**How to Make an Israeli Arab’s Joke about Netanyahu’s ‘Concessions’ Come True
Shaul Arieli, Jul 26, 2019**

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One hope as we head toward a repeat election is that a Jewish-Arab partnership will arise that could help form a different government. Ayman Odeh’s amusing speech in the Knesset before it was dissolved in late May, in which he listed the “offers” he had received from Benjamin Netanyahu in the prime minister’s bid to obtain 61 MKs to form a coalition, can teach us something about the chances for a Jewish-Arab partnership and the necessary compromises.

Odeh began with Netanyahu’s “promise” to leave the West Bank. This position aligns with his party’s platform in the previous Knesset, which says: “The Joint List is fighting for a just peace in the region based on the UN resolutions … ending the occupation of all the territories conquered in 1967, dismantling all the settlements and the racist separation wall, and establishing a sovereign independent Palestinian state in the June 4, 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.”

Ehud Barak, Benny Gantz and Yair Lapid must realize that this is a necessary condition for Joint List’s participation in a government formed by them, or at least for supporting that government from outside the coalition. It wouldn’t be hard for Odeh to forgo the rest of the demands: He would have to adopt the land swaps that the PLO has agreed to, which don’t include Israeli Arabs and would allow a majority of the settlers to remain under Israeli sovereignty. In any case, the separation barrier would be dismantled and rebuilt on the new agreed-on border.

This first demand illustrates Israeli Arabs’ priorities; first, resolving the conflict between Israel and their people in the territories. This would let them concentrate on the fight for equal civil rights and dissolve the tension that Israeli Arabs currently face between “my people” and “my state.”

Odeh then cited a “promise” to annul the law that declares Israel the nation-state of the Jewish people. In this case, Barak, Gantz and Lapid have already expressed a willingness to go halfway. They promise to amend the nation-state law to include the value of equality for all Israeli citizens. If so, they would also have to change the wording from “the development of Jewish settlement” to “the development of settlement for all citizens.”

Bear in mind that since the state’s founding, 700 new communities have been built in Israel, not one of them for Arabs. There are now 930 communities where Arab residents are essentially not permitted, while the jurisdictions of the Arab communities have not been expanded at all. Also, the nation-state law would have to be amended, in the spirit of the first “promise” above, to say that Jerusalem, without the Arab neighborhoods in the east, is Israel’s capital, and that Arabic is an official language.

Odeh would also have to agree to a declaration stating that Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people in which the Jews are exercising their natural right to self-determination, just as the Palestinian people will realize their right to self-determination in a future State of Palestine. With the resolution of the conflict and his demand for equality, Odeh would have to drop the demand in his party’s platform for “canceling the mandatory draft of Druze Arabs and rejecting all plans for a military draft and national service for Arab young people.”

In his speech, Odeh cited consent for national and not just civic equality, though he did not elaborate. Here, too, in the party platform, we see that the reference is to “full equality, national and civil, for Palestinian Arabs in Israel … and a demand that this group be recognized as a national minority with the right to self-management in the fields of culture, education and religion.”

In other words, his aim is not for Israel to become a binational state or power-sharing democracy, as the Higher Arab Monitoring Committee demanded a decade ago. Odeh and friends appear to recognize international law and understand that when a people dwells inside a state, it does not have the right to establish its own state if that means the breakup of the existing state. This is because the principle of respecting a state’s territorial integrity and sovereignty outweighs the right to self-determination. Therefore, for example, the Catalonians don’t have a right to break up Spain, and the Kurds don’t have a right to break up Iraq or Turkey.

Odeh concluded with Netanyahu’s “promise” to “recognize the Nakba and end the historical injustice.” Here, too, he did not elaborate, but we can assume that recognition of the Nakba mainly relates to the refugee issue. The party platform is enlightening here as well: “a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem that ensures the right of return on the basis of the UN resolution.”

There is nothing here that would alter the Palestinian and Arab position presented in negotiations with Israel and in the Arab Peace Initiative: absorbing refugees in the State of Palestine, not in Israel, with additional compensation. Odeh probably also had in mind compensation for the “internal refugees” – Arabs who fled or were expelled but remained in Israel at the end of the War of Independence. This community was not discussed in the negotiations between Israel and the PLO.

At first glance, the challenge appears too large, but if both sides moved toward each other without a substantial concession on key principles, a government could be established with a basis unlike any other during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Barak made a first step when he took responsibility for the events of October 2000. A similar intention can be seen among the Arabs in the Zionist parties. It remains unclear what Gantz, Lapid, Amir Peretz and Odeh will do.