

This week,

Yossi Klein Halevi, renowned American-Israeli journalist and author, was recently in Minneapolis to talk about his book, *Letters To My Palestinian Neighbor*. So TC Jewfolk editor Lonny Goldsmith and I sat down with him for a wide-ranging interview about responses to the book and American Jewish Zionism.

I'm Lev Gringauz, and welcome to *The Jews Are Tired*, your podcast about Jewish news.

First of all, some unrelated news: Jewfolk, Inc is selling merch! If you want to support the work of this podcast, or Jewfolk more generally, a link to our Teespring store is available in the podcast notes. Right now it's mainly TC Jewfolk branded products, but soon there will be products for our *Who The Folk?!* podcast, products with our Jewfolk podcast logo, and of course, *The Jews Are Tired* stuff like a branded pillow, blanket, and mug for when you feel a lot of Jewish angst.

You can also support us directly by donating, which will also be linked to in the podcast notes. None of this work happens for free, so we appreciate any support you're willing to give.

OK, now to Yossi Klein Halevi, a man with a long history spanning the Movement to Free Soviet Jewry; making Aliyah and moving to Israel while being a journalist; becoming a widely-respected author; and being one of the most prominent thinkers and writers on what it means to be Jewish, American Jewish, Israeli, and everything related to those things as a senior fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.

His latest book is *Letters To My Palestinian Neighbor*, released in 2018, where he focused on bridging the divide between Israelis and Palestinians through a series of letters to Palestinians explaining his Zionism and attachment to Israel, and how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is understood by Israelis. A link to the book's website is in the podcast notes, if you are interested in buying a copy.

Klein Halevi was invited to Minneapolis to speak at Minnesota Hillel on October 12 by the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas. The JCRC has also been running The Letters Project, a letter writing contest to spark discussion and engagement with *Letters To My Palestinian Neighbor* in the Twin Cities community, particularly among young Jews.

Lonny Goldsmith and I talked to Klein Halevi about what the responses to his book have been like, his views on American military aid to Israel, the divide between American Jews and Israelis and more. We had a blast during this interview, verging into quite a bit of unscripted and unplanned territory, and I'm grateful to Klein Halevi for coming on this podcast.

Our conversation has been edited for clarity, especially as we spoke outside to be COVID-safe. I hope you enjoy it as much as we did.

Lev Gringauz

Hi, my name is Lev Gringauz. I'm the host of the Jews are tired podcast.

Yossi Klein Halevi

Hi, I'm Yossi Klein Halevi, senior fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.

Lonny Goldsmith

And Hi, I'm Lonny Goldsmith, the editor of TC Jewfolk.

Lev Gringauz

So first of all, let's just start out with this is your first time being back in the Twin Cities since I believe 2018 when you were the featured speaker at the JCRC annual events. How do I remember that one? How does it feel like to be back?

Yossi Klein Halevi

Well, before I answer your question, I'll tell you what was particularly memorable about that event was meeting Ilhan Omar. And the JCRC had given her a copy of my most recent book *Letters To My Palestinian Neighbor*. And she seemed very happy to have it and to read we had a very friendly encounter. This was before she became the Ilan Omar that we've all learned to, to know and love. And what's so interesting for me in retrospect is to appreciate how the Jewish community here makes such an effort to reach out and has connections with with all the different communities here. And I really saw that out in full force at the JCRC annual event. That was beautiful. It was didn't doesn't always work. But it really is a source I think of it goes a long way toward explaining the success story of the American Jewish community this this uncanny capacity for reaching out and building alliances.

Lev Gringauz

I think that's the nicest thing anyone has ever said about Midwestern Jews. Normally we're flyover country, this is great.

Yossi Klein Halevi

I love the Midwest, like I went to school at Northwestern. It's true, you know, it's Chicago. It's Evanston it's it's a little more urban. But you know, I I really love the Midwest. I I love the sensibility the the

warmth of people. And the lack of cynicism. At least that's the way it used to be. I hope it still is. I don't know, I don't know if the 21st century wave of cynicism is entirely passed over the Midwest. But at least that's how it used to be.

Lonny Goldsmith

Yeah, that is definitely the nicest thing i think i've ever heard said about the Midwest,

Yossi Klein Halevi

I'll say one more nice thing. And then and then you and then we can get nasty. Pleasure. And that is that Jewish communities in the Midwest, remind me a bit of sort of Jewish communities in the south, they tend to be very rooted, close, warm. And you know, I grew up in New York to different and I love New York, I love New York Jews, but it's a different it's a different thing. And I I was always touched when I encountered Jewish communities in the Midwest, and I've had a lot of that in recent years being a lecture tour really going around and and the welcome and the appreciation is something special here. So you've got something good going, going for you guys. Don't Don't shortchange yourself.

Lonny Goldsmith

It's delightful. He's buttering us up right from the off.

Yossi Klein Halevi

No, no, no, there's there's still there'll be there's going to be a big financial ask.

Lonny Goldsmith

So you mentioned your most recent book, Letters To My Palestinian Neighbor. It's become a bit of a sensation I think in a good way. Largely I would imagine amongst American Jews you're in terms of the the three plus years since that book has come out how how has that been for you? And do you think it's achieved? It gets aims when you decided to write it and then put out the I guess, more recent addition with the new epilogue? Yeah, it's

Yossi Klein Halevi

it's, it's a great question. Because I, I had several goals, or or several audiences in mind when I when I wrote the book. Initially, I thought that I would write two books. After this one I intended to write a book called Letters to a Young American Jew. Fortunately, I never wrote that. First of all, nobody would read a book with the title like that. And, and what happened was that as I was writing Letters To My Palestinian Neighbor, I realized that much of what I would want to say to a young American Jew about Israel, I was actually already saying to a Palestinian. Now, there isn't a total overlap. If I were writing a book, specifically to a young American Jew, I would have written a lot more about how do we integrate the Holocaust, for example, into a 21st century Jewish identity? What, what of that experience? Do we need to preserve? What do we need to leave behind, I would have had a more of an internal Jewish conversation. And I needed for the sake of the integrity of the book, I needed to keep the focus very much on a conversation with a Palestinian. And it had to ring true for, for the book to be authentic. It had to I couldn't use a Palestinian interlocutor, as a way of writing to young American Jews at a really rate to a Palestinian give you another example. I wrote the book from a religious perspective as a

religious Jew, writing to a religious Muslim. If I were writing a book to a young American Jew, I probably would have downplayed the religious side. But the only way that I felt I could have an authentic conversation, as an Israeli to a Palestinian is if religion was a an animating part, even a key component of that conversation. Because we're both we are religious people. And most Palestinians are religious, or traditional. And so, and that's where I really felt that I had a chance, at least, of establishing some rapport. And it actually did work. I got lots of responses from Palestinians saying how they trusted this book, because it was written by a religious person, even though it was Zionist, you know, all of that. So it has my primary audience, were Palestinians. The next circle of audience were Arabs, or Arabic speakers, generally, people in the Middle East. The third audience, were young American Jews. And the fourth audience intended audience were my fellow Israelis. And in terms of the first circle, the Palestinians, I wasn't aiming, I wasn't hoping to reach large numbers. Because, you know, when you're in this conflict, and you realize the depth of fear and anger and trauma that an existential conflict creates, there's there's just the limited capacity that people have for, for empathy or for respond, even to respond to somebody reaching out. And what I was asking Palestinians, it was very difficult. I was asking them to redesign its narrative. The book was translated into Arabic and put online for free downloading. And about 5000 people downloaded the Arabic edition. I don't know how many are Palestinian, how many in the wider Middle East. But I did get hundreds of responses from Palestinians. Many of them were not pleasant. Many of them were angry, some are hateful, a few were threatening. But I got a fair number of very thoughtful responses. People writing long emails, arguing with the book, in some, in some sometimes expressing appreciation for the book. So what I was looking to achieve on the Palestinian front was find even a few Palestinians who would read the book, respond in a thoughtful way, argue, argue about everything, but engage. This is my narrative. I'm inviting you to respond with your narrative. And let's model a respectful conversation over probably a reconcilable narratives and I found, I found not many and I found a few To the extent where I was able to even model publicly, with, with Palestinians, what a respectful, painful conversation on our wildly opposing narratives would sound like, and we argue about everything. But what I was looking for with Palestinian potential partners was agreement about one thing. And, and that is that we we both agree that this is a conflict between two indigenous peoples this, if you can't accept my indigeneity in this land, or if I can't accept your indigeneity then we then we have no basis for for conversation. But if we if I if we share the same starting point, that we are two peoples caught in a conflict between right versus right, two peoples in this little land between the river and the sea, who each belong here, then we can argue about absolutely everything else who started the conflict. Why isn't therapies who's responsible for for the Nakba, who's responsible for the collapse of the Oslo peace process, argue about everything. So that's the Palestinians, the wider Arab circle was very, very good. The book has been reviewed in Arab media. One of Saudi Arabia's leading news magazines, gave it a two page spread. And you know, nothing like this ever happened before. And, and the reaction in America, which is really what you were asking me about, has been so gratifying to be in so moving. Because it, it really, it came, it came out at a time when, when young American Jews were feeling more and more pressed to defend the Israeli story to defend Zionism. And this book, gave gave them a language of on the one hand, standing firmly in your own story. And on the other hand, being able to reach out and empathize with Palestinian suffering, without taking all the blame on the Israeli side. And that's, that's the language I was trying to model. And now finally, the last circle of audiences, the Israeli readers, and the book has just come out in Hebrew. So I am waiting to see how my compatriots responds. Whether they dismiss the book as

hopelessly naive and starry eyed or whether they, some Israelis will find that the Palestinian responses are surprising, and might even lead to some rethinking about possibilities between Israelis and Palestinians.

Lonny Goldsmith

That feels like a weird quirk of the publishing world, that your book written in Israel about the situation there would only now get translated into Hebrew.

Yossi Klein Halevi

There's a backstory. First of all, I wanted to wait before I had Palestinian responses for the book to come out in Hebrew. Because the book The the the main part of the book, the letters that I wrote, explain Israeli ness, explain Zionism. Israeli Jews don't really need that part of the book so much. I mean, I do think it's potentially interesting for Israelis to see how an Israeli writer tries to speak to a Palestinian about Zionism. So I think in that sense, there is some interest, but the heart of the book, I imagine for Israeli readers, will be the epilogue will be so what so what a Palestinian say to that, you know, I had my my publisher said to me, you know, okay, let us tell my Palestinian neighbor, so what what are the Palestinians say in return? And I said, Well, you've you've just published the book. There's an epilogue there, Palestinian letters. And what I found so interesting about his his response, he knows that there are Palestinian responses, but we're so we're so wary, we're so demoralized, about about the chances of being accepted by Palestinians out of our legitimacy being recognized. The eyes that even when you even when you publish a book, you're the publisher, you publish a book with Palestinian responses that do affirm Jewish legitimacy in this land, it's still it has an internal and it hasn't, it hasn't sunk in. So so the first reason why I needed to wait was to accumulate enough Palestinian responses to, for this to be of interest to Israeli readers. And the second reason is much more technical. And that is that I did not translate the book myself, my Hebrew isn't good enough for me to do the actual translation. But it is good enough for me to know whether a translation is good enough for that. And so, you know, my book was translated into, into Korean. And, you know, whatever, whatever you want to do with the book in Korean is up to you I, there's not much I'm going to going to interfere there. But with the translation into Hebrew, I was really a nightmare for the translator, because I sat on every word and she was great. She was was so patient. But I literally literally weighed every word. And, you know, when you write a book, it's not only you're not only using using words, but you're using words in a in a certain way, that creates a kind of music. Every book has a has a rhythm, there's there's, there's there's a musical language, a reader may not necessarily know the musical language consciously. But if you're connected to a book, you're connected to the music. What I found in in some of the previous translations of of earlier books of mine into Hebrew, is that the music can so easily be destroyed. In translation, that's what you lose some translation is the rhythm. And so I really sat on this one, I decided I'm just not going to let the translator have, so to speak, the final word, and, and to really try to be as involved as the translator and as the process would allow.

Lev Gringauz

Speaking also of other aspects of the past three years since your book came out, and tying into them the Israeli conversation, we've seen longtime Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pushed out of power by a bizarre and kind of amazing coalition of left wing center and right wing political parties,

including an Islamist Arab Party, which, you know, many thought pigs would fly, no pun intended, before an Arab party would, you know, join a governing coalition? You wrote in a times of Israel of Israel blog in June that this new coalition gave you hope, after Netanyahu's divisiveness. So how do you feel now months later about how the coalition is doing, and how much they're embodying your approach to the Palestinians in Letters To My Palestinian Neighbor

Yossi Klein Halevi

It gave me hope, but now that it's been in existence for over 100 days, I'm post hope. And I actually mean that in a positive way, because,

Lonny Goldsmith

because I wasn't sure where you were going to.

Yossi Klein Halevi

Either I wasn't sure how I was going to get out of that. I knew what I wanted to say. But post hope is when is when your hope is fulfilled. This and this government has fulfilled my hope. First of all, it exists it stayed together, you know, I used to, I used to get the urge, in the early days, the government, every Shabbat, I would, I would just breathe. And I'd say, we made it another week. And now I'm starting to take the existence of this strange and wondrous government for granted. And when I say strange, and wonder is there's no government like this that I can think of in the entire democratic world that brings polar opposites together. to this extent, it's not only hard left and hard right. It's it's a victor Lieberman's frankly, anti Arab party with an Islamist party. The whole thing is, is amazingly insane. And it's such an Israeli moment, because it's counterintuitive. And we went from, to my mind, the worst government we've ever had in the country's history, the most divisive. Netanyahu turned right wingers against left wingers. Jews against Arabs is he would wake up in the morning and think which group Can I can I turn against against another group today, this is this is This is what we were living with. Now you in America wouldn't know anything about to visit politics. But we in Israel have really experienced that over the last four years. And, and so now we have a government, that's so improbable. But first of all, what keeps it together is desperation, this shared revulsion of, of Netanyahu, his political culture, and, and a deep fear of nataniel of the return of this viziv leader who tried to poison Israeli discourse, and demonized our democratic institutions and the democratic ethos. So in that sense, I think we're, we're so ahead, just the fact that this government exists. And they tell Yahoo is not empowered, but already puts us ahead. But I think the government is really doing some very, some very interesting things, it's, first of all, it's investing in the Arab Israeli community, to an extent that no government has ever put those kinds of resources that before, and it's a confirmation of coalition politics, if you play the game, if you're in our party, and you're inside the coalition, you will, you will get budgets for your community. If you if you boycott the political system, your community will be left out of the you know, will be left out of out of the pie. So this is a this government is a triumph for pragmatism and for the necessity of of common identity over our our sub identities that pull us apart. In other words, this is a government that's affirming that Israelis have more in common than what pulls us apart. That's not something to take for granted. As you as you know, from here, when when, when the sub identities when the tribal identities predominate, become more important than the national connecting identities. Society begins to disintegrate. That's what we were. That's what we were starting to experience before this government.

Lonny Goldsmith

So changing gears a bit on the most recent episode of The Shalom Hartman Institute, For Heaven's Sake podcast, you were part of a really interesting conversation about whether or not and how much Israel actually needs American military aid. Is it in relation to the Progressive House Democrats stripping congressional funding of a billion dollars in aid for Iron Dome. In Israel, the missile defense system it days later overwhelmingly passed, even though it hit a bit of a snag in the senate soon after, it so because we're sort of wondering, can you explain you your or, as more broadly, the Israeli argument for reducing American aid to Israel from that podcast?

Yossi Klein Halevi

Yeah, I would say that, that my argument, at least is not that we need to reduce the aid. I don't think we can or should. But I think we need to reconfigure it in two ways. One is there are systems that Israel helped develop, for example, the Iron Dome that we can afford. And and we don't, I don't think we need aid. At this point in Israel's economic evolution, we can stand on our own to a large extent, where we do need ongoing aid is are in systems that we ourselves haven't developed, for example, a bunker busters if Israel is going to attack Iran's nuclear facilities, and personally, I don't see any way in which we can we want at this point. I think that the we have one of two alternatives at this point, which is either make our peace with a nuclear Iran, which we will not, or attack those facilities that we don't need anyone to do that for us. But we will need certain systems to make that possible. More broadly. I would like to see Israel adopt an approach that Israel's former ambassador to the US Michael Oren recently proposed, which is to treat Israel the way That America treats Germany, Japan Korea as as a recipient of military aid, under the defense budget, that is a special category. When you when you look at the defense a that America gives to other countries, it is at least as as large, if not larger than the aid that that Israel receives. But undue attention is focused on Israel, because we're not part of the defense budget in that way. We're a special category. And I think that the time has come in the in the history of, of our relationship, first of all, to be treated as as as, as a formal ally, and not as a beneficiary of aid. And that and I think that what, what what graded some of us about the the aid for, for the Iron Dome, is that there was something of a handout, mindset there. Let's help out these poor Israelis what we're not poor, we don't need help, we need partnerships. And in the same way that America has military partnerships with with other countries, I think the time has come for that to happen with Israel. And one last point about about the Iron Dome that that upset me, and concerns me not is that you're setting the bar too low in terms of support for Israel. And that is, okay, I can support aid for Israel, so long as the weapons system is entirely defensive. Now, Israel, we find ourselves at war every few years, with another terror enclave on our borders, no other country in the world faces, the kinds of threats on its borders that we face, America's big threat on its borders, is that too many people want to become Americans. But the threat that we have on our borders is that we have too many, we have too many enemies who actually want to destroy us sitting right on our borders. And so I don't only need weapons, to protect myself against attack, I also need offensive weapons, I need to be the best military in the Middle East. And if that's something that parts of the Democratic Party, I can no longer get behind. And that's a real problem in the relationship. I don't, I don't need your help. For Iron Dome, I do need your help in because in maintaining my position as the best army in the Middle East, that's that's a really dangerous part of the world. And and if if America feels that it is in its interest, to maintain a strong Israel as a

partner, then that needs to be the thinking not Don't be debating about Iron Dome. You know, let's debate about how to keep Israel's military edge.

Lev Gringauz

So among the many intriguing aspects of that perspective, what caught my attention on the Hartman Institute's podcast, something you didn't actually mention right now, is putting all of this in context of American Jews specifically, in the sense that you basically said that American military aid to Israel is almost more important for American Jews than it is ultimately to Israel. And that maybe that's not sustainable anymore. And let me just give a quote from what you said, What's positive is that we're giving American Jews the opportunity to turn an emotional attachment into a mitzvah into a tangible act. Supporting Israel in Congress is an elemental mitzvah. And I certainly want to encourage American Jews to continue with these meats votes. But maybe after 70 years, it's time to rethink the ways in which these meats vote play out, and quote. So that's a very weird thing to think about for mainstream American jury, which is built an identity around, as you said, not so even the religious aspects of Judaism anymore, but oftentimes, just bringing aid to Israel. So keeping in mind that, you know, pointing out an issue doesn't automatically mean you'll have the answers to the issue. But what are the ways in which we need to rethink American Jewish support for Israel in a time when, in many ways, as you said, Israel doesn't quite need it. And to add an extra element in at least under the Netanyahu years, Israel often didn't really care for the American Jewish support either.

Yossi Klein Halevi

Or no, I think that under the Netanyahu years, Israel did care for American Jewish support, it just didn't care much about American Jews. Which is worse? The well let me let's let's start with what American Jews to my mind need to keep doing. And then and then think about what needs to change I think what's what is essential for Israel and I think it's essential for America for the strength of the American Jewish community as well, is to continue its political support for Israel. And that means continue. The lobbying continued to make sure that that the anti Israel wing of the Democratic Party remains a minority and remains confined to the good state of Minnesota.

Lonny Goldsmith

Let's not forget my home state of Michigan, and you know, oh, yeah, Missouri, Massachusetts, all the

Lev Gringauz

states, our libertarian friend currently holding up the iron dome funding

Yossi Klein Halevi

republican as well, that's fair to say. So there does seem to be a problem with the M states. But other than that, we're, we're, we're okay. So the, the so the first thing is, yes, keep keep the line on bipartisan support. And that's something that the American Jewish community is really adept at doing it has, it has decades of experience. And one of the things that I've always been so, so amazed by, especially in the last few years, especially under the, in the Trump years, is I do a lot of speaking for APAC. And I'll speak to congressional delegations that come to Israel, under APEC auspices. And it's stunning to me to see these bi partisan groups of, of members of Congress that come. I've noticed less in the last

couple of years. But still, you will have some bipartisan groups coming. And I've asked members of Congress, are there any other issues where you all do these trips together? And they said, it's only Israel. So in that sense, too, I think that American Jewish support for Israel helps Congress to maintain some minimal sense of bipartisanship, on foreign policy issues. That's, that's actually a gift to the American political system. And it wasn't something that that that one thought would, would ever be really necessary, because certain amount of cooperation between the two parties was always a given. It's not a given anymore. So I do think that the American Jewish community has an important role there too. So definitely maintain the political support, maintain the strong presence in Congress and, and prevent the erosion of let's call it prevent the carbonization of the Democratic Party.

Lonny Goldsmith

Do you think that obviously, you said you made you made mention how the Netanyahu government felt about American American Jews,

Yossi Klein Halevi

took American Jews for granted?

Lonny Goldsmith

Do you think that that's changing in the face of the new coalition?

Yossi Klein Halevi

Absolutely. I don't think that some of our leaders, including leaders in this government, understand how to change the relationship. But But I think there's a great deal awareness in this governments in particular, that something has to change. So so you asked me really what has to change? What do Americans use needs to change? But let's broaden the conversation what, what do both sides need to change in the relationship, and I'll start with Israel as as an Israeli, the first thing we need to do is, is begin respecting the forms of Judaism that you've created here. And I would even take that a step back and say, we need to respect the American pneus of American Jews. That's something that's very hard for many Israelis to do, because Israelis think, Oh, well, American Jews, the more American they become, the more they're assimilating, and there's obviously a correlation there. But I think that America that Israelis misunderstand about, first of all, how different America is from any other diaspora we've ever experienced, even with the rise of anti semitism. And also, I think that Israelis don't understand that one of the reasons that the American Jewish community is so effective as an advocate for Israel, is precisely because it's so authentically American. When American Jews stand up for Israel, they're doing it obviously as Jews, but not only, they're also doing it as Americans. And that's something that I've learned from my involvement with APAC, just how deeply American American Jews are. And what that means is that American Jews have no inferiority complex about pushing their political agenda. We have, we have just as much right, as...you guys are laughing. What did I say?

Lev Gringauz

No, it's just because I think often in the relationship between Israel and American jury, there's a sense that American jury is too much pushing its own view. In this case, you mentioned the Iran deal earlier is a perfect example of American Jews pushing their argument about what should be happening with

Israel in the Middle East, arguably, from the Israeli side overmatch in an overbearing fashion. So it's just sort of interesting to mention that for you to mention that is a positive.

Yossi Klein Halevi

Now we can have a good argument, because I I'm, I have still not recovered from the deep hurt that I that I felt by the America by a large part of the American Jewish community, not fighting the Iran deal. And the minority of the Jewish community that fought the Iran deal heroically, I was with them in that fight. I did a lot of speaking at that time. On the Iran deal. I think the Iran deal is the single worst thing that America has ever done to Israel has ever done to the Middle East. And in the context of the Middle East has ever done to itself. We can argue that let's we can have a good fight about the Iran deal if you'd like. And I don't take back one word of that. And so what what's so moves me about the the strong pro Israel, part of the American Jewish community, is this feeling of American entitlement. We're doing this as American citizens, we think this is a really stupid plan, a stupid deal. Not only for Israel, but for America for the world. And we're going to stand up and say our peace. And and a lot of Israelis don't understand that precisely what makes American Jews so American is what makes them such effective advocates for Israel.

Lev Gringauz

That's I'm I am curious about this. I've been curious about this for a long time, I was often around many people who at that time oppose the Iran deal. And naturally, as someone who's younger, I'm only 24 right now. So you can imagine my age, then I sort of followed that. And then later, I learned something that was curious to me that, for all the talk about the politics of you know, that's in Yahoo showed up and said, this is bad for Israel, on the political side, a lot of APEC saying this is bad for Israel. And then I learned about many of the Israeli generals, and the defense establishment in the intelligence community that themselves said, either ranging from this is not perfect, but better than nothing. Or now that we have it, we can actually use it in effective ways. And then when you know, it was cancelled under the previous American administration, many of those same defense and intelligence official said, Well, we maybe we could have used that maybe you didn't need to cancel it now. Which has always been curious to me about the sort of division of the political Israel versus, you know, for a long time, the words of the generals were kind of so

Yossi Klein Halevi

glad us. So I'm curious.

Lev Gringauz

Fascinating, and in America, we don't have that conversation enough. Because we're so stuck on the political divides of nothing. Yeah, who came and told us we don't like it this, you know, so.

Yossi Klein Halevi

So I know of a handful of former leading figures in the Israeli security establishment, who supported the deal. Not necessarily passionately, but felt Okay, under the circumstances. The overwhelming majority of the Israeli security establishment did not support the deal. What happened was, once the once it became clear, that we had no chance of stopping the deal, and it was clear before Netanyahu went to

Congress, there was a letter that was signed by a large number of, of figures who were formerly part of the defense establishment who said, this is a losing battle, we're going to lose more than we gain by fighting it. It's time to just win. Give it on this. That's different, because that was not the support. Now it's true that today, you'll have many figures in the in the security establishment who will say it was a mistake to cancel the deal. I'm not part of the security establishment. And I do not think it was a mistake to cancel the deal, by any means, what I think happens. And I'm gonna preface this by saying, I am not a fan of Donald Trump. I, unlike many Israelis who are, and I understand Israeli gratitude to Trump, but I think that the damage that Trump did to to America, the violence was was this was such a violation. And that it was it was in a sense of existential threat to the America that we know, and an existential threat to America as a threat to the world. And so I even though Trump happened to have been the best president for Israel, that we probably ever had, I don't think the trade off was worth it. So again, many Israelis won't say that, but I maybe it's because I, I've spent a lot of time in america and i i saw upfront what this was what he was doing to American society to, to the culture here and close to irreparable damage. But having said that, Trump understood the Middle East, and it probably takes a Donald Trump to understand the Middle East, the pathology of the Middle East. And what Trump got right was two things. One is that, unlike Obama, who fantasized that the Iranians could become the the linchpin of regional stability, Trump understood that Iran was the source of the region's problems, or one of the sources of its problems, and that he met this regime, this Iranian regime will never be an ally or a stabilizer. And the second thing that Trump understood is that the only way to, to get a better deal, and I think he was after a better deal, rather than no deal at all, was to apply more and more economic pressure, till the breaking points. So what went wrong? What went wrong? From the point of view of the deal, not from the point of view of your political situation? What went wrong was that the Democrats won the election. And I'm convinced that Iran was waiting it out. And I'm also convinced that whoever it is, is on their side in this country was telling them don't give in yet Trump Trump might lose, and they were holding out. And they knew that when the democrats came in, they knew that Biden would be desperate for a deal. And my big fear is still, even though there's been it's taken longer than I thought it would. But I do not trust the administration on this issue at all. And I fear that they will give him had Trump been reelected. And again, I'm speaking very specifically on Iran. I think that the Iranians faced with four more years of Donald Trump would have had to renegotiate the deal, something that they don't feel any need to do with Biden, because they know that Biden, and this issue is a push up for not only on this issue, I think that withdrawal from a disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan, the disastrous way in which it happened was a very clear signal to the Iranians. The Democrats are back, relax. That's all I have to say about.

Lev Gringauz

That's all. Fascinating, I don't I thank you for responding back letting me ask that I have a lot more I'd love to ask. But I don't want to make this just a big, you know, podcast about the Iran deal. as fascinating as that would be one.

Yossi Klein Halevi

Can I say one last thing about the generals? Absolutely. It's really interesting. How, in American Jewish conversation on Israel, I find that people really, people here really care. What do the What did the generals of the former generals think so I know, for example, there's a dovish organization of former

security officials who are for Palestinian state, and I never hear about them in Israel, but I always hear about them in America. And there's a good reason for that. Nobody in Israel really cares? What former generals think about anything, including security issues. Okay, thank you very much. And I'm you know, I mean this I'm not being cynical, thank you for your service to the country. But now that you're a civilian, you know, as much as I do. I know as much as you do. We've all been in the army. We all know what the West Bank looks like, we all know what the political threats are we all more or less know something at least about Iranian enrichment. What do you really know more than me, you are tacticians. And the way that a friend of mine put it, you know, when when the head of the Mossad or former head of the Mossad came out for the Iran deal. He said, You know, if I'm looking for someone to assassinate a terrorist, I'll go to the both sides. But if I'm looking for a political opinion, I'm I my opinion is worth as much as the head of the Mossad. Now, it's hard for American Jews to understand. But it's an essential part of, of Israeli egalitarianism of the Democratic ethos in Israel, which is we all serve the country, we all live these issues. All right, you have some inside information, which helps you in battle, but do you really understand the political issues better than I do? Not necessarily. I listened to some of our former generals, I think, what kind of a moral value, you know, we, you know, we placed the fate of our country in your hands. And that's what you think. That's a very typical Israeli response to to what the generals think and it changed in Israel with the Yom Kippur War 1973 Before that, we revered our generals whatever the and when they went into politics, you know, they were they had the last word. This is a very different Israel today.

Lev Gringauz

So many fascinating things I'd love to give asking you about

Lonny Goldsmith

how many hours do we have to do okay, we're gonna I want to switch taken up so much of your time, we're gonna I want to switch tracks a little bit, because obviously, as Lev said, we could do the other track for a really long time. On open door media's show unpacked, you talked about the distinction between occupying land and occupying people in the word occupation, tends to feel very loaded here in the states in the UK, and possibly in Israel as well, when you're looking at the context of the Israeli Palestinian conversation, so can you sort of explain the difference and distinction you make between those two?

Yossi Klein Halevi

Yeah, you guys really did your homework here. my starting point is that all of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, is the land of Israel. And Jews are not occupiers in any part of that lands. A Jew is not an occupier in Judea. It's all for me. It's all Judean scenario. It's not the West Bank. It's certainly not occupied territory. But that's my starting point. It's not my end point. My end point is there's another people between the river and the sea, who I am occupying, whose lives I'm controlling. And I don't want the Jewish state to be in a position of permanent occupy, I think it's a disaster, long term disaster for Israel. And so I support a two state solution. I support the contraction of our territorial claim to what is now more or less to the borders of the State of Israel, in the same way that I will expect Palestinians who believe that all of the land between the river and the sea is Palestine. And I've never met a Palestinian, no matter how moderates who doesn't believe that, in principle, all of

that land is Palestine, including the State of Israel, whose starting point is not the same as my starting point. It's all mine. But in that same way, I I'm expecting a Palestinian partner for peace, to contract their territorial claim to what will be not part of the land of Palestine, that will be the State of Israel. So what I'm really calling for is a partition not only have the land but a partition of justice, because each side believes that justice is on their side and I do believe that all of this land in principle is mine. And I don't believe I never use the term, give back land, the term that I use is giving up land. Because I'm making a sacrifice of land that belongs to me, in the same way that a Palestinian would never speak about giving, giving back land to the Jews. The state, I'm not giving, I'm not giving back the State of Israel to you, I'm giving up the state of itself. Because the State of Israel is sitting on land, it's Palestine, I accept that for you. It's all Palestine, no problem. And because for me, it's all it's all of the land of Israel. So that's for me, the distinction between occupying land and occupying people is basic to how I see not just the conflict, but solving the conflict. Each side has every right to its maximalist claim, where we get into trouble is where each side tries to implement its maximalist claim. And that's something that that leads to a dead ends on war.

Lev Gringauz

So finally, bringing it all back again to your book Letters To My Palestinian Neighbor. In 2020, the JCRC started the letters project, a letter writing contest, to spark discussion and engagement in the Twin Cities community, particularly among young Jews. So what has surprised you, if anything about how young Jews have responded to this book any notable takeaways? So

Yossi Klein Halevi

first of all, I'm really glad we're coming full circle back to the JCRC. Because there is no other Jewish community that has gone so far in in adopting and using letters as an educational tool, as you have here. And it's extraordinary to me, really, the JCRC has gone all out. And that's a model for other Jewish communities. And I'm starting to see some interest in in other Jewish communities, and adopting the JCRC model the Minnesota and North Dakota, or south to

Lonny Goldsmith

both Dakotas. Third, Dakotas, Dakota, always leave

Yossi Klein Halevi

the Dakotas out when I speak about the JCRC of Minnesota. And I always get a very nice note from from Sally or Holly, could you please just include that the code does so. So here you see I did that I preempted the correction. And, and so no other JCRC has gone as far as as, as you guys have. And that means an enormous amount to me, because part of my frustration, you know, the book, it has resonance in the Jewish community, it's done, it's done well. But I just, I just wish we could get this book into the hands of every kid that's going to college next year, because it gives you a language, it gives you a framework for dealing with the assault that's coming. And, you know, when you ask me left, what what kind of responses I've gotten in the letters that I've gotten from young people have participated in the JCRC letter writing contest. Just, it's been phenomenal. You know, they write letters to me. And it's so moving to, you know, I invited Palestinians to write letters today. And I got back well, as I mentioned, a whole range of letters. I didn't really think I'd be getting letters from young American Jews. And I have

this big and growing file of response responses from participants in the letter writing contest. And most of all, I'd say what, what, what moves me is the sense of gratitude that I that I get from, from young people that now and it happened, especially during the most recent Gaza conflict, and I heard this over and over again, you know, I had a context in which to understand what was what was happening. And that really, in the end, is the greatest gift that a writer can can receive, which is the sense that your book is being read and is shaping people's consciousness. You know, there's there's nothing else that a writer really wants or should want. You know, writers want lots of success and money and we all of course, we all want that. But But the only the only thing that we really have the right to want is that our work can can reach readers. And that you become a part of a readers worldview part of, of a readers, state of consciousness, and how what an amazing thing that is, you know, to, to enter into the mind of a young person, and to be part of whatever's going on inside that mind to be to be one of the voices that that are competing with other voices for this person's attention. And so I feel privileged. I know that's, that's a loaded word these days in America, but I feel privileged in the best sense of the word, to be writer to be a writer for Jews, and to have the kind of audience that you hear in in Minneapolis, and that you've given me so thank you. Thank you for that.

Lev Gringauz

I think Thank you for coming on this podcast and being willing to speak with us is delightful. Thank

Yossi Klein Halevi

you really a pleasure.

This has been this week's The Jews Are Tired podcast, I'm Lev Gringauz, don't forget to subscribe and share, and hopefully next week, the Jews will get some rest.

The Jews Are Tired is a product of Jewfolk, Inc. For more information, go to TCJewfolk.com, or email the show at podcast@tcjewfolk.com. A link to the transcript of this episode is available in the podcast notes, along with links to any news stories or reports referenced for this episode.

There is actually a little more to the conversation with Yossi Klein Halevi after the main part of the interview was done, where we kept recording and had a good banter about the Movement to Free Soviet Jewry and some of Klein Halevi's journalism experience in the 1980s. If you would like to hear that, just keep listening.

Lev Gringauz

I can also say I'm a Russian speaking Jew. My family came from the Soviet Union. So I'm also very grateful for your work against Soviet Union back in the day. Oh, well,

Yossi Klein Halevi

thank you.

Lev Gringauz

Thank you a lot of appreciation for Yes,

Yossi Klein Halevi

I personally saved you. Thank you. It's very funny love, you know, because I was speaking with with Natasha Sharansky, a couple years ago. And he said, he said, Every time I go to America, somebody comes up to me and said, I saved you. So when I say rad ski was, well, I have to tell you, personally, I did not save you. Because I had my years of activism in the movement ended just as you were getting involved. So by the time you went to the Gulag, I was not out there protesting feels like you did jail for him. That for him. It wasn't

Lev Gringauz

the first time I've actually my family has heard the we got you out of their line when a synagogue was pushing parents to donate because we weren't donating enough because when we first arrived, so whole long story,

Yossi Klein Halevi

what do you think you are, you're

Lev Gringauz

not gonna do the whole thing now? No, but the other interesting part for me is like my mom, my parents were in sort of the first early wave in the 1980s. So my mom actually later got involved herself in the movement to free Soviet jewelry. And also so it's kind of like we sort of I saved myself. And you know,

Lonny Goldsmith

I mean, I I'm, I'm 46. And so my bar mitzvah was at a time where a lot of American Jews were twinning with with Russian Jews who were Trump, who are of similar age. And so you know, we have like a whole card insert in there and I got you twinned? I did I spoke either to him or I was on the phone. I think there was transformers the KGB agent, I'm sure. I mean, a significant delay because this was 1987 telecom now 88 telecom? Yeah. 88. telecommunications. So there's, you know, back in the day, where there was the long delay when you're at a phone conversation with somebody from overseas, Oh, yes. So yes, but no, that was the very

Yossi Klein Halevi

hacked on your Jewish identity.

Lonny Goldsmith

I'm not sure I fully got it. At the time. To be honest, I was a day school kid too. So like, I guess I sort of got it. But like, being a day school kid like, that, I think impacted more at the time. I think, if I wasn't a

day school kid, or I wasn't as engaged in the Detroit Jewish community as I was, at the time, I might have had a better grasp, for example of what it all meant, for lack of a better word, I guess, of what it all meant. I guess I sort of, I also maybe just don't remember, I think, you know, 33 years, a long time. And I might have actually had a really good grasp of, you know, of it at the time. And, but but I don't actually know,

Yossi Klein Halevi

well, you know, I'm really glad that 3 million Jews about living under a totalitarian rule, but but but I, I wish that young American Jews could have had that experience, that unbelievably energizing experience, that that I had growing up, and that the soviet union movement gave me, but yes, on balance, I'm glad that we won.

Lev Gringauz

I've got a whole soapbox on how the American Jewish community sort of forgot everything that happened and now my generation knows nothing but I won't get in the middle. The other important question I have for you What was it like earning \$2 a word back in the day for journalism?

Yossi Klein Halevi

Oh, wow. \$2 a word and not was that \$2 a word I worked as, in the early 80s I moved to Israel 1982 and I was the Israel correspondent for The late lamented Village Voice in New York. Sure. And

Lonny Goldsmith

Israel correspondent That's amazing. It's

Yossi Klein Halevi

bright. Pink. And not only that, but Zionist. Yeah. And think of what that means. I mean, there's a whole other discussion that I love that I'm bringing it up is, is I was paid \$300 an article and I would work for weeks on those articles. So it was nowhere near \$302 a word and and if you factor in the time, it was a scandal, but I was so happy to be writing for the voice that I barely noticed that I was really poor. It was just the thrill was a thrill to to be a journalist and anyway that's a whole other conversation.

Lev Gringauz

I don't know if that makes me feel better or worse about journalism nowadays, but it makes

Lonny Goldsmith

Me feel so much worse as the guy who is responsible for getting him paid. Before he joined our staff, and I just I yeah, we're gonna do it against you. I'm just gonna go sit in the car and cry. That's all right.