

While moderate Palestinians seem to be willing to negotiate two states for two peoples, some of their demands are non-starters, such as Israel returning to the armistice lines of 1949 or absorbing 1.5 million Palestinian refugees. Complicating the situation is the division within the Palestinian people, with Hamas ruling Gaza and Fatah running the West Bank. Until there is reconciliation among the Palestinians, there will be no progress toward a peace accord with Israel.

At the same time, Israel must do more to demonstrate its willingness to make necessary concessions for peace—first, by freezing settlement building. The settlement enterprise is so extensive and widespread, if not halted immediately, all hopes for a viable, contiguous Palestinian state will be lost.



Levi Weiman-Kelman (rabbi of Kehillat Kol HaNeshama in Jerusalem; a founder of

Rabbis for Human Rights): Both Israelis and Palestinians are unable to stop thinking of themselves as victims. This creates a lack of mutual empathy and the inability to recognize the humanity of the other side.

Hannah Yakin: Hatred of the other is cultivated on both sides. In Israel, at least, hatred of Palestinians is not taught in schools, although it is often expressed in homes. In contrast, the official Palestinian media is full of anti-Jewish, anti-Israeli propaganda, and the textbooks replete with slander and lies.



Matthew Sperber (founding member of Kibbutz Yahel; chair of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism's National Board):

The first impediment is the large number of Palestinians who want Israel destroyed. Palestinian television broadcast a sermon by Ibrahim Madi, imam of a Gaza mosque, who stated: "God willing, this unjust state Israel will be erased." The second is our government's inability to believe that the Palestinian leadership is capable of concluding and upholding a peace agreement in the name of the Palestinian nation. Both impediments are surmountable, but I doubt peace will come in my lifetime.

Michael Livni: The biggest obstacle is the refusal of the Arab leadership—not only politicians but the theological and intellectual-cultural elites—to accept a Jewish state as part of the Middle East. For example, although there is official "peace" between Israel and Egypt as well as between Israel and Jordan, any Jordanian or Egyptian scientist, artist, journalist, or academic suspected of maintaining professional ties with Israeli colleagues is expelled from his/her national professional organization.



Evan Cohen (cantor and director of overseas relations and fundraising for Kehilat Har-El; instructor for HUC-JIR's Israeli rabbinic program):

The biggest impediment is each side's refusal to recognize the narrative of the other. The Palestinians refuse to acknowledge the Jewish people's ancient historical, religious, and emotional connection to the land—such as to the West Bank city of Hebron, where, according to Genesis (23), Abraham purchases property for Sarah's burial. And many Jewish Israelis refuse to accept that the Palestinians belong to an indigenous people whose roots in the land date back centuries, if not longer—and that they, too, have equal right to self-determination.

Hanan Cidor: For Israelis the biggest impediment is apathy. The majority of Israelis who would give up land for peace have become defeatist because every previous peace effort resulted in disappointment and frustration. Sadly, that leaves us in the hands of a highly organized and increasingly influential minority—extremists who will never agree to give up the West Bank.

For Palestinians, the biggest impediment is defining their national identity in terms of opposition to Israel as a Jewish state. It is very hard to make peace with people who call you "Satan," refuse to acknowledge your country's right to exist, and blame you for everything bad that has ever happened to them. Only when Palestinian identity turns toward building up their own society and nation will they recognize that compromise is in their best interest.

Miri Gold: Deep down, neither side really wants peace. Of course, everyone will say, "I want peace," just like everyone wants to be thin and in good shape, but that doesn't mean that people will take the positive steps to achieve their goals. Both sides know that a compromise must be reached, but any such deal would unleash a revolt by fundamentalists and radicals on both sides. Both Israelis and Palestinians would rather keep the conflict going than risk a bloody civil war.

What are the best hopes for peace? Is outside intervention needed?

Levi Weiman-Kelman: I cannot believe that God brought the Jewish people back to the land of Israel after 2,000 years of exile so that we would live in a state of perpetual warfare with our neighbors. I believe God has called on the Jewish and Palestinian peoples to model how to overcome strife and somehow share a common homeland.

Miri Gold: While the politicians seem uninterested, some Israeli grassroots organizations such as Rabbis for Human Rights are working to change attitudes, for example, by organizing groups of Israeli Jews to help Palestinians harvest their olives. While picking olives in a West Bank village, I've witnessed the amazement of Arab families when they see Jews volunteering to help them with no expectation of payment. Encountering "the other" without fear brings us closer to peace.

Michael Marmur: I am too discouraged to have a particular peace recipe in mind. But for starters: 1) Jewish and Arab kids need to encounter each other in high school through twinning programs rather than out-and-out integration; 2) We must refuse to give in to the settler movement's messianic lunacy; and 3) We need to work on local models of economic cooperation which make coexistence a win-win for all.

Having said all that, I believe that our best hope is Barack Obama, because a mixture of pressure and support may

continued on page 56