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The rise of Meir Kahane is a boon to Jew haters and Arab haters alike.

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# THE DEMONS OF THE JEWS

BY LEON WIESELTIER

**"A** SPECTER is haunting the Jewish world—Kahanism." So says Rabbi Meir Kahane to anybody who will listen. It is one of the very few true propositions that issue from the foul man's mouth. Upon the Jewish world he has been, in Israel and in the United States, for almost 20 years, a kind of curse with a return air ticket. There is a sickening fascination about his ideas and his commotions; they are the most definitive representations of the triumphalism and the intolerance that have accompanied, like a lengthening shadow, the achievements of the Jewish community. Kahane is the perfect product of the contemporary Jewish underside. He is a boorish and maddened little man, whose soul is merely the sum of its angers, who succeeds in the street because he belongs in the gutter, who cloaks a violent desire for power in the concepts of great religious traditions that he has a rare talent for twisting.

Until recently, Kahane was merely of sociological and psychological interest, a sinister sectarian within a Jewish world that could not have been expected to cope completely well with the many complications of its modern history. Alas, there is now a more pressing reason for bothering with him. He sits in the Parliament of Israel. For now, he sits alone, the member from Kach (which is best translated as "Thus!"); but a succession of polls in recent months makes his prospects impossible to ignore. In June, Israel's most respected polling service produced numbers that showed Kahane increasing his electoral popularity fivefold in new elections. (In the election of 1984 he improved his showing fivefold over the election of 1981, winning 1.2 percent of the popular vote.) In early August, 600 Israeli high school students were surveyed for their opinion of Kahane. Forty-two percent declared their support, and 11 percent promised their votes. In late August, another poll by the same service predicted 11 seats for Kach. In September the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv* conducted a survey that confirmed such a prediction.

All these studies concur that Kahane's new support comes at the expense of the right-wing parties, particularly Menachem Begin's Likud. But there is small solace in that. Kahane is a price that many on the right may be prepared to pay; with anywhere from five to 11 seats, Kach would almost certainly constitute the largest religious party in Israel. It is hard to imagine a Likud leadership that would not invite the demagogue into a coalition, if it required his membership to form a government. For

one of the consequences of Kahanism, the smoother protestations of the Likud notwithstanding, will be the further radicalization of the Israeli right, precisely during the period of the Israeli right's ascendancy.

Among Meir Kahane's fantasies is the fantasy that he will be the prime minister of Israel (or, more exactly, the "king of Israel," as the mob that attends him likes to rant). About that there is no need to worry. Indeed, if the pragmatists in the Likud led by David Levy prevail over the rabble-rousers led by Ariel Sharon, even the worry about Kahane in a cabinet may be exaggerated. Of course, there is a kind of critic of Israel who will insist on such a worry. Kahane is a boon to those who hate Israelis and to those who hate Palestinians, to those who hate Jews and to those who hate Arabs. His political fortunes make many forms of prejudice suddenly seem plausible.

But Meir Kahane is not the real danger to Israel; he is the symptom of something that he did not sow and will not reap, the discharge of a deeper, and in some ways more disturbing, danger. He will not influence Israeli policy; but he will influence a political culture in Israel, the radical and frequently racist nationalism that is sedulously amassing strength, that may determine for many years to come the disposition of the occupied territories and the nature of the relations between Jews and Arabs on all of the west bank of the Jordan River. Almost more urgent than the question of Kahane's future, then, is the question of his past. How did this monster come to pass? What dark forces in the Jewish community, in Israel and in the United States, conspired to create the first Jew who may be properly compared to the Nazis ("... the growing number of Jewish girls who date and sleep with and marry Arabs. Who easily bed the foreign laborers and foreign soldiers. The incredible pollution of the sacred Jewish seed. . .")? It is not only anxiety that this man should occasion among Jews. It is a reckoning.

## I.

**K**AHANISM is really about rage, but it includes a few ideas, too. Like many extremists, Kahane likes to pretend that he is a mere creature of logic. Indeed, there is a logic. It is crude, and its conclusions are immoral and unacceptable, but it has a broken basis in reality. It goes something like this: Judaism is in contradiction to democracy. Zionism is in identity with Judaism. Zionism, therefore, is in contradiction to democracy. And so the Arabs

within the boundaries of the Jewish state must be banished. Or, as he likes to say, "they must go." Sometimes Kahane delivers his proposal to punish tens of thousands of innocent people and permanently compromise Jewish honor as if it were only an obvious solution to an obvious problem. This is how it sounds in his mock-analytic voice, with which he learned a long time ago to mask the immense volume of hatred that impels him:

There is an ultimately insoluble contradiction between a Jewish state of Israel that is the fulfillment of the 2,000-year-old Jewish-Zionist dream and a state in which Arabs and Jews possess equal rights—including the right of the Arabs democratically and peacefully to put an end to the Jewish state. Those who refuse the Arab that right but tell him he is equal think he is a fool. He is not. The Jews and Arabs of the Land of Israel ultimately cannot coexist in a Jewish-Zionist state. A time bomb in the Holy Land ticks away relentlessly. . . . The great Arab weapon in the battle against Jewish Israel is: babies. . . . Eventually the very majorityship of the Jews will be threatened by the Arab birthrate. . . . In this the "hawks" are as hapless as the doves: they have no answer for what to do with either the Arabs of Israel or the liberated lands. . . . If we hope to avoid this terrible result, there is only one path for us to take: the immediate transfer of the Arabs from Eretz Israel . . . to their own lands. . . . There is only one answer: separation, Jews in their land, Arabs in theirs. Separation. Only separation.

With the exception of Kahane's repugnant conclusion, there is much in this reasoning with which a sensible student of Israel can concur. Kahane is right: Israel may be destroyed demographically. A significant increase in the number of Arabs could take back the attainment of Zionism, which was to have created a state in which Jews are a majority, to which they could therefore flee fully confident of sanctuary. (Of course, it is not the political achievement of Zionism that Kahane seeks to secure, but the racial and religious exclusivity of the Jewish state.) This Israeli fear, moreover, is a Palestinian hope; I have heard Palestinian intellectuals in Nablus coolly contend that if their *fedayeen* will not bring about a "secular democratic state in Palestine," their fertility will. Time, they believe, is Palestinian.

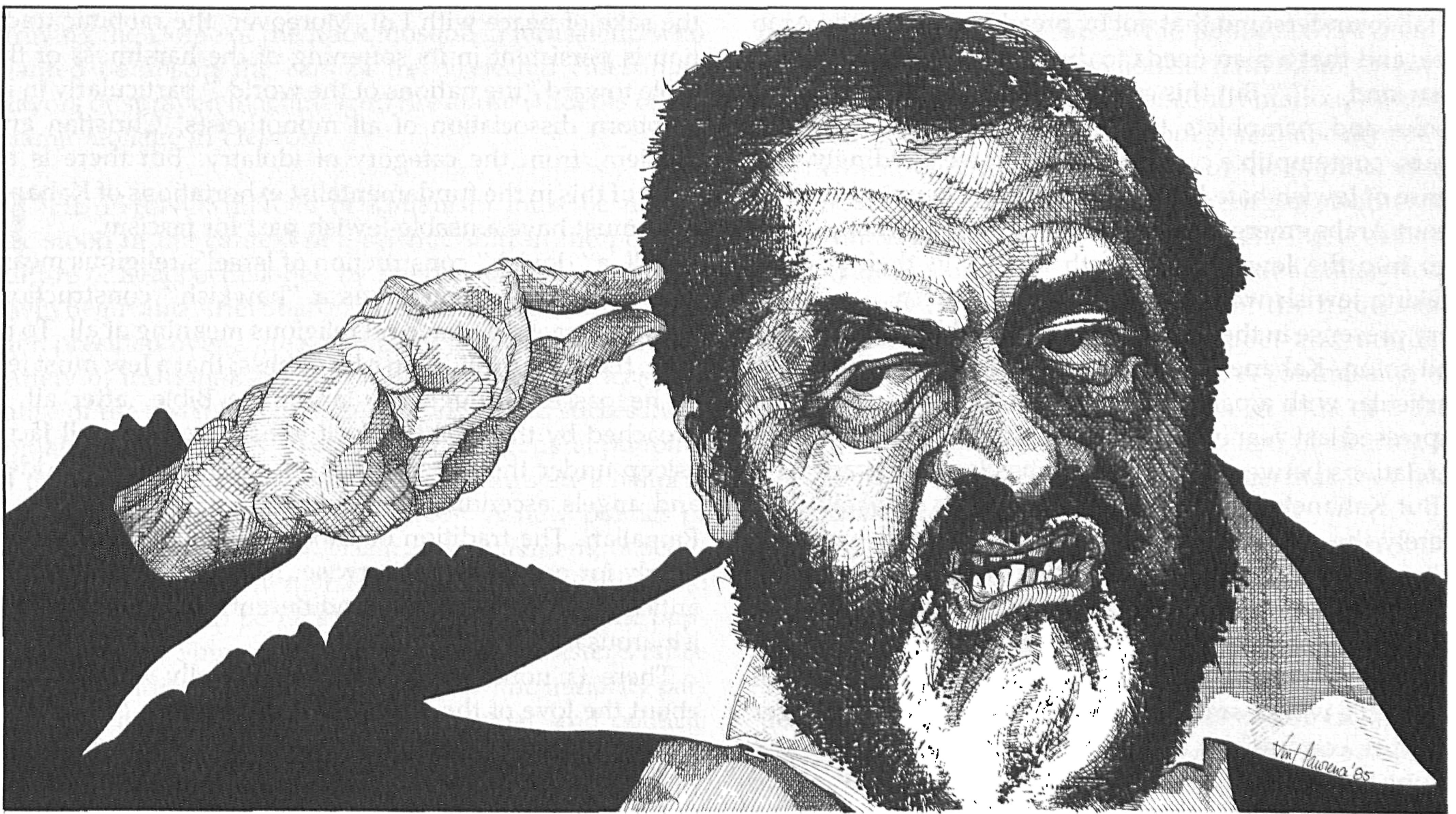
**A**ND SO TIME IS; but only if the occupied territories are annexed. The moral irony of the Israeli debate about the West Bank and Gaza is that the liberals, the doves, the traders of territory for peace, are the separatists; while the jingoists, the hawks, the believers in hallowed boundaries, may pose as the democrats. I say pose, because there can be no doubt that the annexers would invent one excuse after another to prevent the enfranchisement of the Palestinians. (Yuval Neeman, a major ideologist of Tehiya, a party to the right of the Likud, recently blurted out that the aim of annexation "is not the transformation of the Arab population into citizens of Israel . . . Israeli citizenship is to be awarded only in rare instances and after appropriate loyalty tests.") In the real world, then, the choice before Israel is not between a small Jewish state with a democracy and a large Jewish state with a democracy; it is between a small, democratic state

with a Jewish majority or no Jewish state at all.

The essential point about a small state with a Jewish majority, however, is that it is entirely consistent with the democratic ideal. The test of the democratic ideal, after all, is the respect for minorities. There is no philosophical or political reason that an Arab minority cannot win such respect from a Jewish majority; indeed, in many critical ways it already has. What stands more and more in the way of such respect, on both sides, is rather the culture of nationalism itself, the discord between the idea of self-determination and the idea of minorities. The idea of self-determination projects a world in which (in the words of John Stuart Mill) "it is in general a necessary condition of free institutions that the boundaries of government should coincide in the main with those of nationalities," in which your social or political being cannot be realized except among your own. The idea of minorities, on the other hand, projects a world in which differences are erased by a single standard of citizenship, in which your social and political being can be realized among anybody. In the past century the idea of minorities has been generally bested by the idea of self-determination; groups have elected, sometimes for reasons of security but often for reasons of self-love, orders of political and cultural exclusiveness. As a Pakistani nationalist put it in 1947, "Good government is no substitute for self-government." The story of the relationship of nationalism to democracy is a sad one.

**A**MONG the achievements of the Jewish state was its more or less successful negotiation of that relationship. As nationalisms go, Zionism did very well. Arabs in Israel certainly enjoyed more of the legal and political blandishments of the liberal state than Arabs anywhere else in the Middle East. Still, there was a secret to Zionism's relative success in the matter of democracy. It enjoyed the luxury of easy numbers. The non-Jewish proportion of the Israeli population was never large enough to create a contradiction between the Jewishness of the state and the freedom of the state. But the Six Day War may have changed that—that is, if the territories are annexed, or allowed to remain perpetually under occupation. The successful defense of Israel in 1967 put it in the way of a great temptation; for the first time Jews would claim sovereignty over a number of Arabs large enough to challenge their legitimacy and their security.

Meir Kahane is correct. Zionism and democracy cannot coexist in Greater Israel. They can coexist, however, in Israel, in a state that improves significantly upon the 1967 borders without increasing significantly the Arab population within them—that cleaves, in short, to the principle of partition, which is still the only just and practical basis for a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. Since it is impossible to argue against the justice of territorial compromise (except from the ideological grounds upon which Meir Kahane is battenning), the argument against its practicality now abounds. Conor Cruise O'Brien, for example, has shown in gloomy detail in the October *Atlantic* the full magnitude of the difficulties that would face any imple-



DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

mentation of the Allon Plan, the Labor Party's long-standing design for territorial compromise. These difficulties, most of which still originate on the Arab side, are impossible to deny; but the difficult is not quite the impossible.

A look back at the first map of partition will prove the point. Drawn by the British, it was a preposterous map, and not only because of its parsimony toward the Jews. Its suggested solution for political chaos was geographical nonsense. Still, David Ben-Gurion had the wit, and the moral seriousness, to realize that, for a stateless people, geographical nonsense made historical sense. He swallowed some of his ideological purity and historical pride and ancient dreams, and shattered the unity of the national movement, and took for his miserable people what they could get (all of which the Palestinian leadership has yet to do). The second map of partition, some version of the Allon Plan that would release Israel from the densely populated regions of the West Bank that loom over its reason for being, will also be geographical nonsense. It will be dramatically complicated by the requirements of security in a world of high-technology war. And it will offer the Palestinians less than they feel they deserve and less than they could have won from the first map of partition. But the second map will represent not merely the least the Israelis can do for the Palestinians, but the least they can do for themselves. The other way lies Meir Kahane.

The rabid rabbi, of course, answers to a higher authority than the state. His charter in politics is God's promise to Abraham ("Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward. For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever . . ."). It is borders,

not numbers, that exercise Kahane. The borders are not negotiable, because they are holy; and he who believes that the borders are holy must indeed be perplexed about the numbers, for he is asking for them. The fact is that there is an essential link between the religious reading of the occupied territories and the idea of expulsion. If Israel eventually absorbs the territories, the territories will eventually absorb Israel. Something, then, has to give. Since it cannot be the land, it will have to be the people who live on it. Kahane should give pause to all those ecstatic or romantic Jews who see only Shechem in Nablus, only Beth El in Ramallah, only the Bible on the West Bank; they must reflect upon the extent to which religion may contribute to the undoing of the state, because of all that it will forbid the state to do in its own interest.

Yet even Kahane's disquiet about the demographic threat is more than a little false. For Kahane, Zionism is antithetical to democracy even within the 1967 borders. No minority of Arabs has a place in the state. Most of Kahane's provocations have been directed at the Arabs of the Galilee, not at the Arabs of the West Bank. They *all* must go. The roots of Kahane's solution to the Arab question are twofold. First, there is racism, of a particularly virulent kind. Talking to Mike Wallace, the rabid rabbi will protest that he has no contempt for the Arab, that he understands the Arab's refusal to live under Jewish sovereignty, and therefore wishes that he will leave and flourish elsewhere; and he can write affectingly, in words that might have come from *The Journal of Palestine Studies*, that "the Arab of Israel can enjoy full religious and cultural freedoms, can say and write what he feels, can exercise political rights . . . just like a Jew. But to think that . . . is

to fail to understand that not by bread alone does the Arab live, and that a man needs to dwell in and feel part of his own land. . . ." But this compassion is counterfeit. In the books and pamphlets that he has published over the years, contemptible contributions to the exceedingly slim genre of Jewish hate literature, Kahane's genuine feelings about Arabs emerge. They are "dogs" and "jackals," they "go into the Jewish night with money in their pockets seeking Jewish women," they are "a cancer . . . whose very presence in the Land . . . is abominable desecration," and so on. Kahane's writings on the Arabs are littered in particular with a pathetic sexual fear of them, which was expressed last year in his notorious proposal to make sexual relations between Jews and Arabs illegal in Israel.

But Kahane's hatred is not bounded by the Arab. Not merely the Arab, but the gentile, too, must be expelled. "Close the doors of the Holy Land to those gentiles unwilling to abide by its sanctity and who enter it with their luggage of abomination." Kahane admonishes Israel's government about the peace with Egypt that "the dogs of the gentile world, smelling the fear, will salivate in hunger for more concessions as their appetite is whetted." And among these "dogs" is the United States, which cannot be trusted. There a holocaust awaits the Jews; "it is a Divine decree." (One of the first institutions established by Kahane in Jerusalem was something called the Museum of the Future Holocaust. The man simply kindles to Jewish catastrophes.) Nor are even the Jews spared the rabbi's wanton wrath. Some of Kahane's most lurid passages are devoted to the Jews who oppose him; "a Jewish state rose from the crematoria not because we deserved it, but because the gentile did." Against Jews he has threatened all kinds of political and physical intimidation. "There are no allies," Kahane uncontrollably concludes.

**T**HE OTHER ROOT of Kahane's readiness to throw the Arabs out of Israel is, alas, Judaism. "Kahanism is Judaism," he humbly says. In a sense, it is true. There is no such thing as a tolerant religion, and Judaism is no exception. It is indeed not democratic. Its texts are riddled with exclamations of exclusiveness, and with the odium of the other; there is much in the canon for Kahane to use. Still, here one must be very circumspect. For every rabbinic insistence upon Jewish superiority there is a rabbinic insistence upon Jewish justice.

For the last decade or so a war has raged in the religious community about the proper theological interpretation of the Jewish state; and there is an impressive array of arguments and exegeses that rule against racism and fanaticism and the refusal to make concessions for the sake of peace. Moses may have been commanded to destroy the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the other peoples of Canaan ("thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them": the verse in Deuteronomy is a favorite of religious annexationists, particularly for the Talmudic gloss that "you shall not give them a place of settlement on the soil"), but Abraham committed what we would call a territorial compromise for

the sake of peace with Lot. Moreover, the rabbinic tradition is persistent in its softening of the harshness of the Bible toward "the nations of the world," particularly in its stubborn dissociation of all monotheists, Christian and Moslem, from the category of idolatry. But there is no trace of this in the fundamentalist exhortations of Kahane, who must have a usable Jewish past for fascism.

Still, a "dovish" construction of Israel's religious meaning may be as egregious as a "hawkish" construction, because Israel may have no religious meaning at all. To be sure, there is a thrill, even a bit of bliss, that a Jew must feel as he passes through the land. The Bible, after all, *is* broached by the West Bank; it is hard *not* to recall Jacob asleep under the stars in Beth El, dreaming of a ladder, and angels ascending and descending, as you come to Ramallah. The tradition of Labor Zionism is now paying dearly for pretending otherwise, for the shallow socialist anticlericalism that made it indifferent to this form of Jewish arousal.

There is nothing morally or politically objectionable about the love of the past or the imagination of the holy. But it comes from the land, not from the state; and it comes to the individual, not to the citizen. The state of Israel is not, in the canonical phrase of the religious nationalists, *reshit tsmikhat geulateynu*, the beginning of our redemption. It is a completely secular thing, created for a completely secular purpose, according to the completely secular conventions of modern politics. The government of Israel was not appointed by God (and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel was appointed by the British Mandate). The extension of sanctity to the state, in the form of myth or in the form of law, has been the source of many distortions of Israeli life, not least among them the view that the Palestinians are merely the new Hittites or the new Girgashites.

The mingling of religion with nationalism did not begin with Meir Kahane. It originated with Zionism itself, in the late 19th century; and it has been responsible for many intellectual, social, and political achievements of the highest order. (In the person of Rabbi Abraham Kook, the first chief rabbi of Israel, it produced one of the most original thinkers in modern Jewish history, and a remarkable mystic.) Still, Meir Kahane would not have been possible without that mingling. It set the snare of metaphysics for the state, the permanent possibility for a national illusion of religious grandeur. Many have fallen into that trap, particularly since the Six Day War. Meir Kahane is merely the most fallen of all.

## II.

**M**EIR KAHANE deserves to be denounced as the national disgrace of the Jewish people. But a denunciation of Kahane is easy, and not quite the end of it. The ground for his success was prepared for him by others. It was not Meir Kahane who dominated the Israeli debate about peace and the Palestinians in recent years, who expropriated Palestinian land on the West Bank, who regularly abused and vandalized Palestinians there, who organized a terrorist underground for the purpose of de-

stroying the Dome of the Rock mosque in Jerusalem, who planted bombs in the cars of freely elected Palestinian mayors or sprayed machine-gun fire at the students of the Islamic College in Hebron.

**T**HE PHENOMENON of Kahanism must be understood in the context of a seismic shift in the political culture of Israel occasioned by the rise to power of Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon. In their different ways these men presided over a great stimulation of extremisms, of a variety of irrationalisms that Israeli politics, not least because of the discipline of its self-defense, had successfully contained for decades. There occurred a general popping of the corks. More than ever before in the state's history, politics left Parliament for the street. A new politics of symbol and myth, of enthusiasm and excitement, of activism and agitation, materialized. And the new politics rose precisely as the old politics fell. The presence for the happy duration of Shimon Peres in the prime minister's office notwithstanding, the Labor Party is now the minority party; and it is in a state of moral, intellectual, and political exhaustion. Israel is in an age of ideology, which leaves Labor, the party of technocrats and bureaucrats and managers and pols, at a sorry disadvantage. Israel is also in an age of class and ethnic rancor, and that, too, leaves Labor behind. The energy is elsewhere.

Menachem Begin unleashed forces in Israeli politics that he believed he could control. Ariel Sharon unleashed them knowing he could not control them, but that the profit from the turbulence would be his. There are three such forces that have transformed Israeli politics under their authority, and created the conditions for the promotion of Meir Kahane from a malcontent on the margins to a fact of contemporary Israeli life: radical nationalism, militant millenarianism, and social resentment.

*Radical nationalism.* The evolution of electoral campaigns in recent years tells the story best of all. In 1981 Begin preached to mobs who proceeded to attack the property of people affiliated with the Labor Party or Peace Now, and a fateful new appellation was introduced into Israeli political discourse: *ha-makhane ha-leumi*, "the national camp," which was how the Likud successfully characterized itself (and, tolerantly, Tehiya too, its competitor to the right). Those outside the Likud were simply outside the nation. By the campaign of 1985, worried by the reversal in Lebanon and the Kahan commission's disclosure of the government's partial responsibility for the massacres at Sabra and Shatila, Ariel Sharon and Yitzhak Shamir (Begin's paltry successor) let loose a famous advertisement, which showed a picture of Yasir Arafat advising the viewer to vote for Peres. (Sharon's rhetoric against Peres remains warped; these days he enjoys inflaming party meetings with the remark that Peres, by freezing settlement on the West Bank because of the economic crisis, has imposed another White Paper on the Jews, referring to the British interdiction of Jewish emigration to Palestine on the eve of the Holocaust.)

These political phenomena were the result of a deeper historical and philosophical change that Begin set in mo-

tion. In 1977, after 30 years in the political wilderness, it was time to act upon the Revisionist chauvinism, its obsession with borders, its appetite for confrontation, its cult of national glory. Thus Begin set about systematically rewriting the history of the state, at least for the popular imagination; suddenly it appeared that the Irgun, Begin's terrorist underground of the 1940s, was the hero of Israeli independence, and the Haganah a kind of auxiliary force. Stamps were issued with the images of the Irgun's martyrs, including Avraham Stern, the poet and murderer who led the gang that bore his name. A commission was formed to look into the assassination in 1933 of a well-known Labor Zionist leader, with the aim of clearing the Revisionists of the time-honored charge that they were responsible. More examples could be cited.

Then there came a new glorification of Jewish militarism, an attempt to discredit the old Haganah policy of *havlagah*, of restraint in the use of force and circumspection in the taking of reprisals. When Begin visited the Museum of the Diaspora in Tel Aviv, a comprehensive display of the full range of Jewish creativity in the medieval and early modern eras, he wished only to know why no Jewish soldiers had been included. Begin's love of militarism is a corny kind of Betar love, gained in the paramilitary youth movement that his mentor Jabotinsky founded. Sharon's infatuation with force is a more worldly thing, and well proven; as is Rafael Eitan's, his chief of staff until the Kahan commission recommended relieving him of his duties, and now a leading figure in Tehiya.

And there came a new politicization of the Holocaust, a shamelessness about the adducing of Auschwitz for political gain. Arafat, who is quite evil enough for being Arafat, was always compared to Hitler. While the Israeli army laid siege to Beirut in 1982, Begin wrote to Reagan that "I feel as a Prime Minister empowered to instruct a valiant army facing Berlin, where among innocent civilians Hitler and his henchmen hid in a bunker beneath the surface." Of course, for Begin, as for many survivors of the Holocaust, Hitler may never be dead; but the same may not be said of many others with a talent for the tactic.

**T**HE BEGIN revolution really amounted to the removal of the inhibitions from the paranoid style in Jewish politics. Begin represented, almost anachronistically, the old-fashioned and radically simplified mentality of the Diaspora Jew; for him there were only two actors in world history, the Jew and the goy, who were eternally locked in struggle. He promulgated the time-honored typological view of Jewish history, according to which the Amalekites were the Romans were the Crusaders were the Cossacks were the Nazis were the Arabs were the PLO. After the massacre at Sabra and Shatila, Begin remarked that "goyim kill goyim and they come to hang the Jews," when in fact Christians killed Moslems and they came to hang the Jews (who were anyway not completely innocent). Included in this typological trap, moreover, were all the Palestinians. "Two-legged animals," Begin called them, though he more than made up for his part in the new Israeli preju-

dice when he signed the Camp David accords and acknowledged "the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people." It was Sharon, and Eitan (he called them "drugged roaches in a bottle"), and many of the propagandists of the settlers' movement, who prodded and prompted an anti-Palestinian feeling, particularly among Moroccan and Yemenite Jews, whose fund of anti-Arab feeling the Arabs had themselves established long ago. In 1984 a poll in *Haaretz* reported that 32 percent of Israelis considered that violence against Arabs, including terrorism, was either "totally" justified or has "some justification."

Is Meir Kahane, then, only a fluke? After the Jewish settlers' council in Qiryat Arba, the large settlement outside of Hebron, accepted a representative of Kach to its membership, Elyakim Ha-etzni, an important figure in the settlers' movement and a man of fire, argued that no apologies were necessary, that Kahane was "archaic" and "medieval" but "not Nazi," indeed, that he was only a somewhat too extreme "nationalist radical." Writing last August, Yuval Neeman condemned Kahane for his "view of Arabs—and goyim in general—as sub-human"; but in the very same breath he called for "the settlement of Arab refugees (about half a million in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza) outside of the land of Israel," and considered "different possibilities of population transfer within the framework of negotiated arrangements."

And writing in September, Ariel Sharon, who has taken the occasion of Kahane's sudden prominence to present himself as the true Jewish Jeffersonian, maintained that Kahane's ideas are "strange to us, as Jews, even crazy," that "our shared life with the Arabs in the land of Israel is . . . a geographical and historical fact, with many positive sides"; and then he proceeded to warn that even though "democracy is a supreme value . . . which must be preserved at any price . . . we have another supreme value: securing the existence of the Jewish people and the state of Israel and its development, as the state of the Jews and as a Jewish state. . . . It must not enter anybody's mind that the rules of the democratic game will lead to a weakening or a loss of the Jewish uniqueness and complexion of the state of Israel." The Arabs "must enjoy, as a matter of principle, equal rights as individuals. . . . But west of the Jordan, in the territories of the Jewish state, national rights . . . belong only to Jews." With such critics, Kahane can live comfortably. And they with him; he can do their dirty work.

**M**ILITANT millenarianism. The settlement of the West Bank for the sake of annexation was not solely the work of the radical nationalists, who are generally secular technocrats or veterans of the resistance. The most powerful impulse for the settlement movement was religious. After the 1967 war there arose from the mystical nationalism of Rabbi Abraham Kook, particularly as it was developed by his son, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, known as "The Hermit," a vigorous application of the traditions of Jewish messianism to the reality of the Jewish state. Both the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War were given elaborate apocalyptic meanings. Political activism, meticulously

planned and aggressively executed by the Gush Emunim (the Bloc of the Believers), was undertaken in an eschatological spirit.

The messianic doctrine of Maimonides is frequently cited as the basis for the pioneering and the politics of the settlers. "The messianic age is this world," Maimonides wrote, "and the world keeps to its customs, except that sovereignty will be restored to Israel." Endorsing a Talmudic text that may be found throughout the writings of the Gush Emunim, Maimonides judged that "there is no difference between this world and the messianic era except the subjugation of the [other] kingdoms." Such opinions have led Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, an influential rabbi and one of the *prophetae* of the millenarian movement, to characterize the politics of the settlers as "messianic realism."

They have also led to certain more concrete developments. The chief rabbinate has issued a number of rulings forbidding the return of any territory for peace. In 1979, for example, it decreed that "according to our holy Torah, and to clear and authoritative law, there is a strict ban on transferring ownership to gentiles" of any part of the land that God promised Abraham. (During the Lebanon war, the attempt was made by the millennial commentators to include Lebanon in the promise.) The speciousness of the legal reasoning in these decisions has been exposed by a number of great rabbinic scholars, but their influence is drastically limited by *their* historical indifference to Zionism and the state.

**N**OR IS THAT ALL. The religious intellectuals of the annexationist movement have drawn a variety of disheartening and undemocratic conclusions about the Palestinians in whose midst many of them live. For all of them, the idea of civil rights is a Western incrustation upon the Jewish revival; the tolerant among them are those who search the classical sources for categories of second-class citizenship for the Palestinians. But the prevailing view consists in a tacit consensus about the desirability of their expulsion. This is rarely stated plainly. As one rabbi put it a few years ago, there are "laws that are not to be publicized"; or, as many like to remind themselves, "the Torah spoke in the language of men," that is, it spoke euphemistically and allegorically, so as not to shock with a direct disclosure of its meaning. Still, the feeling is everywhere that there is no place for the Arab in the Jewish land—and that the holiness of the Jews exempts them from the obligations of morality that are binding on other peoples. The commandment to conquer the land, writes Rabbi Aviner, "transcends the human and moral considerations of the national rights of the gentiles to our land." And in one instance, in an article called "The Commandment of Genocide in the Torah," a rabbi proposed that Israel's Palestinian policy be guided by the injunction in the Torah to wipe out all traces of the ancient foe Amalek. As the late Uriel Tal observed, in one of his important studies of the political culture of the West Bank millenarians, the article occasioned no controversy in its community.

I have been to the settlements on the West Bank many

times, and I count some of the settlers among my friends. I have disputed with them fiercely. I have also prayed with them, admiring the vitality of their venture and envying a little the quantity of rapture that they have introduced into their lives. I believe that they are wrong, and that they may be putting the whole of the state into jeopardy. I do not believe that they are all racists, or psychopaths, or terrorists, or fascists. Still, all these may be found in their midst; and more important, they—I mean even the gentlest spirits among the settlers, the most thoughtful and the most ethically exigent among them—have created the intellectual and political conditions for anti-Palestinian prejudice and anti-Palestinian violence.

It will not do for them to dissociate themselves from the worst consequences of their zeal, as they tried to do in the affair of the Jewish terrorists. The people were theirs, and so, therefore, was the responsibility. Intoxicated by their own idealism, the settlers do not see that they are pushing the state in the direction of problems for which they have no acceptable solution. Mystical experience will be a poor excuse for historical blindness. Now Meir Kahane has appeared, and many of the settlers are embarrassed, and are nervously trying to make distinctions. Distinctions there are; but without the legitimation and the popularization of political messianism by the settlers and their leaders, more Israelis may have recognized, in Kahane's screeds about "the irrational, dangerous, Jewish things," the full measure of his grotesqueness.

**SOCIAL RESENTMENT.** The simultaneity of social unrest with with messianic activity is an old story. In Israel since Begin, interestingly, they occurred simultaneously, but by different hands. There are very few Sephardic (Oriental) Jews among the settlers of the West Bank; Sharon's attempt in the late 1970s to set up an entirely Sephardic settlement not far from Nablus failed miserably. The Sephardic rage was expressed elsewhere. While more Sephardim voted for Labor in the elections of 1977, 1981, and 1985 than is commonly realized, and while most of the structure of the Likud (and a substantial portion of the supporters of Kach) is Ashkenazic (European), the fact remains that one of the primary instruments of Begin, Sharon, and Kahane has been the politics of resentment. Begin, for whom a Jew is a Jew is a Jew, probably did not exploit the resentment intentionally. His strategists, and certainly Sharon, did. Incitement became a standard Likud ploy. The results were rattling. I recall seeing "Askenatzim" ("Ashke-Nazis") scrawled on walls in more than one development town.

What is the justice of the Sephardic grievance? It is hard to say. The great Sephardic immigrations of the late 1940s and early 1950s occurred in a period of grave economic crisis; and, as Marie Syrkin wrote recently in these pages concerning the insensitivity of the government to the culture of the new citizens, "in a rational society it is fair to ask how far reverence for ancient folkways should go." Recent research in Israel, on the other hand, presents a picture of paternalism and prejudice in high places that is

hard to deny. Whatever the case, the availability of a vast fund of social bitterness proved to be a decisive fact of Israeli politics in the late 1970s.

The bitterness was both class and ethnic. For the Likud it included a foreign policy dividend as well. The economic crisis worsened it; and the Begin government offered a politically expedient boom for the short term that amounted to a hoax played upon its most loyal supporters. Perhaps the most vivid account of the bitterness is Amos Oz's report of an encounter with a group of Sephardic workers in Beit Shemesh, a development town near Jerusalem:

When you were on top, you hid us away in holes, in *moshavim* and in development towns, so the tourists wouldn't see us; so we wouldn't stain your image; so they'd think this was a white country. But that's all over now, because now we've come out of our holes. . . . You want the hatred between us to end? First of all, come and apologize, properly. We have sinned, we are guilty, we have dealt treacherously—that's what you should say. That's what you should say, looking us straight in the eye at Beit Shemesh, and in front of Begin's house. . . . Say you're sorry for the thirty years you were in power. . . . We're not out for revenge. You're Jews, too. But one thing: come without that arrogance of yours. . . .

About the Arabs, the fury in Beit Shemesh is no less considerable, though it quickly turns to targets closer to home:

You think the Arabs want a state in the West Bank? They want to eat us up alive—that's what they want. And Shimon Peres is willing to sell them the whole country, just as long as he gets back into power. The guy's sick. You're all sick. The sickest ones are those writers and the left-wing professors and the television reporters and Peace Now. . . . Look at the Arabs, just look! Do they have anything like Peace Now?

**W**HEN Meir Kahane visits Beit Shemesh, he is welcomed as a hero. "Kahane, king of Israel!" Kahane has made a career out of the distrust of elites and the disaffection from "establishments." He speaks proudly about the enthusiasm of this stratum of the population for his extremism. His pride always is accompanied by a textbook illustration of paranoid anti-intellectualism. At the National Press Club a few weeks ago, he defended his Sephardic supporters as "the last normal people [in Israel], untouched by college professors. Not every Jew has to be a Ph.D." The coarseness of his mob pleases Kahane; he shares its fear of what he calls "the Hellenists—disturbed artists, intellectuals, and writers, the barons of television and radio and theater, placing their own needs, desires, and illnesses over that of the sacred yoke of Heaven." Kahane is indefatigable in playing upon the unhappy Sephardic past. "This is the accusing finger," he writes, "that points at the Israeli Establishment, for what Muslims could not do during more than 1,000 years of domination of the Jews in their lands, the Jewish Establishment accomplished in less than 25: the spiritual destruction of hundreds of thousands of Sephardic Jews. . . ."

The good news about the ethnic tension in Israel, however, is that the edge seems to be going off it. The present government of national unity marks a decisive step in the

political enfranchisement of the Sephardim; both its deputy prime ministers, Yitzhak Navon of Labor and David Levy of Likud, are of Oriental origin. Indeed, the first Sephardic political elite in the history of the state is now in formation. And as the rates of ethnic intermarriage increase, and the integration by the common experience of army service intensifies, the appeal of demagoguery and the reliability of the protest vote declines. Thus, like any accomplished practitioner of the politics of resentment, Kahane will do his best to keep his supporters down even as he pretends to raise them up. He needs their anger.

### III.

**M**EUR KAHANE has the dubious distinction of combining the ugliest of American Jewry with the ugliest of Israeli Jewry.

I remember Kahane well. In 1969, when I was 17 and a student at a yeshivah high school in Brooklyn that mixed a strenuous curriculum with a passionate commitment to religious Zionism, I joined the Jewish Defense League. Kahane had spoken at the yeshivah, and made an impression. He dressed like an Israeli and spoke like an American. He wore a large woolen yarmulke, as did we all. His voice had a strange, and finally a soothing, rhythm; it would rise and snarl, as if to frighten us, and then subside into a calm that seemed more proof of conviction. (Later I learned that the calm was of a different kind, what Charcot called *la belle indifférence des hystériques*.) He would punctuate his speech with ostentatiously heavy sighs, as if all that he was saying was obvious, as if all of the collective memory of the Jewish people was his to carry. Nobody knew very much about him; he seemed to have arrived from nowhere. Though he called himself a rabbi, he did not seem very learned. We did not care. His appeal was not to our minds.

The climate in Brooklyn in 1969 was clement for Kahane's message, which was essentially that we, the Jews of Brooklyn, were as besieged as our ancestors, and as our brothers and sisters in Israel. We, too, were fighting for our lives. He seemed to move our uneventful existence from the peaceful periphery to the calamitous center of Jewish history, to enlist us in the great Jewish melodrama. Two events had recently taken place that made us ripe for rousing. The first was the Six Day War; for us, *this* was the world-historical war of the 1960s, and our primal political scene. When Kahane appeared, the flammable mixture of despair and exaltation of June 1967 was still vivid in our hearts. On June 6, for example, all teaching at my yeshivah was halted, and replaced by the radio coverage of the war, which was broadcast over the public address system. When our Israeli teachers wept, we wept too. A few weeks after the war we all hung a large poster of a Hasid changing into a Superman costume in a telephone booth. "The whole world is against us," we would say in Hebrew; or, as Kahane later put it, "a Jewish fist in the face of an astonished gentile world . . . This is *kiddush ha-shem* [the Sanctification of God's Name]."

The other event was the Ocean Hill-Brownsville teachers' strike. There came the shock of black anti-Semitism:

"Hey Jew Boy with that yarmulke on your head / You pale-faced Jew Boy, I wish you were dead . . .," dedicated by a young black girl, celebrated in her community, to Albert Shanker. We had found our enemy. I will not pretend that we were betrayed liberals; in Flatbush, in Boro Park, in Bensonhurst, in Crown Heights, the blacks had almost always been *shvartzes*. Still, a young paranoid needs an enemy, and we had agreed to let Kahane train us in paranoia. The Jewish Defense League was founded in 1968 as a cross between a self-help group and a vigilante organization, to patrol the streets of Brooklyn's mixed and troubled neighborhoods and protect elderly Jews from attackers. I thought this was a worthy activity; and in acting self-reliantly I felt Israeli.

It was not long before the Jewish Defense League developed into what it became—an American Jewish Poujadist movement, organized around an endlessly ambitious and reckless leader, fascinated by lawlessness and brutality. A short time later, after Kahane found his "foreign policy," his violent anti-Soviet and anti-Arab demonstrations, I quietly parted company with the movement. While Kahane prided himself on "getting Soviet Jewry onto page one of the *New York Times*," I decided that it was really Kahane he was trying to get there. (Another group, called Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, was doing the real work.) The lust for violence—"Every Jew a .22"—frightened me. One summer I considered three plans for my vacation: Camp Jedel, a paramilitary summer camp Kahane had started in the Catskills; a program of social work for high school students in Appalachia, which was then a big draw for the children of the middle-class; and a first visit to Israel. I chose Israel, and it opened my eyes to what was happening in Brooklyn.

**W**HEN I RECALL my attraction to the Jewish Defense League, I begin to understand the attraction of many Israeli teenagers to Kach. Kahane seemed to hit every resentment, every fear of inadequacy, every fantasy. There was the resentment of Brooklyn for Manhattan. It was the class resentment of the lower-middle-class Jews in semidetached houses for the genteel Jews in buildings with doormen. And it was the cultural resentment of young Jews who spoke Hebrew or Yiddish naturally but never saw a foreign film for the well-educated and socially gifted Jews across the bridge whose Jewishness seemed illiterate. "Is This Any Way for Nice Jewish Boys to Behave?" was the JDL caption to a photograph of Jews in yarmulkes brandishing bats and chains.

There was a kind of Holocaust resentment, too. In Manhattan they were making speeches and holding commemorations; in Brooklyn we lived among the survivors, we were their children, and met the death daily. "Never Again!" was Kahane's most popular slogan; it seemed properly absolute, and had the additional advantage of making Auschwitz into a mere political problem. We never understood the Jewish organizations' objection to it. Everything, then, that Kahane said about "the Jewish Establishment" sounded right. It had ignored and insulted us, the Jews from the provinces, the not-so-prosperous



Jews, the Jews with accents, the Jews in yarmulkes.

Kahane's skill was first to make us feel more powerless than we were and then to make us feel that we had more power than we did. The Jewish Defense League was based on an odd combustion of feelings of superiority with feelings of inferiority. The Jews were victims and they were victors. They were meek and they were mighty. And Kahane's other skill, I realized much later, was to make it possible for us to have the 1960s our way. The Jewish Defense League was a right-wing protest movement that owed many of its methods and much of its glamour to the example of the radical left. It was an antiblack organization whose hatred of the Black Panthers was equaled only by its respect. In acting self-reliantly, we felt not only Israeli; we also felt black. I recall, not a little to my shame, protesting to my parents that Eldridge Cleaver was making me a better Jew. I remember a week in which I handcuffed myself to the Soviet consulate on 67th Street and organized a Jewish contingent to an antiwar rally on 42nd Street. (I also remember Robert Lowell sitting next to me on the IND to Bryant Park, as on my lap I had a volume of Yehuda Amichai's verse.) For all its crude affirmations of Jewish authenticity, the JDL was for many of us a welcome avenue of assimilation, a way of getting in on the great melodrama of the goyim, too.

#### IV.

**T**HE EMERGENCE of Meir Kahane is a sign that the Jews must attend to their demons as well as to their enemies. But Kahane's emergence is owed in part to the behavior of their enemies. No, Arabs are not responsible for what Jews do; only Jews are. For centuries the excuse of external hostility has existed for the Jews, for their shortcomings and their failings, but they never took it up. The Jews will have to defeat Kahanism. But the Arabs, and the PLO, and the Palestinians, are not helping.

In 1947 the Jews accepted the partition of Palestine and the Arabs did not. Now many Jews do not, too; that is really all that has changed over the past 40 years. It is a fateful change, to be sure. But it is a change that the Arabs were instrumental in bringing about. Three times the Arabs dispatched their armies for the purpose of destroying the Jewish state, and scores of times they dispatched their terrorists for the purpose of destroying Jewish men, women, and children. Precisely how much punishment can the Jewish willingness to compromise take?

Certainly, the Arab-Israeli conflict is a political problem; this the peace with Egypt, despite its chills, demonstrates. But who cannot forgive Israelis for believing that the problem is cultural, or racial, or metaphysical? Certainly, the war with the Arabs was not like the war (or what war there was) with the Nazis; there is a difference between fighting to defend a state and fighting for a better way to die. But who cannot forgive Israelis for returning from the front in 1967 and 1973 with thoughts of extinction? Asking the Jews to cling to compromise is asking them to overlook a substantial portion of their experience. This, very vigilantly, they have done—sometimes because peace seemed possi-

ble, sometimes because they refused to countenance a destiny of pure darkness; sometimes as an act of mind, sometimes as an act of will. But it is a psychological feat of great magnitude to act as if the people who seem to want to destroy you do not want to destroy you, to withstand war after war and hold that peace is imminent, to busy yourself with your own defense and still keep yourself open.

**T**HE SPLITTING of the Jewish self required by the "peace process," the strain of negotiating with oneself because there is nobody else prepared to negotiate with one, is becoming harder to bear. The rise to power of Menachem Begin should have signaled this. From the election of 1977 that brought Begin to the prime minister's office to the election of 1985 that brought Kahane to the Knesset, the evidence has mounted that the argument for hope is becoming less and less plausible to more and more Israelis. For years the PLO, with the assent of the king of Jordan, played upon the Israeli insistence upon risking illusion; the "two-track" strategy of diplomacy and terror was a consummate cynicism, requiring that Israel heed new words while the PLO practiced old deeds. The angry man from Beit Shemesh was right. The Arabs have no Peace Now. They have no Labor Party, either. And they had their own Kahanes before the Jewish one was born.

The Arabs, in short, have made Israeli liberalism seem refuted by reality. Every day that passes without the arrival of King Hussein and the announcement of a moderate Palestinian leadership on the West Bank is only more proof against it. Still, it is early for complete despair. There have been some hysterical things said in the wake of Kahane's celebrity. Doubts have been raised, for example, about the resilience of Israeli democracy. It is true, certainly, that demagogues like Kahane flourish in democracies; they are the slime that democracies must suffer. But Israeli democracy moved swiftly against Kahane. The Knesset passed a law in July banning racist parties like Kach from future elections. The law is problematic, and no doubt Kahane will find a way around it; but at least this democracy is alive to the danger from the anti-democrats in its midst. Nor does Kahane's election prove that Israeli society is fundamentally anti-Arab; recent polls show a healthy (if dwindling) majority that opposes any such attitude.

Kahane is not Israel. He will never come to power. But even his limited success will aid and abet the forces in Israel that may land Israel with a problem it will not be able to solve. You do not have to be Meir Kahane, or Yuval Neeman, or Yitzhak Shamir, or Ariel Sharon to oppose the PLO. But the PLO was crippled militarily in Lebanon, and now politically in the *Achille Lauro* affair; the Palestinians remain. They may not be central to the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, or to the imperishable instability of the Middle East, or even to all of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but they are central, surely, to the Israelis and to themselves. And there can be no greater blow to the prospects for peace than the poisoning of relations between peoples who will share, whether they like it or not, with God's blessing or without, the same unknown fate. □