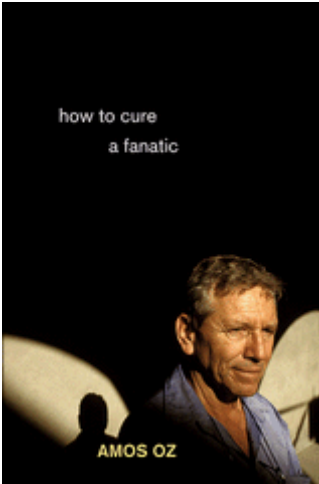


## AMOS OZ



Amos Oz was born in 1939 in Jerusalem. At the age of 15 he went to live on a kibbutz. He studied philosophy and literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and was visiting fellow at Oxford University, author-in-residence at the Hebrew University and writer-in-residence at Colorado College. He has been named Officer of Arts and Letters of France. An author of prose for both children and adults, as well as an essayist, he has been widely translated and is internationally acclaimed. He has been honoured with the French Prix Femina and the 1992 Frankfurt Peace Prize. He lives in the southern town Arad and teaches literature at Ben Gurion University of the Negev.

Amos Oz has rooted his writing in the tempestuous history of his homeland. Through his writing, both fiction and nonfiction, runs a common thread: examining human nature, recognizing its frailty but glorying in its variety, Oz consistently makes the plea for an end to ambivalence, for dialogue, for a channelling of passions towards faith in the future. With an economy of words, Oz presents the people of Israel, its political tribulations and biblical landscape. Newsweek writes, "Eloquent, humane, even religious in the deepest sense, [Oz] emerges as a kind of Zionist Orwell: a complex man obsessed with simple decency and determined above all to tell the truth, regardless of whom it offends."

Internationally acclaimed novelist Amos Oz grew up in war-torn Jerusalem, where as a boy he witnessed firsthand the poisonous consequences of fanaticism. In two concise, powerful essays, the award-winning author offers unique insight into the true nature of fanaticism and proposes a reasoned and respectful approach to resolving the Israeli Palestinian conflict. As an added feature, he comments on contemporary issues--the Gaza pullout, Yasser Arafat's death, and the war in Iraq--in an extended interview at the end of the book.

Oz argues that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a war of religion or cultures or traditions, but rather a real estate dispute--one that will be resolved not by greater understanding, but by painful compromise. As he writes, "The seeds of fanaticism always lie in uncompromising righteousness, the plague of many centuries."

The brilliant clarity of these essays, coupled with Oz's ironic sense of humor in illuminating the serious, breathes new life into this centuries-old debate. Oz argues that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a war of religion or cultures or traditions, but rather a real estate dispute--one that will be resolved not by greater understanding, but by painful compromise. He emphasizes the importance of imagination in learning to define and respect other's space, and analyzes the twisted historical roots that have led to Middle East violence. In his interview, Oz sends a message to Americans. Why not, he proposes, advocate for a twenty-first-century equivalent of the Marshall Plan aimed at preventing poverty and despair in the region? "What is necessary is to work on the ground, for example, building homes for hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who have been rotting in camps for almost sixty years now."

Fresh, insightful, and inspiring, *How to Cure a Fanatic* brings a new voice of sanity to the cacophony on Israeli-Palestinian relations--a voice no one can afford to ignore.

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**Kirsten Garrett:** Someone once said—actually it was Samuel Johnson, that 'the most dangerous thing about a fanatic is his sincerity.' This is *Background Briefing*, on ABC Radio National. I'm Kirsten Garrett, and today you'll hear about fanaticism in a talk given by a modern writer, Amos Oz, in Australia.

**Michaela Kalowski:** Good evening. It is my great pleasure to introduce Amos Oz to you this evening. Amos Oz is an internationally renowned Israeli writer, novelist and journalist. He is also a professor of literature at Ben-Gurion University and a distinguished visiting scholar to the Leon Liberman Chair in Modern Israel Studies at Monash University. He was one of the founders of the Peace Now movement in 1978. Since 1967 he has been a prominent cultural voice and advocate of a two-state solution to the Israel Palestine conflict.

A prolific and highly revered writer, he has published 18 works of fiction and eight collections of essays in Hebrew, and his works have been translated into some 30 languages, including into Arabic in 35 countries. His memoir, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, has been hailed internationally as a masterpiece. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Amos Oz. [Applause]

**Amos Oz:** Ladies and gentlemen, friends, good evening, Shalom. Erev Tov to all of you. This evening we are not going to discuss Israelis and Palestinians. We are not even going to discuss literature, storytelling and reading. We are going to focus on a topic which I regard as probably the single most urgent topic of our time: fanaticism.

Fanaticism is all over us. Certain scholars claim, like Huntington, that the drama of our day is the clash between east and west, between Islam and Christianity, between the rich and the poor, between the Arabs and the rest of the world. I think the clash which is going to become the syndrome of the 21st century is the clash between the fanatics of all colours and trades and brands, and the rest of us.

The 9/11, ten years ago, was not an attack of the poor on the rich. Otherwise the attack would have come from Africa, the poorest, and launched against the rich Arab Gulf states in the Persian Gulf—the richest. It is not the war of civilisations. It is the war between those people who believe that the end justifies all the means and the rest of us who believe that not every end justifies the means. And certainly no end justifies all the means.

Ladies and gentlemen, a young Norwegian man detonated a car bomb in the centre of Oslo, in front of the prime minister's office; then went to a resort island and massacred over 70 young boys and girls. When caught he claimed that he had done so in the name of western civilisation. In the name of the white race superiority. In the name of Christianity and in defence against the invading Islam.

Interesting question: why would such a man not massacre Muslims? Why massacre Norwegian white, Christian Norwegian boys and girls like himself? Because he was busy, like all fanatics, changing the others. The fanatic is—*all fanatics, every kind of fanatics*, is always involved in changing other people's minds and hearts. The fanatic is a great altruist. He is more interested in you than in himself or herself. He wants to change you for your own good. He wants to save your soul for you. He wants to rescue you from your own prejudices or ideas or opinions. He wants to cure you from your voting habits or praying habits—or smoking habits.

Fanaticism is very ancient. It's older than Islam. It's older than Christianity or Judaism. It's a basic component in human nature. I think fanaticism is a bad gene. And potentially there may be something of a fanatic in each and every one of us. So let's be aware of the potential internal fanatic in every one of us.

I think Bin Laden, who died a few months ago, differs from people who blow up abortion clinics in America in the scope of his action, in the magnitude of his action, but not in the nature of his action. He is out to change other people. He is out to save the world from something. He is out to improve the world as he regards improvement.

Ladies and gentlemen, my childhood in Jerusalem rendered me quite an authority in comparative fanaticism. And let me say in passing that perhaps it's high time that every university and every school in the world start a course in comparative fanaticism, because it's all over us. It's everywhere. And it is the syndrome of our time. Jerusalem of my childhood was full of messiahs, prophets and redeemers. Everyone had his or her personal formula for instant universal redemption. Not everyone was violent. Not everyone was a terrorist. Not everyone, of course, was aggressive. But everyone had a personal formula for redemption.

Many people came to Jerusalem claiming, after the old Zionist slogan, that they are in Jerusalem to rebuild it and to be rebuilt by it. But secretly quite a few of them craved to crucify, to get crucified, or both. Even in today's Israel, every line by a bus stop is likely to catch a spark and turn into a fiery street seminary with total strangers passionately arguing about politics and religion and history and political and metaphysical good and evil, with the participants of such a street seminary, while differing on political and metaphysical good and evil are nonetheless elbowing their way to the top of the line.

This is not necessarily fanaticism. Not every person with a strong opinion is a fanatic. Not every self-appointed redeemer is a fanatic. The fanatics are the violent ones, the ones who want to change you by force. The ones who will force you to change. They love you. They love you dearly. They love you more than they love themselves. The fanatic has no private life. He or she is one hundred per cent public. No private life. The fanatic gives no value to his or her life. He is eager to sacrifice his life for the sake of a cause, whatever cause, because he doesn't think much of his life. His life is empty. No family, no relationship, no warmth, no human touch to his life. One hundred per cent public.

As a little boy I have to confess that I was a little fanatic. The first words I ever learned to pronounce in English, except for yes and no, were the words 'British go home!' Which is what we kids, Jewish kids in Jerusalem, used to shout at the British patrols as we were throwing stones at them in Jerusalem of the 1940s in the original Intifada, the Intifada of the Jews against the British.

As a seven-year-old boy, together with two devoted young friends, we built an awesome rocket and aimed it at the Buckingham Palace in London, planning to present the king of England with an ultimatum: either you give us back our land by Yom Kippur, by the Day of Atonement, or else our Day of Atonement is going to become Great Britain's last Day of Judgment. The rocket consisted of a broken motorcycle and the remains of an old refrigerator. And the reason Britain survived my zeal and my friends' zeal, is that we didn't quite succeed in developing the guiding device and the right fuel. And the British were smart and they pulled out quickly.

But I was a slogan-screaming little chauvinist. I was self-righteous like any fanatic. I was utterly convinced that the Jewish-Zionist cause is one hundred per cent—one hundred and ten per cent—right, and every other cause, every opposing cause is evil, dangerous, and deserved to be wiped off

the face of the earth. The Arabs hated us—they were evil. The British were against us—they were evil. The rest of the world was not sympathetic? It's an evil world. Black and white. Just like that.

What actually cured me from this fanaticism was a very strange early friendship with a British police constable: a short, fat man, short of breath, asthmatic, whom I befriended as a seven-year-old boy in Jerusalem and whom I taught some lessons in Hebrew. He actually had some background in biblical Hebrew. I gave him some lessons in modern Hebrew. He taught me some English. And after our secret, hushed meetings in a small café in Jerusalem, in the back room of a small café in Jerusalem, it was no longer possible for me to hate everybody else. It became impossible to hate without exceptions. And once you start making exceptions, then your fanaticism might be reduced.

When I speak about fanatics, I don't necessarily mean the obvious fanatics—those whom you see on your television screens shaking their fists in the air against the television cameras and screaming slogans in languages we cannot understand. In its more domestic forms, fanaticism is present everywhere around us. And, as I said, possibly also inside us. We all know the vegetarians who will eat you alive for eating meat. We all know the anti-smokers who will burn you alive for lighting a cigarette. Do I know the pacifists, some of my colleagues in the Israeli peace movement who are willing to shoot me through the head just because I have a slightly different idea on how to make peace with the Palestinians.

Actually I am not saying that everyone who raises his or her voice against something is a fanatic. I am not saying that everyone with strong opinions is a fanatic. I am saying that the seed of fanaticism is in uncompromising self-righteousness. Violent, uncompromising self-righteousness, the curse of many generations, and in particular the curse of our generation. Of course there are varying degrees of evil, and I will be the first to differentiate and I think differentiating is a moral obligation of everyone of us. Grade evil. Different degrees of evil. Militant environmentalists cause less harm than a terrorist and an ethnic cleanser, although both of them may be fanatical.

There is also a special interrelationship between fanaticism and kitsch. The fanatic lives in the world of kitsch, in a world of good guys and bad guys. In an everlasting Hollywood movie with nice guys and ugly guys. Many people treat the Israeli-Palestinian tragedy as a clash between right and wrong. Essentially it is not. It is a tragic clash between right and right. Sometimes it's a clash between wrong and wrong. Often it is a clash between wrong and wrong. But black and white it is not. The fanatics on all sides are trying to paint it in black and white.

Now the fanatic is also fascinated by death; attracted to death and charmed by death. The fanatic is not a person who would willingly sacrifice his life for a cause. No. The fanatic is a person looking for a cause for which he or she will sacrifice their lives, because life is insignificant. Because life is empty. Because life is hollow. Because life is meaningless outside the cause. Because, as I said, the fanatic is one hundred per cent public. It's very important to be public. It's very important to be publicly involved. It's very important for every decent human being to be public, but please, for God's sake, not one hundred per cent public. Thirty per cent is enough, give or take.

Israel is a special fascination for fanatics all over the world, possibly because it was born out of a dream. And the magnitude of a dream created unrealistic expectations from Israel. Israel is expected to achieve world record in high jump morality. It is expected by some people to be the most Christian nation in the world, if not the only Christian nation in the world in terms of turning its other cheek to an enemy. It is expected to perform a universal role model in morality. It cannot live up to those expectations, not in a state of everlasting conflict. Unfortunately Israel's moral standard

in its conflict with the Arabs, with the Palestinians, is sinking lower and lower. But certainly these are not the world record in morality.

Fanatics are quick to jump on Israel. If Israel is not a sample state. If Israel is not a light unto the nation, let there be no Israel. Very soon, in a few weeks, the Durban Convention will reconvene again. Here, the usual anti-Jewish, anti-Zionist, anti-Israeli talk, which goes way beyond a legitimate criticism of Israel—and Israel deserves a lot of legitimate criticism for its rigid position on the Palestinian issue and on the settlements—but the Durban conference is going always, or for several times now, going way beyond legitimate criticism. It is a festival of hatred. It is a festival of fanaticism, of anti-Israeli, anti-Zionist and indeed anti-Jewish fanaticism.

Now the fanatic is also a great sentimentalist. A friend of mine, the Israeli novelist Sami Mikhael, told me an episode. He was driven once for a lecture in Ben-Gurion University in Bel Shiva, in my university, he was driven from Haifa, which is a long drive, three hours, by a very militant, right-wing, fanatical taxi driver. And during the drive the chauffeur says to Sami, 'You know, I believe we have to kill all the Arabs.' As simple as that.

Sami is a sophisticated man. Instead of saying, 'Shame on you,' or instead of just wrapping himself in silence, he turned to the chauffeur and said, 'Yes, you think so? And who exactly do you think should kill all the Arabs?' 'We should kill them. All of us have to kill them.' 'No, be more specific, please. Should the police kill them, should the army kill them, should the doctors kill them? Who should kill all the Arabs?' Quiet. The chauffeur is thinking. Then the chauffeur is saying, 'I think everyone of us has to kill a few.'

Sami doesn't lose his temper. He never loses his temper. He says to the chauffeur, 'Okay, suppose you are allocated one block of flats, one block of apartments in Haifa, your home town, and you are to kill all the Arabs in the block. And you'll knock on every door or ring every doorbell: excuse me, Sir, excuse me, Madam, are you an Arab? And if the answer is yes, you shoot them and kill them. And you finish the block and you turn to walk home, and then you hear a baby crying from upstairs. Would you go back upstairs and kill the baby? Yes or not?' Silence. The chauffeur is thinking. Then the chauffeur turns to Sami saying, 'Sir, you are a very cruel man.' [Laughter]

This is a significant story because the fanatic has no imagination. All fanatics have no imagination. They don't have the ability to put themselves in other people's shoes.

I am a great believer in curiosity. I think curiosity is a powerful antidote to fanaticism. I think curious people are in the habit of putting themselves under the skins, or at least in the shoes of other people, imagining the other. What if I were him? What if I were her? This is a powerful antidote. I believe the curious person is a better person than a person who is not curious. I believe curiosity is a moral imperative. I even believe a curious person is a better lover than a person who is not curious, but it's too early in the evening to discuss this aspect. [Laughter]

So curiosity is an antidote. Humour is another antidote. I have never met a fanatic with a sense of humour. Nor have I ever met a person with a sense becoming a fanatic unless he or she lost their sense of humour, which happens sometimes. Because humour is relativity. Humour is the ability to see yourself as others see you. Humour is very often the ability to contain more than one valid point of view of a certain situation. So if I could only compress sense of humour into capsules and persuade entire populations to swallow my humour capsules, thus immune them to fanaticism, I may qualify one day for a Nobel prize in medicine, not in literature. But then look at me. Look what am I doing. I am fantasising about compressing sense of humour into capsules, make other people swallow sense of humour capsules for their own good, changing them for their own good. It's very

easy. It's very catching. You can very easily become an anti-fanatic fanatic, an anti-militant militant. Very dangerous. Be careful. [Applause]

Now it always begins inside the family. The grain, the seed of fanaticism is inside the family. You, spouse or child, or brother, or sister, you must change for your own good. You must be like me, you must become like me. I want to change you. Otherwise this marriage is not going to work. Either you are going to change, or this marriage is not going to work. Either you are going to change or I don't like you any more. Either you are going to change or everything is going to end very badly. When this urge to change the other becomes violent and uncompromising, this is the seed of fanaticism. And this happens in every family. It happens in the best of families. Where have we not heard the sentence: You must change. Please change for your own good of course. Always for your own good. the fanatic is always interested in your own good. He is always falling on your neck, loving you, wanting to save you, and to cure you, and to rescue you. In case you prove to be incurable he will be at your throat. He will kill you, also for your own good.

And finally, not only curiosity and humour and the ability to imagine the other are antidotes to fanaticism. Another powerful antidote is the ability to live in open-ended situations. To accept the fact that some conflicts are not resolvable. That some conflicts don't resolve, they dissolve into fatigue and exhaustion. And this will be my only touch on the Israeli-Palestinian, Israeli-Arab conflict. It's not going to be resolved through a magic formula after which the two parties will embrace one another like long lost brothers in tears: oh brothers, will you ever forgive me, please love me, take the land. Who cares about the land? Give me your love. This is never going to happen. What is likely to happen, and what is perhaps beginning to happen in the Middle East, is a syndrome of fatigue and exhaustion both among Israelis and Palestinians. And a syndrome of fatigue and exhaustion finally leads to a compromise.

I know the word 'compromise' is regarded as an ugly word, as a dirty word, especially to some young idealists. They think compromise is dishonest. They think compromise is lack of integrity. They think compromise is somehow sneaky. Not in my vocabulary. In my vocabulary the word 'compromise' is synonymous with the word 'life'. And where there is life there ought to be compromises. And the opposite of compromise is not integrity. And the opposite of compromise is not idealism. The opposite of compromise is fanaticism and death.

I am a great believer in compromise as opposed to capitulation. I am not advocating turning the other cheek to an enemy. I am advocating trying to meet the other somewhere halfway. And believe me, I know one or two things about compromises, having been married to the same woman for 51 years. So the Israelis and the Palestinians are tired, and it is a blessed fatigue. It's not that the eyes of the Palestinians are open to see the light of the Zionist truth; or the eyes of the Israelis open to see the light of the genuine claim of the Palestinians over the land. None of that. It's a clenched-teeth acceptance that we are not alone in the land. We Israelis are not alone in the land. The Palestinians are not alone in the land. No-one is going to go out—and this small country, smaller than Denmark, makes so much fuss about it, you would think it's bigger than China, but in fact it's smaller than Denmark. this small country happens to be the only home of two nations. They cannot become one happy family because they are not one and because they are not happy, and because they are not even family. They are two unhappy families. They have to divide their house into two smaller apartments. I think this is called in English a semi-detached home. This is likely to happen. The only ones who oppose it and object it and try to derail it are the fanatics on both sides. The [applause] advocates of greater Palestine and the advocates of greater Israel, they would not compromise. They want it all for themselves. They ignore the existence of the other.

Now this is a natural definition of the fanatical evil. Ignoring the existence of the other. Or ignoring the essence of the other, or ignoring the respect of the other. I am a great believer in compromises. Even the—and this will be my concluding remark—even the controversial issue of the holy places in Jerusalem can be resolved through a pragmatic compromise. Whose holy places? This seems to be irresolvable, unsolvable. But I have my grandmother's wisdom. When I was a little boy she explained to me in simple words: 'Where is the difference between Jew and Christian?' Not between Jew and Muslim but between Jew and Christian. And she said the following, she said: 'You see, my boy, the Christians believe that the Messiah has been here once and he will come again one day. We Jews believe that the Messiah is still to come. Over this difference you cannot imagine,' she said, 'how much hatred and bloodshed and persecution. Why,' she said, 'why can't everybody simply wait and see. If the Messiah comes, saying "Hello, it's nice to see you again," the Jews will have to apologise to the Christians. If on the other hand the Messiah comes saying, "How do you do, it's good to meet you," the entire Christian world will have to apologise to the Jews.' [Applause]

'Until then,' said my grandmother, 'live and let live.' And let this line be the bottom line of my presentation: live and let live. Thank you very much. [Applause]

**Kirsten Garrett:** Renowned Israeli writer, poet, activist and historian Amos Oz, giving the Ervin Graf Memorial Oration for the Shalom Institute at the University of New South Wales. Amos Oz was asked about what we could do about fanaticism. He'd talked about humour and imagination in his own writings. Does he write so that his readers can 'imagine the other'—that is, the person with other strong beliefs.

**Amos Oz:** That's what literature does. Not just my books. Every literature does this. It makes us imagine other people, put ourselves under the skins of other people. Let me tell you a little story. When I was a little boy, six or seven or eight, my parents used to take me to cafes in Jerusalem where they conducted long conversations with their friends and they asked me to shut up, to keep quiet, and they promised me that if I behave myself and be quiet I'll get ice cream in the end. They conducted their conversations with their friends for 77 hours or something like this. And I had to keep myself busy. So I began to spy on other guests in the cafÃ©. I looked at the body language. I overheard snatches of conversation. I looked at the clothes. And I began to invent their stories for them. I still do that, when I have to kill time at an airport or in a clinic or in a railway station. It's a wonderful pastime, recommended to every one of you, and you get ice cream in the end. [Laughter]

**Kirsten Garrett:** One question went back to what Amos Oz had said about the conflict not being a Hollywood movie with good guys and bad guys, but a war between right and right. What does he mean by that?

**Amos Oz:** Well, the Palestinians are in Palestine for the same reason for which the Norwegians are in Norway or the Greeks are in Greece. This is their homeland. They have no other homeland. They tried, so they were forced to try. They were pushed out of Palestine into exile in Lebanon, in Egypt, in Jordan. They were not received well anywhere. They learned the hard way that they have no other homeland but Palestine. The Israeli Jews have no other homeland but Israel. The Jewish people as a people never, never had a homeland. As individuals, yes, but as a people never had a homeland other than the land of Israel. It is their land; it is our land. It's a dispute between right and right. Between one very powerful, very convincing, very persuasive claim and another claim no less powerful, no less convincing, no less persuasive.

**Kirsten Garrett:** There's a wave of change, protest and rebellion across the Arab world. The so-called Arab Spring. What will be the effect of this on the Israel-Palestine conflict?

**Amos Oz:** Well it's very hard to be a prophet coming from the land of the prophets. There is too much competition in the prophesy these days. But my suggestion will be to speak not of the Arab Spring but of Arab springs in the plural, and not in the singular. Different things are happening in different countries, and the outcome in Syria is not necessarily the prospected outcome in Egypt; and the outcome in Egypt is not going to be the same as in Yemen. What the outcome will be nobody knows. On the same parades, on the same marches, on the same demonstrations in the same squares in the Arab countries there are democrats, 21st century-oriented people, open society advocates—marching together, shoulder to shoulder with fundamentalist medievalist Islamists. Who will prevail nobody knows. There is a Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde there. But if democracy prevails in any Arab country there will be peace. As you all know, there has never been war between two democracies. Never, not once in history. So I believe as soon as there is democracy in an Arab country, there will be, eventually—perhaps not overnight but eventually—peace between Israel and that Arab democracy.

**Kirsten Garrett:** The issue of the recent protests and street marches in Tel Aviv was raised. Street protests are unusual in Israel, which is traditionally an internally stable and prosperous country. The question was: are these protests in Tel Aviv a sign that Israel, like several other countries in the Middle East, wants change?

**Amos Oz:** Well it's not happening in Tel Aviv; it's happening all over Israel, in big towns, in small towns, and even in villages. And it seems like an upheaval of the Israeli middle class, who has been heavily weighed by an impossible distribution of the riches. Israel used to be a relatively egalitarian society, and perhaps not even relatively. Perhaps a real egalitarian society in the old times, in the early years when Israel was much, much poorer than it is now, but nonetheless people cared about one another and there was a strong sense of social solidarity.

I think what the demonstrators in Tel Aviv and other towns and villages in Israel are missing the most is this sense of social solidarity. What began as an outcry for affordable accommodation easily and quickly evolved into an outcry for social justice and even an outcry for a restoration of the welfare state. It's going to be very interesting. Is it related to the events in the Arab countries or not? Maybe in a superficial way. But I think it was a long time coming. The Israeli economy is doing exceptionally well. The unemployment rate is among the lowest in the western world. The gross national product and the gross national income is remarkable and impressive and growing very rapidly. And yet the riches do not flow down. It remains in the hands of the very rich. And there is a sense of outcry for social justice among those demonstrators all over Israel.

**Kirsten Garrett:** Another question was that in September Palestinians will go to the United Nations to ask for recognition of Palestine as a state. What does he think will happen if the United Nations grants that?

**Amos Oz:** Let me give you a one-man opinion, and please remember that I only represent myself—and even this only on a lucky night. [Laughter] If Palestine declares independence and is recognised by the UN, let Israel be the first nation to recognise independent Palestine. [Applause] We may then argue about the borders. We may then argue about the holy places in Jerusalem, but let this be an argument, a bargaining, a negotiation between two sovereign states. At last it will become a normal peace agreement between two neighbouring states. Israel will do well to be the first country in the world to recognise independent Palestine for historical reasons.

**Kirsten Garrett:** It was mentioned that Amos Oz has often been invited to speak to political leaders. But then they ignore him. Who was the most receptive, most impressive leader Amos Oz has known?

**Amos Oz:** Well most receptive is a very hard question. Most impressive was David Ben-Gurion whom I had the honour and the privilege to meet as a very young man. And it was an awesome meeting which I'll never forget. He was the single most impressive individual I've ever met in my life. There was something biblical, Old Testamental, about Ben-Gurion. He was a fascinating man, as fierce and focussed as a laser beam. And he had a presence which I have never confronted before or after in my life. Open to persuasion is a hard question. Perhaps Levi Eshkol, who was the pragmatic, the humorous prime minister, and unjustly forgotten prime minister of Israel in the 1960s. He was the most open-minded and the most receptive of them all. He had a wonderful sense of humour. He used to say, 'A human being is only a human being and even this is very rare.'

**Kirsten Garrett:** One criticism often levelled at Israel is that it's practising apartheid. What does he say to that?

**Amos Oz:** Out of laziness: apartheid is bad and the Israeli occupation and suppression of the West Bank is bad—but these are two different kinds of evil and two different degrees of evil. There is nothing racist in the Israeli suppression of the Palestinians. It's not about race. It's not about colour. It's not even about faith. It's about insecurity, to be precise. The Israelis are suppressing the Palestinians because they are immensely insecure, and because they are greedy for the West Bank. They want the West Bank for themselves. This is bad, but apartheid it is not. The popular comparisons between Israeli politics and apartheid is a result of trendy laziness.

**Kirsten Garrett:** Amos Oz is a political writer and analyst. Has he ever thought of going into politics himself? Has he been tempted to do that?

**Amos Oz:** Well I have a serious disability. I am physically unable to pronounce the words 'no comment'. How can I be a politician? [Laughter]

**Kirsten Garrett:** He's said in the past that he would like to be a sound technician so that he could turn down the volume any time a politician mentions the past; that he thinks we should move forward without referring to the past.

**Amos Oz:** Israelis and Palestinians have to agree about the present and especially about the future. They may remain divided for ever about the past, and they will probably remain divided for as far as the eye can see about the past—and there is no harm in being divided about the past. We can live with two different narratives: the Israeli narrative and the Palestinian narrative. We don't have to accept each other's narrative in order to live in peace and coexistence. So politicians, negotiators, are very often making the situation impossibly dense and hateful by referring to the past. That's why I said if I had a capacity in an Israeli-Palestinian peace conference, I would like to be the sound technician and to disconnect the microphones each time any politician refers to the past. Those people are paid to deal with the present and with the future. Let's leave the past to historians and storytellers like myself. [Applause]

**Kirsten Garrett:** That was Amos Oz, giving the Ervin Graf Memorial Oration for the Shalom Institute, a Jewish training college at the University of New South Wales.

You're listening to *Background Briefing* on ABC Radio National. Next, an edited snippet from a talk by Charles Massy about one of the biggest business failures in Australian history: the decline of the wool empire. It's based on his book *Breaking the Sheep's Back*, and it's a story of political skulduggery and betrayal. It happened in 1991 after a decision in the late 80s to raise the reserve price of wool. It was a disaster, and the wool industry has never really recovered.

**Charles Massy:** Good evening ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the night. I'm Colin Steele, and the ANU (Australian National University) author event tonight is with Charles Massy.

**Kirsten Garrett:** Charles Massy spoke at the ANU recently and here's an excerpt from his speech. It's been edited to bring out some of the main points from many years of research.

**Charles Massy:** The journey of writing this book has involved over 35 years of my life, across the entire wool textile industry. It's a journey of 15 centuries and more in wool. Of blood-sampling for DNA analysis with a peasant farmer and his 25 sheep in the foothills of the middle Atlas mountains in Morocco, where I was in quest of 15 centuries of genetic history behind the fabulous merino fibre.

I also remember a time across the ocean to near Bradford, England, where I worked with a 70-year-old Yorkshire foreman in a weaving mill. I swear his accent was so broad, it was an hour before I realised he was speaking English. And to a room in the back streets of Osaka, Japan, and a group of young Japanese executives and scientists from a leading spinning company who were revealing to me their new wonder-fabric made from a blend of wool and reconstituted bamboo.

However, a final vivid memory of this journey is of nearly being thrown out of one of Italy's leading spinning mills. And this was about six months after the wool collapse in early 1991, and because they thought I was from the Australian Wool Corporation. When the mistake was rectified, they told me that they'd bought wool because they'd trusted the repeated word of the Australian government, but then been betrayed two months later. As a result, this private family company lost \$8 million overnight.

So yes, quite a journey. You know, I searched about for an appropriate quote on why we never seem to learn from history. I came across the usual suspects: Hegel, Santayana, Winston Churchill. But the quote that struck me came from that prolific author, Anon. Now Anon said, every time history repeats itself the price goes up. And this very much applies here. The actions described in this book occurred in the face of the best advice of some of Australia's finest economic and financial brains from the 1930s onwards, decade after decade, and advice regarding the 100 per cent failure rate of government instigated buffer stock schemes. But it was ignored. And the result was Australia's biggest ever business disaster which, in 1991 totalled a conservative 12 billion. Over 20 billion in today's terms. And that's without calculating the ongoing social, environmental and opportunity costs.

So I'm forced to ask why, in recurring business cycles, and in government and public administration in politics generally, why is it that virtually all the big political and business disasters occur in the face of the previous lessons of history, and in the face of highly accurate and prescient Cassandras? The answer, I think, is it's just due to basic human nature: to greed, hubris, and all the rest. This wool disaster occurred because there were no checks and balances to prevent the march of folly. So you see Groucho Marx was actually wrong. We can't opt out of the human club, even if we didn't want to join any club that would have us for a member.

But importantly, this critical issue of human nature combines with a second. While this story is a combination of bad policy and bad governance from the 1950s through to the 1990s and beyond, today we have a different form of political corruption. This was exposed by Guy Pearse in his seminal article in *The Monthly* of March 2009 titled 'Quarry Vision', where he described how the Big End of town has unprecedented access and undue influence over government policy. What's crucial today, however, isn't a potential 20 billion dollar disaster but the fact this corruption of a political process is occurring in the face of the dire social, ecological crisis of combined climate

change, over-population and peak eco-system services—of diminishing fossil fuel energy, water and so on.

The solution? This might sound simplistic, but it encompasses one word: leadership. Visionary leadership means proactive good policy and good governance. And you know at the end of writing this book and now watching these contemporary shenanigans, I find I have to agree with Ronald Reagan, of all people, who in 1977 said this: 'Politics is supposed to be the second oldest profession. I've come to realise it bears a very close resemblance to the first.' [Laughter]

Now that the truth is out concerning this mega wool disaster I hope it will stop the collective and individual denial still redolent within government, in the industry and in agri-politics. A denial which allows the purveying of a false view of history.

But there's a wider dimension to my book, which is my fifth and final point, and this is the cautionary tale embedded in the story. When describing in the book that moment of the fatal decision to set too high a reserve price in 1988, I highlighted an outstanding piece of investigative journalism. It was by Julian Cribb and appeared in a double page in the *Weekend Australian*, headed 'Is this the price that could floor the wool industry?' In this piece Cribb stunningly warned, two months before the decision, that setting a high floor price would be disastrous. He was right, and with chilling accuracy. Julian's recent book, *The Coming Famine*, is a further example of his journalistic skills.

I'd like to end by quoting the final paragraph of Julian's review of my book. Says Cribb, about *Breaking the Sheep's Back*: 'Above all this is a book for those who dream the Australian mineral boom will never end, that the climate will never change and the sea never inundate our cities. That the landscape will remain covered in gum trees and koalas. Our oil, soil, water and food supplies never dwindle. And that the Australian Dream will somehow transcend global financial incompetence and greed.' [Applause]

**Kirsten Garrett:** That was Charles Massy, author of *Breaking the Sheep's Back*. There'll be links on the *Background Briefing* website to more information about this issue, and also about Amos Oz, who spoke earlier in today's program. I'm Kirsten Garrett and you're with ABC Radio National.

## How to Cure a Fanatic

By MARGOT WALLSTRÖM

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When the names of the 77 victims of the terrorist attack in Oslo were read aloud and their pictures shown at a memorial concert recently, it was as if something changed. Cries could be heard from relatives who broke down. It was as if the victims materialized in front of us — with their youthful hopes for the future, innocent smiles and clear eyes looking straight at us. We realized the magnitude of the loss. So many individual lives cut short and their dreams of love, careers, travels or changing their country and the world that will never come true.

But one name was not mentioned at the event in Norway, nor has it been pronounced by Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg in his speeches and appearances after the massacre of July 22. The name of the killer.

I like to think that it is a conscious policy by a wise political leader who realizes that the main characters in our collective memory of that dark day should be the victims, not the murderer. This avoids turning a terrorist into a martyr.

And that is a real risk. His is the face of a fanatic. Someone so deeply convinced about his own ideas that he has ceased listening to anyone else. He is willing to sacrifice himself and others for what he believes to be the one single truth. The dream of a homogenous and monocultural society, a “pure” place to live. The Oslo killer has searched history, ideologies and racism for legitimacy. He has been able to find like-minded people on the Internet, supporting his utopian idea of being able to exclude all the “others,” those with different ideas and cultures.

Preventing fanaticism takes a democratic tradition with an understanding that all societies are pluralistic. We will never find an idea, a language, or a culture that everybody can agree to. As much as we might feel frustrated about it, our reality is a multifaceted, multicultural world. Democracy and basic human rights are the only principles that we can rally around, that will allow us to manage our different views and find political compromises to ensure that we live with respect for one another.

The most important fight today is against fanaticism and extremism in all religions and ideologies, against prejudices that will bring us back to the darkness of the Middle Ages.

Fear and intolerance are far-reaching weapons and the most important battlefields are people’s minds and thoughts. But we have too many historical examples of violence as a method for fanatics. Even though they might not lead to genocide, ethnic cleansing or other atrocities, propaganda about “cultural purity” creates suffering and fanaticism. People suffer from having to hide their identities, sexual preferences or religion.

So how do you cure a fanatic? By denying them what they want most — recognition. Ultimately, the cure for fanaticism does not lie in the structures we build to protect ourselves, although they are necessary when all else has failed. The way forward is prevention through democracy, education, information, and by ensuring that you and I give ourselves a moment of reflection and doubt about always being right. The fanatic is not always somebody else; he or she lives, potentially, in all of us. Multiculturalism doesn’t create fanatics, but it gives us the possibility to cure our own fanaticism if we only dare to admit that we are not always right.

*Margot Wallström is U.N. special representative of the secretary general on sexual violence in conflict.*

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/16/opinion/16iht-edwallstrom16.html>