



Prepositions ... and the Goldman Enigma

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What a complicated business language is. There's grammar, rhetoric, word choice and God knows what all. In an ever more verbose world, leave aside the writer's genius creatively to invent something that truly stands out against the cacophony. But as a wannabe decent translator, I've often been confronted by, of all things, the often tiny preposition. In every language under heaven (or every one that I've encountered or heard reported about thus far) the preposition is the linchpin of meaning and sense. Let's ignore, for now, definite and indefinite articles or no articles at all.

Twenty-four years ago our young family met up with a Japanese banker whose wife had been one of Nancy's students. Nancy is a virtuoso teacher of English as a second language. Her instincts and compassion for her students are quite glorious. At a self-imposed distance, I have observed her working her magic. And in the mid-1980s when we were in Bahrain she taught a bevy of Japanese bankers' wives.

Because of the Japanese intricate social pecking order, each wife had to have private tuition, and Mrs. Nakamura (not her actual name, at Nancy's insistence) was a star pupil. In any case, we met up with *Mr.* Nakamura in Dubai Airport on our way to India for our son John's graduation from high school. Mr. Nakamura was on his way to do banker-talk in Tokyo. So we sat in the airport's central coffee shop and Mr. Nakamura thanked Nancy for 'everything you did *to* my wife'. He repeated this phrase several times with some emphasis as we adults politely sipped coffee, and our kids, Tom and Beth, choking on their Cokes. When Mr. Nakamura's flight was mercifully finally called, amidst gales of laughter, our kids coughed out, "Mother, what did you *do* to Mrs. Nakamura?"

Prepositions and the verbs that they define and assist! They are the cluster-bombs of language!

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Well, the serious point of this frivolous anecdote is to set in context the 'historic speech' on June 14th of Bibi Netanyahu, his highly touted riposte to President Obama's 4th of June Cairo address. All commentators I've read have panned it as typical Netanyahu formula drive. But one thing commentators have *not* picked up on (or have deliberately ignored) is something that Uri Avneri* analyzed in the Zionist vocabulary some time ago.

* I have quoted Uri Avneri not a few times in these meditations over the years, and perhaps it's long overdue that I give you access to his background. Please check out http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uri_Avneri. In his 72 years as an Israeli citizen (immigrating with his German parents as a 10 year old in 1933), he became involved with the Irgun as a teenager but soon resigned in protest against the Irgun's policy of targeting civilians and innocent Palestinians. He fought as a commando in the Israeli army during 1948, but then went into politics. He was a publicist and activist, winning a ten-year stint in the Israeli Knesset. In 1982, during Israel's siege of Beirut, Avneri met Yasser Arafat, the first ranking Israeli politician to do so. He founded *Gush Shalom* (The [Israeli] Peace Bloc) in 1993 to

Among the preconditions Palestinians must accept prior to any peace talks resuming (a process he actually has no intention of pursuing) was that they must recognize 'Israel as *the nation-state of the Jewish People*'. Flabbergasting! And the media have largely truncated the phrase, reporting that Netanyahu demanded that Palestinians recognize 'Israel as a Jewish state'.

Netanyahu's choice of the preposition-loaded formula, 'the nation-state *of* the Jewish People', was very deliberate and not a case of his usual hoof-in-mouth. It is a clear indicator that his remarks were addressed not to the Palestinians at all. Palestinians were only a construct, a straw man, a fictional convenience with a nice round bull's eye on their forehead, hard to miss. He was actually talking to world Jewry.

The formula Netanyahu quite deliberately used harks back to the early days of the vigorous debate between David Ben Gurion and the leadership of the World Jewish (later, Zionist) Congress, specifically, between him and its chairman, Nahum Goldmann. Low key at first, the debate began in the early 1940s and escalated in incremental steps with successive Israeli leaders into the early 1980s, well after the founding of Israel. In that debate, Ben Gurion demanded that all western Jews immigrate *en masse* to Israel. It was their sacred duty to do so.

In the early 1940s Ben Gurion didn't want Oriental Jews to come to Israel. They were the dregs of the dregs, corrupt and primitive. They could rot in hell for all he cared. What he wanted ... what he *demande*d of the World Jewish Congress and never got ... was that properly acculturated *western* Jews must come to Palestine in great numbers and create there an overwhelming *western* enclave in an otherwise degenerate Oriental environment. That, he proclaimed, was the intrinsic logic of the Zionist proposition and for a Jew to defy it was, in essence, to deny one's Jewishness.

Goldmann and his colleagues at first demurred and then openly resisted. They argued for a healthy 'Jewish Diaspora', supportive of Israel but also with authentic identities as loyal citizens of their home countries. Furthermore they advocated a two state solution in Palestine. In his later years Goldmann even tried to meet with Gamâl 'Abd-un-Nâsir of Egypt and with Yâsir 'Arafât of the PLO (but the government of Israel prevented that). Even so, he advised the PLO on how to frame their political agenda. The PLO accepted much of his advice and that led to its eventually being internationally recognized as the legitimate voice for the Palestinian People.

Goldmann is an enigmatic Zionist figure (he carried three or four passports). I have only seen the tip of his iceberg. But the point is, he never accepted the Ben Gurion formula that Bibi Netanyahu has now re-launched. Israel, in Goldman's vision was not 'the nation-state of the Jewish People'. In his vision it was a Jewish state with a significant multi-cultural component that would live side-by-side with a Palestinian state, and demonstrate to the world Judaism's higher values.

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which he is still the mentor. I personally became aware of him in the late 1960s and have followed his career ever since. For several years now I have read everything he sends out. He writes prolifically, incisively and eloquently in both Hebrew and English. Given his long experience and profound commitment to peace, he more often than not cuts to the quick of things Israeli. You can engage with him through: avner@actcom.co.il.

I am, if the term be used loosely, an 'Islamist' by trade, a student of Islam and dabbler in things Islamic. I've only a smattering of 'Judaica'. I'm not likely to pick up much more in that department given my context, age and resources. But I do know something about prepositions and definite articles. 'The' and 'of' are important. The first indicates a specific object or point of reference; the second indicates a proprietary link, a claim of equivalence ... Jew equals Israel. Rom Emmanuel needs to be as incensed as I am about Bibi Netanyahu's speech. Actually, he should be even *more* incensed. He's directly *implicated*. As our president's chief of staff, will-he-nil-he, Bibi Netanyahu has now declared him to be an inalienable citizen of Israel, all disclaimers to the contrary notwithstanding. And that applies to a broad spectrum of Jews in America and in every other country the world over. In a phrase, Netanyahu (as once Ben Gurion did) has 'stuck it to' Jews worldwide. It's in their court. And the ghost of Nahum Goldmann growls at them from his grave.

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On 'the Jewish street' not least of all in the US, it's struck me that the Zionist myth has transmogrified. The demand for all western Jews to do 'Aliya' is now muted. They don't have to actually emigrate to Israel. Oh, yes, send sons and daughters to experience life in a kibbutz and sip at the Zionist springs, but remember to send lots of money and 'stand fast' in the face of all those 'self-deniers' who may call themselves Jews but who criticize the state of Israel. The Zionist message today is that Jews must realize that Israel is their guarantee against Anti-Semitism (real or not). This is how the hype runs: So long as Israel is there, they (the Jews) are somehow and in some obscure manner inoculated against Anti-Semitism. Israel is their escape hatch. (Nahum Goldmann groans though dead!)

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So what is there to do?

Well, I guess that President Obama (who's clearly not Jewish) must bite the bullet on this one. He's got to become very preposition-sensitive. The PLO, ever since Oslo has recognized Israel as a sovereign nation state. That's not changed. Whether that state defines itself as 'Jewish' is up to its citizenry ... it's an *internal* matter. The essential recognition has been given but, regime after Israeli regime, the PLO's recognition has been spat upon. Zionist doctrine requires that Palestinians realize their alienation from their homeland as a legitimate thing ... even a deserved! ... and final. They've no 'home' in their homeland to which they have an inalienable right. And that's where the revived Ben Gurion doctrine comes in, doesn't it?

We do not recognize any nation state on the basis of its religious coloration. A country may proclaim itself to be 'Islamic' or 'Jewish' or 'Buddhist' or even 'Christian', but the world recognizes only a nation state that stands on its own merits, religion aside. Today, it is only Israel that demands *of Palestinians and of Jews in particular* the concession that Israel is exclusively Jewish ... emphatically *not Arab* (be they Christian or Muslim or any other citizens of Israel who are not Jews; they are all, at best, second-class citizens by definition). And Israel is not just Jewish but *specifically* Jewish in the legal sense that it incorporates and implicates and engages *all* Jews throughout the world. And that's just nonsense.

We need to get beyond this. Specifically, *Obama* needs to get beyond this nonsense. If the American Republic stands for anything at all, it stands for an emancipation from the tyranny of prepositions. The US stands for 'liberty and justice for all'. After all what is the 4th of July all about? Obama needs to ask whether Israel stands for that same ideal. And there stands the Goldman enigma and the Netanyahu corruption. God help us!

And I greet you from the Lands of the Morning.

NOTE: The longer Reformed Church in America missionaries serve, the more they come to see the ethical implications of Christian faith with the eyes of the people among whom they serve. We treasure our missionaries and are glad to know what they think. However, RCA Global Mission does not, itself, have partisan political views.