

[Sacred Cows] Chapter 54: "What a filthy profession Middle Eastern Studies, that everything turns to garbage." – A variation on love and darkness with Professor Emanuel Sivan

By Yizhar Be'er

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Our guest in this chapter is Professor Emanuel Sivan, one of the leading scholars in the field of Middle Eastern Studies who lives among us. It was a myth-busting conversation, about the fresh voices that are heard in the Arab world thanks to secularization and democratization and why it still seems that democracy is moving farther away from it. About the Arab Spring and its failure, and why the final word has not yet been said about it. About the contribution of colonialism to the Middle East and the commonalities between Arab and Hebrew myths. We talked about the new, promising, Middle East scholars and about those who claim to understand the Middle East but have no idea what it is; and also, about Amos Oz, who actually understood more than anyone.

Professor Sivan tells how Professor Bernard Lewis foresaw peace with Egypt when no Israeli expert dared to dream of it, and about the rebellion Sivan organized among officers at the Aman research unit (the military intelligence division within the IDF. g.b.) against the high command's refusal to recognize the authenticity of Saadat's initiative.

Does the renewal of the relations with the Gulf countries indicate Israel's return to the Middle East? Emanuel Sivan, an expert witness on the affairs of the Arab world will provide a simple answer.

Listen, judge, and share!

I will go ahead and say that I owe a special personal debt to the guest, Professor Emanuel Sivan, who is also a researcher and decipherer of political myths. His analyses and diagnoses regarding the role and essence of myths in the lives of nations, communities, and individuals inspired me to build the concept of Sacred Cows.

Professor Emanuel Sivan was born in Kibbutz KfarHaHoresh. He was a student of Professor Yehoshua Prawer, from whom he developed an interest in the history of the Crusades, which

he studied from the Muslim-Arab perspective. In the mid-1960s, he did his doctorate at the Sorbonne in Paris about the jihad during the Crusades. Sivan also served as a commentator on Israeli television and was an external consultant to security agencies and the Prime Minister's Office. He is Professor Emeritus in the Department of History and the Department of the History of the Islamic Peoples at the Hebrew University.

Long before Zvika Yehezkeili began his televised meanderings in European Islamic centers, Sivan plowed through Europe's mosques to sense the shifting moods among Muslim immigrants, like a living barometer that measures zeal. During a visit to a mosque in Paris ten years ago, he diagnosed the isolation trend that took over the Muslim communities, which led to their distancing from the French way of life, an isolation built on frustration and hostility toward the majority society. "These feelings have given birth in the past and will likely give birth time and again to violent radicalism among some Muslim youth," Sivan said as if predicting the birth of Daesh (ISIS) and its popularity among the Muslim communities in Europe.

In his book "Radical Islam" Sivan presented the birth of revolutionary Sunni Islam of the late 20th century, which preceded the Shiite Islamic Revolution in Iran. One of President Saadat's assassins, he said, was an outstanding officer, who on the night before his execution listed all of Saadat's sins. Contrary to popular belief, the sin of peace with Israel appeared in the 18th place on his list. The top spots on the list were occupied by completely different issues, such as, for example, regulations preventing female students from wearing the veil at the university.

We met for a conversation on the grass lawn at the university campus of Givat Ram, where Professor Sivan began his academic career until background noises drove us into one of the rooms. Professor Sivan is 83 years old and is no longer healthy. He has difficulty walking and speaking, but his mind is clear, his knowledge is deep, and his understanding is enviable.

We began our conversation with the words of the ninth-century Islamic poet Abu al-Atahiyah, who knew how to mourn the passing years in his poetic way: "I wish my youth would return one day, so I could tell them what old age did to me."

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Professor Emanuel Sivan, Shalom.

Sivan: Shalom.

How are you?

Sivan: Considering... You need to know how to leave the stage. So far it hasn't happened...

Many people who know your place in Middle Eastern Studies, as a researcher of the first rank, wonder where you are, where is your voice, what are you doing today?

Sivan: Look, more or less, you know, I am like Amos Oz in his last lecture, if you remember.

Yes, he spoke about the *shachzeret* disease? (Amos Oz's last lecture before his death)

Sivan: About *shachzeret* (This “disease” per Amos Oz who called it in Latin *recontractitis* a “condition” suffered by Palestinians and Jews who want to resuscitate or reconstruct a lost past, g.b.) and the Lifta affair, which is an extraordinary insight, which he did not have earlier, because I talked to him precisely about these things.

How did he arrive at it? After all, he wasn't a Middle East scholar.

Sivan: He was a wise man.

This means, maybe you don't have to be a Middle East scholar to understand reality.

Sivan: Of course, you don't need to...

What do you need then?

Sivan: A Middle East scholar, first of all, means that you accept the loves and hatreds of the Arabs as they are, and they do have many loves. They have very nice things. I read stuff that Meir Hatina wrote in his book “Arab Liberal Thought in the Modern Age,” about how they, the true liberals, mourn the fact that military regimes eradicated any possibility of civil society.

Why?

Sivan: Because... military men...

Started running the country?

Sivan: It's a hierarchical system....

Did they essentially replace Western colonialism?

Sivan: Yes. Colonialism did damage on its own and so did the last period of the Ottomans, but there was still a thriving civil society. The whole *nahada* (revival)... It begins roughly in the late 80s or early 90s (of the 19th century). This led to some interesting things, for example, the idea of the separation between church and state. And these people were well-informed about Islam. They were also communists, of course...

Did Western colonialism contribute anything to the Arab world?

Sivan: Of course, it contributed. But you know, it's like the famous story on the eve of the Bar Kochba revolt, when the Jewish sages were sitting around and one of them said, “Look what Rome did for us; She built roads, bridges, aqueducts.” And Yehoshua ben Hananiah, who was one of Rabbi Akiva's disciples, responded, “For us they did it? For their own needs,

they did it.” I mean, there were indeed some people, mainly, for example, within French colonialism, who thought, that “we will help them to develop,” to create a social class called in French '*Abolia*' – the Westernized. Look, the encounter in itself, why did Napoleon have to go East? Go figure. Nobody understands. But the moment he arrived and stayed there for three years and did all the stuff that he did, he also laid the foundations for the study of ancient Egypt, for governing according to law and not according to people. He contributed. That rascal from Corsica, a 29-year-old. He made a huge contribution...

Myths need poets:

“A myth is a type of political allegory passed down from generation to generation with heroes and villains,” Sivan explains. “A myth doesn't have to be false. It may contain a fact in its core, but it is processed, expanded, and interpreted to give it a heroic meaning. This is what happened when the creators of the Tel Chai heroic myth replaced the juicy Russian curse Joseph Trumpeldor uttered when he was dying, according to one of the versions, with the ancient Roman saying, ‘It is good to die for our country,’ which was put into his mouth,” says Sivan in the introduction to his book “Arab Political Myths” (published in 1988).

Sivan's diagnoses of the meaning of myths can sound entirely relevant these days, as political myths intertwine before our eyes with the materials of reality, on television, in the press, and on social networks. The myth, Sivan explains, helps to interpret reality and also serves as an engine to mobilize people and communities through the use of rational and emotional motifs. The images that myths project trigger identification or rejection, admiration or alienation, and thereby inspire love for the community one belongs to and hatred for other groups. In the end, it is “an act of faith” and not of logical persuasion, Sivan says.

Is a myth created intentionally or is it created by itself?

Sivan: Look, for a national myth to be created usually there is still a need for someone, preferably a poet. Think of Mickiewicz, think of the people in the 19th century, Mickiewicz, Garibaldi...

Adam Mickiewicz, the Pole?

Sivan: Yes, of course. Garibaldi was an excellent orator who motivated people. He sold them a new idea that there was such a thing called Italy. There was no Italy before that...

Is there a fundamental difference or deep differences between Arab myths and Hebrew myths or the myths of Zionism?

Sivan: No! I gave you the example of Maysalun Day and Tel Chai Day. Nations also celebrate defeats.

What is the Battle of Maysalun?

Sivan: The Battle of Maysalun is the battle... When the Arab kingdom was established in Damascus by Faisal I...

(On March 8, 1920, the independent Arab Kingdom of Syria was proclaimed in Damascus, with Emir Faisal of the Hashemite House as its king. This unilateral action was immediately renounced by the French. On 14 July 1920, the French gave Faisal an ultimatum to surrender. Faisal surrendered on the same day, but his war minister and chief-of-staff General Yusuf al-Azm ignored Faisal and on July 24, 1920, he led a small army to fight the French at Maysalun. After a few hours, the majority of the Arab forces fled or surrendered to the French, and General al-Azm was killed. Soon afterward, Faisal was expelled from Syria. The battle is viewed by Arabs as a symbol of courage and resistance to the colonialist powers.)

Which is actually a British creation?

Sivan: Yes, true. But we (in Israel) are also a British creation...

And the French are on the other side, as part of the Sykes-Picot agreement?

Sivan: Why did Comrade Macron (President of France) go to Lebanon for the third time already? He will break his teeth there. I'm sure. But he's so full of himself, so this will teach him something.

Actually, the Battle of Maysalun was between the French, who, as part of the Sykes-Picot agreement was trying to take control of Syria-Lebanon, and Faisal with the permission of the British, went against the French and was defeated by them?

Sivan: Yes, right in the middle of the road. When we went to the land of the cherries (Lebanon) in 1982, I found Maysalun. I even have photos I took there.

How far is it from Tel Chai?

Sivan: 60 kilometers.

Timewise, it also happened very close, in the same year (The Tel Chai battle occurred on March 1, 1920).

Sivan: Sure. It's amazing. Why is this amazing? Because it shows that two very young nations met here...

So, let's talk about the TelChai myth versus the Maysalun myth. Why do we Israelis not know about it at all? Why hasn't the average Israeli heard the term The Battle of Maysalun, which is a defining myth for Arabism, certainly for Syrian Arabism?

Sivan: Unless he took a course on Syria with Moshe Maoz.

Do Arabs know about the Tel Chai myth?

Sivan: Yes, yes.

I'm not talking about the intellectuals.

Sivan: But only intellectuals know about it. What is all the rest? Our intelligence personnel?

They only count missiles: "Today there are already four million missiles..."

The myth of Tel Chai is a myth of defeat, right? And also, the Maysalun myth as far as the Arabs are concerned is a myth of defeat. Can you compare the weight of each of these myths?

Sivan: The similarities are that in both cases one can say, "We were defeated!" The Maysalun defeat is of course much greater than that of Tel Chai, there were over 500 dead out of a thousand or so. The French were in good shape...

What role did the defeat in Tel Chai serve for the Zionists, and in Maysalun for the Arabs?

Sivan: The Arabs lament it. The Jews said, "At least we will take pride in our willingness to defend an outpost" (to the death). Listen, I'm from the generation that celebrated the 11th of Adar, we used to seriously sing "Kadru Pnei Ha Shamayim" (The lyrics for "The face of heaven darkened" were rewritten in 1920). Berl Katznelson, in the capacity of a poet, wrote after Tel Chai "Yizkor Am Yisrael" (a eulogy for the 8 fallen Jews of Tel Chai), which is completely secular, but well-constructed... He came from Russia, from the most deep-rooted Jewish community.

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A scene in an Arab film

In his book "Arab Political Myths" Sivan describes an event in a small movie theater at the Latin Quarter in Paris, a few months before the Six-Day-War (1967), where "Saladin" a film by the Egyptian director Youssef Chahine, was screened. The filmgoers, most of them of North African origin and some of them Palestinians, were ecstatic watching the victories of the Arab mythological hero over the invaders from the West, and from the external resemblance of the actor who played Saladin to the then President of Egypt, Gamal Abdel

Nasser, the leader of the new Arab nationalism. Sivan admitted that he was carried away by the enthusiasm and the deep emotional involvement of the audience.

Sivan: I saw how the film affects them, and how they interpreted it...

And you describe there the enthusiasm of the Arab students about the similarity between Saladin and Nasser, who leads the Arab nationalism.

Sivan: I saw a moment that they were enthusiastic, and I felt enthusiastic with them.

Did you get into their head?

Sivan: I can understand it. Look, after all, I have a mind of a historian, analytical. Of course, I looked at it coldly, but there was something... They didn't say "Let's go outside and murder all the French..."

This analogy, between a glorious past and a promising future, that you saw in the movie theater in Paris with the Arab students, is it possible today?

Sivan: Of course. In my book, I included two illustrations, one from an Arab newspaper published in Jaffa in 1911 in which Yehoshua Hankin meets Saladin, who tells him "We will not give you the Jezreel Valley for all the gold in the world." In the second illustration, Saladin, with the beautiful facial features of the young Saddam Hussein, enters Jerusalem in July 1967 and conquers it. Why is it interesting? Incidentally, it is a poster from 1986, so I have a student who is one of those I'm proud of, Amatzia Baram, who worked on Saddam Hussein's personal archive, which was taken to America. He discovered that in that same year, 1986, there was a meeting of the Ba'ath leadership, Saddam Hussein had a completely secular view of Arabism. And Saddam Hussein said to his friends in the Ba'ath leadership, "Comrades, I have no choice, I, who revived the myth of ancient Babylon... with a broken heart, I am forced..."

After all, he revived this myth to give some secular content to the past. "We are not just another screwed-up nation that everyone exploits for its oil or something like that. We invented the writing system. But there is no choice, the people are motivated by Islam, and we must adapt ourselves to this..."

Did the religious myth take over the secular myth?

Sivan: You see him enter Jerusalem with a green flag of course. Green, because this is the army of the Prophet, 'La ilaila la lala' etc. But he says, "We have no choice, we must do it!" in a closed meeting. And of course, everyone is afraid of him, all these boot lickers, and they agree, and the only one who opposes him is Tariq Aziz.

The Foreign Minister?

Sivan: He was a Christian. And he says, "Then for what did we go and create such a beautiful, secular national idea...?"

And his position was not accepted of course?

Sivan: No! But he continued to serve his master. By the way, he was also responsible for acts of repression. Don't think that Tariq Aziz was some kind of their Abba Eban (An Israeli politician, who served as foreign minister between 1966-1974). All of them are drenched in blood...

Has the Arab attitude toward Saladin's legacy the Saladin myth or the historical facts about Saladin changed over the years?

Sivan: No! Because it gives hope. It says, "There have already been such defeats in our history. They surprised us..." I found documents from Damascus, from five years after the invasion (of the Crusaders), they still didn't know that they were Crusaders. They thought they were a type of Byzantines because the Byzantines had claims on all this territory...

Faranjis? Romans?

Sivan: Yes. In general, they call them Romes, Romans, or Efrang, Franks. This is true, because even the Franks themselves, most of them came from the region of Normandy.

The Faranji that the Palestinians are talking about actually means "the foreigner"?

Sivan: That's correct because it changes according to the period. The Jews were called here Muscovites because many of them had Russian passports.

A story about Love and Darkness:

How do you interpret the influence of religion on the so-called "Arab soul?" Is there even such a thing as "Arab mentality" or is it a popular term that has no meaning?

Sivan: This is a popular concept. There are enough rational, smart Arabs... You saw what Yoram Cohen who was one of the best Shin Bet heads said. Maybe only Diskin was better than him. He is speaking today in terms of giving them territorial continuity, because otherwise... then they will agree to a type of autonomy that will provide them with space for self-expression. He talks about it. Yoram Cohen, you know, is the man who discovered within two days who murdered Mohammed Abu-Khdeir (On July 2, 2014, 16-year-old Abu Khdeir was forced into a car in East Jerusalem by a group of young Israelis, some of them were minors and disappeared. A few hours later his charred body was found in a forest on the outskirts of the city. The autopsy suggested that Abu Khdeir was beaten and burnt alive. The

murderers claimed that their crime was a response to the abduction and murder of three Israeli students on June 12 by Palestinians).

Yoram Cohen, contrary to the Shin Bet leadership, said “Jews did it.” The Shin Bet leadership thought it was not possible. Do you know why Jews wouldn’t do it? Because Jews know that if you kill an Arab, you can go to prison for life. So, Cohen said, "Guys, you don't know what's happening today in the Yeshivas, what kind of mentality..."

Is it because he wears a kippah(yarmulka) himself and knows how they talk?

Sivan: Yes, he knows how they talk. Within 48 hours he simply gambled on which group it was, sat with them, and spent time with them. Have you seen the series "TheBoys?" It’s a great series. (This American-Israeli TV mini-series is called Our Boys in English. The 10 episodes focus on the kidnapping and murder of Abu-Khdeir, the crime investigation, the arrests, the trial of the perpetrators, the response of the victim’s family, and the growing tension between Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem. It aired on HBO in 2019. In 2020 it was nominated for a Peabody Award for excellence in television).

We have seen the religious awakening phenomenon around Daesh (ISIS). Would it be a mistake to talk about the influence of religion on the “Arab soul?”

Sivan: And the influence of religion on the “Jewish soul?”

Okay. This is something I want to hear about from you...

Sivan: It's the same. There is a nation here that, in reality, a large part of its historical success took place in the past.

And the longing is for a return to the past?

Sivan: This is what Amos Oz grasped so wonderfully. It is one of his smartest things. He, by the way, told me – I was with him and his daughter at an institute in Berlin and he came to visit so we spent time sightseeingtogether. He wanted to see the place where the Wannsee Conference was held (The 1942 conference in which the senior Nazi leadership discussed the implementation of the Final Solution to the Jewish Question.) – We were about three kilometers from there, and this was when he told me that he was writing his autobiographical book.

A story about love and darkness?

Sivan: Yes. It was around 2005. He told me that Volger, an important German, has a series called "One Hundred Books on the 20th Century", and he chose Amos Oz to represent Hebrew literature and the book he selected was My Michael. So,he told me: “All you can say about me is a book I wrote at the age of 27-28? That’s all? I must show it to you.”

And that was his motivation?

Sivan: You should know how important this book is (A Tale of Love and Darkness) – I have a British friend, Mark Allen, who is more Arab than an Arab, a kind of Lawrence of Arabia. He was on secret missions and so forth, and also the deputy head of MI6 (the British intelligence service). So, I sent him a translation of the book – he is very interested in Israel, but he comes from the side that claims that we are a nuisance to the Arabs. He was mainly impressed by the memories of Amos Oz's aunt, who described what life was like for her and his mother in Riga. That we were always so oppressed, meek, like rabbits, walking along the walls just so they wouldn't see us. This passage in the book made a great impression on him. He told me: "I always had a problem with why you are here. I know the reason why you are here, because of imperialism. But now I also understand the deep reason why you are here; Because you wanted to be European and Europe vomited you up," those were his words. He wrote a small book of 100 pages, which is the utmost wisdom of his understanding of the Arabs. This is a man who served in Saudi Arabia, in Cairo, he did all kinds of unpleasant shenanigans with Muammar Gaddafi (in Libya) and all. He reached the top (of the echelon) and then they arranged for him a job in British Petroleum as a consultant. Nevertheless, he was already an elderly Jew...

Was he Jewish?

Sivan: No, no, he is not Jewish. My father used to call random people, "A Jew." He would say: "So I went to that Jew, and he didn't want to sell it to me, so I beat the living daylight out of him..." And I told him "But dad, he is not a Jew..."

What you're really saying is that Amos Oz is an intellectual who managed to interpret our reality of the conflict with the Arabs without any unique knowledge or without him being a researcher or a Middle East scholar or even a speaker of Arabic?

Sivan: No, but he met with Arab intellectuals many times. We had a group at the Israel Democracy Institute that a good Jew financed for us, and we met there, 11 or 12 times, with a variety of people that my Lebanese friend Hazem Saghih introduced to us. We usually met in Turkey or Cyprus, nearby places. It lasted until the end of the first decade of this century. There was an agreement on one thing between me and Hazem Saghih, that we don't deal with the Israeli-Arab conflict. We want each person to present something from their culture, whether they are proud of it or ashamed of it. For example, the late Israel Segal, if you remember him...

Of course...

Sivan: Segal told the story of a novel he planned to write – about how his family excommunicated him, and how his brother refused to let him come even to his father's Shiva

(seven days of mourning). It impressed them terribly. The Muslim participants said, “We understand him, for him it was sacred.”

Mota (Mordechai) Kremnitzer told us that he was born in a camp for displaced persons in Germany and immediately after the war he immigrated to Israel. He said, “The gap between me and friends from my childhood was that my parents never dealt with horror stories about what they (the Germans) did to us. On the contrary, they talked about the times when someone from the Waffen-SS took pity on the children and gave them bread...”

Did he humanize them?

Sivan: Humanization too. He said, “I don’t know why my parents did this to me. Whether they want me to become a lefty or what? But it affects me to this day.”

This is also what happened in my family....

Sivan: Really?



With Emanuel Sivan

The modern Jewish Sabbatarian movement:

(In the 1600s Shabtai Zvi, an Ottoman Jewish mystic claimed to be the Jewish Messiah and founded the Sabbatean movement).

I wanted to go back for a moment to religion. Judaism and Islam are close, compared to Christianity...

Sivan: Very

We see that in the Christian world, which is largely secular, there is no religious fundamentalism similar to Jewish and Muslim fundamentalism...

Sivan: Actually, there is...

The evangelicals, of course...

Sivan: Yes, yes, yes. Who are the evangelicals who hold...

The United States?

Sivan: The United States. They are awful.

Nevertheless, there are unique characteristics of religious Islam, after all, we see the phenomenon of Daesh (ISIS), and we don't see a militant phenomenon of this type among evangelicals, or Jews.

Sivan: Look, first of all, don't forget that both religions have their own history. And how they treated the Protestants in the 16th and 17th centuries is not a testament to Christian humanism. They just evolved since then...

Why does Islam have a bad reputation? Or a bad image? Terrorism is globally associated with radical Islam. It does not exist in other places at these levels. What are the deep processes that you can say caused modern radical Islam to resort to violence?

Sivan: First of all, because they were screwed. They were the conquered...

Are they still screwed today?

Sivan: If you read the first chapter of *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*—you have a feeling that Islam is losing its place in the world. “We are starting to resemble Westerners.” Also because of (Gamal Abdel) Nasser's influence and (Arab) nationalism. This nationalism is a awful problem, it distances us from religion.” This means that there is a feeling that we are “the losers of history.”

Is the absence of democracy in many Islamic and Arab countries, and phenomena such as the status of women and violation of human rights related to something inherent in Arab or Muslim society, in the tradition, in the religion?

Sivan: Women's issues, definitely. And it goes back a bit to what Muhammad said about women, that's the story.

Fine, but we've been through a thousand and some years...

Sivan: Behavioral patterns were created. The hijab was created. The attire was created...

Look, there is only one Muslim country today that is truly democratic – I follow it in detail. Of course, nobody will talk about it here in Israel. That's Tunisia. Among other things, the Muslim Brotherhood of Tunisia, after the failure of their brothers in Egypt, understood that they needed to move toward democracy. They understood that this was their last chance because otherwise, they would have nothing...

“We will also be thrown into the dustbin of history?”

Sivan: There are 45,000 Muslim Brothers in detention camps in Egypt. There is a debate whether it is 45,000 or 65,000.

Who rules Tunisia today?

Sivan: In Tunisia, a coalition government rules with terrible problems, just like in our coalition. A part of their coalition is made up of two secular parties, and the Muslim Brotherhood, which is called there by a different name. But the Muslim Brothers, as a result of what happened in Egypt, have announced that they are finally giving up the principle that Sharia will be the law of the land. This fundamental concession, Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, would be doing somersaults in the air when he heard about it (b.1906 - d.1949. g.b.). They understood it. So far, they have been in this coalition government for six or seven years. With glitches, true, and so forth, but it holds. Nonetheless, two laws protect them, which are part of the legacy of Sharia.

The first law states that it is a crime against the state to be involved in atheistic talk, or any disbelief in the existence of God and Muhammad his Prophet. This complicates them with a lot of lawsuits, because there are many Tunisians who studied in France and learned to eat pork, and it is difficult for them. The second law concerns inheritance laws, where the Muslim practice continues, only in private inheritance laws, which says that a daughter inherits only half of her brother's share.

Excuse me, when was the last time there was jihad? I am talking about jihad before Afghanistan.

Daesh (ISIS) did not speak in terms of Jihad?

Sivan: Daesh is a phenomenon of low-lifers.

But Daesh charmed Muslims in the West, thousands joined them...

Sivan: Daesh is an embarrassment for Muslims, even for religious Muslims. Certainly, for Muslims who are liberal. Why, because Daesh was established inside al-Qaeda in Iraq. And who was in charge? Alow-lifer from eastern Jordan, he was caught pickpocketing and such things and tried to get the position of the head of al-Qaeda in Iraq. I mean, it's an anarchist movement, lacking in any knowledge.

For me, the Muslim Brotherhood is a tough phenomenon, which proves that even when you get a majority in democratic elections, as they did in 2012 (in Egypt), you can't control the temptation to rule by decree. They were elected, the prime minister, and the president, but after 5-6 months... Look, democracy is such an undignified thing: Everyone talks a lot, and it takes time. At that time, they were elected in June 2012, and already in November 2012, I mean very quickly, the government assumed the authority to rule by decrees. You don't need to pass anything in parliament. Even though they had a majority in the parliament, (doing things) in parliament was difficult...

Something like this is starting to happen here too...

Sivan: That's right, there is temptation...

I wanted to talk to you about Jerusalem. You studied the sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam, a phenomenon that greatly interests me. The Temple Mount or the Holy Basin with its enormous potential for an explosion, especially with the opening of the Temple Mount to the entry of many Jews, many of whom belong to the "Friends of the Temple Mount" and talk about the vision of the end of days and the like...

Sivan: I am pleasantly surprised overall...

That's what I wanted to ask you about. How do you explain this phenomenon that it is quite calm in Jerusalem, for the time being, and that the Arab and Muslim world are generally calm?

Sivan: First of all, it is not calm. If the Iranians want to establish their shock troops, they call them "The Quds Force." It means that we are your family. We do something for you. I think, first of all, that the influence of the Jordanian control over Mount Temple— it was an idea of David Farhi, who worked hard to convince Moshe Dayan, who was the king then...

Was that the right thing in your opinion?

Sivan: Yes, very much. David Farhi was really... It's a terrible loss that he died in such a stupid way. He drowned in the sea while swimming at the age of 40. And to make it even more unfortunate – he was married before that to a woman... give me a break, she had some screws loose, and he suffered a lot from it. And precisely in that last year of his life, like Benny Kedar, he found the love of his life. Then he went to Beit Yanai beach...

What is the reason that despite the potential for an enormous explosion in Temple Mount there is currently some normalization. Jews go there and pray, and there is relative calm?

Sivan: But we know it's dangerous...

Very dangerous...

Sivan: Listen, I know one of the members there, he is the head of the Jewish division that investigated Hagai Segal, the father of the “great genius” of the Israeli media (Amit Segal). They managed to get him to talk about his plans for the Temple Mount and it was horrible...

They were going to drop a bomb on it from a plane...

Sivan: For real!

When I was working on a project about Temple Mount, I interviewed Ami Ayalon, and he told me this: “Before I was appointed to the head of the Shin Bet, I thought that every day the sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening. When I was appointed to that position, I realized that to allow the sun to rise in the morning, I had to work very hard to protect the Temple Mount.”

Sivan: Good, he also had an outstanding assistant for such things, Mati Steinberg...

Yes. I interviewed him a few times... Is he still active today?

Sivan: He is active but pessimistic... He told me that some of Ami Ayalon's accomplishments will be lost because of Avi Dichter. Not because Avi Dichter is a bad person, but rather, Avi Dichter is a constricted man. Just a limited person. He is not a smart man....

Mati Steinberg is the successor of Yehoshaphat Harkabi...

Sivan: Right. But he is also, apparently, a good teacher. He was also a good teacher for Yuval Diskin. They have some people who understand it deeply. They also understand the danger of anarchy. To this day, it amazes me how Gershom Scholem understood the danger of the Sabbatean movement. (Scholem is one of the great scholars of Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, and Hasidism. 1897-1982. g.b.)

The modern Jewish Sabbatean movement?

Sivan: Yes. You know that the Shaw Commission in 1929, after the Western Wall affair...

Gershom Scholem refused to provide the commission with his assessment of the incidents at the Western Wall during the riots of 1929... (The Shaw Commission was a British commission of inquiry, led by Sir Walter Shaw, that investigated the violent anti-Jewish hostilities of August 1929. g.b.)

Sivan: Right. He refused to give an opinion so as not to give it legitimacy.

Did he do it so that the incidents wouldn't take on a religious dimension?

Sivan: Yes. How did he already see it then?

To leave them in the political realm and not the religious one?

Sivan: Jerusalem is the explanation of all the religiosity in a concentrated form. No place else does it like Jerusalem. You can't say someone would die because of Khan-Younes...

The Arab Spring is not over:

How do you explain the developments in the attitude of the Gulf States toward Israel?

Sivan: Simple. It's realpolitik. Simple realpolitik.

Does it have any deep ideological dimension?

Sivan: No! Just fear. A real fear of Iran. But it doesn't go all the way, mind you. In all the blabbering about Bahrain, one thing is forgotten, that the majority of Bahrain's residents are Shiites. During the Arab Spring, they protested and demanded democracy. Since Bahrain didn't have a real army, it called on the Saudi uncle and Saudi tanks crossed the bridge and suppressed the protests. Probably with dozens of casualties.

I don't believe the rumors that Saudi Arabia will agree to sign an agreement with us, for two simple reasons. One, they have the Saudi Peace Initiative, which they passed at the Arab Summit in 2002, and we foolishly rejected.

Should have we accepted it, in your opinion?

Sivan: For me, as a basis for negotiations, certainly. And then, it depends on how the negotiations proceed. Two, don't forget, King Salman, may helive a long life, is the *Khadim al-Haramayn al-Sharifayn* (custodian of the two holy cities). He is the servant of the two holy places, so he has responsibility also over Jerusalem. It's a responsibility, I would say, with a calling.

Did the Arab Spring accomplish anything for the Arab civil society? Did it have any meaning?

Sivan: In Tunisia....

Only in Tunisia?

Sivan: Very much in Tunisia.

And elsewhere?

Sivan: Look, in Lebanon, if you had talked to me before the big explosion (In the port of Beirut August 4, 2020), a serious movement started demanding a secular state. In other words, to stop with the religiosity. And remember that they held protests for a year and a half.

Similar protest took place in Algeria, as well. Keeping the protests going for a year and a half is a lot.

But Lebanese society is nevertheless unique, it is not similar to Jordanian or Egyptian society.

Sivan: But even in Lebanon, the coronavirus ended it. Also in Algeria, where they have a small but influential liberal school. The coronavirus has changed everyone's brains. They don't dare to do anything now.

Maybe the coronavirus will end the demonstrations here against the Prime Minister as well?

Sivan: Could be. But we still have a different country. We still have institutions here. In this institution here, we have 8 or 9 Nobel laureates... I mean, in the same area of Israel where you are sitting now, only one of them has extreme views.

Israel Aumann? (A mathematician and economist who won the 2005 Nobel Prize in Economics).

Sivan: Aumann. Fine, but his son was murdered. He is also a practicing Jew, what can be done?

When I read reports that were given to me by someone—I will call him “Haim from the Shin Bet”—he gave me copies of the conversations with Hagai Segal (A member of the Jewish terror underground, indicted and sentenced to 3 years in prison in the 1980s. g.b.). I told him, “I am reading here stuff by Muslims.” This is how the Muslim fanatics, who organized the assassination attempt on Nasser's life, used to speak. This idea – to do something that will blow up everything. How did they give him even a foothold? The fact that he didn't spend much time in prison, I can live with it, but giving him a foothold (in a public media channel), a man with blood on his hands. This says bad things about us.

But still, how do you explain, despite the great closeness between Judaism and Islam and the appeal of the past and the new trends of returning to religion, that we in Israel are still a semi-democracy or a semi-civil society, and in all of the Arab world, with the Arab Spring, except for Tunisia, we see that there is no...

Sivan: Tunisia and in some ways Lebanon. In some ways, even Algeria, which I am interested in.

So how do you explain that in most Islamic and Arab countries there is no civil society and no democracy?

Sivan: You know that the group of young officers in Egypt (a clandestine group called The Free Officers established by Nasser. It toppled the Egyptian monarchy in 1952. g.b.),

except for Naguib, are from the first and second class of the officers' school. So, a British researcher went and checked in the library what books they read. They read books about Garibaldi, they read books about the Polish uprising. For them, it was a civil society rebellion. They had good intentions. However, since they had to manage it, they wanted to manage it efficiently, which meant, militarily. And you know, military men are often terribly limited people, and also not very educated. They weren't educated, but they read about Garibaldi. So, remember one thing, I say this to anyone who asks me about the Arab Spring. You know, once upon a time there was the Spring of Nations in Europe in 1848. Suddenly, no one knows how it happened, there was an uprising in Poland, there was a rebellion in Austria, there was a rebellion even in Germany, and of course in France, the Second Republic was founded. Within two years it failed. And in France, to their shame, the one who became the ruler was Napoleon's nephew, who was called Napoleon III, and he was elected by the people. The stupid people elected him. So many people said, "It is the end of the world!"

But then, what happened? 20 years later, completely by chance, Napoleon III went into battle with the Prussians, he was defeated, and then the Third Republic was established in France, which has been in existence for 150 years since then. I mean, there was a revolutionary potential, and it blew up completely. Even Victor Hugo wrote about it in one of his famous laments: "I am happy that I can store away my lamentation, because the young French nation that nearly died in 48', today pushed its younger brothers to die for 1870-1871." So, we don't know if this story is over.

"Wake up Saladin, we're back!"

One of the intellectuals in the Arab world, with whom Sivan has maintained a long friendship, is the Lebanese Hazem Saghieh, who in a series of unusual articles challenged the accepted Palestinian narrative in Arab internal discourse.

Your friend, Hazem Saghieh, recommends that the Palestinians cancel the demand for the right of return, do you think that the right of return is the main minefield facing the resolution of the conflict?

Sivan: No, Jerusalem too. They want to return to Jerusalem. It can't be in Abu Dis, because Al Quds University is located in Abu Dis. They will need some solution.

We remember Abu Mazen writing his doctorate in 1980 that proved, in standard Soviet-style, that in total there were *only* one million dead in the Holocaust. My friend Hazem and others in his group wrote essays that what he (Abu Mazen) wrote insulted them and that Arabs refused to recognize the Holocaust. Not everything is manipulation. The Holocaust is a bloody affair in world history. Do you know who is the person that Saghie respects the most in Israel from the academy? Shoka Porat... (Yehoshua (Shoka) Porat was a professor in the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University. He died in 2019).

Who was very suspicious of the Palestinians...

Sivan: But he wrote a masterful book, of which there is not much to add, about the Palestinian national movement in its early days, during its critical years. And he was, as you know, a man with a very hot temper. But the book is written with clarity and coolness. You won't believe it was Shoka. So, I respected him...

The Western world didn't know how to deal with the East. When Allenby entered Jerusalem (1917) he said, "This is the last crusade," and when Henri Gouraud, the French General, entered Damascus, he came to Saladin's tomb and said, "Saladin, wake up, we are back!" (1920).

Sivan: Right, yes. This is right...

What did the West not understand or still don't understand today about the East? Is the blame of Orientalism, the charge of Edward Said still valid? Does it have any validity in your eyes?

Sivan: Look, there was a legacy of hostility. One of the beautiful achievements of Benny Kedar (B.Z. Kedar, professor emeritus of History at the Hebrew University) is that he showed how the failure of the Crusades led them to another path, through the (Christian) Missions. Which they also tried to implement in Japan in the 17th century and experienced a total failure. This was not the only failure. The Christian Mission in Arab countries, as a rule, also failed, partly because the Arabs had something to be proud of, and that was the Ottoman Empire. Listen, who would have thought that suddenly these half-Mongol armies in the 15th century would be the main force that had beaten the Byzantines, which was the third Rome? There were many reasons to be proud of the Ottoman Empire. It is a fact that Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi studied law to prepare themselves to become licensed Ottoman lawyers.

You mentioned Mark Allen from the British intelligence. He claimed that what characterizes the Arab world is dependent relationships based on patriarchy, which are

implemented through sectarian politics. Do you think it has a defining distinction in the Arab world?

Sivan: It makes it difficult for the development of individualism...

Which proceedsto democracy and civil society?

Sivan: Individualism is a basis for democracy. The person who started individualism was Martin Luther, who was not a great democrat, as you know. Also,an anti-Semite...

Do you see this as thecontemporary minefield in the body politic of Arab society today?

Sivan: It makes things very difficult.

Why don'tthese patriarchal dependent relationships fall apart?

Sivan: Because they also have advantages. Theyprovide security, they provide you with a distinct identity, and they provide you with the possibility to hope for a better day. For example, for the day when the next Saladin will eliminate the Zionist presence.

Is there a chance for secularism in the Arab world, as happened in the Christian world?

Sivan: There is, but not enough. The Egyptian people are mostly religious...

And in Syria, where secularism was stronger?

Sivan: Syria is a slaughterhouse. They just took half a million people and killed them;they took 6 and a half million people and made them refugees...

Perhaps because of the trends of secularism?

Sivan: Not because of secularismtrends. Listen, he (Bashar al-Assad) was trained as an ophthalmologist in England, and all the people who worked with him say, by the way, that he is talented in this field. They said that his lifestyle was completely secular. Without going overboard because he had to be careful. So, what happened? A tragedy happened to him.His talented older brother, Bassel, was killed in a car accident, so he was brought in. Everyone expected that in the first year of his rule, 2000-2001, he would be good. That he would open a new chapter after his father's difficult years. Mark Allen, who was in office then, wrote, "I reckon he will rule with a group of his family members."And that is indeed what happened. He ruled witha group of his in-laws.

What is the exact diagnosis of Mark Allen about patriarchal dependent relationships?

Sivan: Correct. Because in the end, these are the people who are ultimately your loyalists. Now, since Bashar's mother passed away, he had gotten rid of his in-laws. He no longer needed the in-laws. He neededthe family of his wife, who incidentally is a banker by profession, with very good training in Lebanon and also in England. She manages the family's treasury. It is estimated that this brother, Makhlof (Makhlof is Assad maternal cousin), whose assets in Syria were seized, because of course they are connected to all kinds

of swartzegashftan (shady businesses). It is commonly said that Makhlouf pays \$28 million as a guarantee that he could safely leave Syria. Because now your (Makhlouf) generation is over and my sister's generation, my wife's generation is here.

Listen, this is the most despicable trend that could be. Now, a little more information for you. To my delight, the Russians are causing them serious trouble. The Russians want to make money off of them, and they apparently sent there Putin's mystery man, responsible for locating Putin's treasures around the world. They sent him as a liaison to Damascus. This means there will be a "carnival" over there.

The Middle East scholars who give the profession a bad reputation:

I wanted to ask you about the profession of the Middle East scholar today. People see Mordechai Kedar from Bar Ilan University on TV, and they see Guy Bechor. Are they Middle East scholars at all?

Sivan: Every profession has people who give it a bad reputation. Right.

Who are our most promising Middle East scholars?

Sivan: Israel Gershoni on Egypt, Meir Litvak on Iran is the best. Meir Hatina on liberalism. If you already want to do work, to spread the Torah, then I would be talking first to these three.

Do you see Bernard Lewis as the greatest Middle East scholar in the West in the 20th century?

Sivan: I have a criticism of him, but look, the biggest thing he did was study the birth of secular Turkey. His book on Islam's treatment of minorities is also excellent. The problem is that in the years after 9/11, he simply became an uninteresting teacher. He got involved in popularizing (the topics), which was not his expertise.

You know, when he was lecturing at Princeton, I once sat next to Clifford Geertz, the famous anthropologist, so he said to me: "If everybody speaks like that, who will write?" Lewis had the talent for speaking in complete paragraphs. Not in complete sentences – even I can do that. In paragraphs. He (could do it) in many subjects. It can't be denied.

You know that Bernard Lewis wanted to enlist in the British army to fight Hitler, but he was told 'We already have experts in Arabic, and we already have enough experts in Turkish too'. So, he asked 'What do you have left?' They told him – this is a true story – Albanian! Because they wanted to do British operations there...

So, he went to learn Albanian?

Sivan: He took a book for learning Albanian and after three months he passed the exam and became an expert...

Are you serious?

Sivan: Bernard Lewis came to visit in '74 when we were all depressed because of the war. I took care of guys who fell in Syria. You know, one intelligence officer sold everything to the Syrians. Do you know the story of Amos Levinger? Simple. He was informed that the State of Israel had been destroyed. So, he said, "If it was destroyed, then I can tell everything." I spent almost six months cleaning up the damage he caused. They had to change things in the north...

The intelligence?

Sivan: Yes. I was very depressed about it. Toward the end of the year, I met Bernard Lewis, and he was cheerful and happy. I said to him, "Why are you so happy?" You know, and there was also the oil crisis... It wasn't simple. It wasn't fun, even though I wasn't one of those who had any responsibility for this...

You took it hard...

Sivan: Still, this is my country. And Bernard Lewis tells me, "Listen, I met with the entire weekly editorial, the entire seventh floor of the (Egyptian) Al-Ahram newspaper. On the seventh floor of the Al-Ahram building sat Tawfiq al-Hakim, and all the literary greats, Najib Mahfouz and others... Listen, he tells me, 'They want peace. They say the disgrace has been lifted. They talked about it with Saadat.'" Can there be such a thing?

Bernard Lewis is not stupid; he speaks to them *Mama Loshen* (mother tongue); This man knew 8-9 languages.

And then it happened. That's why, when Saadat gave his famous speech, and then our boss, Mota Gur, said "This could be a ploy." I organized people with a petition to show Aman Research and it said, "We see here the insights of Bernard Lewis, that claim, 'We want peace for the sake of Egypt, and this will bring us closer to the United States,' and they are coming true."

We were put on trial for this – "It is forbidden to write such things" – but they forgave us in the end because he (Saadat) came. I remember the day I met him, and really, I thought, what a filthy profession it is, that everything turns to garbage for us...

Could it be that the perceptions of Middle East scholars who leave the security apparatus for academia have been spoiled?

Sivan: Not all of them. First of all, Patty (Yohshaphat Harkabi) ...

Harkabi, Okay. Well, but that was a long time ago...

Sivan: For example, Meir Milstein, who was the advisor to the head of the Civil Administration in Judea and Samaria, is excellent. He asks questions that are suitable for academics and not just for 'who will be the ambassador of Doha in Israel'. I don't deal with such "fascinating" problems. Heavenforbids. Don't think about these two: Motti Kedar is crap. He was a very limited (intelligence) collection officer. His Arabic is very good, but his understanding is weak.

And Guy Bechor?

Sivan: Guy Bechor simply discovered that if you want to succeed in populism, of what is marketable, then you have to be Guy Bechor...

You listened to episode 54 "What a filthy profession, Middle Eastern Studies, that everything gets discombobulated." A variation on Love and Darkness with Prof. Emanuel Sivan

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Yizhar