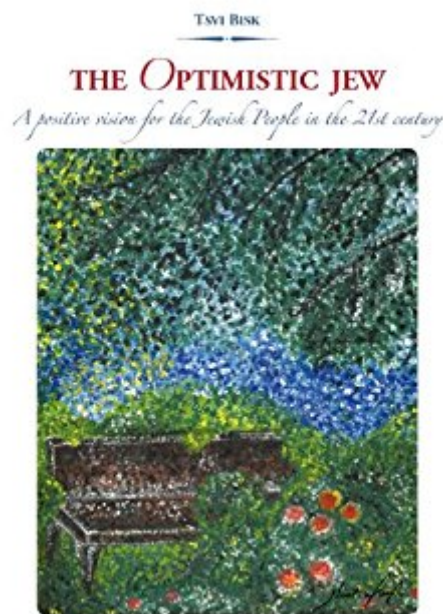




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The Optimistic Jew: A Positive Vision For The Jewish People In The 21st Century



Synopsis

This interesting book is divided into two parts. Part 1, called "Where We Are and Where We Should Be Going," is an analysis of contemporary Judaism. Part 2, "Realization: Looking Back from 2020," demonstrates how the Jewish people and Israel will have confronted their challenges and achieved the aims outlined in part 1. Bisk posits that Jewish life in the twenty-first century must mobilize and direct the energies of the Jewish people into creative activity; transform Israel into a society with the highest possible scientific, cultural, and social standards; and turn Israel into an economic superpower with one of the highest per capita standards of living in the world. Bisk believes that this century offers a promising future for the Jewish people. Cohen, George

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EXCELLENT

The author opens in his preface by saying, "The purpose of this book is to stimulate imagination and activate energy and idealism in a Jewish context". He hopes to provide a vision of the Jewish future

which will as he says 'build a new Jewish paradigm for the twenty- first century'.I read a lot of books on Jewish subjects and found the idealism and inventiveness of the effort made here truly refreshing. The book is rich in description and analyses of the Jewish and most specifically Israeli situation and in prescriptions of how to change it for the better.As for my father would have said I believe Tsvi Bisk " is thinking in the right way".He does not wish to wallow in the past or in self- pity. He aims to move the Jewish people forward. Here he provides a vision of an economic and social revolution , a creative revolution in which Israel and the Diaspora will be true partners. He makes specific proposals for projects such as 'The Jewish Energy Project' ' The Tikkun Olam Boarding School Project' 'Urban Plantations' for new ways of cooperating together, of producing the kind of synergy between Israel and Disapora which will benefit the Jewish people as a whole.In the course of the writing he presents dozens of ideas each of which is worth a lengthy consideration in itself. He connects the Jewish situation with the world - situation, with globalization and sees how a more creative Jewish people can make a real contribution to mankind. He cites Ben- Gurion and believes like him that the Jews to be a true light to themselves must be a light to the nations. And he says this while showing a real knowledge of the situation on the ground, the problems Israeli society faces in terms of income gap, poverty.However with all my enthusiasm for this book and I do have great enthusiasm for it I have reservations about elements in it. At times Tsvi Bisk seems to give the sense that our situation has done nothing but improve with the years. He wants us to shift attention to the self- realization of individual Jews but nothing can change the difficult fact that the major problem Israel is still facing is 'survival'. The mentioning but not giving full weight to the security threats Israel faces from its neighbors and in fact from the Islamic world as a whole is the kind of optimism which borders on folly. It is wonderful to talk about self- fulfillment, but Israel has survived because thousands of young people have risked and many sacrificed their lives on the field of battle. I also while believing with Bisk that we should not remain mired in the past did not like the accusation of 'self- pity'. The Jewish people and so many Jews of recent generation have suffered such horrible losses that they are inevitably central in their consciousness.The latter part of the book is an exercise in which the author looks back at Israel and the Jewish people from the year 2020 and points to all the positive developments that have happened in this time. Perhaps the idea is that by dreaming it you help it make it happen. I certainly hope most of what Bisk 'dreams' does happen. However between 'wishing' and 'making it so' the road is long indeed, especially in the Middle East.On the whole, once again I believe this is an extremely valuable book which all those who care about Israel and the Jewish people should read.Even if its predictions turn out mostly wrong and its plans not fully realized it is a step in the right direction.

Given the immense challenges facing the Jewish people today, a book entitled "The Optimistic Jew" would seem to be either a bad joke or wishful thinking. But it isn't. The title and the content grew from decades of deep thinking and study by futurist Tsvi Bisk, who points to a truly possible future for the Jews -- if we dare to hope for one and commit to making it happen. The author isn't stuck on his version of a future, and invites the reader to create a positive future that includes her/his own self-actualization. He leads by example - and the power of his example derives from values dear to the Jewish people: breadth and depth of learning, the courage to hold a redemptive vision, and down to earth practicality. Analyzing present world trends, understanding Jewish history, and rooted in the Zionism and the pragmatism of Ben Gurion, Tsvi Bisk shows us a path forward. Some of us work to understand and mitigate the present threats to Israel's survival as a vibrant country and society, and the threats to Jews' sense of security and dignity in a world again rife with anti-Semitism. I call this work the "anti" work. Hard and painful as it is, it is essential work. But it acquires new meaning when we also work as cultural creatives - I call this the "pro" work. With the very real freedom we have today as Jews, and preserving our internal freedom from encroachment by hopelessness and apathy; with the enormous strength, inspiration and learning we can draw from our history and ancestors, and with the wisdom and learning we draw from other peoples and traditions, we can create a beautiful and powerful future. Some of us work in this "anti" and "pro" directions not just relative to the future of the Jewish people, but of humankind, of the planet and all sentient beings. This book focuses on the first of these but doesn't exclude the others. Tsvi Bisk sees them as complementary. Depending on how comfortably and consciously Jewish identity fits for any individual Jew with the other levels of his/her identity, so will focusing on the future of the Jewish people complement their work for a positive future for all. In my own experience of pointing out a path forward - a path which integrates but is not held back by the present obstacles - I have found that people very rarely dare to vision, and therefore also rarely dare to commit and act in a timely way. Staying within the herd seems to be a more powerful force for humans in general, than ensuring a good future for all. Leaders are generally far more interested in personal glory (requiring herd approval) than leading towards a good future for all. As a consequence, a bad future arrives - a deterministic future: determined by the forces that were at work in the present when people opted for inertia, apathy, divisiveness, powerlessness. Tsvi Bisk tells us that it doesn't have to be that way. Just reading his understanding of Zionism is a balm to the heart and health food to the mind. (Zionism being a word so distorted and maligned in the world, that many Jews have become "closet Zionists"). Tsvi not only brings it with dignity out of the closet, but he is one of our best teachers on

Zionism for the many Jews who know little about it and lack the sense of historical perspective. (His other book, *Futurizing the Jews*, goes into more depth relative to the historical origins of Zionism as a movement). Bisk realizes that most Jews today live in a highly individualistic world. Collectivist cultural values and norms are on the wane in the experience of most Jews. (He likes the way the pendulum has swung. Others of us may prefer other combinations of individualistic and collectivistic cultural habitats). Zionism always held as one of its highest values *Hagshama Atzmit*, Self-Actualization, but the mix of individualistic and collectivistic values and feelings that brought about self-actualization for Jews 50 to 100 years ago is a different mix today. This is a fact, and Tsvi Bisk modernizes Zionism by acknowledging the real and potent integration possible today between what is meaningful for individual Jews and creating a good future for the Jewish people. Having said all this, I don't agree with Tsvi on every single point. Neither may you. But this book has convinced me to become his ally in the creation of the future, and I believe and hope that many others that read it will be inspired to do so also. This is an excellent book for book clubs and study groups. It is available through the big book merchants, store and on-line purchasing...

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