

*Fierce debate has been raging in 'The Independent' about Israel's conduct in Gaza. Here, one leading Jewish thinker argues that until Jews shake off their persecution complex, there can never be peace in the Middle East.*

In most Jewish circles, if you pause to question this narrative and suggest that it might be exaggerated, that it unrealistically implies a level of dreadfulness and victimhood unique to Jews, you'll attract hostility and disbelief in equal measure, and precious little public sympathy. But in the work of Professor Salo Baron, probably the greatest Jewish historian of the 20th century, we find powerful justification for just such a questioning.

Professor Baron spoke out angrily against what he called the "lachrymose conception of Jewish history", which placed suffering at the centre of Jewish life. "Suffering is part of the destiny" of the Jews," Professor Baron said in an interview in 1975, "but so is repeated joy as well as ultimate redemption." Another distinguished historian, Professor Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, said Baron always fought against the view of Jewish history as "all darkness and no light. He laboured mightily to restore balance".

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