

# Editors' Note



We are writing this note in late July, during a temporary cease-fire in this summer's Gaza War, and wondering how and when this particular sub-war will end. We dare not even think about long-range peace solution in the current circumstances.

Possibly the theme of this special issue of the *ISR—New Age in Israel*—might seem particularly inappropriate at the moment, given the bleak mood in Israel and among those who care about it. So perhaps it is worth ruminating a bit on how our philosophy of how to manage a journal that focuses on the field of Israel Studies affects our choices of articles and themes.

We believe strongly that our journal cannot ignore the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but, on the other hand, should not focus on it as the most important aspect of the State of Israel, even though it often seems to be exactly that at times like this. In other words, we try to emphasize the nature of Israel beyond the conflict, seeking to choose articles and themes that give a fuller picture of Israel and its complex society than can be gained from newspaper articles and current events. Thus, we see it as integral to our mission to seek out and publish important scholarship on subjects that our readers might not encounter on their own.

It is in this spirit that we present the current issue on the theme "New Age in Israel," guest-edited by Rachel Werczberger and Boaz Huss. It is an aspect of Israel that comparatively few know much about, apart from the increased popularity in recent decades of "alternative" medicine, yoga, Judaism, and attitudes in general related to New Age practices. Some of it may seem like part of the pervasive Americanization of Israel but, when viewed more closely, Israeli New Age has developed, like everything else that arrives in the country, its own particular flavor and characteristics.

One important theme in most of the articles is the relationship between politics and New Age in general, and in Israel specifically, given that New Age is often regarded as non- or even anti-political. Of course, politics in Israel necessarily includes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Dalit Simchai discusses how the importance of ethno-national identity in Israel interacts

with New Age universality. Adam Klin-Oron looks at “channeling” and considers how it relates, theoretically and practically, to political action. Assaf Tamari analyzes the role of “consciousness” in the teachings of Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, who combines New Age *Hasidut* with extreme right-wing politics and has achieved guru status among some of these groups in Israel. And Chen Bram considers how Sufi circles, often regarded as apolitical and purely spiritual in much of the world, play a role in the complex relations between Jews and Muslims in Israel.

The remaining two articles manage to avoid politics for the most part. Shai Ferraro examines a group that most readers probably have no idea exists in Israel except perhaps as an epithet, namely, Pagans, and their attempts to create a place for themselves, as both Pagans and Jews, in the Jewish State. And Tomer Persico looks at an aspect of Bratslav *Hasidut* that has become important to New Agers, i.e., the practice of *Hitbodedut* meditation and how it has evolved to fit twenty-first-century New Age Hasidim, with few of its adherents born into the Hasidic movement.

After that intensive exposure to these aspects of New Age spirituality, readers may turn with some relief to our reviews section, which contains a more usual selection of reviews of books on the conflict and Israeli politics and society. Kobi Michael, in a review essay, discusses four books on civil-military relations in Israel, while other reviews explore the United States in the Middle East, democracy and conflict resolution, and the impact of lasting occupation, among other topics.

We hope that you enjoy the smorgasbord of subjects we cover in this and other issues. If so, we ask that you assign articles from the ISR to your classes and recommend them to students doing research. This is much easier than formerly, since all ISR articles back to the 1980s are now indexed in JSTOR, which makes them much simpler to find and use. And please continue sending us your new articles to publish.

We hope the political situation is better by the time you read this.

— *The Editors*