

## **According to Law of Moses and Ishmael**

**Instead of quarreling with the Palestinians, come and let us reveal the truth to them: they are Jews after all. That is the proposal of Tsvi Misinai, whose emissaries are already passing the word around, at least when Abu Mazen's police are not arresting them. If the neighbors agree to join up to the Jewish people en masse, a significant boost to the Ashkenazi community is anticipated.**

**Avinadav Vitkon** (translation from Hebrew – Benno Mekimi)

B. is standing on a construction site in a moshav in the center of the country, shifting his weight from one leg to the other. He is large-bodied, and speaks quickly, with fervor. "Sharon laughed at me when we met in '91. He said 'Ha-ha-ha...I found someone more Jewish than me.' I was in favor of Sharon at that time, but he fled from Gaza and paid dearly. If they carry on this way, one concession after another, the state will be gone in another three or four years."

B. is a resident of the village of Bidya, which is in Samaria. Like many others, he was forced to abandon his Palestinian village and live in Israel as a resident-refugee in which no one relates to him, much less salutes him. In his view, he is not quite a refugee, more a lost son. "I thought of this for many years, and I reached the conclusion that most of the residents of the village of Bidya are Jews," B. says very seriously. "You see this by the behavior, by their mentality, by appearance. They are light-skinned, many of them are blue-eyed. How many people in Bidya worked with Israel? Over 80 percent. This did not materialize out of thin air."

He has specific names. "The Taha family, for instance; everybody knows that they are Jews. The Amar family, throughout the West Bank, in Gaza and Jordan, they are Jews. If you ask them 'who was your first grandfather,' all will respond 'Yaaqov,' not Ishmael. And the Rabi family, they say that they are Jews in every way. Even the families of Salami, 'Othman, and Boolad."

### **Do you also know anything about Jews in the Palestinian leadership?**

"Abu-Ala, of the Kre'a family - look at his face; he is Jewish, clearly. If they give us a little support, we will rise up. Look at the result, if the government would only give it a chance."

B. not only believes in this theory; he also labors to promulgate this among Palestinians. The person is backing this mission of his is Tsvi Misinai, a high-tech retiree. On the backdrop of the past century, this sounds unreal, but in the eyes of Misinai, B., and others, they are the first harbingers of the avant-garde of the great revolution: the return of the Palestinians to the welcoming bosom of the Hebrews. "My father taught me of the Jewish origin of the Palestinians," Misinai says. "The fathers of Zionism spoke of this as well: David ben Gurion, Israel Belkind, Dov

Borokhov, Yitzhak ben Zvi, and others." In his opinion, the reality from the Jordan to the sea is likely to change, if we only make the change in our minds. "It is known that there were many conquests of the land of Israel in the course of history, but nothing is known about the fate of the Jewish community itself. There is no basis to the assumption that the People of Israel in its entirety was exiled from here. I took the trouble and ran down oral and written sources that were amassed painstakingly by many individuals during the centuries, almost all of them Palestinians, about their Jewish origin."

## **BROTHERS ARE NOT TO BE ABANDONED**

The village of Bidya is known to Israelis primarily by virtue of the Sabbath market, which attracted masses of Israeli until the second Intifada broke out. But the 'Israeli' past of Bidya is yet more interesting. In '82, during the outbreak of the first Lebanon war, the dignitaries of the village approached the governor of Tul-Karm in a request to enlist in the IDF and to combat the PLO, shoulder to shoulder with the Israelis. They were not conscripted to the IDF, but Ariel Sharon came up with an initiative - the 'Association of Villages' - an organization that became an apparatus of bribery and extortion and was eventually shut down.

They are those who will argue that the initiative of 1982 was invented by opportunistic sheiks, but B. is convinced that it concerns something more profound (i.e., their knowledge about their Jewish roots). Presently, at any rate, the gunmen of various organizations rule in Bidya too. B. himself was saved from an assassination attempt when he visited there several months ago. Despite this, his optimism knows no bounds: "Religion is a bit of a problem, but there are many who are prepared to be Jews. In fact, why shouldn't they be Jewish Muslims, as there are Turkish Muslims and Turkish Christians?"

### **Because religion and nationality are intertwined in Judaism.**

"OK, there are those that are Jews in every way. They have adopted a Jewish name, are beginning to observe the Sabbath. I actually want to be secular. I believe in the Almighty but I want to drive on the Sabbath. What, is my blood" - he outstretches an arm - "less Jewish than that of a Jew who does not believe in God at all? I say thanks to God every morning, for all things emanate from Him. My girls will marry only Jews.

I led operations of the GSS (Shabak,) I gave my soul to the state. In which way am I less Jewish than others? When I sat with the GSS on an operation, lieutenant colonels would leave the room (due to the too high level of confidentiality involved)."

Sulayman, a Fatah operative that sat in Israeli prison for several years, speaks in similar terms, albeit more cautiously. "There is no difference between the peoples in this country," he states in a conversation form Bethlehem. I believe that peoples were mixed in ancient times. Part of the families here in town were such as these, even if not all of them wish to declare the matter."

Sulayman, who actually claims that there are no Jewish roots in his family, decided to renounce the way of terror, and to seek solutions to the conflict between Israelis and

Palestinians. Today, he is winning over hearts and minds in Bethlehem for Tsvi Misinai's idea, according to which the Palestinians are by overwhelming majority Jewish fellahin (farmers) who were forcibly converted to Islam, and their return to the Jewish people is to bring about an end to the wars in favor of a shared life of fraternity in one Jewish state.

"The idea could be realistic if we utilize it to the benefit of both sides," Sulayman says. "Tsvi says that there is no need to convert whomever possesses sources that state that he is a Jew. So fine, it is possible to ply that solely as a political solution. If you tell them to accept Judaism, it will not happen so quickly. There is a need to discuss this more and more, particularly among Orthodox Jews. I think that the response of the rabbis will be a trigger for debate."

Misinai (62,) the founder of the Sapiens International Company and among the pioneers of software development in Israel, emphasizes that he is a realistic individual, and that both his legs are on the ground. Nowadays he devotes all his time - and not a small amount of his fortune - to collecting bits of evidence and oral traditions of Palestinians and Bedouins concerning the Jewish origin of their families. He diligently catalogs the documentary material according to indices of the extended families, villages, and tribes.

"Subsequent to the first Gulf War, when they began discussing a new order in the Middle East, I wrote a ten-page article on the subject, and I tried to reach Sharon with it," Misinai recounts, but then the Oslo Process came about, and although I detested the agreement, I sensed that I could not measure up to the energy that was created around it."

He was awakened anew to promote the topic with the outbreak of the second Intifada. At that time, there was publication of Hebrew University Professor Ariela Openheim's research about Palestinian and Jewish genetics. Most of the Ashkenazi Jews were pleased to discover that they are genetically related to some Norwegian tribe. However, Openheim's research showed that they are actually closest to the Palestinians, even more than they are related to descendants of the Yemenite community. Incidentally, the people second closest to the Jews is the Kurds, which requires renewed study of the national treasury of humor.

In Misinai's eyes, these things are additional proof of the claims that have been made from the beginning of the twentieth century. "If we sit to research the origin and makeup of the fellahin, we regard their internal lifestyle, and we delve into the ancient oral traditions that are preserved in their speech to this day," thus wrote Ben Gurion, "we see that there is almost nothing shared between them and the true Arabs, the scions of the Arab race...most of the masses and classes of the Muslim fellahin in Western Israel demonstrate a different racial specie and an entirely variant classification, and there is no doubt that much Jewish blood flows in their veins - the blood of those same Jewish farmers, 'the salt of the earth,' who elected in the tribulations of the era to deny their religion if only so as not to be uprooted from their land." Israel Belkind even revealed practical and political implications to this: "In 'Arabs' that reside in our country, we will find the offshoots of the People of Israel...We, before whom the Chronicles of History lie open, recognize them as our brothers, and they cannot perceive us as brothers that

have traveled far afield, and treat us as strangers...On the basis of these facts, we will determine our relation to this people in the future. And it is obvious that there can be but one relation between us, that of brothers; not only brothers in the political sense, after History decreed that we share our lives as a nation, but rather brothers racially, as well, brothers of one people."

Two-and-a-half years ago, Misinai published his book on the subject 'Not To Be Believed,' and he received media attention, among other things in two newspapers in Arabic. He has since published an additional book, 'Brother Shall not Raise His Sword Against Brother,' a pocket book that has appeared in Arabic, too - 'The Engagement.' "Today we have Palestinian operatives that are spreading the word among Arabs, and the reactions are wonderful," says Misinai.

According to him, he is attempting to get a meeting with Abu Mazen and Abu Ala. The concept of partitioning the country, creating a Palestinian state, and evicting additional Jews from their land, unnerves him; his proposal is to create one state. "Abu Ala has already stated that it is impossible to move on a two-state solution. I say – please, one state - not bi-national, but rather, uni-national, Jewish. The extremist Muslims will oppose this, of course, because I pull the rug out from under their feet, but we will attract those Palestinians that are close to us. By the same measure that they are religious or secular today, they will accept Judaism instead of Islam. If I as a secular individual am considered a kosher Jew, there is no reason to force them to be religious, for they are Jews just as I am. We were one people and we will return to being one people, but if I tell them to convert now, the sane Islamic world will join the insane Islamic world and oppose us. Moreover, as a democratic state, we cannot coerce them into converting. For this reason, I differentiate between the religious aspect and the national one."

## 50 THOUSAND JEWS ANNUALLY

According to Misinai, circa 85 percent of the Arabs living between Jordan and the sea are Jews in one way or another, and at least the half of them know this. "After we inform them that they are Jews de facto, we will be successful in bringing them back to the Jewish nation at the tempo of 50 thousand persons per annum. They will undergo training in a sort of intensive course of evening and weekend studies, and over the course of a year or two will learn Hebrew, Bible, Judaism, and Jewish history – particularly theirs as coerced Jews. This way, they will be fully prepared for conversion. They will eventually take an oath that they are not Arabs, but rather, Jews – or Israelis, for not all of them are from the tribe of Judah, and within 40 years, we will return the majority of them to Jewish awareness."

**Awareness or not, they will not be recognized as Jews without conversion.**

"Whoever is not Muslim will be recognized as a kosher Jew, as they are already Jews. There is no need to convert Jews. There were in an exile of consciousness, as we experienced a geographical exile. Most of the Palestinians of Arab origin already left in 1948 and 1967. Today only five percent of the Arabs in the land of Israel are of Arab origin, and another nine percent are

of a Byzantine origin and were compelled to convert to Islam like the Jews.

When I tell them ‘I am also Palestinian and you are Jews as well, the land is yours and mine,’ I not only resolve the conflict – I eliminate it. And besides, ‘when there is no bird of song, even a cockroach becomes a nightingale.’ This plan is the sole solution, and even if it were only idle chatter, we must believe in it and promote it.”

Misinai’s partner on this journey, Attorney Elon Yarden, has written a row of books that deal with the issue of the land of Israel (‘Zion Shall be Redeemed in Justice,’ ‘A Common Homeland, not Disputed Land,’) and he even reached the same conclusion. “Transformation instead of Transfer,” as he summarizes his doctrine. “Partitioning the country is impossible, and even transfer was feasible only up to the 50s. The situation is paradoxical: in order to preserve the identity of the State of Israel, we are required to endanger its existence, and in order to preserve its existence, we must endanger its identity. Therefore, the solution is transformation, alteration of the identity. This is our ‘Right of Return.’”

### **And what about their identity as Palestinians?**

“Their national identity is not developed, for they think in religious terms, not territorially. Their identity today is Islamic, and there is a need to cause them to desire to obtain a modern national identity, neither ‘The Nation of Islam,’ nor ‘Arabness.’ By way of ethnic-territorial identity, they will encounter their Israeli identity. Palestine is a fiction; the country never had such an identity, there was only the Israeli identity, and they themselves are the progeny of Israelis. In other words, there are two bluffs: the semantic bluff of the name ‘Palestine,’ and the genetic bluff. ‘Palestine’ means the scions of the Philistines, while their true identity is Israeli.

The conversation with Yarden and Misinai, which occurred in a Jerusalem restaurant, was momentarily interrupted: the Arab waiter, who was evidently listening from the side, approached the table, introduced himself as Riyad, and stated his opinion: “This is quite true, what you say. My family’s name was originally Cohen. There were two brothers who fled Iraq at the time of some massacre, one reached Syria and remained Jewish, and the second one made it here and became a Muslim out of fear. We live in the Old City; and if you go there today and inquire of my family, they will tell you, “Ah, the Jews.” To this day, names like Yaaqov and Itsik are in circulation in my family.

The Jerusalemite families, Nashashibi and Husseini, they are all Jews,” Riyad continues. “According to the Muslim religion, if you read well, all the residents of this land are the People of Israel. The Prophet Muhammad was also from the People of Israel. One family, but they do not know how to manage. Many wish to hear what you are saying, but there is a need for someone who can speak, and is not afraid. This will bring peace.”

### **GRANDMOTHER’S CANDLES**

Talk is cheap, but it could cost the life of Palestinians that are openly active regarding the concept of becoming Jewish. Changing one’s religion, in the eyes of Islam, according to some

interpretations, is a transgression for which the punishment is death. However, it appears that 'changing nationality' can be discussed with a bit more freedom. This is the idea that Misinai's activists are attempting to promote among their neighbors, despite considerable skepticism and fears.

T., a resident of the village of Sawakhra that is near Jerusalem, met Misinai at an Israeli-Palestinian discussion event. "When I saw his book there, I thought that this is another madman," he says, but when I read (it,) I was not surprised by what is written in it. We knew that part of our family is Jewish by origin. I learned this from my father, as well, who was a teacher of history."

The factual basis does not make the idea easier to assimilate. "There is a combination of knowledge and denial," says T. "I have spoken with many, and I asked them 'Maybe your family is Jewish,' and they all responded, 'No, it cannot be.' It is not easy to discuss this with them. Whoever has a doctorate will not agree to discuss this with you, but a simple farmer actually will."

From what he says, there are new musings among Palestinians about the second Intifada and suicide bomber terror, and concurrence concerning Oslo. "The Palestinians do not like Oslo. The roadblock was created along with Oslo, and the fear started with Oslo. They want one state, but know that the Jews harbor fears about being a minority."

#### **And how do they relate to the idea of The Engagement?**

"People laugh at the idea of a Muslim-Jew, but Judaism is not merely a religion, it is a people. Some of them ignore it, some of them say 'perhaps,' or 'it is not a good time,' it still requires investigation,' 'this is another way of the Jews to take over the world.' At the present, the Hamas takeover is generally more worrisome to them than the conflict with Israel. My mission is to continue publicizing the subject, in any case."

While in the eyes of many Palestinians the idea of a vanished Jewish grandfather sounds distant and menacing, there is a not small population of Palestinians and Bedouins that from a cultural and mental standpoint see themselves as Jews in every way, after they crossed the lines and came to reside in Israel.

Eli Pellet, director of a non-profit organization for collaborators, is originally a resident of Bidya, a son of the Boolad clan. He is now married to a Jewish woman and the father of two – Shulamit and Yosi. A mezuzah is affixed to the entrance to his home, although he himself has not converted. "The very fact that there is one mosque in a village of 50 thousand people indicates the absurdity (of considering them true Muslims)," he says about Bidya.

Pellet does not know to point out any Jewish custom that exists in his family, but "this is passed down among us from generation to generation. Grandfather says that his grandfather was a Jew, and each family has rumors of its own. Our extended family is only a part of the 'Uthman clan, which came from Yemenite Jews. Our neighbors call us "Samaritans," which is a polite term for non-Muslims, that is to say, Jews."

Pellet is raising his children as Jews in every aspect; "They do not know that they have

any ties whatsoever to Arabs." His wife even wanted to send them off for Haredi education, but he insisted on a state-oriented school. "If you look in the yeshiva seminaries you will find a lot of Palestinians there. There are several in Qiryat Arba as well, and in Bat Yam there is a young man from Balata (a refugee camp near Gaza), who wears a yarmulke. I made acquaintances with a man who came here from Egypt, after his grandmother told him, "You are a Jew, go live in Israel." He came to Israel and said, "My grandmother told me that I am a Jew," and they did not accept him, for he had no documents. They threw him back to the Sinai. We have no documents," Pelled explains. "During the time of the "Ottoman regime, people did everything in order not to preserve them so as to avoid paying taxes, and for that reason there are no written documents."

Even if there are no written registries, there are perhaps other signs. In the village of Meskha near Elqana, the Palestinian police recently arrested one of Misinai's activists who was trying to photograph signs of mezuzahs in the doorways of homes. After a month-and-a-half of lockup, he was conditionally released. This treatment may explain, perhaps, why even those about whose Jewish origin there is no dispute are not rushing to publicly recognize their roots.

A., originally a resident of southern Mount Hebron, tells of a fractured identity: "Our elderly women light Sabbath candles, and our doorways show traces of mezuzahs, although by now they have obliterated almost all of them." In his words, Israel is responsible for the fact that many residents of southern Mount Hebron have strayed from their Jewish origin. "As far back as 1983, Yediot Aharonot published an article about my family, but the Jewish establishment neglected us for a long period. They brought Jews from all over the world, but they abandoned us, who are here."

### **Is there a chance that Palestinians would return to being Jews?**

"They do need not to 'return' to being Jews, for they remained Jews. They say one simple thing: 'If we return to Judaism, we need to understand that we return to be first class citizens and not second class.' I have heard that there are residents in the area that are in stages of conversion. I say: if we are Jews by origin, it is forbidden to convert. If I should convert, it is a sign that I am a gentile. There are no other communities in the southern Mount Hebron, we married no others, and we are Jews, therefore. Many will return to Judaism when they see the proof, and when Jews behave nicely towards them and they will speak to them nicely." There is a need to see a positive reaction on the Israeli side, security backing, so that anyone who desires to return to Judaism need not fear, and then many others will come."

In Israeli reality, even A.'s children have difficulties seeing positive reactions. "I brought my 18-year-old son to Israel. It is hard, he has problems, and so he now wants to return to our village although Hamas rules there. I sat for four hours at a roadblock yesterday before I got through. My small son told me: 'if they are our brothers, why do they treat us this way? Why do they all pass and we are at the roadblock?' I want to prove to him that the soldiers are OK, that they only catch the bad ones, but if we are stuck, it is a sign that we are bad. Only in the end, after they understood our story, a woman soldier came and brought us snacks and water."

Rabbi Eliezer Altshuler, the rabbi of the community of Susya, which is in southern Mount Hebron, is convinced that despite it all, Palestinian-Jews will not make real steps toward being Israeli or Jewish. "Local residents once approached us about converting without deserting Islam. They wanted to be Jewish-Muslims. So there is a riveting historical issue here, but to say that this could create a change in orientation vis-à-vis Jews – I do not see it. Maybe this will happen if a dialog commences. I am not ruling anything out, but I am not developing any great hope."

Over the years, we have met Palestinians who know axiomatically that they are the descendants of Jews, but this is not something makes a difference one way or the other in everyday life. I sense no extraordinary interest on their part. The people that are more interested in this are the bunch from our side, not from their side."

## **WE SHALL SETTLE FOR SEVEN**

In the framework of his activity, Misinai made contact with the 'Sanhedrin' under the tutelage of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz – an organization that deals with fresh examination and Halakhic ruling on the current issues of the Jewish People – that decided to aid and examine the chance of returning the lost Palestinian descendants to the bosom of the nation. Rabbi Dov Stein, the recording secretary of the Sanhedrin that accompanies Misinai in his meetings, disagrees about accepting Palestinians with inordinate ease. "I worry that Tsvi possesses insufficient understanding of Halakha," he says. "It is not simple to transform them into kosher Jews, but it is an important issue in any case: a common religious origin, even if it does not prevent hostility, would assuredly blunt the hostility."

"Their Jewish roots are of great interest to them, but there are those who no longer relate to it. I think that in light of our common origin, we can offer them a way in which they remain Muslims and live in peace with us. After we break down the walls of rancor, we can propose that they observe the Seven Noahide Laws, as was the initial objective of Islam. Whoever desires it can later proceed and convert. It may be easier for the Bedouins, as the Islamic orientation is less strong there. We are working on that currently, preparing work teams, and we will move ahead slowly."

Among the Bedouins, which Ben Gurion wished to Judaize back as early as the 50s, it is indeed possible to hear some enthusiastic voices. One such is Ovadia Yerushalmi, a Bedouin of the Sawarqa tribe, now residing in a small alcove in Rehovot, beneath photographs of Rabbi Kadouri and romantic couples in jeans. The Hebrew name, the mezuzah, and the pictures of the rabbis are more than enough for him.

"The neighbors' children would call my family 'Jews,' when I was still there," Yerushalmi recounts. "They call all the people in my tribe that way. I have heard that there was a great famine once, and our fathers became Muslims because they had nothing to eat. I am a pure Bedouin and Jew just as you are. Many Bedouins are of Jewish origin. Are the immigrants from Russia more Jewish than us? They are all non-Jews!"

Shlomi, a Bedouin from Rafiah (Rafah,) is residing in Tel Aviv today. He married his

cousin who lives in Lod, divorced, and is now married to a ‘regular’ Jewish woman. Hundreds and thousands like him are living in Israel, but unlike them, he is in stages of conversion, although his Israeli citizenship is vouchsafed under ‘reuniting families.’ “I work like a dog, pay alimony, and live in a pair of wretched rooms,” he says. “No one is paying me to convert. What profit is there for me? But despite it all, I will never forget it for all my days if they accept me for conversion.”

### **Why?**

Before my father passed away, he came and told me: ‘Listen to this secret, and do not reveal it until the day arrives. I am a Jew and you are a Jew.’ I was nine years old at that time, the only son in the family, and therefore they told only me. The day of which my father spoke arrived yesterday, and I told it to the conversion court.

I want to convert for four years now. I have two children from my second wife, and I want them to grow up as Jews, as I am a Jew born of a Jew. The children from my first wife want to convert as well. They tell me, ‘where you go, we will follow you.’ “

Asher, a Bedouin of the tribe of Rahat, tells of the Jewish tradition that is passed down through his small tribe. “Not all of the tribe knows about Judaism, but our customs are those of Jews. For example, our slaughtering is ‘kosher’: we do not only slaughter, we also examine the lungs and other organs, and do not eat it if there is a blemish. There are other tribes that follow our slaughtering method. We are working on this idea, of finding individuals who are Jewish. This is moving ahead slowly, but well.”

## **THE STATE IS NOT GEARING UP**

Dr. Mordekhai Nisan, an Orientalist from the Hebrew University, was asked by the ‘Sanhedrin’ to serve as its professional consultant on this issue. “The topic was not foreign to me,” Nissan says. “I also had faint clues as to the Jewish origin of some of those dwelling In Israel, perhaps from Yitzhaq Ben Zvi’s writings. This matter requires dividing into two. The first part is research-academic related, i.e., the question as to how much truth there is in the claim that the Arabs in Israel are of ancient Jewish origin. If this is so, then it is necessary to afford them the opportunity to return to their Jewish origin. If we are interested in locating secret Jews in Spain, in South America, and Africa, then it should definitely interest us here. The phenomenon of secret Jews residing in the Land of Israel that is supposed to function as a center of attraction is riveting.

The second part concerns the aspect of feasibility – whether they identify with the idea. Let us suppose that they are actually Jewish in origin; what are we to do? Is there an option of offering them a possibility of moving closer to the Jewish People, such as studying Judaism in a social-cultural setting of ours? Have we the rabbinic-economic-social tools to make this change in their life, in addition to the significant aspect of security? The practical side is enormous. It is not that the State of Israel and its institutions openly declare ‘These are our brothers by law,’ and make themselves available for this project. It still involves an initiative of private individuals.”

A., from southern Mount Hebron, sums up the bottom line: “**It’s not simple to transform an enemy into an ally. It is a tremendous revolution that does not occur overnight.**”