

THE THREAT TO JEWISH EXISTENCE

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Forty years ago there were three million Jews in Poland. Most of them were killed by Hitler. Some few made it alive to Israel. Forty years ago there were three million Jews in the Soviet Union. Through various skillful government maneuvers which have sought to make Judaism, as well as Christianity, unattractive, few of these Jews openly identify themselves with the Jewish people or with Jewish organizations. It is entirely possible that within another twenty years, the Russians will have a nation which is "Judenrein", without Jews. There is, of course, a sharp difference between the situations in Poland and in the Soviet Union. In the case of Poland, the Jews have physically disappeared. In the case of Russia, the Jews have disappeared because they have been forcibly separated from their synagogues, from their educational institutions, and from their cultural traditions.

There remain only two fairly substantial Jewish communities which have any chance for survival on this planet. In the State of Israel about two and one-half million refugees from Hitler and refugees from the Arab nations have gathered together in a dramatic attempt to swim upstream, to reverse the saga of Jewish destruction, and to demonstrate, once again, that the Jewish people is miraculously eternal. No one can accurately project how long the Israelis can handle the double problem of controlling the antagonistic nations along their frontier, while trying to pacify an unfriendly host of Arabs now living within the new Israeli boundaries. Someone once said, "There is no greatness without audacity". The Hebrew word for audacity is "chutzpah". The Israelis eat chutzpah for breakfast every day. Indeed, that they go to bed at night hopeful of sleeping peacefully is also an act of chutzpah, within the current situation.

The second substantial Jewish community surviving today is, of course, the American community of five million Jews. On the surface, it might seem that our community is more certain of survival than the Israelis, but, as we have discussed earlier this Yom Tov, our foes are the more devious kind. The American Jewish community is threatened from within by indifference, by lack of commitment, by assimilation into a materialistic pleasure-idolizing culture. We could speak about these problems at great

length, but, tonight, we shall consider some of the problems that Israeli and American Jews have together, problems which threaten them both. We ought to know that the Israeli-Arab encounter shows signs of accelerating into a kind of Holy War between Mohammedans, over 100 million of them, and Jews everywhere. We ought to know that Arab propagandists are no longer confining themselves to attacks on the Israeli government. They have now chosen the entire Jewish people as their target. We ought to know that some right wing fundamentalist Christian organizations have readily taken to this anti-Jewish Arab propaganda, and once again, libels against Jewish character may be seen not only in every hate sheet in America but in some right-wing Protestant church publications. The same kind of propaganda is being filtered by the Arabs to the Black extremists who think of Jews as rich and oppressive capitalists, while the Arabs are viewed as impoverished and oppressed masses. It is true, incidentally, that the mass of Arabs are impoverished, but they are oppressed by their own Arab leaders. As a matter of contrast, the Israeli Arabs have a much higher standard of living than the Arabs residing in Arab lands.

Public opinion polls seem to show that the longer Israel holds on to the conquered lands, the more Americans seem to shift over to the Arab side. When Israel was surrounded by hundreds of thousands of howling Arabs bent on pushing the Israelis into the sea, almost every American sympathised with the Israelis; but when they showed themselves to be strong, and the T.V. spotlight is now on the Arab refugees, the issues in the contest seem to be forgotten. The startling fact that emerges from a recent survey is that 37% of Americans are clearly prejudiced with respect to Jews. People capable of such prejudice find it difficult to separate truth from fiction, propaganda from facts. We American Jews ought to face the reality of anti-semitism, just as we have to face the reality of the accelerating war in the Middle East.

Anyone who studies the developments in Israel and in the American hate newspapers has to conclude that, like it or not, American Jews can no longer separate themselves from Israel's afflictions. Like it or not, we Jews have been forced back upon one another and are being held responsible for each others actions. Yet, it has always been this way with the Jews, as it is true for any minority group. Let one member of a minority group do something that seems unusual, and all members of that group are criticized. This is one reason why a minority group has to try to achieve higher standards than the

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majority group. This is why the minority group must have a strong self-discipline. This is one reason why Jews have long said, "Kol Yisrael arayvim zeh b'zeh, all Israel is intertwined together".

Several months ago, some remarks made from this pulpit received considerable publicity in the newspapers. On a Friday evening this Rabbi said that Israel might have been unwise in invading the Beirut airport in Lebanon. He was anxious to make two points in that ^{much} criticized talk, first, that the Israelis, being human, would probably make many mistakes in the future, and, secondly, that within the current war the Israelis were worthy of our support, even if they made an occasional mistake. I also wanted us, as American Jews, to understand that we can feel comfortable in supporting Israel, even while we reserve the right to disapprove of any specific steps she might take in her attempt to survive. I felt then, as I feel now, that the Israeli government does not speak for American Jews: nor need we endorse every thing that government does. On the other hand, I strongly feel that if Israel goes under, American Jewry will have been dealt a staggering blow, from which, it possibly might not be able to recover.

Eric Hoffer, the workingman's philosopher, who has been consulted by presidents and Congress for his opinions, has stated often on T.V. interviews that he, as a working man, feels that Israel must survive, if human history is to make any sense. If Israel survives, he has said, then, human history takes on a deeper dimension, and all peoples will be encouraged in their particular struggles. If Israel dies, says Hoffer, then, all mankind has cause to despair, because the end of Israel means the waste of 4,000 years of courageous human effort. If Hoffer, who seems not to be Jewish, has this conviction, how much more so must we Jews think this! For who founded modern Israel but the brothers and sisters of our fathers and mothers? If the Israelis had not worked a miracle in the desert, dayanu! They would still be worthy of our help, since they are clearly . . . bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; but, now, after what they have done, in a dramatic demonstration of human courage and invention, it seems to me that any human being, even those not related by blood, would be impelled to make certain that this small but precious community survives.

How can American Jews get other Americans to understand what is going on in Israel today? How can we combat the Arab propoganda

which will surely increase in the days ahead. It seems to me that we have to make some kind of parallel so that Americans can grasp the situation quickly. What is going on in Israel today is ^{in some ways} almost exactly parallel to what went on in early America. Just as the Pilgrims came here as religious refugees, so the Jews who came to Israel came as religious refugees from Hitler. Just as the early Americans found a resident population, the Indians, who resented the new immigrants, so the Israelis found a resident population, the Arabs, who resented their coming. Just as the Indians staged night raids on early American settlements and burned them to the ground, so the Arabs staged night raids against early Israeli settlements and burned them to the ground. Just as the Indians feared the white man, because he brought with him a different and more developed culture, so the Arabs fear the Jew, because he brings with him a different and a more developed culture.

There are, however, some very important differences in this parallel which every Jew should understand, so that he can tell the story in an informed way. When the early Americans came to America, they found that many of the Indians lived in settled agricultural areas. When the Jews came to Palestine in the 20th century, few Arabs lived in settled agricultural areas, because the land was anything but the fertile land of America. As Clarence Darrow said 50 years ago, "Palestine is a land of sand and stones, and the stones are there to keep the sand from blowing away." Fifty years ago, most of the Arabs in Palestine were nomads, Bedouin, who wandered with their sheep from area to area in search of a little grass. When the Jews came to Palestine in recent decades, they displaced no Arabs; they drove out no Arabs. The early Pilgrims brought guns with them to America; the Jews coming to Palestine brought no guns. They were a pacifist people, taught for centuries in Europe to survive against the majority culture by bowing low.

If one studies the history of the first Arab-Israel war in 1948, one is shocked to discover that it was not a war led by the Palestine Arabs. It was led by Arabs who were untouched by the Jewish immigration, by Egyptians and Syrians. Prior to this first war on Israel, during which the Arabs seized much of the land granted Israel by the United Nations, there had been no Arab refugees. Every American Jew ought to know the facts.

There were no Arab refugees until Nasser attacked the new tiny state. Such Arab refugees as exist, exist precisely because of Arab militancy, and primarily because of the militancy of non-Palestinian Arabs. Every American Jew ought to know that the great Nasser, who cries publicly because of the fate of his Palestinian brethren, not only caused them to become refugees, but while he controlled the refugee camp in Gaza for almost 20 years, he refused to let the refugees resettle in Egypt. Let no one misunderstand. The Egyptian Arabs consider themselves superior to the Palestine Arabs, and they do not choose to make any real sacrifices in their behalf. There is another part to the refugee story that the anti-semites forget. There are, as a result of the 20 years of war between the Arabs and Israel, hundreds of thousands of Arab refugees. The official number is far less than the Arab propaganda office claims. Naturally, their ranks have been swelled by birth, etc. Most of these ran in fear, or they ran at the request of Arab military commanders who wanted to bomb a given area. Incidentally, those Arabs who chose to stay in Israeli conquered areas have more work and are living at higher standards than ever before, and they are permitted to send money and supplies which they earn in Israel to their refugee brethren.

Now what about the Jewish refugees from Arab lands? Have you ever heard about them? There were about 250,000 such refugees. Where are they? There are no Jewish refugee camps because Israel absorbed the Jewish refugees from Arab lands. They are treated as full and equal citizens. The resident Israelis made sacrifices in behalf of the newcomers, gave them schooling, hospitalization, and housing. On land less fertile and far less plentiful than land controlled by the Arab nations, Israel resettled her vast number of refugees. Why do the Arabs continue to play the game of refugees? If they are better than the Israelis, as they claim, why don't they show, at least, an equal compassion for their brethren, and take them in.

Recently, I was privileged to visit Israel and that section known as the Golan Heights. It is in northeast Israel near Syria. From this section, the Syrians, protected by the heights and by impenetrable concrete bunkers, would shell the Israeli farms below, so that children slept as a matter of regularity in underground bedrooms. In the Six Day War, at the cost of many lives, the Israelis captured the Syrian bunkers and the land beyond. Once the bunkers were taken, the Arabs fled before the Israelis as if they had the atomic bomb. An entire city of 20,000 Arabs was a ghost town before the detachment of Israeli soldiers arrived,

and before a shot was fired. Had these Arabs remained in the city, Kunetra, they would be no worse off than the Arabs in occupied Jordan, in Nablus and Hebron, who live as they have always lived, working their farms, tending their sheep, selling their wares in the market-place.

As I drove along the plains of the Golan Heights, I could see, for miles and miles, fertile land, much more fertile than most of the land of Israel. As I drove, I couldn't help but think to myself, "Why didn't Syria invite the refugees from the earlier war to settle this land, most of which is untended?" It is such a contrast to see that in Israel every square inch of available land is worked, and in some of the Arab territories, vast areas of good land are ignored. American Jews ought to know that if the Arabs were primarily concerned with the fate of their refugees, they could easily take care of them in their own unsettled territories; but the Arabs are not primarily concerned with resettling their refugees. They are concerned with eliminating Israel, and they will not rest until they have done so, or until Damascus and Cairo have been destroyed.

I would be disappointed if any of you would indulge in a hate Arab campaign. This is not my position, nor can it be the American Jewish position. The Arabs are, for the most part, an impoverished people. Their governments are feudal, dictatorial, and reactionary. The Arabs are people who need sympathy and help. When you visit the Gaza refugee camp area and suddenly realize that the refugees live no worse than many of the local Arabs, as they have lived all their lives, when you see doorways no higher than three feet, and roofs made of tree branches, and floors of sand, then your heart must go out to these people whose leaders hold them down for their own selfish advantage. We Jews can only have sympathy for the Arab peoples, but we must understand that the Arab political and rich land-owners and propagandists are quite another matter. Any group that could be so indifferent to the needs of its own people is capable of greater cruelty to those not of its people. The Arab political leaders receive financial aid in huge amounts from the wealthy sheiks of Kuwait and other oil rich Arab lands. They have their counterpart of the United Jewish Appeal, Israel Bonds, and the like. Three or four unbelievably wealthy Arab rulers can equal the giving of all of America's Jews in a few seconds, and they do. They give, however, not to raise the standards of the people, but to buy planes and artillery to destroy Israel.

Did you know, for example, that impoverished Egypt has 800 pieces of Soviet artillery across 100 miles of the Suez battle line? That's 8 artillery pieces for each mile, a cannon for every 200 yards. The Israelis, ^{who} are not accustomed to a war in fixed positions, are shelled constantly across the canal, sometimes, without let-up from dawn to dusk. It seems that there is no end to the war material possessed by the impoverished Egyptians. Israel is now receiving 50 Phantom Jets from the United States to help her in her unequal aerial battle with Egypt. Each of these Jets costs Israel six and a half million dollars. Russia has supplied Egypt with a huge number of planes. Russia is training the Egyptian pilots, and Russia is one of the main reasons that the Arabs will not establish a peace with Israel. This is the same Russia that has systematically closed Jewish folk schools and cultural institutions at home. This is the same Russia which has made it impossible to buy Jewish religious books or objects and which systematically has sent Jewish engineers to distant Siberian cities where no other Jews are present.

All of this adds up to one main point as far as the American Jewish community is concerned. We can no longer afford to be detached observers of the Arab-Israeli War. Just as we are affected by the anti-Jewish propaganda which the Arabs are spreading throughout the world, so we are affected by the outcome of the accelerating Middle East War. Several conclusions are inevitable for us. First of all, we have to give everything we possibly can afford to the United Jewish Appeal this year and we have to purchase Israel Bonds to the limit of our ability. Secondly, we have to know the facts about the Arab-Israel situation as thoroughly as we know the fingers of our hand, so that we can intelligently discuss the situation with those around us. Thirdly, we can no longer afford the luxury of indifference to any aspect of the Jewish community, be it synagogue, the local Jewish Federation, or our national institutions. There remain only a few precious Jews in the world. We must stand close not only to our people but to our organizations and to our religious faith. Never before has one Jew needed another like today. If we join hands, we shall, at the very least, seem to be of greater numbers than we really are. If we cooperate with pride and courage, we shall work yet another miracle and give hope to all men who struggle against great odds. Let us pray that we can say next Yom Kippur, "Am Yisrael Chai, the people of Israel lives! The people of Israel still proclaim its prophetic message to all mankind." "