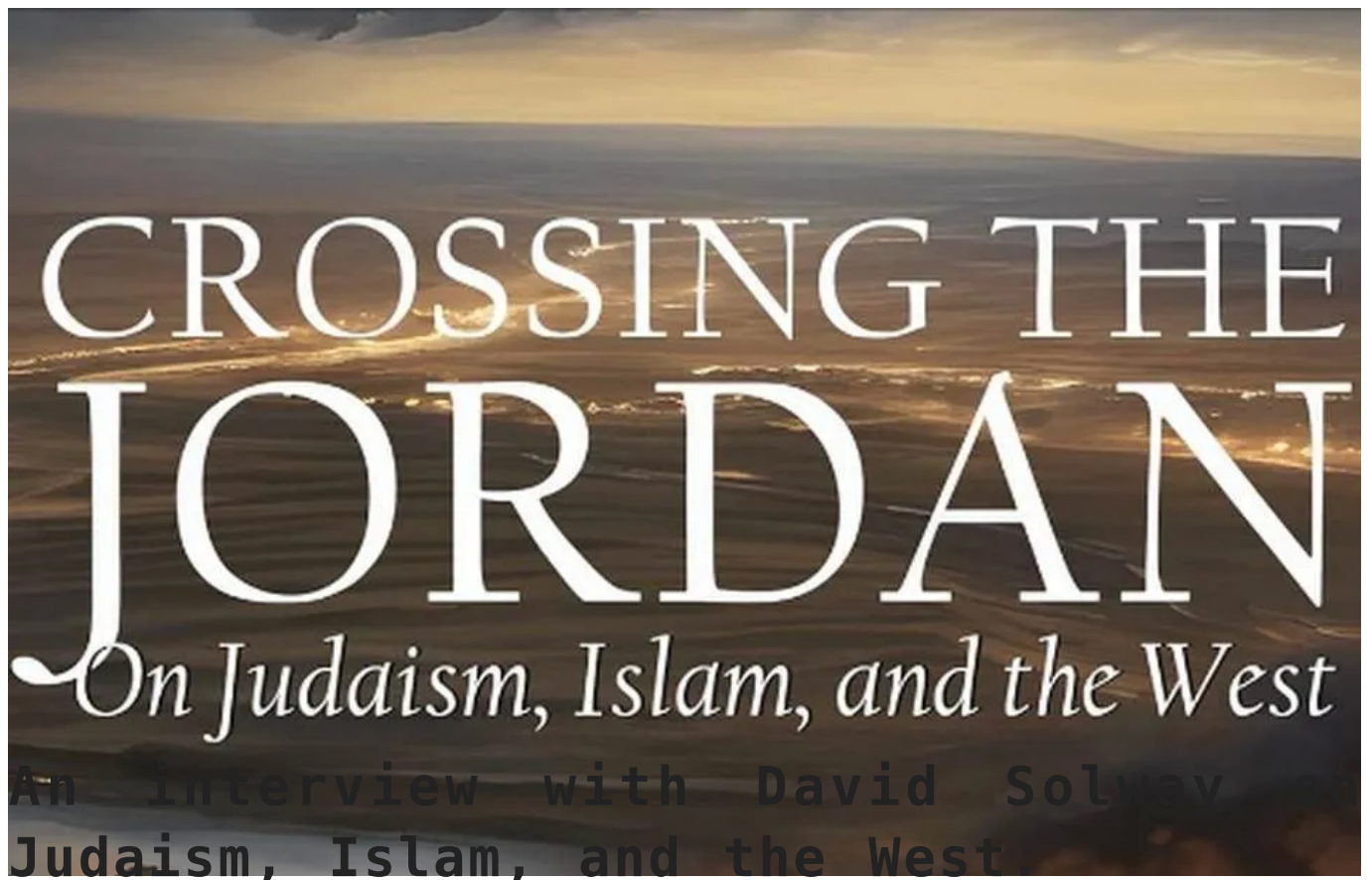


Crossing the Jordan



by Mark Tapson

In the wake of the savagery in Israel last October 7th, the sickening worldwide demonstrations in support of Hamas' Jew-hatred, and the subsequent war in Gaza, there couldn't be a timelier book than [Crossing the Jordan: On Judaism, Islam, and the West](#) by Canadian-born poet, essayist, travel writer, literary critic, teacher, and songwriter David Solway.

A collection of 26 short essays composed in Solway's erudite-yet-accessible style, *Crossing the Jordan* was published by [New English Review Press](#) just a couple of months after the October 7th terror attacks, and so he had no opportunity to address them in the book. *Crossing the Jordan* is nonetheless a relentlessly honest, compelling and thought-provoking read addressing issues of identity, faith, and civilizational

survival.

An award-winning man of letters in a time of our culture's diminishing capacity to appreciate such rarities, much less produce them, David has published over 30 volumes of poetry and nonfiction, including the bestselling [*The Big Lie: On Terror, Antisemitism, and Identity*](#). As author Daniel Mallock puts it, "David Solway is a writer's writer." Very true, but Solway is also a *reader's* writer, which may be an even bigger compliment.

David kindly took the time to respond thoughtfully to some questions I hope capture the essence of *Crossing the Jordan*.

Mark Tapson: *David, if you could add a 27th essay to this book now, what would you want to say about Judaism, Islam, and the West in light of October 7th, a day that will live in infamy?*

David Solway: I would say that the triangular relation between the three concepts and their political ramifications has become even more incendiary, as we note in the aftermath of October 7, the upsurge in Jew-hatred coupled with Hamasophilia across the faux-democratic West, the generally unwillingness of municipal authorities to meet the plague of Islamic locusts destabilizing their fiefdoms, and the long-deferred revelation of virulent academic antisemitism—with regard to the latter, at least it's now out in the open for Jewish donors to see, shut their pocketbooks, and withdraw their children for less toxic institutions.

MT: *Could you elaborate here on something you address in one of your essays, a "new pathology" corroding Western countries which you call "Islamolepsy"?*

DS: *Islamolepsy, the kind of rigidity found in schizophrenia and hypnotic trances, now transposed upon a collective cultural sensibility and reducing it to a condition*

of social and political helplessness. After all, how could we welcome into our midst the adherents of an imperial faith with its 1400-year record of conquest and oppression, its doctrinal ordinance which enjoins the suppression or murder of the infidel in *surah* after *surah* of the Koran, and its campaign to impose *shari'a* law upon the social and cultural framework of a free society? We feel no danger in inviting the 7th century into the 21st while deprecating our own traditions, usages and foundational premises.

Perhaps the most distressing fact of all is the utter naivety of our media mavens, public intellectuals and a hefty segment of the political class who have rallied to the Islamic cause. How can we explain what is nothing less than a passion for self-immolation, a welcoming of the encroaching darkness?

Islamolepsy may be described as a pathology characterized by fixity of posture, obliviousness to external stimuli, and a diminished sensitivity to our own welfare—reminiscent of Freud's death drive or Thanatos instinct in which the organism seeks activities that eventually cause its demise. The etiology of the affliction entails the glad acceptance of personal complicity, the denial of palpable reality, the construction of a Barbie world of make-believe, and the tendency to discredit those who can still see clearly. Hence, "Islamolepsy."

MT: *In "Islam's War on the Past," you warn that "the barbaric iconoclasts of Islam" are undertaking an "initiative against the collective memory of the West." Why is this "murder of the past," as you put it, of "astronomical significance"?*

DS: You recall what Orwell said in 1984: "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past." Memory is the issue. In his extraordinary book *The Open Past: Subjectivity and Remembering in the Talmud*, Sergey

Dolgopolski points out that the modern practice of memory is confined to providing data—which can be easily falsified—whereas the rabbis viewed memory as furnishing insight into thinking about the past in such a way as to emulate the Divine, that is, in its human form, as a moral commitment to truth. This is what we might call Talmudic memory, using all the tools at our disposal—textual analysis, the intuition of spirit rather than ideological exigency, the conviction that understanding the past, both individual and historical, striving to remember it rather than using or abusing it for ulterior purposes, is instrumental in creating your personhood.

Otherwise, you are simply a reified nothing. Extinction is the next step. Without personal memory, you are a mere cipher. In the absence of historical memory, a civilization has no identity, no ground on which to base and defend its existence. Ban books. Topple monuments. Censor information. Invent alternate realities. Fudge statistics. Provide data without context or meaning. Seize and destroy archeological artifacts. Perform what I called in my *Education Lost* a chronosectomy—excise the organ of memory, and you have won the war against a free and productive society. You have, in effect, conquered the Judeo-Christian West.

MT: *In “The Ideal of Perfection in Faith and Politics,” you note that the socialist and Islamic worldviews represent similar totalitarian ideals. At the risk of asking you to give away too much, can you identify what “distinguishes the philosophies that enable human flourishing from those that inevitably produce mass misery and political disarray”?*

DS: Whether we consider Thomas Hobbes’ description of the state of nature as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” or the erection of a harshly authoritarian governing *Leviathan* to ensure self-preservation, the picture is one of endemic inequality, poverty, famine, perpetual conflict, and despotic control of a laboring and subject

population. This is the default position of human life across the millennia, the rope bridge across the historical abyss that civilizations perilously negotiate. The complexities of diverse civilizations, however, do not assure general human flourishing. Only the slow and painful emergence of the democratic state and its associated free market has succeeded in lifting vast populations out of misery, destitution, stagnation and unaccountable coercive authority.

Communist, anarchist or socialist experiments in the life of peoples and nations are bound to fail, for they do not treat of corresponding finite entities. In other words, these adventures in social perfectibility flow from the refusal to ground a vision of the future in historical and political reality. In order to achieve the possible, it is necessary to acknowledge the real, that is, the limits set by the actual parameters of historical existence and the constraints of human nature.

Thus, socialism in all its forms is doomed to fail because it cannot comprehend that we live within the realm of the finite, and that excellence is rare. This is the ignorance of the Left, which ensures that mediocrity and failure must ineluctably ensue. Individual talent, dedication to honest work in the world in which we actually live, as the Koholet preached in the *Ketuvim* section of the Bible, and intelligence and merit in every department of life are qualities that must be preserved and promoted for the benefit of the many. Whereas the veneration of purely notional and immaterial constructs together with the collective fetish of forced equality is, as history has repeatedly proven, economic stagnation, human misery and eventual collapse.

As for Islam, our elites have permitted beachheads of Islam in what Muslims designate as the territory of the infidel, the Dar-al-Harb (or House of War), in other words, the countries to which they have spread. There can be little doubt that Muslim "emigration" (or "immigration") is a politically

correct euphemism for “infiltration.” And there should be little doubt, as The *Orthodox Christian Information Center* puts it, “Islam is a self-evident outgrowth not of the Old and New Covenants but of the darkness of heathen Araby.” The house of Western culture is being invaded by a twenty-first century *volkswanderung* and we are, apparently, supposed to sue for clemency or simply move out. How dim can a dhimmi get? How servile and craven?

Daniel Pipes is famous for suggesting that the antidote to radical Islam is moderate Islam, a mantra that has not born much fruit. The Koran does not allow for so blinkered a proposal. As Prime Minister of Turkey [Recep Tayyip Erdoğan](#) put it, “These descriptions are very ugly, it is offensive and an insult to our religion. There is no moderate or immoderate Islam. Islam is Islam and that’s it.” Coming to rational terms with an increasingly intrusive Islamic fact would help renew the *pneuma*, the spiritual integrity and mores of the heritage culture. The alternative is the ongoing dismantling of the social infrastructure, escalating friction and strife, and potential dispossession.

Ottoman thinker Said Nursi predicted in his [Damascus Sermon](#) that “Europe and America are pregnant with Islam. One day they will give birth to an Islamic state.” One recalls, too, the Muslim Brotherhood’s 1991 document, [An Explanatory Memorandum on the General Strategic Goal for the Group in North America](#), which proposed a “Civilization-Jihadist Process” and stated that Muslims “must understand that their work in America is a kind of grand Jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and sabotaging its miserable house.” In an interview with *ReMix News*, Hans-Georg Maaßen, Germany’s top domestic intelligence chief from 2012 to 2018, warned of the imminent downfall of Europe to Islam. Indeed, according to *Pew Research*, Europe’s Muslim population will triple to a staggering 76 million by 2050. As Maaßen concluded, “The end result will be the gradual

destruction of our European cultures.” The year 2200 will be the civilization inflection point. Meanwhile, Muhammad is now the most popular name for baby boys. What we are observing is a pincer movement for the ages. Between the hegemonic Left and a renascent Islam falls the shadow of Western dissolution.

MT: *In the essay, “Resisting the Obvious,” you note that the world is witnessing a resurgence of the old “barbaric malignity” of antisemitism, and that while some Jews are beginning to wake up, too many of them have overslept. What must Jews around the world recognize and what must they do in order to combat that rising tide?*

DS: We in the liberal West are only abetting such depravity in refusing to speak out against that malefic tide, cowering in fear at the possibility of reprisal or even justifying what is nothing less than the debauchery of evil. We can see ourselves in the mirror of *Psalm 22*, if we only look: “The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted.”

As I’ve written before, this does not imply that the Jew is a pristinely innocent being. The history of Judaism reads like a scroll of strife, estrangement and rupture, from the time of the splitting of the nation into two warring kingdoms and the early Temple magnates glorying in their perquisites at the expense of the common people, through the centuries of religious factionalism and reciprocal excommunication, the profound antipathy between assimilated Jews and their irredentist counterparts in Jerusalem, Tiberias, Safed and Hebron as well as the caste-like contempt of Western Jewish intellectuals for the *Ostjuden*, that is, their plebeian and “uneducated” East European brethren, the shame of the Jewish Councils in Nazi Europe collaborating with their murderers, to the present moment in the newly restored nation where left-wing peace activists and “post-Zionist” intellectuals strive to erode the Jewish character of the state and so deprive it of its legitimacy.

Altogether, such lack of collegiality, amounting to a clash of intrinsically insoluble paradoxes, is the shadow side of Jewish life which must be frankly acknowledged in the interests of both honesty and self-understanding. Across the centuries and today in Israel, it is as if we are watching a repeat of the biblical combat between siblings, between Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, and we are moved to ask: will it ever end?

And this is not to mention the jam-packed stadium of mainly left-wing Diasporite Jews who have turned against their own, who vilify and seek to delegitimize the Jewish state and Jewish peoplehood. No less disturbing is the psychological clustering of the vast majority of American Jews who support the Democratic party (like their counterparts in Canada who vote Liberal), which is increasingly inimical to Israel and, ultimately, to Jewish concerns. This is a phenomenon I am tempted to call "overboarding," a psychic consensus founded on a kind of mass hypnosis that does not take actual conditions into account.

These are people who do not know what it is to be persecuted, who grew up in safety and comfort in a tolerant and advanced society at a time when antisemitism was at its lowest ebb, and who, not being Israeli, have never had to dodge bullets, defuse bombs, take cover in shelters or worry about suicide bombers suddenly manifesting in a Starbucks. It is such fortunate ignorance that permits them to spout their noble and "enlightened" sentiments about highly dubious UN resolutions or an "occupation" which is nothing of the sort.

"The philistine Jew is part of what's wrong with the world, a modality of its sickness," wrote Canada's greatest poet, Irving Layton, in the Foreword to *The Swinging Flesh*; the Jew's place, rather, should be "beside the Jewish visionaries, scholars, poets, and rebels." Layton would have been horrified at the spectacle of so many "good Jews" siding with Goliath, earning them twice over the epithet of "philistine." All this

suggests what may well be the major question for contemporary Judaism: Can Jews survive themselves? One may well wonder if the curse of David may yet come to pass: "Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block, and a recompense unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway" (*Romans 11:9,10*). And as Isaiah prophesied, "thy destroyers and those that made thee waste shall go forth of thee" (*Isaiah 49:17*). What to do about this inherent Jewish tendency to self-abnegation is the question that confronts us today as it has for millennia. Your answer is as good as mine.

MT: *One of your final chapters is titled, "Can Israel Survive?" in which you address the threat to Israel of betrayal from within, including "broken Jews who have embraced left-wing causes." Again in light of current events, is betrayal from within still a serious concern, and are you optimistic or pessimistic that the Jewish state can survive? For that matter, are you optimistic or pessimistic that the West can survive?*

DS: As noted above, we can't help but remark the left-wing peace activists and post-Zionist intellectuals who strive to erode the Jewish character of the Jewish state and so deprive it of its legitimacy. The Israeli Left, dancing around the golden calf of a factitious peace, represents the gravest danger to the survival of the country; in the words of Israeli literary critic Gershon Shaked, they have "subverted the Zionist metaplot," that is, pulled the rug out from under the very notion of Israel's *raison d'être* while chasing a corposant of fire and ash. For Jewish anti-Zionists, the state of Israel is a violation of Jewish teachings; it is too exclusive and flies in the face of Tikkun Olam. For Jewish post-Zionists, the state of Israel is a historical mistake, which is why they wish to repeal the Jewish Law of Return, one of the central platforms in the founding of the country as a sanctuary for homeless, dispossessed and immigrant Jews the

world over. That, under the circumstances they propose, both anti-Zionists and post-Zionists would cease to exist at the hands of their enemies does not seem to have occurred to these nominal disputants—or perhaps it has, which is even more perturbing. That the same fate would befall those of their countrymen and co-religionists who think otherwise also appears to be a matter of little importance to them. It is almost as if there must be something in the collective psyche of the *Yishuv*, the body of the Jewish people in the Holy Land—and indeed, the diaspora—that breeds *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred, among themselves. It is almost as if, as mentioned above, there is an insatiable death wish eating away at the Jewish soul.

As for the fate of the West, I am no historian but I sense the current state of affairs is ruefully summed up in Jeffrey Tucker's synoptic peroration to an important essay for the *Brownstone Institute* called "Lockdowns, Closures, and the Loss of Moral Clarity." Tucker surveys the debris of the Leftist project we observe all around us. "What's awesome and terrifying to contemplate," he writes, "is just how many things have gone wrong all at once. The quality of money has taken a huge hit...we also have a health crisis, a psychological decline, massive learning loss, dependency on government largesse, a loss of work ethic, an ideological putsch against basic tenets of traditional liberalism, a revolt against religion, a denial of basic biology and science, a wholesale loss of trust in elites, the valorization of war, even as the administrative state alongside intellectual elites remains firmly in control of the apparatus of power at all levels...This is an extremely dangerous mix, so much so that it is hard to find historical examples." The dilemma is compounded by the fact that "many of our leaders have been co-opted into a machinery of corruption." The Left has injected its serpentine toxin into the very entrails of the culture, traditions and politics of the West.

Historically speaking, the neo-liberal descent into authoritarianism, steered by a compromised leadership, should have been expected. What we are currently witnessing is an object lesson in the politically inevitable as it has manifested in many Western nations in the past century—Germany, Italy and others—and now its latest global iteration. Plainly put, so long as informed skepticism concerning the profane incarnation of the state, and a determined insistence on citizen rights, remain a scarce resource, and so long as the *personae civitatis* acting on behalf of the people are few and far between, the progressivist Leviathan will continue to devour its prey. I am not sanguine. Sorry, but I have to say what I see.

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