

Professor returns to Israel to make his contribution

By Joe Starita

"Despite the pain and grief I felt while watching 'Holocaust' I'm glad NBC decided to show it. The show convinced me of one thing: that my place is in Israel."

For the last two years Joseph Perl's place has been at UNL. But within a month the electrical engineering assistant professor, his wife and two small children will return to Israel.

Not because they dislike the United States, explained the Rumanian-born Perl, but because "I want to raise my children in our culture with our language."

"I like the U.S.," said Perl, who graduated from the Israel Institute of Technology in 1972. "I love the people here, but I have to contribute to the well-being of my country. The U.S. can take care of itself. It doesn't need me. Israel might."

Returning to Israel in June will be smoother than Perl's initial entry into the country 17 years ago.

"My father tried to get into Israel for 40 years. In the early 1930s, he tried to immigrate to Palestine but his efforts were blocked by the British.

"After the war, Rumania's communist government wouldn't let him go.

"Finally, in 1961 we lied and said we wanted to visit France. Once we got to France we were able to get a visa and passport without any trouble."

Not all of Perl's family made it to Israel in 1961. He said members of his and his wife's family were gassed in Nazi concentration camps.

Watching 'Holocaust,' added Perl, convinced him that it is better to be a majority in Israel than a minority member of another country.

Bouncing his son on one knee, Perl explained in excellent English what he thinks it will take to bring about a Middle Eastern peace.

He said the necessary ingredient to any peace settlement is an assurance that Arabs do not want to destroy Israel. Without such an assurance, Perl added, there are two solutions.

"One solution is that the Arabs win a war, completely destroying Israel. That is a clear solution.

"Another is that both sides keep fighting—winning some and losing some, winning some and losing some—until both sides have had enough and are forced into peace."

Perl said Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's November visit to Israel "was a commendable act," but a settlement must be rooted in something more substantive than "kindness or a piece of paper."



Joseph Perl, electrical engineering assistant professor.

Photo by Mark Billingsley

Arab demands that the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people must first be restored before a settlement can be reached, Perl said, will always be a stumbling block because "no one knows exactly what that means."

Perl, who fought in the 1967 Six-Day War, said the rapid conquest of the Arabs in that war led Israel to believe they were invincible. But the bitter fighting and heavy casualties of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, he said, brought Israel back to reality.

Today, added Perl, he would return all Israeli-occupied territory captured in those wars if it would assure a Middle Eastern peace.

But based on current Arab offers, he said, it would be foolish to return that territory.

"If I was the Israeli premier I would not concede an inch based on Arab offers. Right now Americans are helping Saudi Arabia build a large military airbase within a half-hour's striking distance of Israel.

"Americans are selling Saudi Arabia about 60 F-15s to equip the airbase. That will be the greatest danger to Israel.

"And if a war breaks out it will be the first thing destroyed. There will be F-15s fighting F-15s."

Perl said American support of Israel is eroding because Arabs are presenting their side of the conflict more effectively.

The belief that American support of Israel is built upon Jewish control of the U.S. media is not true, Perl said.

Initially, American support was caused by guilt, he said.

"Three-hundred thousand American GI's returned from World War II after seeing the gas chambers. That's what caused American support of Israel."

Now, he said, the American media show an Arab boy damaged by an Israeli raid. The media neglect to show the same boy damaged by Arab fighting, added Perl.

"Americans see what they want to see and the press reflects that view. I am amazed how winds that blow from the White House affect the press.

"Americans encourage us to make bold, dangerous concessions that directly affect our lives. Then we look at something like the Panama Canal treaty negotiations.


"All that fuss and commotion over a territory that in no way directly endangers American lives and is not even to be turned over to the Panamians until the year 2000."

His two years at UNL have been enjoyable, said Perl, who spent three-and-a-half years at Colorado State getting his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees before arriving in Lincoln in August 1976.

"The students here are great. They're good and healthy. They are bright, work hard and they're not lazy. I think it looks like a good generation.

Perl said he will leave with American-developed racketball and skiing expertise and good memories of Nebraska.


"Nebraska really is a good life, just like they claim it to be. I'm certainly not leaving because it's bad. I just want to build my future and my children's future in my country."



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