



The Wexner Foundation Electronic Beit Midrash Parashat Bo

Join the Effort to Leap Israel

By Gidi Grinstein

Gidi Grinstein, an alumnus of the Wexner Israel Fellowship Program, is Founder and President of the Reut Institute, a Tel-Aviv based policy and strategy group, which has been called one of Israel's leading think tanks. Between 1999-2001, he served in the Bureau of the Prime Minister as the coordinator of the Israeli delegation for the negotiations with the PLO. He can be reached at gidi@reut-institute.org.

The ISRAEL 15 Vision calls for Israel to become one of the fifteen leading countries in terms of quality of life within fifteen years. Realizing this vision requires national mobilization of Israelis and Jews around the world. The frontiers of this challenge should be populated by Wexner alumni. This article is an invitation to join this journey.

Since its inception, Israel has been a rich country for poor Jews and a poor nation for the rich Jews. For the latter, Israel is often the needy nephew and the subject of philanthropy, political support and personal sympathy.

But Israelis want a different story for themselves. We are no longer happy with being at the bottom of the ladder among developed nations; we want to be at its top. We are no longer satisfied with islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity. We want the opposite. We want to take Israel to the next level.

Israel's rapid development is not a "nice to have." It is a must and should be a pillar of the Zionist agenda of our time. The dramatic gap between the quality of our population and business community, on the one hand, and our underperforming public sector and low overall quality of life, on the other hand, is not sustainable. It creates our paradox: in a globalized flat world: we have the foundations to be global leaders if we realize our potential, as well as the making of a story of collapse if we do not retain and attract talent, investments and technology.

We have to continuously improve our quality of life in comparison to other nations. This means growing our economy by an annual five percent in real terms for a period of twenty years, as well as disseminating this wealth in a way that ensures significant improvements in the personal, physical, and social well-being of all Israelis.



True, leapfrogs in quality of life are rare phenomena and therefore ambitious goals to set. Only about fifteen countries – such as Ireland, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Singapore or Chile – have experienced them in the past sixty years. Israel is also a member of this exclusive club: between the 1950s and 1970s, we doubled our standard of living in comparison to the United States, from approximately 30 percent to roughly 60 percent. Since then, our catch up with the USA has stopped and our standard of living has *not* improved despite twenty years of growth.

Leapfrogs are not 'economic miracles' as they are often referred to. True, they have no recipe and are an outcome of a virtuous alignment in economic policy, social and political ripeness, a sense of urgency, leadership and national mobilization of all major sectors of society. However, leapfrogs were generated by people and therefore can be studied. Research points to commonalities among these countries such as articulating a rich and textured national vision; identifying and exploiting engines of growth; improving the ability to implement structural reforms or high investment in human capital.

Another one of these characteristics has been the ability to exploit unique assets. For example, Singapore capitalized on its status as gateway between east and west, while Ireland masterfully tapped into the opportunity offered to it by the European Union. One of Israel's unique assets is its relations with the Jewish world and with Israeli Diaspora. To date, we have not systematically explored the potential of this relationship.

In this context, this article is a call for action. The ISRAEL 15 Vision should be the task of our generation. The Reut Institute, which I founded and head, is mobilized to serve this vision by being its catalyst. We work to brand and research it, to create synergies among organizations and people who are committed to it, and to identify and articulate models of success in order to allow them to scale. We, at the Reut Institute, are mobilizing forces, groups, organizations and people on the Israeli side. But we need partners around the Jewish world as well.

Once a year we invite the ISRAEL 15 community for an annual gathering named The ISRAEL 15 Conference. Elected officials and civil servants from the Government of Israel and from local governments, leaders of the nonprofit, philanthropic and business worlds, academics and representatives of world Jewry come together to learn about this vision and to mobilize for realizing it.

This is why we are reaching out to the alumni of the Wexner Foundation, as well as to other cadres of leadership within world Jewry. Naturally, Wexners – alumni of the Israel, Heritage or Graduate programs – are leaders in Jewish communities the world over and can be at the



frontiers of this challenge. We hope that many of you would consider dedicating some of your interest, learning, actions and leadership to its service.

To learn more about the conference, slated for June 8-11, 2009, go to www.israel15.com. Gidi will be in LA in February, NYC in March, DC and Chicago in April and May, and would be happy to meet with any Wexner alumni on this or other issues.

To volunteer to submit an upcoming electronic beit midrash please contact Brigitte Dayan at bdayan@wexner.net