

Editorial: Introductory Comments

Paul Takagi

THE TWA 747 FLIGHT FROM Paris to Tel Aviv was filled to capacity and it seemed to be mostly white folks, except for a black couple and a recently retired Japanese American professor — me. Once inside the Ben Gurion Airport I queued up to clear immigration. People received different colored ticket stubs. I received a white ticket, which meant I was to be taken to security for questioning. As I walked through the opening in a roped-off area, an Israeli woman took my stub and instructed me to follow her. I was deposited in a room and told to wait. The only other people waiting in the room were two women and five young children seated on a bench against the wall. They must be Palestinians, I thought, and I flashed back to a Bay Area meeting where a Palestinian American lawyer had predicted that I would be questioned by security.

A policeman dressed in civilian clothes asked for my passport and plane tickets, looked at them for a moment, and then began to pose questions, sometimes repeating the same questions: What is your purpose in coming to Israel? Where are you going to stay? How long are you going to stay? Who do you know in Israel? Did you receive an invitation to come to Israel? What is your occupation? Were you in any Arab countries before coming to Israel? Do you have any baggage? Did you come alone? Who sponsored your trip? What is your business in Israel? Who are you going to see in Israel? Who made the arrangements for your accommodations? What places are you going to visit? Who are you going to visit in these places? The tickets were issued one week before your departure. Why did you suddenly decide to come to Israel? As suddenly as the barrage of questions had started, it stopped. I had told him that I had come to Israel with friends and he wanted to see them. We walked out of the room toward the baggage carousel and I saw Ellen, a Legal Aid attorney from New York. She looked at me and asked if I was okay. I said “yes” and asked her where Howard — one of the organizers of the trip — was. She pointed toward the carousel. I yelled out Howard’s name and he looked up.

The police official must have observed all this because he ordered me back to the security room. Once in the room, he said I could go. I looked around to see who else was pulled into security. The room was empty except for the two

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women and children who still waiting. Oh yeah, I thought, and I waved my hand toward them and wished them well.

It was almost dinner time when we checked into the National Palace Hotel in East Jerusalem. Our room — I roomed with Osha Neumann, a contributor to this issue — had a window and deck with an eastern exposure. It turned out that Osha and I liked the sun shining into the room so we left the drapes open. With the first light of the morning — around five o'clock — I would get up, put on my jogging clothes, and jog/walk sometimes around and, at other times, through the old city that was located only two blocks from the hotel. Once I got lost for an hour in the maze of walkways inside the walled city. There were always Israeli soldiers. Asking them for directions was like talking to the stone walls. But then why should these young soldiers be friendly and helpful to someone in the wrong side of a divided city? I usually headed toward the East Gate. Across the road from the gate is a deep ravine with visible ruins that perhaps date back several centuries before Christ. And in the silence of the early morning I felt in my imagination as though I were uncovering a reality in which I was linked, if not biologically then certainly spiritually, to generations of people. These were very special moments.

One morning I headed toward the South Gate. And there it was, the Wailing Wall. My vantage point was on a slight incline some distance from the wall, perhaps a 100 yards away. I wanted to get closer but my jogging partner dissuaded me, explaining that this was a sacred place. His words made me think of a book I had recently glanced through, *Sacred Landscapes*, which consists mostly of creations of nature, among them Ayer's Rock in Australia, Mount Fuji in Japan, and Machu Picchu in Peru, which are open to all and to be experienced in whatever way one chooses. Looking at the wall below me and at the wire fencing that segregated the women from the men, the child within me jogged my memory of other places at another time that this place was like a private reserve.

The most vivid impression I have of the West Bank is not the biblical towns of Jericho and Bethlehem or of the ancient cities of Ramallah or Nablus. Rather, it is the image of denuded hills and mountains; with the exception of olive trees planted centuries ago on terraced hills, the landscape is treeless. I thought of the clear cutting of forests in California and it made me shudder. On top of the barren hills are the settlements, some 130 of them throughout the occupied territories with 70,000 Jewish settlers. Staring at a settlement high on a hill made me think of the books I've read on the expansion of the western frontier in the United States during the second half of the 19th century, and of John Wayne heading a calvary charge to rescue the homesteaders from hostile Indians. Indians are penned on reservations, and from time to time John Wayne is called upon to quell another uprising. I thought to myself that the settlements and the refugee camps, which confine almost one million Pales-

tinians in the occupied territories, are opposite sides of the same coin. One cannot exist without the other. First the Indians are annihilated — especially those who resisted — and then the remainder are decimated by disease and the conditions of oppression. As such, by the turn of the 20th century the population was reduced to only one-tenth of what it had been at the time of the arrival of the white man.

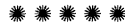
In Israel's Holocaust Museum, initially one sees only photos of terrified and desperate people, but soon the scripts, artifacts, and the black-and-white photos become a reality, distant but real and a part of you, like the blue sky. Staring at the clear blue sky without blinking produces involuntary tears, and so it is at the Museum. I stared at the black-and-white photos of people dead, dying, and about to die.

It was like auto-hypnosis; I could not blink and my eyes hurt. The tears started to flow. It eased the pain in my eyes and reduced the tension that had built up within me. I wasn't immediately aware of my feelings but the exhibit evoked a forgotten sense of sadness and pain that I felt so many years ago when my family and I, as well as the rest of the Japanese Americans, were locked up in prison camps during World War II in the United States. I am not suggesting that the prison camps were like the death camps. My feelings of sadness and pain have to do with the imprisonment — and, in the case of Jews, extermination — of whole populations of people on the basis of race or ethnicity. Toward the end of the exhibit at the Museum, there is a sign dedicating the Museum to the memory of those who died and as a reminder to the living that this will never again happen to Jews.

Adjacent to the Museum is another building. The door was open, so I walked in. There was a man standing inside the doorway. I looked inside the building and it was dark except for dim lights on the floor. I walked closer to see. It was a relief map of all the death camps; dim lights called attention to the names of the camps. The man at the door made a grunting sound to catch my attention. He pointed to the table in front of him and motioned toward his head. I walked over, and on the table sat a row of *yamulkas* made of paper. The man nodded his head when I pointed to them. I put one on and I walked back to the relief map. I stood there staring at the names of the different death camps. I closed my eyes and paid tribute to the victims of the Holocaust: I agreed that it should never happen to Jews again. And I paid tribute to the Gypsies, communists, trade unionists, and all the others who also died in the death camps.

After two weeks I was ready to return home. I was certain that I would be questioned and perhaps searched by Israeli police at the airport so I sent my notes, tape recordings, and literature home by mail. This time I was not taken to a security room. I was initially questioned by a woman officer and then turned over to a male officer who questioned me at length. By the nature of

their questions they wanted me to name names. I was annoyed that I had to go through this again and I responded to their questions with accusations of discrimination. I was sent to the end of the line, which I went through again, and was then questioned by a third officer. As the three of them conferred I began to feel uneasy. While waiting for the police to make up their minds, I started deep-breathing exercises, which helped me to relax and to reject the notion that I was being victimized. It was their problem, not mine. Soon one of the officers walked toward me and handed me a gate pass.



When I was first invited to join a group of lawyers to go to Palestine, I had to think it over. The trip was going to cost around \$2,000 and I could think of many places to visit instead. Palestine is a war zone; I didn't want to be injured — hit by rocks or a stray bullet — or, above all, to be enveloped in tear gas, which makes me panic. Despite those considerations, it was an easy decision. I had to go. For over a year I had daily become upset and agitated by reading the news on events in Israel, and the trip was an opportunity to learn first-hand what was not being reported in the news: the struggle of a people behind the daily body count of Palestinians and Israelis killed and injured.

The possibility of being stoned in the occupied territories always exists. One time the bus in which I was riding through the town of Nablus was showered with stones, but no one was injured. In the refugee camps, one also sees children suddenly appearing from between buildings ready to throw stones at passing vehicles. I was never directly in a situation of gun fire, but I did arrive only moments after a shooting had occurred in Bethlehem. The next morning I learned during a visit to the critical care unit in an East Jerusalem hospital that it was a young boy who had been shot in the back of the head the day before in Bethlehem. The physician showed us X-rays of a plastic bullet that was lodged deeply in his brain. The boy was not expected to live.

My worst moment occurred when I inhaled a small whiff of tear gas. As I walked through the narrow streets of the Old City late one evening, I felt momentary panic when the familiar smell of CS gas caused my nose to wrinkle and my eyes to tear. Not all of us, however, returned home unscathed. At the end of the first week of our stay in Palestine, we had been joined by a group of medical people. Of the people of color besides me in the two groups, a female Palestinian American college student was shot and injured by Israeli soldiers; a male Palestinian American lawyer was stopped for questioning by Israeli soldiers and beaten with truncheons and rifle butts; and an Asian American nurse practitioner was taken to a security room and strip searched. The others in our group came and went like most of the white folks.