

# WALTZ WITH BASHIR

AN ARI FOLMAN FILM

## THE MAKOM VIEWER'S GUIDE



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CULTURE



## Questions for Text Study

The **Kahan Commission Report** (8 February 1983) concludes "that the massacre at Sabra and Shatila was carried out by a Phalangist unit, acting on its own but its entry was known to Israel."

Ariel Sharon, in a speech to the Knesset (**22 September 1982**) following the events at Sabra and Shatila, stated:

"On the night of 16-17 September, the Phalange force entered the Shatila camp. At its request it received at a certain time illumination from 81 mm mortars and from planes. These were afterwards halted."

"The Phalangists' liaison officer... requested the I.D.F. to provide illumination for the force which was moving in, since its entry was taking place after dark. Initially, the illumination was provided by a mortar company, and subsequently also by aircraft; but because the illumination from the planes interfered with the evacuation of casualties of an I.D.F. unit, this source of illumination was halted; mortar illumination continued intermittently throughout the night."

"In a pivotal scene - repeated at several points in *Waltz with Bashir*", bright balls of light drip from the Beirut night sky as Ari, Carmi, and an unnamed third soldier come up from the beach on the night of 16-17 September - a central symbol of the indirect responsibility that haunts Ari.

What is the meaning of the term 'indirect responsibility'? How does the Kahan Commission Report construct its judgment on the basis of a powerful interpretation of Jewish ethics and the Jewish historical experience?

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1

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The Kahan Commission maintains that Israel should live up to the notion of 'indirect responsibility' in connection with the Phalangist massacre at Sabra and Shatila. The report suggests two main images from Jewish culture in order to explain their understanding of the moral question at hand:

1. The 'beheaded heifer'
2. The Jewish historical experience as victims of mob violence often perpetrated, encouraged, and allowed by 'those responsible for safety and public order.'

- Based on the use of the image of 'the beheaded heifer' (See the outtake from the Kahan Commission Report, & Deuteronomy 21, 1-9), what is the significance of the line uttered by the town elders, "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it." (Deut 21:7)?
- Would you say their statement is an evasion of responsibility, or a recognition of responsibility?
- How do you think the text brought by Benjamin Ish Shalom from the Talmud (Shabbat 54b) sheds light on the phrase from Deuteronomy? Does it perhaps shed light on a wider Talmudic recognition of the issue of 'indirect responsibility'?
- Ish Shalom differentiates between 'legal righteousness' and 'moral righteousness' - between 'human law', and 'divine law'. What do you understand by these ideas? Do you accept the distinction? Do you think that the Kahan Commission manages to bridge these two ideas through the concept of 'indirect responsibility'?

The Kahan Commission report asserts that because of our historic experience as victims, Jews should know better and act better. Judge Kahan and his colleagues contend that because Jews know the meaning of being victimized, so we should bear an additional measure of responsibility towards others who face victimization. All the more so, in the case of the Phalangist massacre at Sabra and Shatila. Israel's soldiers, commanders, and political figures both knew about the unfolding massacre, and had the power to stop it.

- To what extent do you think the different voices presented (Ariel Sharon, Zeev Mankowitz, Bob Dylan, etc) agree and/or disagree with the Kahan Commission's expectations?
- What do you think about the way this official governmental document makes such detailed reference to Jewish text?
- Should the ways that Jews remember our past have a say in the way we behave today?
- Because the past is not a concrete object, but is subject to interpretation, can we really talk about the lessons of the Jewish past for life today in any authoritative way?
- Ari suffers from a kind of amnesia that he actively searches to cure, that is the quest that Waltz with Bashir portrays. Is it better, healthier to allow for amnesia rather than face the hounds of memory?

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2

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## Recalling the Jewish past?

In his numerous public appearances, Begin strove to place Israel's attacks and raids within the vast context of military horror. If the Israelis had bombed Tyre, what about Coventry? If they had razed Sidon, what about Dresden? If the opposition insisted on seeking a political settlement for the Middle East, the prime minister invoked the ghost of Chamberlain and Munich. If the Israeli television network screened some footage of a dead Lebanese child, Begin did not lack the 1,500,000 Jewish children sent to the ovens by the Nazis, or-as a last resort-the pathetic memory of his own family.

The strategy was less than successful. "Are we really to view the miserable refugee camps as Munich and Nuremberg?" wrote Professor Ze'ev Mankowitz, an authority on the Holocaust, in an article published in the newspaper *Haaretz* early in August.

"Are we to understand that the flattened hovels outside Sidon represent the Palestinian Dresden? Are we to see thousands of old people, women and children, bereft of all and exposed to the elements, as the paragons of a master race? Are we really to see Beirut as Berlin? There may be political method here, but it in no way diminishes the madness.... In transforming a justified punitive action and preventive measure into total war, without regard for the price to be exacted, Begin has lost touch with reality and is pursuing phantoms born in the greatest tragedy that ever befell our people. Whatever its final outcome, the epitaph to be placed upon the war in Lebanon will read: Here lies the international stature and moral integrity of a wonderful people. Died of a false analogy."

**Howard Sachar, in *A History of Israel* (Vol. II) 195-196**

The neighborhood bully just lives to survive,  
He's criticized and condemned for being alive.  
He's not supposed to fight back,  
He's supposed to have thick skin,  
He's supposed to lay down  
and die when his door is kicked in.  
He's the neighborhood bully.

The neighborhood bully been driven out of every land,  
He's wandered the earth an exiled man.  
Seen his family scattered, his people hounded and torn,  
He's always on trial for just being born.  
He's the neighborhood bully.

**Bob Dylan, *Neighborhood Bully on Infidels* (1983)**

So now maybe we've finished once and for all with that crap about the Jewish monopoly on morality, about the moral lessons of the Holocaust and the persecutions, about the Jews who were supposed to have emerged from the gas chambers pure and good. We're done with all that garbage. That little destruction job we did in Tyre and Sidon, the job in Ein Hilweh (too bad we didn't wipe out that maggots nest for good) and the nice, healthy bombing of Beirut, and that mini-massacre – all of a sudden five hundred Arabs becomes a massacre! – in those camps (too bad the Christian Phalangists did it, and not us, with our own delicate little hands!), all those blessings and good deeds have finished off that bullshit about a 'Chosen people' and a 'Light unto the Nations.' Yes, bullshit! We're finished with that : not chosen and no light, and thank the Lord we're done with it! (...)

Maybe the world will finally begin to fear me instead of feeling sorry for me... Let them realize that we're a wild country, deadly and dangerous to everyone around, awful, crazy, capable of suddenly going nuts because they murdered one of our kids – even one! – and running wild and burning all the oil fields in the Middle East. And by the way, if it happens to be your kid, God forbid, you'll start talking the same way.

*"Z" speaking in "The Tender Among You, and the Very Delicate," Amos Oz, in The Land of Israel (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983) 88-89*



**Who will utter the mighty acts of Israel (1982) David Tarakover**

(Offset, 70 x 100  
Photograph: David Seymour, Self produced)

"The Poster issued following the massacre by Christian forces in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon (Sept. 17-18, 1982). A week after the massacre a demonstration attended by a mass of 400,000 was held in Tel Aviv, demanding to establish a commission of inquiry into the massacre, a withdrawal from Lebanon, and the government resignation".

I came here to report on the areas for which we are responsible and I will speak only about them. They have nothing to do with the criminal murder, since we have not war with the Palestinian people. We have declared a war to the finish against Palestinian terror. And if there is someone indirectly responsible for this murder (interruptions) - those directly responsible are the Lebanese, but if there is indirect responsibility for this murder, it is the P.L.O. terrorist organization. Therefore I can say here, immediately and clearly: not one soldier and not one I.D.F. commander participated in this terrible act. The hands of the I.D.F. are clean, purity of arms was preserved there too, as we acted throughout the months of the war. Therefore, this whole attempt to attribute this grim affair in any way to the I.D.F. - including the demand to appoint a commission of inquiry - all this does a disservice to the I.D.F. We are ready to be examined on any matter, we have no problem. All this does a disservice to the I.D.F., to those responsible for it, and to the whole nation of Israel... Our Government, like our whole people, is sensitive to acts of murder and terror, more than any government and other peoples of the world. For three months, the I.D.F., its fighters and commanders, have been waging a marvelous campaign in Lebanon, which has brought and will yet bring huge security achievements. We knew of every movement of our troops and units, we were briefed and we reported immediately. In the tragedy which occurred within the camps, we did not know clearly what was happening, and to this day we still do not know exactly, since when what happened occurred, the Phalangists were inside (the camps - ed.), and not I.D.F. soldiers...

On the night of 16-17 September, the Phalange force entered the Shatila camp. At its request it received at a certain time illumination from 81 mm mortars and from planes. These were afterwards halted...



בארץ ישראל קם העם היהודי  
שהוגלה מארצו בכח הזרוע והיה למשסה  
ונרדף, ועונה, ונמכר לעבדות...

בארץ ישראל קם העם היהודי  
על ההיסטוריה שלו, שנות אלפיים

וכל עוד בלבב פנימה נפש : אני אשם!

יזכור, צבי עצמון

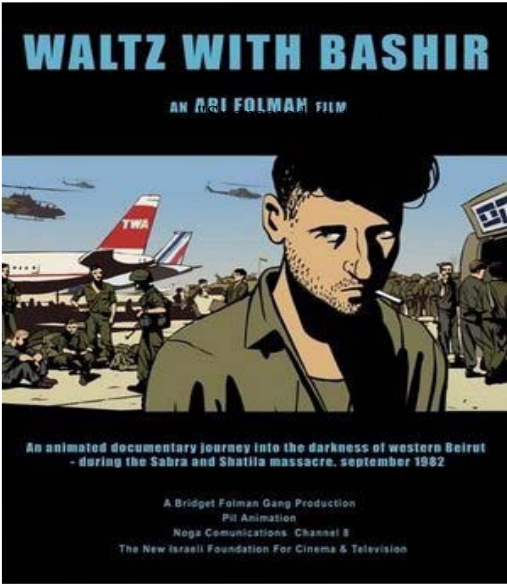
In the Land of Israel arose the Jewish people  
who were forcibly exiled from their land  
and were hounded and persecuted, tortured, and sold to slavery...

In the Land of Israel arose the Jewish people with all of its history – two  
thousand years

And as long as a heart beats within: I am guilty!

**Yizkor, Tzvi Atzmon (1983)**  
<http://www.snunit.k12.il/shireshet/atzmon7.html>

"Our hands did not shed this blood ..."



The Talmud determines that the ability to prevent a crime or, at least, to protest against it, constitutes a degree of responsibility that incurs divine punishment if not human: "Anyone able to protest [the blameworthy conduct] of a member of his household who fails to do so is blamed together with his household; of the people of his city—is blamed with the people of his city; of the entire world—is blamed with the entire world." (Shabbat 54b) That he is liable not under human law but only under divine law resembles the distinction drawn between "legal righteousness" and "moral righteousness."

**Benjamin Ish-Shalom, "Purity of Arms" and Purity of Ethical Judgment. *Meorot* (Shevat 5767)**

וַעֲנוּ וְאָמְרוּ יָדֵינוּ לֹא שָׁפְכוּ אֶת־הַדָּם הַזֶּה וְעֵינֵינוּ לֹא רָאוּ ... דְּבָרִים כ' א', ו

and they shall answer and say, 'Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see *it*.

Deuteronomy 21:7

"Would anyone expect that the elders are guilty of murder? Rather, they declare that they did not see him and knowingly allow him to leave without food or without an escort."

Rashi on Deuteronomy 21:7

### Summary of the conclusions of the Kahan Commission

In February 1983, the Kahan Commission investigating the horrific events at the Sabra and Shatila camps published its report. No evidence was found that IDF senior officers had known of the massacre, let alone conspired with the Phalange commanders to carry it out; indeed Sharon later successfully sued *Time* for claiming he had done so. Still the commission maintained that they ought to have foreseen it and, since they are representatives of the occupation force were responsible for whatever went on in the Beirut area, prevented it from taking place. Amir Yaron, the commander on the spot, was asked to resign, as were the chief of intelligence (Major General Saguy) and Ariel Sharon (Israel Minister of Defense 1981-1983). As for Eytan (Raphael Eytan – Chief of IDF Staff 1978-1983), his term of office was about to end. Therefore the commission, though treating him with undisguised contempt, did not demand his resignation.

**Martin Van Creveld, *The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israeli Defense Forces* (Public Affairs, 1998) 301.**

"that the massacre at Sabra and Shatila was carried out by a Phalangist unit, acting on its own but its entry was known to Israel. No Israeli was directly responsible for the events which occurred in the camps. But the Commission asserted that Israel had **indirect responsibility** for the massacre since the I.D.F. held the area, Mr. Begin was found responsible for not exercising greater involvement and awareness in the matter of introducing the Phalangists into the camps. Mr. Sharon was found responsible for ignoring the danger of bloodshed and revenge when he approved the entry of the Phalangists into the camps as well as not taking appropriate measures to prevent bloodshed. Mr. Shamir erred by not taking action after being alerted by communications Minister Zippori. Chief of Staff Eitan did not give the appropriate orders to prevent the massacre. The Commission recommended that the Defense Minister resign, that the Director of Military Intelligence not continue in his post and other senior officers be removed."

#### From the Kahan Commission Report (8 February 1983)

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA>

"A basis for such responsibility may be found in the outlook of our ancestors, which was expressed in things that were said about the moral significance of the biblical portion concerning the "beheaded heifer" (in the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 21). It is said in Deuteronomy (21:6-7) that the elders of the city who were near the slain victim who has been found (and it is not known who struck him down) "will wash their hands over the beheaded heifer in the valley and reply: our hands did not shed this blood and our eyes did not see." Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says of this verse (Talmud, Tractate Sota 38b):

"The necessity for the heifer whose neck is to be broken only arises on account of the cheapness of spirit, as it is said, 'Our hands have not shed this blood.' But can it enter our minds that the elders of a Court of Justice are shedders of blood! The meaning is, [the man found dead] did not come to us for help and we dismissed him, we did not see him and let him go - i.e., he did not come to us for help and we dismissed him without supplying him with food, we did not see him and let him go without escort." (Rashi explains that escort means a group that would accompany them; Sforno, a commentator from a later period, says in his commentary on Deuteronomy, "that there should not be spectators at the place, for if there were spectators there, they would protest and speak out.")

When we are dealing with the issue of indirect responsibility, it should also not be forgotten that the Jews in various lands of exile, and also in the Land of Israel when it was under foreign rule, suffered greatly from pogroms perpetrated by various hooligans; and the danger of disturbances against Jews in various lands, it seems evident, has not yet passed. The Jewish public's stand has always been that the responsibility for such deeds falls not only on those who rioted and committed the atrocities, but also on those who were responsible for safety and public order, who could have prevented the disturbances and did not fulfill their obligations in this respect. It is true that the regimes of various countries, among them even enlightened countries, have side-stepped such responsibility on more than one occasion and have not established inquiry commissions to investigate the issue of indirect responsibility, such as that about which we are speaking; but the development of ethical norms in the world public requires that the approach to this issue be universally shared, and that the responsibility be placed not just on the perpetrators, but also on those who could and should have prevented the commission of those deeds which must be condemned."

#### From the Kahan Commission Report (8 February 1983)

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/>

1 כִּי־יִמָּצָא חָלָל בְּאֶדְמָה אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ לְרִשְׁתָּהּ נָפַל בְּשָׂדֶה לֹא נֹדֵעַ מִי הִכָּהוּ: 2 וַיֵּצְאוּ זִקְנֵיךָ וְשֹׁפְטֶיךָ וַיִּמְדְּדוּ אֶל־הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹת הַחָלָל: 3 וְהָיָה הָעִיר הַקְּרֹבָה אֶל־הַחָלָל וְלִקְחוּ זִקְנֵי הָעִיר הַהִוא עֵגֹלֶת בָּקָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עֹבֵד בָּהּ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־מִשְׁכָּה בָּעֵל: 4 וְהוֹרְדוּ זִקְנֵי הָעִיר הַהִוא אֶת־הָעֵגֹלָה אֶל־נָחַל אִיתָן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יַעֲבֹד בּוֹ וְלֹא יִזְרַע וְעָרְפוּ שָׁם אֶת־הָעֵגֹלָה בְּנָחַל: 5 וְנָגְשׁוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי לֵוִי כִי בָם בָּחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁרְתּוֹ וּלְבָרֶךְ בָּשָׂם יְהוָה וְעַל־פִּיהֶם יְהִיָּה כִּלְרִיב וְכִלְגָּעַ: 6 וְכֹל זִקְנֵי הָעִיר הַהִוא הַקְּרֹבִים אֶל־הַחָלָל יִרְחֲצוּ אֶת־יְדֵיהֶם עַל־הָעֵגֹלָה הַעֲרוּפָה בְּנָחַל: 7 וְעָנוּ וְאָמְרוּ יָדֵינוּ לֹא [כ= שָׁפְכוּ] [ק= שָׁפְכוּ] אֶת־הַדָּם הַזֶּה וְעֵינֵינוּ לֹא רָאוּ: 8 כִּפּוֹר לַעֲמֹךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר־פָּדִיתָ יְהוָה וְאֶל־תִּתֵּן דָּם נָקִי בְּקֹרֶב עַמֶּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִפְפֹּר לָהֶם הַדָּם: 9 וְאַתָּה תִּבְעֹר הַדָּם הַנָּקִי מִקֶּרְבֶּךָ כִּי־תַעֲשֶׂה הַיֵּשֶׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה:

דְּבָרִים כ' א, ט

1 "If a slain person is found lying in the open country in the land which the LORD your God gives you to possess, *and* it is not known who has struck him, 2 then your elders and your judges shall go out and measure *the distance* to the cities which are around the slain one. 3 "It shall be that the city which is nearest to the slain man, that is, the elders of that city, shall take a heifer of the herd, which has not been worked and which has not pulled in a yoke; 4 and the elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with running water, which has not been plowed or sown, and shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley. 5 "Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near, for the LORD your God has chosen them to serve Him and to bless in the name of the LORD; and every dispute and every assault shall be settled by them. 6 "All the elders of that city which is nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley; 7 and they shall answer and say, 'Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see *it*. 8 'Forgive Your people Israel whom You have redeemed, O LORD, and do not place the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of Your people Israel.' And the blood guilt shall be forgiven them. 9 "So you shall remove the guilt of innocent blood from your midst, when you do what is right in the eyes of the LORD.

Deuteronomy 21, 1-9