

INTERVIEW WITH YOSSI SARID

Barbara Taufar makes a short introduction: The interview with Yossi Sarid was recorded in Tel Aviv on Thursday, 22 May 1997. Yossi Sarid is the leader of Israel's Meretz party.

BT: First of all, let me ask you, when was the first time you heard about Kreisky?

YS: It's very difficult to say. I heard about him ...

BT: Was it through newspapers, or ...?

YS: I am trying, I am trying not to be as provincial as the typical Israeli, you know. So I am following the politics of Europe, of various countries in Europe, of Austria regularly, but ...

BT: You were then a young ..., actually a young member of the Labour party?

YS: A young member of the Israeli Labour party. I started my parliamentary career in 1973. And since when was he a chancellor?

BT: Kreisky was then already chancellor, and '73 was the Yom Kippur War.

YS: Yom Kippur War, yes.

BT: And he came before the Yom Kippur War. You remember maybe, there was the famous glass of water-affair, which is a myth like your visit in Majorca. And after the Yom Kippur-War there was the first mission, the fact-finding mission of the Socialist International into the area.

YS: I see. Okay.

BT: Now you probably met him, when he was here in '74?

YS: No. I met him for the first time ...

BT: But did you hear something in the party after this first fact-finding mission?

YS: Of course, of course, he was considered number one enemy of Israel in Europe.

BT: In that time already?

YS: Yes. Yes, sure.

BT: Why?

YS: Because, as far as I remember, Golda Meir was the prime minister since 1969, March, April '69. And he, she couldn't stand, couldn't stand Bruno Kreisky. And ..., well, psychologically ...

BT: Why?

YS: Psychologically speaking, it's relatively very simple to explain. Because he wasn't a supporter of the policy of Golda Meir of the Israeli Labour party, of the Israeli government in that time and he was Jewish. So since he was Jewish, he was considered as a traitor.

BT: Why as a traitor?

YS: There is a difference between a Jewish politician in one country or another and a non-Jewish politician. A non-Jewish, well, it is legitimate that he is critical, as far as the Israeli political affairs are concerned. But since he is Jewish, he is more dangerous. He is more distorted, mentally speaking.

BT: Because he is not a Zionist?

YS: And ... he is not a Zionist, he is not a natural and automatic supporter of Israel. Since you are Jewish, you have to support the policy of Israel, no questions asked.

BT: But there were already Jews before him in high positions like Kissinger.

YS: Yes. Okay, so Kissinger, Kissinger ... You remember that Kissinger was called in Israel ...

BT: A Jew boy.

YS: ... the Jew boy and „the husband of the gentile woman“, yes? This was his common description or definition „the husband of the gentile woman“. But, first of all, Henry Kissinger was the secretary of state of the United States. So they didn't dare to speak about him openly. Secondly, from time to time he supported the Israeli policy. But when he was critical, he was very sharply and cruelly criticised by the Israeli politicians, on the same ground, by the way. To be Jewish, but not to be an enthusiastic supporter giving the Israeli policy the blind support. You are supposed to be blind. If you are Jewish, you have to support the Israeli government blindly, blindly.

BT: Doesn't matter what they do?

YS: Don't ask questions, don't hesitate.

BT: Is that today the same? I mean, was that in the old times even stronger than today?

YS: I believe. I believe there are signs for it at the present moment: For example, US-ambassador Martin Indyk. From time to time you have to draw a distinction between what you are hearing openly and what is told behind the scenes.

BT: It was known even with the Schönau affair, with the terrorists and when Kreisky closed Schönau, that the Russian immigration continued nevertheless through Austria. And it was only Austria. He was the one since '56, when Lowa Eliav was sent to Vienna, to help the Jews. Which means, this was a man where everyone who was in power, knew that that JKreisky does a lot for the Jews.

YS: Doesn't matter.

BT: Doesn't matter?

YS: Doesn't matter. The good things are being considered as obvious, as natural. We don't have to thank somebody for that. It's his duty. And since he did it, it is already trivial. Now what you are doing more for us - that's the question. And ... okay, so when he assisted the refugees coming from the Soviet Union, from the former Soviet Union, probably, he was praised, but after a minute, when he was critical, everything had been forgotten.

BT: Let us go back to the time immediately after the Yom Kippur War. In that time he was busy trying to find out if the Arab countries and Israel could make peace, could find a solution together.

YS: That's bad. That's bad.

BT: That was already bad?

YS: That's bad. That's bad.

BT: But still ...

YS: Don't interfere, don't be involved!

BT: But still ... Well, it was a project of the Socialist International, and actually Golda also supported it.

YS: Yes. Up to the point of what she considered as an intervention in our domestic affairs.

BT: Now, when it came to the middle of the seventies - '77 then - and Kreisky had met Issam Sartawi. Kreisky was already criticised very violently by the Israeli press. If you look back, how is it possible that the Israeli press, which had in that time was a different generation in leading figures, the older generation, they were actually

violent against him and obscene and outrageous. I would say like the mob at Kikar Zion (square-Zion) against Rabin's peace politics!

YS: His fate was my fate, for example, Amry's fate. Since we advocated the need to meet with the Palestinian people, with Palestinian leaders, with people from the PLO, we were almost boycotted in Israel.

BT: How was your attitude then?

YS: Between '67 and '69 I was in the United States. I was a student and I studied in an American university. By coming back to Israel in '69, I was in charge of the well, propaganda - it's a bad word, but when we approached the elections of '69. I was then 29 and I was very privileged to be in charge. Since then I advocated the need to meet PLO members, PLO leaders and I said that there is no other alternative, but maintaining an open and direct dialogue with the Palestinians and this was the reason for the bad blood between myself and Golda Meir. I was hated terribly by Golda Meir and others. And for their benefit I would say that they didn't find a reason to relate to Bruno Kreisky differently than to me. So they judged us ...

BT: How many people in the Labour party shared your opinion?

YS: As far as I remember, I was the only one.

BT: The only one?

YS: The only one. And it was a comprehensive picture, political picture. To that we have to add the need to recognise the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and to recognise the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent Palestinian state. And those positions at that time were considered to be treason.

BT: Yes.

YS: That's it.

BT: Now when Kreisky invited Arafat to Vienna for an official visit ...

YS: It was in ...

BT: In '78, I think.

YS: '78, yes.

BT: ... there was a outrage here in Israel. Do you remember the meetings in that time of your comrades in the Labour party? How was the mood in the Labour party and why was the labour party so extremely outraged? Peres had till then very good relationships with Kreisky. And he had even before a meeting with Sadat in Vienna.

YS: Shimon Peres! Shimon Peres was against any dialogue with the PLO. And Shimon Peres ..., well, now it's very difficult to imagine, because he is considered to be the prophet ...

BT: Of peace.

YS: ... the prophet of peace. But he is one of the devoted representatives of the old dead position of the Israeli political establishment saying that „we will never, we will never meet Palestinian leaders from the PLO, we will never recognise the right to self-determination and we will never agree to establish a Palestinian state.“ So Shimon Peres in the seventies - it's not Shimon Peres of the nineties.

BT: Yes, yes. This, of course, I understand. But the point is, was there no voice in the Labour party or in Labour party circles who would have interfered, let's say, with this outrageous hatred against another statesman, a very respectable man?

YS: As far as I remember, I was the only one. I was the only one. And as far as I remember, even my meetings with or my dialogue with Bruno Kreisky was not considered very favourably in the party.

BT: When did you meet him for the first time?

YS: I don't remember exactly, but it was right after his meeting with Yasir Arafat. I remember that, because I was very interested, naturally, in listening to what Arafat had to say to Bruno Kreisky. And I can assure you that it was very, very interesting. The first time I met Kreisky, if I am not mistaken, I met Kreisky, I don't remember exactly whether twice or three times. Twice for sure, three times I am not very sure.

BT: Let us go to the first meeting.

YS: The first meeting - and I hope I don't mix between the first time and the second time. I was asked to come to Austria.

BT: To give a lecture?

YS: It was „Bruno Kreisky initiative“, to give a lecture in the Karl Renner Institut. And I went to Austria.

BT: With your wife Dorit, I remember.

YS: With Dorit, right, absolutely. And I was a personal guest of the chancellor. And when I was in Austria at that time, I met him twice, - first day, second day - and we met together in Karl Renner Institut, this was the third time or the fourth time. And I was, deeply impressed by Bruno Kreisky, because he was really an outstanding statesman. I have never met such a person.

BT: You mean, you could feel that there was a great personality?

YS: Immediately. He had a tremendous charisma. I was quite convinced by his goodwill and good intentions. And I have to admit that I really liked him. So it is not a matter of accepting his positions, or appreciating his positions, it was also a matter of personal relations. And I will never forget, I will never forget what he had to say - it's after 25 years or almost 25 years now, and by telling that, I am very much excited even at the present moment. He said that he has two sons, one Palestinian and one Israeli and the Palestinian one is Sartawi, Issam Sartawi, and the second one, the Israeli one, is Yossi Sarid. And ... well, this was a great honour and excitement.

BT: Did you consider him somehow as a political father figure for you?

YS: Yes, yes, for sure.

BT: Yes?

YS: For sure ...

BT: When you met him ...

YS: I had two political fathers, one domestic and one an outsider. Ex-minister Sapir was the Israeli political father and Bruno Kreisky was the other ...

BT: The global.

YS: The other, the global. The other one, yes.

BT: When you met him, did you immediately go into political talks or did he want to find out first of a little bit about you and about your wife and about your family? How was that?

YS: Yes, yes. He asked ... Yes. The first time, if I am not mistaken, I met him together with my wife.

BT: In his office?

YS: In his office or I don't remember, whether it was in the first time or the second time. So I don't remember. But I was in his private house. And I was together with Dorit. At the beginning it was a sort of a personal conversation. And he asked about our children and about Dorit and about everything. And from the first moment on it was, the atmosphere was very friendly, very close, very warm.

BT: And when did he come, let us say, to the tachless (Hebrew for facts)? I mean, he was someone who very much liked to squeeze out information of his partners.

YS: And I was very interested to squeeze out information of him.

BT: So how did that go?

YS: He asked questions and I asked question. It was right after the meeting with ...

BT: Arafat.

YS: ... with Arafat and he told me about the meeting in details. If I am not mistaken, this conversation, this meeting with Arafat was either taped or typed, I don't remember. And if I am not mistaken, he gave me even the protocol of the meeting. And I was very impressed, at least by one point. I remember very vividly that, when I came back to Israel, I found the necessity to emphasise this particular point again and again.

BT: To whom?

YS: To everybody. And this point had something to do with the Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. Since I considered the Jewish settlements as the main obstacles ...

BT: To peace.

YS: ... obstacle on the way to peace and I opposed all the settlements from their very, very beginning, either in the occupied territories in the West Bank or in the Golan Heights or in the Gaza Strip - I emphasise it, because many, many people, unfortunately, opposed certain settlements in certain areas, but I opposed all of them everywhere with no exception whatsoever. So, in '78, '79 the dimension of the problem was not as big as it is now. Nevertheless, it was very, very big.

BT: What did you hear from Arafat?

YS: ... I learned, I learned that Arafat said that he does not oppose to the very existence of the Jewish settlements and he is ready that those settlements will remain in their respective spots either under Palestinian authority or jurisdiction or by any other mutually agreed arrangement. And for me it was a very, very important message. Because, you know, to uproot the settlements, even though - personally - I don't mind that the settlements will be uprooted, but - realistically speaking - it is next to impossible. So I remember that this point was impressed me, impressed me very much. And I remember that this point impressed Bruno Kreisky very much, and Bruno Kreisky presented this point as a sign for moderation in the Palestinian camp, and many other issues which have been discussed between Kreisky and Arafat. But I remember very clearly that this was the main, the main point.

BT: Was Kreisky convinced that the Israelis can make a progress only with Arafat? Or did he think that there were other solutions?

YS: No.

BT: Only with Arafat?

YS: Bruno Kreisky was totally convinced that the only option is Arafat and he said that, relatively speaking, Arafat is the more, more moderate.

BT: Did he ask you, what chances you see that his point of view of peace in the area might develop? I mean, did he ask you how you could help with it?

YS: Sure, sure.

BT: What did you discuss?

YS: Sure, he did. But my obligation was to present an appropriate and very accurate picture, and I couldn't mislead Bruno Kreisky to say that we are approaching a state of majority within our party. On the contrary, I told him that I have no doubt on my mind that one day, sooner or later, we'll make it. We will succeed to convince our colleagues, but it will take time. It will take a long time. But at the...

BT: Didn't Kreisky have the point of view that, maybe, that would be too late?

YS: Yes. He said it very clearly, you know, „Okay, but we don't have much time. We don't have much time,“ because he was not very sure that Yasir Arafat will survive. He wasn't very sure that the other moderate people will survive. He was very concerned. He was very much concerned.

BT: Very soon after that, Camp David started. And as you know probably, also here Kreisky was very much involved in making the first bridge between the Israelis and the Egyptians. Unfortunately, it was not the Labour party to grasp it, but it was Dayan and Begin. Was Kreisky in that time, when you met him, still convinced that the Labour party will play an important role for peacemaking? Or had he given up already on the Labour party in Israel? Because his relationships with Peres and the Israeli Labour party soured enormously after the meeting with Arafat.

YS: Well, he was pessimistic, but I can't tell you for sure that he said that he has no hope whatsoever for the future. He was very pessimistic. He was under the impression that the Israeli Labour party leadership is totally out of focus, they mislead the Israeli public opinion and themselves. He was very pessimistic. I can't tell you that he said, „Well, it's final. There is no hope and ...“

BT: Was he hurt by the press he got in Israel?

YS: Very much so. Very much so.

BT: Did he ask you why the people are so aggressive?

YS: Yes, he was, he was very concerned about it. He was very sad about it. He wanted to know the reasons and the explanations.

BT: What did you tell him?

YS: I felt terribly, because I had to explain and I did. And I told him what I just told you about the Jewish complexes in Israel, and I tried, I tried to instruct him about the Israeli sensitivities. He was listening very carefully, by the way. Sometimes I have heard that he should have said the same things but differently, a little bit, slightly differently. And ... and you know the Israeli sensitivities and all the traumas, the Holocaust, etc., so I tried to explain to him how to put the same position, but not to touch the open very sensitive wounds and nerves. And he was listening very carefully, by the way. And if I am not mistaken, I can't demonstrate. I can't, I can't, but I had the impression that later on he did not leave his basic positions, but probably he put them a little bit differently. But I am not sure about it.

BT: Well, the problem is that it looked to many people in that time really as a disgusting internal Jewish Ping-Pong, the accusations and the bad remarks. Because in the Begin times - you remember ? - he called Begin bad names and Begin called him bad names, and then he gave an interview in „Trouw“-newspaper where he screamed against the Israeli army as a „bunch of bandits“, and then the famous remark of „Die Juden sind ein mieses Volk“ (the Jews are a base people), and „if they are a people at all.“ Many Israeli intellectuals in that time tried to give the point of view that everything, what Kreisky says is because he has a Jewish problem!

YS: They did, they did do it. The intellectuals, you mean? That's correct. Well, the same question you can present with regard to other problems. I don't remember the intellectuals adopting a different position with regard to other national very critical and substantial problems. The intellectuals were not too different from the political power of our life. The intellectuals were not too courageous to present a different picture of needs and hopes for the future.

BT: Did Kreisky hope that the intellectuals would become more active in Israel, that they would get more influence?

YS: I don't remember. I don't remember talking about the Israeli intellectuals.

BT: Kreisky wrote in his memories that ..., when it came to the question of the Jewish people, he analysed what are the Jewish people. And his opinion was that Jews who come from Yemen or Iraq or Egypt or Syria, that they had actually nothing in common with the Ashkenazim. And he thinks that, if at all, it will be still a very, very long time till these many ethnic groups will become one people. And he said that the Jews are actually a religious, historically religious community, because these historical bonds are the only thing they have in common. Otherwise, they have actually nothing in common. Was he discussing that with you?

YS: No, no.

BT: Not at all?

YS: No, no, because one of the problems of the Israelis - it's a very typical problem - is that you have to accept somebody else's position 100 percent to agree with him. And this is not my basic attitude to life and to people. My personal sympathy, empathy with Bruno Kreisky does not necessarily say that I shared 100 percent of his opinions. He was not a Zionist, I am a Zionist! But I was convinced by his goodwill and by his good intentions and by the fact that he might play a very positive role. So I don't think that he thought that it will be desirable to discuss those basic problems. Because in this particular sense I believed that we wouldn't have found the same or common ground.

BT: Did he ask you ...?

YS: He was not a Zionist. I accepted it.

BT: Did he ask you, if you wanted to meet Palestinians?

YS: I don't remember exactly, but there was no specific proposal.

BT: And you didn't propose it to him?

YS: No, I didn't propose and he didn't propose. And this is the reason why I was quite astonished to realise that people are saying that I was in ...

BT: Majorca.

YS: ... in Majorca...

BT: ... to meet Arafat.

BT: How many years later did you meet him again?

YS: Two years or three years later.

BT: In Vienna?

YS: In Vienna, yes, in Vienna. I came especially to see him, to be informed about what is happening in the Palestinian camp. And at that time I saw him in his private house, because when I met him, when I met him, he already had his eyes' problem and his health was in deterioration. One of the reasons I went especially, although I don't like to go abroad very frequently, (was that) I was told that his health is deteriorating - and the news coming from Austria were very, very bad - so I wanted to see him. I was afraid, probably, I would not have another opportunity. So I went. I went to see him.

BT: You were in that time still with the Labour party?

YS: Still with the Labour party.

BT: In that time the Camp David agreement ...

YS: Was signed.

BT: When you met him the second time, was that before or after the Lebanon war?

YS: That's a good question. I believe it was ...

BT: Before.

YS: ... earlier, it was earlier. And I can judge it according to the fact that, as you probably remember, I was the most outspoken opponent to the Lebanese war, and I am quite sure that, if it was after the war or in the middle of the war, we would have discussed the Lebanese war in details. And that was not the topic on the agenda. So I am quite sure it was before.

BT: Camp David was signed, was he optimistic now about the Middle East situation? Or did he tell you that Camp David ignored actually the Palestinian cause?

YS: That was his position. He was very much concerned about the fact that the peace agreement with Egypt excluded or ignored the Palestinian problem and he considered the Palestinian problem - and rightly so, I believe - as the essence and the heart of the Israeli-Arab conflict. So he was very much concerned about it, yes.

BT: In that time you had met already Palestinians! Did you discuss these meetings with him and what you had heard from them and the situation?

YS: Yes, yes, yes.

BT: Do you remember the questions he had, or in what he was really interested?

YS: He was always interested in our domestic situation, whether our position will have, the chance to develop and to buy a greater presence and dominance in Israel. That was his main concern. And frankly speaking, I could not tell him better news in 1981 than in 1978 or 79. The situation was not substantially different. It was more or less quite the same. On the one hand, it was encouraging ...

BT: In the Labour party now?

YS: In the Labour party and everywhere. Well, of course, the Israeli Labour party was the key element for the change. You could not expect that the change will come out of the Likud party. But Labour went more and more to the right. This is the reason, why I left the Israeli Labour party in 1984. In '84 I left the Israeli Labour party due to the differences of opinion with regard to the Palestinian problem, to the Lebanese war, to the right to self-determination, of the Palestinian problem, the whole

mixture of problems. And the gaps between myself and the party were very, very wide and deep. And this was in 1984. You know that it wasn't easy for a person like me to leave the Israeli Labour party, which was by the way, two months after I had been elected overwhelmingly by a majority of 75, 80 percent into the central committee. You know that sometimes people are leaving their own parties by estimating that their chances to be re-elected are slim. I was elected two months earlier by 75 percent or 80 percent of the people.

BT: Yes, but that means that there were already enough people here, who were convinced by what you were saying?

YS: No, it had an internal reason. It was a special reason. People didn't accept my views. On the contrary, they hated them a lot, but first, well-humbly speaking, I can tell that they appreciated my capabilities and they appreciated my courage, to present them very openly, and probably they thought that it is good that somebody, somebody will present those opinions; but let us hope that there will not be too many Yossi Sarids in the Israeli Labour party. So it was a combination of personal relations and the fact that they understood that such a position is legitimate, even though they hated it tremendously. You can't imagine!

BT: People in the Labour party say that, when Peres went to his first meeting with the king of Morocco and that was after a meeting with Kreisky - that he thought the time had come to speak to the Palestinians, to speak to Arafat. And Beilin said, „Well, I am all for it, just tell me and I (will) organise a meeting.“ And Peres said, „No, no, not yet. Because if that will become known, I am losing the elections.“

YS: I believe it is right. I don't know the details, but I believe it.

BT: When Camp David happened, it seems, that there was already a new thinking in the Labour party with your comrades that maybe we are on the wrong train, maybe we should talk to them?

YS: Well, in 1984 Shimon Peres was elected as prime minister.

BT: Yes, but I speak about the time before.

YS: He did nothing - he did nothing for the Palestinian cause. I didn't notice a great change between Shimon Peres A and Shimon Peres B as a prime minister.

YS: And I remember the famous meeting of the Socialist International in Lisbon by refusing to see Issam Sartawi, when Issam Sartawi was assassinated during this meeting.

BT: Kreisky, it seems, had given up on Peres, no? Did he say anything about his relationship?

YS: For sure, for sure he did. For sure he did. And he didn't have many compliments.

BT: You remember ...?

YS: Yes, he didn't have many compliments for Shimon Peres and he didn't raise any expectations of Shimon Peres. But I can't quote him, because I am not sure that I remember very clearly the wording. But the atmosphere was there, there is no question about it. The general attitude towards the Israeli Labour party, the leadership of the Israeli Labour party, Shimon Peres in particular, was very, very clear. You can't be mistaken.

BT: In the Begin-years the Labour party went more and more to the right under Peres. Was Kreisky aware of that? Was he well-informed? When you talked to him, did you have the feeling that he knew very well what was going on in Israel?

YS: Yes, he was informed and that's the reason why I didn't present any significant change.

BT: What was it what he gave you, was it a sort of global tour he gave you?

YS: Yes, a global tour much of the history. He was a great witness of the history of the last fifty, sixty years. And I can tell you that I was tremendously attracted and charmed by his global view, by his memories, by his experience. And he told many stories about the past and about other politicians, about other experiences. For me it was an outstanding experience.

BT: When you came back home after such meetings with Kreisky and you told your friends about it, how did they react to it?

YS: I don't think they reacted at all! You know, that in Israel Europe is not considered very seriously; Austria is not considered very seriously, Bruno Kreisky, well Bruno Kreisky was out of limits at that time, if I am not wrong. So probably they were interested, but not too much.

BT: Was he associated in the Israeli consciousness with Austria?. I mean, Austria is a land of Nazis, of anti-Semitism till today.

YS: Yes, yes, yes.

BT: Do you think that he would have been considered differently, if he would have been, let us say, the chancellor of a South American country?

YS: A little bit, a little bit, a little bit. I think that it could have been different.

BT: Which means...?

YS: Because the combination between Austria and Bruno Kreisky was not, was too much for the Israelis to swallow.

BT: Would you say that they could not accept the fact that suddenly in the country, which was historically known to be anti-Semitic and Catholic and the birthland of Hitler, that there suddenly rose a Jewish chancellor? Was that one of the main reasons which disturbed them?

YS: Yes. That was one of the main reasons, no question about that. And people were convinced that for Kreisky, in order to survive politically in such a state, like Austria he should, he should be sort of an anti-Israel.

BT: Joseph Burg told me that, when Begin sent him to Vienna after a few very sharp remarks of Kreisky against the Begin government, he got the impression that Kreisky actually was friendly with the Arabs only, because of oil, and gas, and petrol, and because he wanted to have all the goodies from the Arab world, to keep down the unemployment in Austria.

YS: It's nonsense. It's nonsense. I don't think that this was the main concern of the Israeli people about Bruno Kreisky. It was the combination between Bruno Kreisky as a Jewish person with Austria, with the history of Austria - that was the main factor.

BT: Now, after the Lebanon war ...

YS: By the way, I wrote an opera together with Amnon Dankner, a modern opera about Golda Meir. And there was a wonderful scene there between Kreisky and Golda. About Golda's complaint about Kreisky for not giving her a glass of water. It was very funny, but very, very sad, you know. The story with the glass of water was very prominent.

BT: But it was a wrong story. I mean, it was a straight lie!

YS: But we are not talking about the facts. We are talking about Golda Meir.

YS: Golda Meir, unfortunately, was considered to be a very honest person. I have a different opinion about Golda Meir and about her integrity. But, nevertheless, the image, the image of Golda Meir in Israel was as a very honest person.

BT: You mean even historically?

YS: When she told, if she told that Bruno Kreisky did not offer her a glass of water, he became an integral part of the Israeli folklore. He is remembered, he is remembered, he is remembered as the one who did not offer a glass of water to an old lady, no question about that. Well, for those who remember. You know, the young people are not, are not very much interested.

BT: I think the young people don't even know anymore who he was!

YS: Yes, that's correct. They don't know even who Golda Meir was.

BT: When Kreisky became involved in the prisoner exchange, he helped many. I mean, he was very successful together with Amry and others, and he worked very close with the Israeli establishment, especially with the Israeli army. Nevertheless, after the second prisoner exchange there was by the Likud government an organised propaganda against him, which said that the thousand five hundred prisoners which were exchanged for five soldiers, that this was actually Kreisky's idea and that they had to obey. Which was not true, of course. But this was leaked, so the last visit of Kreisky to Israel, which was organised by the Center of Peace in the Middle East could not take place.

YS: Well, you know, you know that ...

BT: And so it was. How is it possible that in a society where the press plays such a big role, that in that time the whole press was totally misled and went into that? Because I heard from Kreisky's office that Shulamit Aloni - and excuse me that I am mentioning her name here - that she called him then and said that they cannot assure his safety in Israel which was outrageous, and that was for him the end.

YS: I remember that, unfortunately. I remember that. Well, when you are doing a favour to somebody you are in trouble.

BT: And you know she had got the Kreisky peace prize?

YS: I am not talking about Shulamit Aloni personally. I am talking about the very common phenomenon that when you are doing a favour you are in trouble. Because, when you are doing a favour, you can't promise a success, a total success. You have to pay, you have to pay a certain price. So the image of Bruno Kreisky - as not a very friendly image with regard to Israel - was so powerful, was so deep he could not change it. Even by doing favours to Israel, to the Israeli government, to the Israeli state. He couldn't overcome, he couldn't overcome the image - and I put it very mildly - as a non-friendly person towards Israel, nothing could have helped.

BT: Has this also to do with the Israeli. They wrote the most outrageous articles against him. How is it that no one of the journalists ever went to the ethnic court of the Israeli press association here to say, „This is going too far. We should not do that?“

YS: I believe that nobody was very much interested. And nobody felt provoked by those remarks about Kreisky. We have to take into consideration that the Israeli press at that time was under the very heavy, rightist influence and the dominant figures in the Israeli press had a rightist ideological background.

BT: And they were totally obedient to what the Shin Bet or the Mossad agents would tell them?!

YS: Sure, sure. And we have very good evidences for that in many other cases. The Israeli press, as far as the major issues on our national agenda are concerned, the Israeli press was too obedient and, I believe, that annoyed at the present moment. They swallowed all the versions of the political establishment with regard to problems of life and death, of war and peace. So we don't have to be very surprised about their ability or their willingness to swallow the version about Bruno Kreisky. Generally speaking, it is very difficult to change images, in Israel it is almost impossible. Because in Israel the division is between people who are for us and against us. So once you are categorised as somebody who is against us, to change it, it's impossible. I don't know of any other example that people who were considered as anti-Israelis changed their image and were accepted sooner or later by the Israeli public opinion, that is to say, by the press or by any other political scene.

BT: Now, why do I press this subject so hard? Because I remember my days were filled by analysing all these terrible, terrible articles and Kreisky himself once asked me, „Maybe one day you will make an analysis about the Israeli press and how bitterly they were against me.“

YS: It's not the press, it's the national mood.

BT: Which means...?

YS: The national mood divides very clearly, very strictly between good people and bad people. I believe, it is everywhere, but in Israel it is very, very, it is very, very ...

BT: Essential?

YS: ... essential, yes.

BT: This total inactivity, of those people who should say, „Listen, it is wrong what we are doing“ was also present in the years when the right started the insults against Yitzhak Rabin, where actually the majority of the press reported about it, but no one ever questioned the fact that there was a murder already going on. Which means that the people of the book don't realise the importance of the word!

YS: Probably you are right. I can assure you one thing: that whenever I spoke about Kreisky, I said very nice things about him. But I don't believe it did help Kreisky and it didn't help myself. So people said, „Okay, well, it is not a surprise that a person like Yossi Sarid is supporting Kreisky and has a good idea about him.“ So whoever, tried to defend Kreisky, his role was considered immediately as a collaborator of our opponents.

BT: When you look back at what Kreisky told you more than twenty years ago - what he said about his vision of the peace in the Middle East, is actually exactly the same what all the leaders of the peace-making process said twenty years later.

YS: Yes, that is a good question ...

BT: And, nevertheless, everyone - including Arafat, it seems - has forgotten that there was once a man called Kreisky, who started the whole thing.

YS: Yes. I don't want to compare myself, because ..., because it would not be right to compare myself with Kreisky. But I always keep telling my colleagues that we are hated twice: the first time is when we are saying things which are very difficult to be swallowed or to be digested by the Israeli public opinion. But you can imagine that after ten or twenty or twenty-five years, when our positions are being implemented in practice, we would have been the most popular persons on earth. „Okay, we were just, so people will appreciate our previous positions and they will admit, 'Okay, we were wrong. Yossi Sarid was right. So let us vote for Yossi Sarid and let us elect him as the prime minister of Israel!'" You are absolutely wrong, because we are hated twice. The second time is when people are saying, „Okay, the bastard Yossi Sarid was right." And it is very difficult for them to accept that people like us were right, and sometimes they are even saying, „Okay, reality is such, because Yossi Sarid said, many years ago that it will be such!" You see? „So without," - it's a self-fulfilling prophecy, „so without Yossi Sarid prophesying that one day we will recognise the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people, the Palestinians would not have exercised this right. If Yossi Sarid would have ..."

BT: Prophets were never liked in this country.

YS: Yes. Okay, what can we do about it? So, if you think that Bruno Kreisky is now more popular than he was before, because his prophecy is now being implemented by others, you are absolutely wrong.

Barbara Taufar: We know that Bruno Kreisky was right. Would you say he was too early, that his vision could not have been appreciated, because he was too early?

YS: Yes, no question about it, no question about that. But I repeat and I emphasise the point that by being too early for your times, this is not to say that, when times come, you will be rehabilitated.

BT: As a Jew?

YS: Particularly as a Jew.

BT: In the Jewish world?

YS: Of course, in the Jewish world. The Jewish world is a very difficult world.

BT: So you mean in another fifty years even the Jews will appreciate him?

YS: Let us hope so. But it will take fifty years, at least.

BT: Thank you, Yossi.