

Herzl and the Bible

This unsolicited commentary is a response to three essays by Professor Salim Mansur (retired from the University of Western Ontario) – “Rabin’s Murder is Prehistory of Gaza-Israel 10/7 [broadcast as an interview],” *The UNZ Review*, Nov. 3, 2023; “Falsus in Uno, Falsus in Omnibus,” March 4, 2024; “Israel – Beyond the Pale,” March 20.

by [Mordechai Nisan](#) (April 2024)



Salim Mansur

I became acquainted with Salim Mansur in 2017 at a conference in Jerusalem, where he presented a positive view of the right of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. As a Muslim, he pointed out that the Quran validated this primordial connection. In the same year, he wrote *The Qur’an Problem and Islamism* in which he defined Jew-hatred as a pathology, though

not embedded in the holy book of Islam. Mansur had earlier co-authored (with Geoffrey Clarfield) an article in *The National Post* (Toronto), Aug. 6, 2015, titled "The Fictional Kingdom [of Jordan]," a modern state bereft of roots and legitimacy. This stood in distinct contrast with the Jews returning by right "to their ancient homeland," a bonding with the land... "never severed or questioned, and recognized by the League of Nations." After a second reference to the "historical and legal right" of the Jewish people, Mansur appended the definitive statement— "there is no [Israeli] occupation" —placing himself decisively on the right side of the conflict. In his own words, Israel "deserves admiration."

With this background, Mansur's recent radical shift and adoption of a strident anti-Israel position was a startling bewilderment. As a free thinker and a Muslim, no less openly critical of radical Islam, he has now reconsidered his position on such a politically controversial and emotionally saturated issue. We cannot ignore the possibility that political pressures and religious condemnations can harass good people to succumb to the prevailing oppressive anti-Israel dogma.

Let me discuss this complex subject with its attendant personal, intellectual, and political significance.

Israel's Uniqueness

The normal criteria of history and nationhood do not apply to the Jewish people. Their identity as the chosen people or a special people, a despised people and a tragic people, defy the categories of collective human experience. Central to the mystery is their bonding of religion and nationhood, their exile and return, their universalism and particularism, and the revival of their language as a spoken tongue. Mark Twain admired what he considered the immortality of the Jews: "All

things are mortal but the Jew ... all other forces pass, but he remains." Salim Mansur however anticipates a dim future for the Jews, the collapse of Israel's modern national renaissance, as he slandered Zionism as "one of the greatest crimes of the twentieth-century."

When both David Ben-Gurion and Chaim Weizmann pointed to the Bible as providing the mandate for modern Zionism, with the drama of that connection, this reverberated with the spiritual power of a people that had weathered the storms of a long and harrowing history. Not everyone is equipped to see this transcending story for what it is—a miracle in human dimensions—and grant it political legitimacy and stand in awe of this exceptional triumph.

No one is at fault if incapable or unwilling to think in *unconventional* categories concerning the Jewish people, whose millennia survival, national integrity, and political restoration in the ancient territorial cradle, are unprecedented. Indeed, the opening words of Israel's Declaration of Independence speak volumes: "The land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious, and political identity was shaped." The right of the Jews to self-determination led to the re-establishment of the Jewish state of Israel in 1948.

Herzl's Scam?

In his obsession to snuff out the state of Israel, Mansur consistently sidesteps the debate over its right to Judea and Samaria, and leaps for the political jugular. Thus, 1948 is the heart of the matter, not 1967. Zionism's guilty verdict bellows at the founding, inherent in the illegitimate birth, adulterated by the nefarious merging of Jewish colonialism with British imperialism.

However, the seeds of this manifest injustice were planted, as

Mansur repeats many times, with *Herzl's scam*. The contempt with which Mansur treats Herzl, the acclaimed visionary and organizer of Zionism, is almost audible. It screeches from his language. Here is his blunt forecast for Israel: "the eventual dismantlement of the last colonial-settler apartheid state in the Levant, as a sordid legacy of the age of European imperialism and colonialism." In the shadow of the massacre by Hamas of 1,200 Israelis on October 7 last year, and the ensuing war Israel faces on multiple fronts, coupled with the abhorrent hatred of Jews and Israel escalating around the world, Mansur's hope may seem more plausible than ever before.

Mansur expectedly agrees with the International Court of Justice and considers that Israel, as accused, may indeed be guilty of a "plausible genocide" of the Palestinians. The moral inversion that transformed savage aggressors, who murdered, raped, and decapitated Jews, into innocent victims is of a piece with the demolition of truth and the decline of civilization. Anti-Israel demonstrations in the streets and anti-Zionist protests on university campuses, acts of harassment and boycotts, and violent assaults in Paris and Los Angeles, illustrate that governments and security authorities in the West have abandoned the Jews to their fate.

Rabin and Arafat

For Salim Mansur, the audacious Zionist project—Herzl's scam—was from the beginning designed to expel the native Arabs from Palestine. With Jewish duplicity in high gear, quite a prominent theme in the Quran, Mansur accuses Israel of violating the United Nations Partition Resolution 181 from 1947. Its key recommendation was the division of Palestine between a Jewish state and an Arab state. The Arabs rejected the proposal and chose warfare. After Israel was able thereafter to capture territory beyond the UN allotted land according to the Partition map, the Palestine Arabs came up

with a ready solution. Mansur, apparently, justifies the puerile moral illogic, a standard Arab position until today, that what is lost in a war of aggression must return to the aggressor. This denies the Arabs any incentive to accept responsibility, or make peace, paying no price for going to war, then losing, against Israel.

A central contention presents Yitzhak Rabin, Israel's prime minister from 1992-95, as the great hope for peace. Mansur believes that his assassination rang the death knell for Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation. This is totally unfounded. Not only did the PLO violate the provisions of the 1993 Oslo Accord, nor was the idea of a Palestinian state an explicit end-game promise of the so-called peace process. Rabin, despite Mansur's insistence to the contrary, never once declared himself in favor of a Palestinian state; already in 1974, he said that 'a Palestinian state in the West Bank will be the beginning of the end of the state of Israel'.

Arafat, Rabin's notorious peace partner, was also unidentifiable in the misreading of Mansur. Employing theatrics and guile, Arafat was not loyal to the Oslo agreement, and violated every clause and condition—promoting hatred of Jews and intifada violence (as with bus, restaurant, and hotel suicide bombings), refusing to collect illegal weapons, releasing terrorists from Palestinian prisons. Whitewashing PLO infractions became a pattern of indoctrination in the anti-Israel broadside. This was a sure path to prevent any authentic reconciliation between the parties.

With the signing of the Oslo 2 accord in 1995, Rabin's policy position was at the most to give the Palestinians 'an entity which is less than a state'. A month before his assassination, speaking in the Knesset, the prime minister stated Israel would not return to the June 4, 1967 borders. As proven over the years in various peace talks and summits, the Palestinians rejected any proposal that offered them anything less than a

total withdrawal from all the territories, including East Jerusalem. Rabin's assassination was a political sideshow; in fact, it was rumored that Palestinian terrorism throughout Israel was convincing Rabin to end Oslo.

Censorship in concealing facts and selectivity in highlighting facts are operative in the biased account of the conflict as discussed by Professor Mansur. To understand the absence of peace, it is enough to listen to the genocidal refrain of "From the River to the Sea Palestine will be Free," reflecting the ideological ambitions of the Muslim Brotherhood, Fatah, Hamas, and all other Jew-hating jihadist Muslim terrorist groups and Iran's Islamic regime.

Islam, as the Quran demands, must be supreme over other religions, if not destroy them. Muslim conquest is the essential goal, while demoting Jews and Christians to an inferior *dhimmi* status, and liberating Palestine from Zionist rule. To rile against so-called "Zionist occupation," and invert the parameters of this problem, is to obfuscate the true nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Salim Mansur once knew this, but chooses now to promote a new and false narrative. Sorry Salim, but Rabin did not support the two-state solution: the Final Solution.

Hamas and the Massacre

Prominent in Mansur's polemic is defaming the rightist and religious political personalities and groups in Israel. Anyone committed to retention of Judea and Samaria, central to the Land of Israel idea, is for him a "fanatic Zionist." Prime Minister Netanyahu is on the guilty list. The Likud ultra-right party, in Mansur's terminology, hijacked a secular political movement and turned Israel into an apartheid state. There is nothing fanatic about the Jewish Return to the ancient and tiny Hebrew homeland, it is not a foreign country

for Jews, its geographic names ring out with the people's history—Shiloh and Hebron, Ofra and Susia. The presence of Arabs in the territory is a human reality that does not grant them a political veto to block Zionist dynamism and resettlement.

A cacophony of contradictions mars Mansur's essays. He is out of his element, unfortunately. He throughout decries the very idea of the Zionist project—Herzl's scam—but then sees it as a secular political movement to be preferred to its religious version of late. He identifies political causality with the appearance of Hamas in 1988 as a response to the national-religious Gush Emunim settlement enterprise founded in 1974. Such a misreading of history ignores the Islamic and Palestinian foundations of the Islamic Resistance Movement, inspired by the Islamic Revolution in Iran and promoting the claim for the restitution of the sacred *waqf* territory of Palestine. As equally absurd as the argument that Hamas is a response to Elon Moreh in Samaria and to Efrat in Judea—for even without Jewish civilians, Israel's military rule alone would be anathema to the Palestinians — is Mansur's psychological explanation that frustration catalyzed the October 7 massacre. Hamas is not in need of psychological treatment but ideological deprogramming.

Rabbi Kook

Another glaring distortion in Mansur's presentation of things is his quoting anti-Zionist rabbis exclusively to substantiate his thesis. Ultra-orthodox *Haredi* alienation from Zionism is a scandalous feature in that religious community in Israel, a generations-old cultic brainwashing. There is an accelerating public controversy concerning the military draft for yeshiva students, who have exploited the exemption rule for decades. Mansur ignored the noteworthy Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook (d. 1935) whose teachings and writings provided the

mandate of Torah to legitimize, support, and embrace, modern Zionism. The contemporary national-religious community, with its dedication and energy, has in the spirit of Rabbi Kook, become a key social force in all aspects of Israeli national life, visibly serving in the Israel Defense Forces.

Thus, portraying Zionism as incompatible with Judaism is an insult and transgression. Salim Mansur trespassed into what is for him uncharted territory. In this domain, his repeated claim that Israel's legitimacy derived from the League of Nations mandate granted to Britain in 1922, while ostensibly correct, misconstrues the historical process and Jewish self-consciousness in shaping Zionism. As documented by Barbara Tuchman in her absorbing *Bible and Sword*, Britain likewise would have never come to assume custodianship over Palestine – the land of Israel – on behalf of the People of Israel had the Bible not been a cornerstone of British culture and faith. This is not the only or first instance in history where religion and politics intertwine.

In *Daniel Deronda* published in 1876, George Eliot weaves the spiritual tapestry in the Jewish soul into the fabric of action. In that prophetic novel, Mordecai comes to appreciate that the “heritage of Israel is beating in the pulses of millions; it lives in their veins as a power without understanding...it is the inborn half of memory, moving as in a dream among writings on the walls, which it sees dimly but cannot divide into speech. Let the torch of visible community be lit!” This is the invisible stuff of life, of action, of Zionism. The Jewish past may seem dim, but also impenetrable and vital.

Rabbi Kook formulated the mystery in his inimitable Torah idiom: “Eretz Israel [the land of Israel],” he wrote in *Lights*, “is bound with a living bond with the nation of Israel.” A Jew cannot be loyal to his thoughts, ideas, and imaginations outside of Israel as in the land of Israel. Ezer Weizman, air force commander and deputy chief-of-staff,

grasped the native spirit animating Jews in the homeland. He wrote in his autobiography *Eagles' Wings* that had the Zionist movement accepted the somewhat bizarre 1903 Uganda proposal, the Jews—becoming Israelis—would not have fought in the 1967 war with the same dedication and courage as they did in the land of Israel. The sanctity of the homeland is alive however enigmatically in their Jewish being.

Not Strangers in the Land

Salim Mansur plunged into the murky waters of leftism and anti-Zionism unprepared for tackling the subject. Two further examples illustrate he was off the mark.

He implied that Israeli prime ministers born outside of Israel signals an alien and incoherent biographical datum, as if tainting the legitimacy of a Jewish state in Palestine. Israel, we note, legislated the Law of Return, allowing a Jew anywhere in the world to come at will and become a citizen—because Israel is the country of the Jewish people, a nation-state, beyond it being the country of its resident citizens. It is not a mitigation of their Israeli-ness or a birth defect handicap that prominent national leaders – Golda Meir (speaking her English-accented Hebrew), Shimon Peres, Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir—all from abroad. This did not make the native-born prime ministers, Rabin, Sharon, and Netanyahu, any better for that. The Jews are the historic indigenous people of the land regardless of where individual Jews were born.

Another misconception that weakens Mansur's presentation is his claim that Zionism was launched for Ashkenazi (European) Jews, not Eastern Oriental Sefardi Jews. Indeed, the spark struck in Russia and Poland, but the fire glowed from Morocco to Iran. Mansur believes Palestinian propaganda that Ashkenazi Jews are not Semites, as he ignores the common historic origin

of all Jews reverting to the land of Israel, prior to the experience of exile and dispersion. Mansur's scheme to drive a wedge between Jews, and disqualify part of them from any rights to the land, is a pathetic attempt to attribute to geography the stamp of identity. The Jewish people are not defined *where* they are but *who* they are, from time immemorial until now.

Bible and All

Significant parts of the world consider the Book as the source and authority for the finest moments and manifestations of the human experience. It is in its verses that law and morality, prophecy and personalities, loom large and decisive. The inspiring tales of courage and drama (about King David), tragedy and suffering (about Job), gave the Bible its indelible impact on the Western world in particular. For the inimitable Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil*, the Old Testament (sic) is "the book of divine justice," which is precisely what Israel deserves and not the malicious human injustice dished out by the global gang of Jew-haters. If one accepts the majestic features and teachings of the Bible, then you take the whole package. Indeed, the whole package includes God's promise to Abraham that the land of Israel is his everlasting patrimony—for him and his seed forever. The value of consistency overrides the prejudices of selectivity.

Is there another people whose identity and statehood bear such a transcending and eternal stamp of authenticity?

Balfour and the British offered the Jews an opportunity in the twentieth-century. They reckoned that the principle of equity provided some political balance between the small Jewish people in a small land, and the many Arab peoples throughout the Middle East. Yet this was far off the mark, a misreading of Islam.

Addendum

Another Mansur interview and essay appeared on March 20: "Israel—Beyond the Pale" after I had completed this essay. Here are a few of my corrections to his false claims:

*Jews were a majority in Jerusalem by the mid-19th century;

*Pioneering Jewish settlement in the land of Israel preceded Herzl's political appearance;

*The Arabs of Palestine were a fractured community without a national consciousness;

*Zionism developed through land purchases;

*The Balfour Declaration (1917) spoke on behalf of the Jewish people throughout the world and not just for the Jews then resident in the land;

*The original map for the Jewish national home as authorized by the League of Nations stretched eastward across the Jordan River to Transjordan.

*The British mandate in the land proved helpful to Zionism, yet at many junctures violated the trust that the League of Nations invested in them, and acted with iniquity against the Jews.

All the while Mansur's main thesis remains carved in stone. For him, British promotion of Zionism was "an unlawful act...illegality prevailed." The Balfour Declaration "must be corrected." Have the Palestinians ever fulfilled an agreement, showed good will, took risks for peace, accepted responsibility for their actions, or made a gesture for accommodation?

The League of Nations (in 1920) and its United Nations

successor (in 1947) represented international law. They explicitly granted the core global recognition for a Jewish state. While creating his own ethereal world of law and legality, Mansur shamelessly provides intellectual cover for the Palestinian genocidal campaign against Israel and the Jewish people. October 7 had historical precedents in Islamic history – in the 1929 massacre of Jews in Hebron, and the 1941 massacre of Jews in Baghdad. October 7 was exceptional in scope, but not in motivation and monstrous sadism.

The courageous struggle of Israel for a life of security and dignity will persevere, against all odds and against all adversaries.

[Table of Contents](#)

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