

13 September 1985

WHO ARE THE FANATICS?

IN HEBRON, in August 1929, Arabs carried out a premeditated massacre of Jews. Its special horrors echoed round the world. The Hebron attack differed somewhat from simultaneous attacks on other Jewish communities in Palestine in that its victims – most of them Yeshiva students and their families – were completely defenceless.

Hebron, it so happened, provided a most instructive example of the deliberate part played by the British authority in the Arab leaders' effort to put an end to Zionism by violence. Even the usually timid official leadership of the Yishuv was moved to issue a detailed, bitter accusation against the Mandatory administration; and the Hebron survivors summed it up in a "memorial" to the British High Commissioner "in the name of 65 slaughtered, 885 wounded and many orphans and widows." They specifically charged that British Police Chief Cafferata "deprived us of the means of appealing for help and defence, betrayed us with empty promises and gave the murderers and robbers their opportunity . . ."

The massacre effectively put an end to the Jewish community, which had maintained itself for many hundreds of years in Hebron – the city of the Patriarchs, one of the four traditional holy cities of Eretz Yisrael. Except for a fitful later attempt at reconstruction – still under British rule – Hebron remained a city without Jews.

To complete the picture, abandoned Jewish property was taken over by Arabs, debts owed to Jews were never paid; and, as the daily *Doar Hayom* commented, the murderers were enabled by the government "to inherit from their victims" (January 2, 1930).

THEY AND their families did indeed; and remained in undisputed possession for almost 38 years. When Jordan's offensive for Israel's annihilation in 1967 was repulsed and an Israeli force advanced on Hebron, the leaders of the Arab community judiciously decided to surrender the town without firing a shot – hoping thereby at least to mitigate the ferocity of retribution which they confidently expected at the hands of avenging Jews.

It is easy to imagine their relief at hearing an official declaration by the Israeli government. After pointing out that King Hussein had launched war despite advice and appeals from the Israeli government, the statement said:

"We have not forgotten the barbaric massacre which Arabs of Hebron carried out on the Jewish community 38 years ago. We know that you fear acts of vengeance. We have no such intention. We do not intend to seek out even those of you who participated actively in the murder of Jews. You will not be molested nor hindered in your peaceful pursuits.

"We also, however, do not intend to allow the consequences of the crime of 1929 to be perpetuated. The Jewish community of Hebron will be re-established. Jews will come in peace to live in Hebron, and we expect you to live in peace with them . . ."

Who today remembers this statement, generous towards an enemy, declarative of intent to heal a horrendous historic wound? Actually, nobody could today remember it, for the reason that such a declaration was never made. It is a figment of this writer's imagination of what should have been.

The Israeli government of 1967 had not the political wit, nor the wisdom, nor the sense of historic continuity, nor the minimal self-assertive dignity of the spokesman of a sovereign nation, to complement the dramatic military return to Hebron by a healing act of Jewish restoration. Who can doubt, moreover (and there was practical evidence), that the Arabs of Hebron, in the circumstances, were ripe to welcome a renewed Jewish presence in the city of the Patriarchs.

Instead, the government accepted, in effect, the verdict of the murderers of 1929. It “closed” Hebron – as it closed the rest of Judea (except Jerusalem) to the Jewish population, including the legal owners of property. The minds of the Arabs were injected with the idea that keeping Hebron (and not only Hebron) – *judenrein* was in keeping with the wish of the government of the Jewish State.

A MITIGATION of this denial of Jewish history, of the nation’s relationship with the heart of its homeland, of the living Zionist passion and purpose, was achieved through the initiative of private citizens who, fortunately, had three advocates in the Cabinet. Rabbi Levinger and his colleagues, in the move to Hebron which began with the Pessah seder in 1968, were given the blessing of Yigal Allon, of Zerah Warhaftig and of Menachem Begin. The end result, after a long political struggle, was the establishment of the township of Kiryat Arba on the outskirts of Hebron.

Hebron was not the only subject of confrontation between citizens and government. Even the restoration of Jewish life in the Etzion Bloc – where there were no Arabs to appease – was initiated without benefit of prior government approval. The orphans of Etzion, the epic of whose refusal, during the 19 years after 1948, to forget the ruined homes of their childhood, and their determination to rebuild their lives there, shamed the government into acquiescence.

The demonstratively cold, negative attitude to Judea and Samaria within the Labour school of thought – and its younger generation – flows from an historic source. Labour leaders constituted the central element in the Zionist Establishment in 1947 which, in urging acceptance of partition, argued (against all warning) that this sacrifice would bring peace with the Arabs. It did not. In the war of annihilation launched by the Arab states on tiny, infant Israel and its people, the Jewish community paid for its survival – and an improvement on the state’s borders – with the lives of one per cent of its people.

The leaders who had blundered so tragically continued in power in the state. Their education policy contained no hint of admission of blunder. They raised partition to the height of a great, absolute victory, the ultimate possible Jewish achievement. There was no word even of regret over the lost heart of the homeland, nor any reference to the fact that the Jewish acceptance of partition had been nullified by the Arabs’ violent rejection. They led a substantial part of the youth to believe that Judea and Samaria – and Gaza – were legitimately foreign territory. Even Jerusalem was not always exempted from this alienation.

They were quite unprepared for the consequences of the Six Day War. They simply did not know what “to do” with the “territories.” If their words and acts, and inactions, are to be believed, many of them had evidently suppressed within their hearts any affinity for Eretz Yisrael beyond borders approved by the UN. Did not even Yitzhak Rabin once express his untroubled willingness to require a visa to visit the Etzion Bloc?

Moreover, even their sense of the sheer need for control of all of Western Eretz Yisrael to safeguard Israel's minimal security, was overwhelmed by an obsessive myopia, indeed a fanatical forgetfulness. They ignored the evidence of bitter experience: that the Arab leaders of 1967, precisely as in 1947, meant it when they said they intended to destroy or dismantle the Jewish State; and they continue to shut their eyes to the unchanging nature and scope of that intention. Year after year they have sought ways of persuading King Hussein (whose history with Israel is as bloody and as bloody-minded as that of all his royal and republican colleagues) to accept two-thirds of Judea and Samaria and Gaza "in exchange for peace."

NOW, PERSUADED at last that this is unacceptable to Hussein, at least some Labour leaders (Peres implicitly, Eban explicitly) are prepared to offer Hussein those two-thirds *as a first installment* without even the lip-service of a peace treaty, the rest to be negotiated later (Eban interview, *Ha'Ir*, 23 September 1983).

Most significant is the evident acceptance by the fanatical partitionists of the doctrine that no Jewish presence can be tolerated in the midst of an Arab population – doctrine that guides their present specific policy in Hebron. Haim Bar-Lev, now Minister of Police, once said of the six students murdered in Hebron on a Shabbat eve: "If they hadn't been there they wouldn't have been murdered."

He spoke deep truth. That indeed is precisely what was proved in 1929 in Hebron. A little thought might have revealed to him that that is the predominant Arab outlook on Israel and on Zionism altogether. If Israel and Jews were "not there," there would be peace; and that is the only peace they strive for.

It is inconceivable that the mindless endorsement of the lesson imposed by the Arabs of Hebron in 1929 will be accepted by the mass of the people of Israel – either in Hebron or anywhere else in the Jewish State.