1

I love teaching students and I regard teaching as a central part of my academic work. Inculcating knowledge is one of the main goals of our work, and in this context the relationship between teacher and student can have an important intellectual and emotional impact that goes beyond the study material itself. In this respect, and given the special character of the Open University, the shaping of the curriculum and the selection of appropriate materials for discussion in the course are also important and influential factors. In my opinion, teaching is also important for the development of the teacher, providing an opportunity to observe different trends and approaches among the younger generation – something that can also contribute to the teacher’s research work.

While I was still a PhD student, I taught a course on Zionist ideology and Israeli identity at the Holon Institute of Technology. My teaching evaluations were positive and the number of students in the course rose from 20 to 50 after three semesters. As a post-doctoral fellow at New York University, I taught courses on the subject of Israeli politics and society. I also led a special project called Paths to Peace, as part of which I supervised and taught a joint group of Jewish and Palestinian students. In recognition of my strong teaching evaluations, the university suggested that I continue to teach at its Israeli campus in Tel Aviv, where I have now been teaching a course on the history of the conflict for two and a half years.

My experience working with diverse student populations was enhanced after I moved from New York to Beijing, where I continued my post-doctoral studies at Tsinghua University (one of the top two universities in China). I was the first person to teach a course in the field of Israel Studies there, and to this end I prepared a general introductory course called ‘The Israeli Case: Israel in the Middle East’. In Beijing I became aware of the tremendous interest in Israel among students from the non-Western world (and particularly from Africa, Eastern Europe, and Russia). I remain in contact with the Chinese university to this day. After returning to Israel and receiving a post-doctoral fellowship at Ben Gurion University, I served as the academic coordinator for a special seminar (the Glazer Seminar) in which I supervised Chinese students from around Israel. The seminar provided a week-long enrichment course, using a curriculum I prepared and including diverse lectures in the field of Israel Studies. This year I also began to teach at the Hebrew University, leading an MA course entitled ‘Zionist Leaders: Ideology, Biography, and Practice’.

The more you teach, the more you learn – about the areas that interest students, about how to challenge them, and hopefully about how to prepare the best possible syllabus and curriculum. One thing is clear to me from the wide range of students I have worked with, Israelis and others: Israel Studies is a thriving field around the world, and it can form an attractive intellectual discipline as a unique unit within the field of the humanities and social sciences in Israel, too.

The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman coined the term “Allosemitism” to refer to an approach that is neither anti-Semitic nor philo-Semitic, but which contains the potential seeds of both these attitudes toward Jews. More than anything else, Allosemitism emphasizes that the interest in Jews is the result of a sense that they are different, others, and unique – for better or for worse. The young German scholar Johannes Becke has proposed an analogous term Allozionism to indicate a similar approach toward Israel. These terms help me to clarify the impression I have gained from my own classes: Israel evokes special interest, whether motivated by hostility or empathy. This interest can and should be used to recruit students, since Israel Studies can indeed serve as a laboratory in diverse fields, disciplines, and subjects.

I believe that a curriculum centering on Israel Studies can serve as a flagship program in the social sciences and humanities faculties. We can utilize the interest in Israeli sociology and politics to encourage intellectual interest in Israel Studies.

As I prepared to submit my candidacy for this position, I reviewed the university’s curricula. I should begin by noting that, in principle, I believe that the combination of Jewish studies, philosophy, and history is a correct and attractive approach (indeed, these are the fields I studied for my BA and MA degrees at Tel Aviv University). However – and without going into detail at this stage – I believe that we can be pioneers in the attempt to shape a degree in the humanities and social sciences centered around Israel Studies.

It would be possible to offer a curriculum based on courses from various disciplines in Israel Studies – history, politics, sociology, philosophy, cinema, culture, and gender, for example – and to base these on courses in other departments.

In each of these fields, courses can be taught that will be of interest to any Israeli student. The relations between ethnic communities, the Israeli right wing, political parties in Israel, democracy studies, prominent leaders, Israel’s wars, Zionism as a national movement, types of colonialism and the Israeli angle, Israeli culture and cinema, the Israeli economy – all these are just a few examples of the subjects that can be a focus of intellectual exploration and should prove fascinating for students, when presented and constructed properly.

One idea could be to combine Israel Studies with a curriculum focusing on the Middle East, together with study of Arabic. Another is to position Israel Studies as the core component of a broader curriculum in the fields of political science, sociology, and economics.

Naturally, I believe that courses in philosophy and Jewish studies are an essential accompaniment to Israel Studies, or indeed to any degree in the humanities and social sciences.

I will be glad to discuss my ideas on this subject in greater depth. I will only repeat here the basic concept: to develop a degree centering on Israel Studies that has the potential to serve as the flagship of courses in the humanities and social sciences in Israel.

To sum up, it is important to me to emphasize that I also maintain working relations with universities and lecturers outside Israel. I am affiliated with New York University and am in contact with lecturers and directors from various university centers in Europe and Abu Dhabi. Together with Prof. Aryeh Dubnov, I recently gave an online lesson for students from Washington University. I am in close contact with the editors of the Jewish Review of Books, who also offer diverse programs for students, and with prominent researchers from around the world. David Myers from UCLA has invited me to publish an article in his journal, and I am also in touch with Colin Shindler, who established the Centre for Jewish Studies at SOAS, Seth Anziska from the University of London, and others. I am confident that the connections I have developed will help me to organize international conferences that will position the Open University as a center for Israel Studies in Israel and on the global stage.

A few months ago, I was informed that I had been accepted as a lecturer for three more years at NYU in New York, where I will teach at the Taub Center for Israel Studies, including responsibility for conferences and other events. One of my goals there is to encourage contacts between the Center for Israel Studies and the Departments of General History and Middle East Studies. I am sure that my time in New York will enrich my knowledge and advance further my international contacts. I am someone who is able to work with friends and colleagues and enjoys doing so; I am also able both to manage others and to work with my superiors.

Despite the horizons offered by my upcoming stay in New York, as a true Israeli and someone who sees my future in this country, I will very happy to find my place at the Open University and to do my best to contribute to its work.

………………………………………………………………………………….

2

Of the three books I have written, I have chosen to provide a summary of my biography of Begin, which was published by Yale University:

In May 1977, after almost three decades during which the Labor Zionist stream dominated the Zionist movement, Menahem Begin – the leader of the Likud, the political descendant of the Revisionist movement – managed to come to power in Israel. Six years later, after a period that included Israel’s first peace treaty with an Arab country (Egypt), the autonomy plan for the Palestinians in the areas occupied by Israel in 1967, and the outbreak of the Lebanon War – Begin suddenly resigned from his post as prime minister. For the next seven years, until his death in March 1992, he lived as a recluse in his home and declined to offer any answers or explanations concerning various events in which he and his movement were involved.

My biography is based on careful archival work, together with the groundbreaking and interpretative use of personal interviews with figures from the period preserved in the State Archives, and not previously studied. I also drew on relevant literature regarding the various historical periods. The resulting book is the first full, research-based biography of Begin. Through the description of the course of his life, the book seeks to offer explanations and interpretations of the issues in which he was involved.

The book describes Begin’s political upbringing in the Beitar movement in Poland in the 1930s, highlighting the ideological differences between his contemporaries and the worldview of the founder of the Revisionist movement, Ze’ev Jabotinsky. The first few chapters of the book focus on the contrast between the liberal nationalism Jabotinsky absorbed in his hometown of Odessa and the integral nationalism that shaped Begin’s worldview against the background of Polish nationalism.

The book then goes on to analyze the characteristics of Begin’s leadership of the IZL underground organization, drawing an analogy between his loose leadership of the organization and the manner in which he later directed the First Lebanon War as Prime Minister.

After the establishment of Israel, Begin founded the Herut movement as the opposition to the government of the time. The study focuses on the ideology of Herut, which sought to combine an emphasis on the Whole Land of Israel with liberal values. It describes the political confrontations between Herut and Mapai against the background of such formative events as the reparations agreement with Germany, the attitude to immigration and absorption, and economic issues.

The study concentrates on the development of the relationship between Begin and the immigrants from the Islamic countries, against the background of an analysis of his attitude toward the Jewish religion, which is presented as the key factor responsible for shaping this bond. Begin’s affinity to Judaism helped him to offer populist and inclusive ideology for socially marginalized groups.

The second part of the book concentrates on the process of deradicalization and moderation that Begin underwent from the 1960s through to the elections of 1977. It describes the changes in Israeli politics and society, particularly after 1967, that helped legitimize Begin and later enable him to come to power.

The analysis of Begin’s time in office discusses the peace process with Egypt in the context of the affinity to the ideology of the Whole Land of Israel, emphasizing that the withdrawal from Sinai was intended to strengthen Israel’s holding over Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip, rather than to serve as a precedent for the “land for peace” formula. As part of this analysis, the autonomy plan for the Palestinians is discussed in the context of the Lebanon War, as part of a broad-based attempt to displace the PLO and curtail the growing Palestinian national movement.

The book also analyzes Begin’s highly contradictory personality and the economic problems that resulted from the manner in which he sought to combine opposing elements of Socialism and Capitalism. Lastly, it seeks to unravel the mystery of his resignation.

The study presents readers with a personal and sociopolitical portrait of a Zionist leader who was in power during a crucial period, and one that is perhaps particularly relevant in terms of understanding the developments in present-day Israel.