announce to you that he has absolutely nothing with the Americans. Bush himself formulated his opinions with great caution and didn't oblige himself to anything. He only wrote that it is desirable that such-and-such should be. We have a long list of agreements with the Americans which they did not maintain.

I remember the struggle that we had in the peace agreement with the Egyptians in keeping the Mitla line and the Gidi pass in Sinai. First they refused to hand them over. And the Americans pressed on us and promised to Begin they will never conduct any negotiations with the PLO and that the F-15 fighter plane will only be given to us for the defense of the country. Afterwards came Carter and he determined he would give that plane to the Saudis. Come Reagan and he even gave them the AWACS intelligence planes. We have today to remember that we came out of all this as idiots who have been manipulated by the Americans.

Hadar: *Are you certain that the government capitulates to pressures?*

Katz: Because of his dismissal from the ministry of defense in 1983, to my mind unjustly, he made the Americans from the start of his service as prime minister into an unofficial secret partner. He is unable to take the smallest step without first confirming with that Condoleeza. God forbid [John] Kerry should become president because Kerry will after all come and tell us he has different opinions and what do we do then?

Since I served as information man of Menachem Begin until my resignation, I know the Americans. We have to remember that the Democratic party is not in our hands. It is in the favor of the other side. It is forbidden to us to fall into the trap. It's less important who is elected. It's more important what will be American policy toward the Arabs. They allow Saudi Arabia to play a much larger role than us.

In the preparation of the Road Map, at the time they didn't even allow us to respond to it, not even a little whisper. There are ministers in the government that rely on "the amendments of Sharon" for the Road Map. But anyone who reads The New York Times knows that these amendments were not accepted. At the end, the Americans acted in the name of the Road Map, which is an anti-Israel agreement and we learned an additional chapter in American chutzpah.

The first condition of the Road Map for carrying out Israeli concessions is that terror should stop and even on that we conceded. We gave up.

BEN GURION IS AFRAID OF BONES

The first time Shmuel Katz met Jabotinsky in 1937 was when Katz was sent to Poland with orders from the command of Etzel in order to ask the Founding Father to replace the leader of the underground – in those days, Whitaker.

Katz: "They asked that I should present Jabotinsky the abundant reasons for the removal of Whitaker, who didn't lead properly and was the one who caused a crisis in the Irgun. I met Jabotinsky seven to eight times. I went to London and to Cairo in this mission since the Mandate authority refused to allow Jabo to return to Eretz Israel. The tremendous tragedy of the national movement was that Jabotinsky died in 1940 when he was 60. Imagine what would have happened if he had remained alive, had returned to the country and lived to his 80th year. Who would even remember Ben-Gurion, who incidentally was so afraid from the threat of the personality [of Jabotinsky], this wonderful personality, that he refused to allow the transfer of his bones to the country [only in the 60s they were brought here by the permission of then-prime minister Levi Eshkol – interviewer's note].

The people of the revisionist movement who trained for the conquest of the Land by the English died in the crematoria of the Germans. That is the terrible disaster which Jabotinsky prophesized. From the beginning of the '30 he plowed Europe back and forth and begged the Jews, "Get out. Leave Europe. The land is burning under your feet."

In the summer of 1946, Katz was added to the headquarters of Etzel and became the foreign minister of the underground and the official information officer of the revisionist movement.

Begin put him among the 14 members of the Herut that entered the Knesset. But he left the Knesset and established a publisher's house in Tel Aviv. The books which were published, in addition to 1,000s of penetrating articles which he wrote in the course of the years, aroused great love in the nationalist camp and fortified his position as the ideologist of the Herut party. Between those were also "The Hollow Peace" and "Battleground", which presented the continuation of Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisrael and examined intelligently the development of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His biography of Jabotinsky, which was published a few years ago, Katz labored on for seven years collecting materials.

But the most important chapter from the point of view of Katz was written far from the legislative halls in the stormy period of the state's establishment. A few days after the disaster of the Altalena, "which I now hear our youth thinks was a casino ship", when some of the commanders of Etzel in Jerusalem asked the permission of Begin to liquidate commanders of the Haganah in revenge. "Jerusalem's Etzel Commander Ra'anan requested that Begin come there as he could not control the matter," relates Katz. "Begin and the members of the command of Etzel, which had officially dispersed, asked that I go to Jerusalem to take care of the matter. I traveled there and handled the matter quietly by speaking to their hearts."

Hadar: *Why did you leave the first Knesset, when more than a few of the veterans saw you as the natural heir of Menachem Begin?*

Katz: I never thought that. I hated almost every moment in the first Knesset. I was an information man – newspapers, ideas. I never thought to replace Begin, not even for a moment. I requested to edit the newspaper 'Herut' that was published then. But Begin said he couldn't spare me and that I needed to sit in the Knesset. And, believe me, for me it was torture.

Hadar: *You sat in the Knesset with Ben-Gurion. How were the relations between you?*

Katz: I first met Ben-Gurion in the legislative committee to which he was invited. There were two seats near the chairman. I sat in one of them. He came a little late and sat next to me. He looked at me and said, "This isn't such pleasant company for me." He didn't have a shred of tact. Later, when we left the session, he said to me: 'The only virtue that you people had was that you did not discriminate against the Eastern communities,' and departed down the corridor."

I next met him in the '40s in a London bus. He sat next to me and we began to argue with each other in front of the astonished passengers.

Hadar: *You said many times that you were never a naïve follower of Jabotinsky.*

Katz: True. If he said or wrote things that I didn't agree with, I went firmly against it, and it cost me quite dearly more than once. For example, in 1933 when in one blow he fired the entire directorate of the new Zionist movement including Meir Grossman, the No. 2 in the movement. Jabotinsky fired them in one day and sent them all home because of a nervous attack as they embittered in his life. Yes, yes, even Jabotinsky had a little strain of the dictator. I, the little one, opposed it. I wanted explanations and stood personally against the leader.

Hadar: *Where did you return to after 20 years, when you left the Likud?*

Katz: I returned nowhere. I wrote articles in the opinion pages of Maariv and sounded a clear and single-minded voice. Now I feel like an observer who looks upon a situation and takes a position. Believe me, with many pangs of love.

Hadar: *You waited years for Begin to become prime minister, and Likud's victory in 1977 was almost bordering a miracle. Now it appears that all goes down to ruin. What has the Likud contributed, from the historical point of view, to the Israeli nation?*

Katz: The most important thing that the Likud carried out in the period of its power, when it was still fresh and vital, was the removal of the combustible social and economic material. Until this day, I find it difficult to understand and analyze how Menachem Begin, that Polish gentleman, found a path to the hearts of the masses of our brothers in the Eastern communities, and managed to give them back their lost status and their honor and to let them have the ability to demonstrate their talents and to reach high positions in the state. That was the Likud's accomplishment from a historical point of view, and it was very well done and I greatly value this. It's the only great achievement which will be granted to the positive memory of the Likud.

Hadar: *Let's talk about the full biography you compose about Jabo. What does the current generation need to remember about Jabo?*

Katz: To remember that every Jew, as he wrote, is a prince. The writing of his biography was, from my point of view, an acquaintance with a multi-faceted person, a translator and a great statesman. For a long time now I had reached the conclusion that he was a phenomenon. Superhuman. A genius. He knew how to navigate in almost 20 languages. He lectured in several languages. He was one of the great lecturers that lived in the 20th century. Twice I traveled with him to a series of lectures in Europe. You sit and listen to him lecture for two hours. And you are fascinated. You are hypnotized. There was something magnetic in his voice. Moreover, he behaved with everybody in the same way. He did not have a shred of what Bibi and Barak have in overabundance, namely, arrogance.

I must tell you an anecdote which Jabotinsky told me about himself. Once he went to sleep late at night before appearing before an audience of 1,000s, who waited for him in the hall. He woke late, saw that he was late, and in confusion wore his suit over his pajamas. He ran to the hall which was filled from wall to wall, with all the generals and heads of the municipality already sitting for hours in their places of honor on the podium. Suddenly, as he climbed to the stage, he noticed his pajama pants were sliding down through his suit pants. Can you imagine to yourself Ben-Gurion or Weizmann addressing the masses in pajamas?

Hadar: *Can you compare the rhetorical gifts of Jabotinsky with that of Begin?*

Katz: Don't even begin to compare Begin to Jabo. People make this mistake all the time. It's almost a desecration. Begin was emotional and theatric. He waved his hands while he made speeches. Jabo did not enflame. He appealed to your rationality without raising his voice for a second.

His personal acquaintance and the writing of the biography exposed Katz to lesser known sides of the revisionist leader's personality. "He was a great joker and loved to tell jokes in company in

order to melt the ice and just to be joyful. First of all, he was what one calls a mensch. He was a pure person, clean in spirit, sensitive to a fault, a refined man. Once he came to Poland he requested that I accompany him on a train trip. What did he debate with me half the way? – Whether Agatha Christie was the best and most fascinating mystery writer of our generation. He read without end not only philosophical and political articles, but he swallowed up the detective and mystery literature. He also loved to watch American westerns. When he lived in London, whenever he heard there was a western, he ran to it.”

Echoes of the doctrines of Jabotinsky Katz also finds among those who were not his disciples. “Alterman behaved as if he was raised in Jabotinsky’s home,” he says, pulling a book and quoting: “Satan then said:

How do I overcome This besieged one? He has courage and talent, and implements of war and resourcefulness. Only this I shall do, I'll dull his mind and cause him to forget the justice of his cause. Thus spoke the devil and it was as if the heavens paled in fear when they saw him rise to carry out his plot.”

And this is what happened to us tonight. This Autumn night brings us to the end of an era, an end to Eretz Yisrael HaShlema.