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Israeli kaleidoscope

America is divided! This is the phrase we hear from most commentators, analyzing the state of the United States now, but in reality, all through the last four years, that is, after the election of Donald Trump as president of the country. Just like in the past, (almost) half of the voters voted for the winner, and the other (almost) half – for the loser, however, they started talking about the split only now. Why? I suppose because principles, slogans and worldview of presidential candidates are steadily moving apart, diverge, the rhetoric becomes sharper and there is a sense of division.

I am not talking about specific events; those are the consequences.

That is dangerous. I am not going to analyze the positions and worldviews of the parties, that is not my goal. The danger to America is not that it is divided, but that **it is split in two, right down the middle!** In other words, a split, a serious divergence in the worldview of these parts of the population, in this case, gives rise to confrontation. And confrontation is dangerous, it has always been dangerous and has repeatedly led to popular disasters in the form of civil wars. It is especially dangerous in a country where there are more than 300 million firearms. Another element of increased danger is the fact that the central government divides its powers with local, state government, which naturally encourages the attitudes of just one of the sides.

But I do not want to analyze America in detail, this is just a vivid **example of where may lead a completely acceptable, according to the principles of democracy, differences of opinion.**

Our Israeli reality is different, and I want to analyze it. I will try to describe it first.

An attempt to divide the worldview of the Israelis into two parts, the right and the left, as the press does it, is not, in my opinion, successful. In other words, not all those on the right are of the same kind and not all on the left are, either.

Instead of a dividing line in public consciousness, a dividing line in political forces, we have something like a mesh structure, where many different lines divide society into several parts, though those parts are not mutually exclusive: that is, each person with such division belongs simultaneously to several segments. Let's consider these lines.

The first line is called **Zionism**. Society is divided into those who support the State of Israel and those who oppose it or simply do not support that idea. The former is a noticeable majority, but, nevertheless, on the political map of Israel there is such a thing as Zionist parties.

The second line is **national**. Israel is a multinational country, where besides the Jews (about 74% of the population) there are Arabs (21%), Druze, Circassians and other smaller minorities that make up the rest of the population. Accordingly, there are also national parties; the Arab population supports four different national parties united into a single list to pass the electoral barrier for elections. The rest of the minorities do not have a party representation in the political arena.

The third line is **religious**. Israel is not at all a homogeneous country religiously. It would seem that 74% of the Jewish population and 21% of the Arab would divide the country between Judaism and Islam similarly to the national line. But it is not so. First, as it relates to religion, both the Jewish and Arab populations are divided into secular and religious groups. For example, out of the four Arab parties, two address the requirements of the secular population; as for religion, in addition to the Sunni Islam, part of the Arab population (about 10%) are Christians. The makeup of the Jewish population is even richer: there is an ultra-religious population, national-religious, moderately religious (they are also called "tradition keepers"), and secular. The ultra-religious population itself also has a wide range of sub-types, three of which have direct representation in the Knesset. Another division is a type of Judaism: Ashkenazi or Sephardic Judaism (we will not talk about the Reformist and Conservative versions of Judaism - those are, basically, American Judaism). Sephardic / Ashkenazi division is not a simple formality, the difference between these currents is about the same as the difference between the Orthodox and the Catholics, in any case - each has its own synagogue.

A common line between the secular and religious populations divides the country almost in half. The secular population is represented in the political arena by two parties in the Jewish sector and two in the Arab sector. The religious half is divided yet further, with one Arab and six Jewish parties representing the religious population. All other parties not included in the clearly defined secular and religious representations, are mixed, that is, they represent pretty much everyone.

The fourth line is **the attitude towards the Arab-Israeli conflict**. Here the gamut of opinions smoothly flows from rejection of the Jewish state, or rejection of its Jewish character, through those who support the principle of "two states for two nations", to the categorical rejection of the creation of an independent Palestinian State. Each political party has its own attitude to this issue, in accordance with the gamut of opinions of the people, and this line does not in any way coincide with any of the previous ones: opinions differ in both the Arab and Jewish sectors.

The fifth line is **economic**. Communists (there is such a party), socialists, social democrats (socialism with a "human face"), parties supporting a market economy - the whole spectrum is represented in the parliament. And this division also does not match any of the others.

The sixth line is the **communal division**. The State of Israel was formed by gathering the Jewish people out of two thousand years of exile. Therefore, Israeli communities corresponding to the country of origin (ancestors, for half of Israelis who were born in the country) carry (to some extent) culture and the mentality of these places, and sometimes the phenotype as well. The main division is, of course, Ashkenazim (immigrants from Europe or North America) and Sephardim, immigrants from Arab countries.

A separate force with direct representation in the political arena is the voice of immigrants from the countries of the former USSR. In the last 20 years, it has been considered a good form to balance Sephardi and Ashkenazi and include a representative from the Russian and the Ethiopian communities in the parliamentary list.

So this is how the picture turns out. In this political situation, **there is not a single question on which a split of the population of Israel into two opposing camps is possible,**

with the exception of only a war, specifically of a defensive nature, that is, the one that Israel is forced to lead to preserve its existence.

Any other question creates a bizarre picture in the Knesset, in which out of 18 parties united into 13 parliamentary factions (in the 23rd Knesset) are forming bizarre coalitions. For example, I remember a bill submitted for approval on the limitation of the night activities of the muezzins, which created a fair amount of noise. Everyone who ever lived near Arab quarters in cities with a mixed population, hears them in the middle of the night, calling the faithful to prayer. The bill, submitted by one of the secular parties, was failed by the combined efforts of all religious deputies, Arab and Jewish. Today it is a muezzin, and what would the secular people want to ban tomorrow?

The very democratic division of the parliament into a coalition (constituting the government) and the opposition (which was not invited there) are uniting within these parliamentary representations such different forces, such different interests that coalition negotiations are insanely complex, ending in drafting of multi-page documents that can compete in their complexity with contracts between countries. These documents provide, within the framework of the coalition discipline, a coordinated response to controversial issues. The opposition often uses this by putting such questions to the vote. This is very confusing for the coalition parties, forced to "step on the throat of their own song", voting against a bill, which could have been one of the symbols of their campaign. But also the opposition, except for the desire to overthrow the government, often has very little in common. Bizarre patterns are compiled here as well.



All this very much resembles a children's toy - a kaleidoscope. It's a tube in which colored glass is collected at the end. We looked through it as children, and saw beautiful patterns that changed with every turn, creating a new unique picture. Who is playing with it now?!

For us, immigrants from the Soviet Union, this situation was unusual and strange. We had a bipartisan model in our heads - the left and the right, like the American one. It took a long time to realize - the political map of the country should meet the interests of the people, otherwise it is not quite a democracy. Indeed, under a two-party system many interests find their solution at the party level. But the parties are just a few people in relation to the population. And party elections often do not reflect the opinion of those who support these parties. No wonder that in the same America, presidential primaries in some states are made open, that is, anyone can vote.

Under a two-party system, if you remove one party, or, more precisely, make it insignificant, we would get the regime under which we already lived: real socialism or, which is the same, people's democracy - that is how such regimes were called in the Eastern European countries.

In a country so motley in composition, a two-party or three-party system would not be adequate, or rather, would be simply impossible. And what is possible really resembles a kaleidoscope.

Here are a couple of examples. A bill was proposed on giving the Knesset the power to overturn the Supreme Court political rulings - a notion that was written on the banners of the largest government party. The kaleidoscope turned - a new, previously unimaginable commonality was created, and the bill was defeated.

A bill was proposed on the impossibility of the current prime minister (who already has three indictments hanging over him) to occupy his position, a requirement of most of the parties that participated in the elections. The kaleidoscope turned – created a new, previously unimaginable community, and this bill was defeated as well.

I have presented only two examples for July and August, but these bills were the basis of the pre-election platform of the parties that have now rejected them. It's not meant to be! The kaleidoscope made an unfavorable pattern.

Another example: the fight against the coronavirus infection. Oh, how inconsistent our government is! Yesterday one thing, and tomorrow another! Everyone who is not lazy criticizes it for this, on the internet. And rightly so! But government decisions are accepted by the parties entering into it, and they make up bizarre associations, at any given moment requiring their own compromise. Under Putin or Lukashenko that would not have happened.

And here's another example on this topic.

From the point of view of the secular Israel, freedom of assembly and democracies is sacred and may not be limited in any way, not for medical reasons nor for any other reasons. But for the religious population, especially for its ultra-religious part, participation in a wedding celebrations of the granddaughter of one of the highest religious authorities is also sacred and it cannot be limited. And they, in essence, do not care about democracy, as well as the nonbelievers don't give a damn about their wedding. A government unable to equally accommodate both problems in its solutions, is forced to give an unofficial instruction not to prosecute anyone at forbidden crowded religious weddings and be quite mild with demonstrators relentlessly violating all medical requirements of the moment.

Kaleidoscope. Bizarre patterns, unusual combinations of political forces, compromises, mutual concessions and reciprocal obligations are not a consequence of the political system of Israel, but rather a consequence of the diversity of its population and its right to proportional political representation. Either a democracy and this "balagan" or ...? Or what? Imagining a dictatorship or an authoritarian regime (such as Russian or Chinese) in Israel is impossible. Bringing everyone to some kind of a common denominator, or, say, two or three denominators, does not produce a result. For that purpose, the electoral barrier was doubled several years ago, so parties having no chance to overcome it began to unite in party lists for the election period. Later, in the Knesset, each of them plays its role almost independently of others. For the same purpose, twenty-five years ago, a law was passed on direct elections of the prime minister. But a head of the executive party elected by the people, similar to one elected by the Knesset, needs support to implement almost any government decisions, and there, the same kaleidoscope awaits him. Well, maybe in the case of direct elections, his stay in power could be limited by law, forcing the leading parties to change their leader every 8 years.

This is a given, with all its flaws. But this is a result of what is today the nature of the people of Israel. And, in fact, if you don't like this "balagan" of natural origin, you just don't like Israel. Well, it happens.

Let's go back to the beginning of our article. We, in Israel, will never have what happens today in the USA. We will not force anyone to their knees to ask for a political forgiveness (same happened in Russia after the 1917 revolution), no one is gagged, without giving the opportunity to express their own, or their segment's, inherent attitude to the

events. There will not be briefings introduced in the workplace on political information (hard to believe, but this is happening in the freest country in the world, exactly as it was in the USSR). We will not rename and censor books and films, erase our history and destroy our monuments (however, we do not have them in the form of figures). There will be nothing of this nature, it just can't be.

Our kaleidoscope will instantly give out a pattern **that will make all this not possible.**

Last year, a hooligan riot by immigrants for Ethiopia over an accidental killing of a representative of their community (by a ricochet bullet), was stopped completely on the second day and was not renewed any more.

We hold "pride parades" every year, and one of the ministers has a non-traditional sexual orientation, but the concept of family established by the Torah cannot be changed. To some, this compromise will seem strange (well really, why not go all the way?), but this is our peculiarity, and the key to understanding it lies in the versatility of our society and its ability to be inclusive for all of this.

Balance. Moderation. Tolerance. Diversity.

We have no room for the slogan **black lives matter** or any other lives matter not because parts of our society have not experienced discrimination, of course, not because of that. Ask the Arab population about it, immigrants from the countries of North Africa, or the Russian community! Ask even the ultra-religious population! Everyone, **literally everyone**, will bring blatant, in their view, examples of discrimination. But we will never have a state discrimination, corrective discrimination, reparations or systemic preferences. The kaleidoscope will turn and a new, fancy pattern, a new political combination will not let this happen, **finding a reasonable compromise, a compromise that no one in completely happy with, but one that doesn't significantly offend anyone.**

Often, when passions run high, we remember why in the history of Israel Jerusalem Temples were destroyed, marking the end of the Jewish statehood? Confrontation! Today there is no Temple in Jerusalem, and one can only believe that it will arise again someday, since real conditions for that cannot be seen at all. But the state of Israel itself, in essence, is the Temple that needs protecting.

We have many shortcomings, we have a farce, we have an Arab-Israeli conflict, we have problems with both the secular and the religious populations - we have all that, and many other problems! But today we can't have a confrontation, even though it may sound strange, between Jews and Arabs, we have a really wide range of opinions on any question. We have **All lives matter.**