

## A Zionist Dream – Part 3

by

Dan Ben-David

---

The time has come to shed the hollow slogans and restrictive labels that we place upon ourselves. They thwart the Zionist Dream from spreading its wings and soaring upward.

Israel's ethnic, cultural and religious diversity contributes to its uniqueness, providing a comparative advantage internationally when it comes to original thinking and unconventional approaches. Instead of channeling this uniqueness into creating an Israeli spirit of togetherness and exceptionalism, many political careers – and even entire political parties – are based on exploiting these differences to divide and segregate.

In too many instances, discrimination and racism created gaps between ethnic groups and between religions, phenomena that have still not been entirely eradicated. There is a need to remember the past so that we will not repeat it. But seven decades after the creation of Israel, the time has come to relegate the Sephardi and Ashkenazi labels to the history books and to leave them there. We are Israelis, and it is a good thing that we marry each other. The way forward requires understanding that the perpetuation of income gaps in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is due primarily to gaps in education – and these are resolvable. In light of the strong link between parental education and their children's scholastic achievements, such education gaps are essentially a market failure that countries can reduce by funneling more resources to those pupils whose parents are relatively uneducated.

Pigeon-holing the complex workings of economies into slogans limits thought and is not constructive in addressing core challenges. A free market and a modern economy are not synonymous with jungles. The invisible hand makes it possible to reach horizons that we could only have imagined in the past, but it is unable and does not need to solve all of societies' challenges. Infrastructures and services that benefit all, that connect and provide equal opportunities, that provide care and assistance in troubled times – these are realms that require strategic vision and action at the national level.

Outdated tags such as Left and Right increase divisive clustering instead of encouraging unobstructed and practical perspectives. No side has exclusivity to concepts of justice and common sense, or to updating the Zionist Dream to the current century. Israeli governments are created on the basis of reaching out to the extremes rather than connecting on the basis of common denominators – which still commands a majority in Israel.

Our recent elections resulted in the current coalition. But the Likud could have chosen Labor, Yesh Atid and Kulanu instead. These four parties include 75 MKs that account for nearly two-thirds of the Knesset. They could have created a government capable of fulfilling the Zionist Dream – had this been its primary objective.

Instead, each side takes advantage of the opportunity, when it presents itself, to choose directions that mortgage the nation's future. To avoid having to sit with the other side, partnerships are made with Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) parties insisting on depriving their children of the basic right to a core education that would provide them with the ability to successfully contend in a modern, open and competitive economy.

Another elephant in the room that prevents realization of the Zionist Dream is the West Bank. This is not just a story about transferring huge shares of society's resources there for decades. In an era of missiles, the settling of civilians in the midst of a hostile population does not provide protection but instead guzzles limited military resources to protect the settlers from their environment.

In a world in which Jews and Muslims are willing to live in democratic countries with crosses on their flags and Christianity as their official religion, Jews also have a right to a democratic home of their own. But Judaism is not the proprietary domain of any stream. The time has come to grant all of Israel's Jews the freedom to decide for themselves the degree of religion that they want in their lives. With Israel's Arab minority, we need to build a shared future in this country. A look around the neighborhood is sufficient for understanding the alternatives.

At the end of the day, this is not simply a Zionist Dream but a Dream that will save the Zionist enterprise. The future will require a different sort of preparation than what we have known thus far. We face a world in which there will be greater movement of goods, of capital – and of people. Israel's future depends on our most educated children and grandchildren wanting to remain here and having others with whom to work and shoulder the burden – and with whom they can feel a joint sense of purpose.