

## Open letter to the next generation

### The opportunity of calamity

by

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*Israel's political establishment has been leading us straight towards the iceberg for decades. Now the coronavirus pandemic actually creates opportunity for profound change.*

Israeli politicians did not invent the term “keep ‘em barefoot and pregnant”, but they have surely turned it into an art form. Merging heightened cynicism towards their voters with love of self that knows no limits, they have for decades been leading Israel along a socioeconomic trajectory that heads straight for the iceberg. Their names may change from decade to decade, and they hail from all corners of the political map, but cynicism and narcissism are the dominant characteristics of Israeli politicians who have successfully eviscerated all attempts by persons of a different creed – there were some, and there still are – trying to correct the ship’s course before it’s too late. Though the current epidemic is just a preview of future social cataclysms facing Israel, the coronavirus’s aftershock also provides an opportunity for a pivot in Israel’s priorities before it’s too late.

Within the Haredi (ultra-orthodox Jewish) community there are many who do understand the need for an education beyond Torah. But although the number of Haredim who embark on academic study has significantly increased, that fact crashes into the wall of reality: the majority of women (53%) and men (76%) have to drop out (according to the State Comptroller’s office) because of the appallingly low level of education that they received as children. When their leaders deprive them of a core curriculum (a denial that is illegal in every other developed country), there should be no surprise when the share of Haredi academics in Israel is just half of the share of academics among American Haredim. When their leaders deny them access to the non-Haredi world that provides their health, security and higher education needs, how can anyone be surprised when so many good people fall by the wayside without understanding who’s responsible for keeping them in the dark, completely vulnerable to any health, economic and security crisis? And as if this were not enough, the same Haredi leadership ensures that they remain eternally dependent and unable to escape by merciless social pressure, made possible by directing huge amounts of limited public money through coalition agreements, ensuring that what is today will remain so forever.

The Arab-Israeli population is in desperate need of better schools, significant reduction in the violence on its streets and in its homes, solutions to its housing crisis and to the many additional challenges that it faces. But its leadership does not choose to merge with the rest of Israeli society. It does not focus on significant education reforms relating to content, teacher training and the way the schools are run that would provide their future generations the opportunity for an incredible future, nor does it focus on systemic reform of transportation, health and security infrastructures. Instead, Arab-Israeli leaders refrain from denouncing the divisive elements from within, whose behavior prevents any serious alliance with Israel’s Jewish

majority. They prefer making deals with the Haredi leadership to increase the flow of benefits – rather than providing root treatment for the problems – thus perpetuating the current situation while digging an ever deepening hole that will make it increasingly difficult for their society to emerge from its current predicament.

Israel's traditional (masorti) and religious (non-ultra-orthodox) Jewish communities are earnestly searching for ways to retain lifestyles integrating religion with active engagement in modern society. But they have been hijacked by leaders that blind them to the racism inherent in preferring the taking over of land (and ruling those who live on it) to basic democratic principles. They are so blinded by the huge sums of money poured into their schools to strengthen their children's ties to religion that they allow their level of knowledge in basic subjects, which determine the opportunities that they will have as adults, to fall far below the secular education stream – not to mention below the vast majority of developed countries – in the recent PISA exam. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that one-third of the traditional and one-half of the religious Jews decide to abandon the lifestyles that they were brought up in (according to the Central Bureau of Statistics). It is no coincidence that their leaders preach for extremely high fertility rates (4.0 children in religious families and 7.1 in Haredi families, in contrast with 2.2 in secular households) that will guarantee them a voting constituency forever.

In contrast with the Haredi, Arab-Israeli and religious Jewish leaderships who unify their constituencies around fear and separation from all other parts of Israel, secular leaders are experts in frightening, dividing and inciting secular Jews against one another. They are abetted by a press that is largely shallow and superficial – if not enlisted in their cause – that highlights every demagogic and extremist viewpoint on its screens and newspapers. These secular leaders can sustain the battle against one another only by dint of political support from the political leaders of the other groups, which grant them that support in exchange for funneling huge amounts of precious public resources to those leaders, which in turn enables them to retain control of their respective groups.

Secular leaders from the left, center and right make deals with the devil to obtain power and its trappings. The continuous transfer of funds to coalition partners to fortify their personal standing comes at the expense of transportation infrastructures that have been allowed to decay for decades, choking the labor productivity that determines our wages, causes our consumer prices to spike, and widens gaps between the peripheries and the cities. Even worse, they cause roughly half of Israel's children to receive a third world education – children who belong to the fastest growing segments of the population – thus demolishing Israel's future ability to maintain a first world economy, which is a necessary condition for the existence of first world healthcare systems and defense capabilities. This, in turn, becomes a very serious existential issue. Throwing more money at the education ministry, whose budget recently surpassed the defense ministry's, is no substitute for a comprehensive reform dealing with the core problems.

The ongoing neglect of the healthcare system is just the tip of the iceberg. The leaders who contributed so much to its deterioration remain in place, and even have the chutzpah to boast in their nightly speeches about how they are dealing with the problems – many of which are of their own making. The paucity of beds, equipment and nursing staffs in the hospitals did not begin with the the coronavirus pandemic, and the result is not just disgraceful hospitalization conditions that too often lead to violence against hospital staff in normal days. The mortality rate from infectious diseases has doubled over the past two decades, catapulting Israel far above

every other developed country. The share of Israelis dying from infectious diseases – even before the coronavirus outbreak – was 73% (!) higher than the second place country, Greece, or 12 to 15 times the number of Israelis killed each year in traffic accidents (according to the State Comptroller's Office).

For Israel to survive, it must take advantage of the current calamity for a sweeping house-cleaning. No less than a full third of the Knesset members are demanding appointments as cabinet ministers in a government that is chopping up ministries to accommodate them – burning up limited budgets as if there were no economic crisis – instead unifying the offices to streamline their services as warranted. Any sense of shame has long ago disappeared, and there is nobody demanding that they feel ashamed.

Each sector of the population needs to take a step back and internalize the big picture, to see who its leaders are and where they are leading – and then demand that the focus shift to the greater good instead of their sector's good and their leaders' personal vanity. We are all on the same ship, headed straight for the iceberg. It's called the Titanic.

Young people of Israel: take off your blinders and see what kind of a future the nation's leaders are preparing for you (those who still don't understand are invited to look at the plethora of findings on the [Shoresh Institution website](#)). When the current crisis passes, go out into the streets instead of embarking on airplanes. Utilize this time to get organized and recruit anyone you can for the day after the plague. Show the leaders that the huge social protests in 2011, that only dealt with the tip of the iceberg, were just a preview of the colossal uproar that you need to wage on the actual iceberg – the currently tenuous future of the State of Israel.