

## The Left by Uri Avnery

Ultimately, Israeli leftism is based on one's view of the occupation

To the left, peace isn't merely a formal political framework but a profound process of reconciliation that requires each side to show respect for the culture, tradition and history of the other side.

I've been asked what the concept of the left means in Israel. I thought I could answer this question easily, then I realized it was a tough job.

It's easy to say what the left isn't. The left is the opposite of fascism — the doctrine that the nation is the most important thing and people are merely cells in the national body. The left is also the opposite of Orthodox Jewish religious law, which states that one does not save the life of a non-Jew on the Sabbath. The left is also the opposite of communism in its Soviet form, which turned people into cogs in a destructive machine.

The left is human. The left believes that human beings are the most important thing. The state is based on an agreement among all its citizens, and the state has no mystical, national or religious significance. To the left, nationality is a cultural and political setting that gives people a feeling of belonging, according to their own free will.

The difference between the left and the right is mainly the difference between spiritual and emotional, from which the practical differences stem. Leftism is a worldview that

encompasses all areas of life.

In Israel, because of the special circumstances under which the state was established and exists, the difference between left and right isn't the same as in other countries. In the broader world, the concepts of left and right are largely defined according to differences in social perception. In Israel they are defined first of all by one's relation to peace and occupation. A person cannot be a leftist if he supports a regime of occupation and repression.

The left desires peace. It sees Israel's second nation &mdash; the Palestinian Arab nation &mdash; as a brother nation. It utterly rejects the occupation, which is inhuman by its very nature. The left strives for Israeli-Palestinian peace. To it, peace isn't merely a formal political framework but a profound process of reconciliation that requires each side to show respect for the culture, tradition, history and desires of the other side. This will be the rule in the comprehensive Israeli-Arab peace that follows.

Since the left believes in every nation's right to freedom and independence, it strives for coexistence between Israel's two nations, each in a state that expresses its political and cultural essence. To the left, the settlement movement is a moral and political disaster because its main goal is to take control of the entire country, prevent peace and carry out ethnic cleansing. The left believes that the border between the two states should be open, in the hope that relations between them will strengthen.

The left wants Israel to be a member of the family of nations, faithful to international law and a full partner in the fight for a world order that prevents war and civil war, saves the planet and ends disease, hunger, suffering and ignorance.

The left also supports social justice and mutual responsibility. Every person has the right to use his

or her abilities to the fullest. Below is a safety net that ensures a respectable standard of living for the weak, the poor, the handicapped and the unfortunate.

A leftist society is based on equality between men and women, Jews and Arabs, Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, members of all religions and members of none, with no discrimination based on sexual preference. A leftist society ensures all children the possibility to live under equitable conditions; every child has the right to a modern, egalitarian education open to the world. A leftist society treats refugees and labor migrants compassionately, integrates them into the job market and allows them to live as human beings.

A leftist society is based on the complete separation of religion and state. It has civil marriage and divorce, with every person possessing the right to join or leave any religion. All men and women live according to their own faith. Every person who shares in the fulfillment of this ideal in spirit and action, every single day, belongs to the Israeli left.

This column originally appeared in Haaretz, and the author kindly granted permission for its publication on Planetary.