

Sermon delivered on Yom Kippur
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Beth Am, Miami, Florida

JERUSALEM THE GOLDEN
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While we American Jews are engaged in a spiritual struggle to retain our Judaism, while we have to fight off the internal enemies of indifference and ignorance, our brothers in Israel are engaged in a more obvious kind of battle. Their enemy has guns and tanks and Russian supersonic aircraft. Israel has other enemies than the Arabs, however. It is opposed by the Russians, by the Communist-bloc nations, by China, by India, and by certain sections of the Christian world. While we have Christian friends also, it is discouraging to discover some Christians in high places taking positions against Israel. It is not easy to understand why this tiny nation has so many enemies, but, as Jews, we have to try to comprehend what is going on, for we ourselves are directly affected in many subtle and telling ways.

When the Arabs failed to drive the Israelis into the sea, as they had threatened in 1967, they resorted to diplomacy and propaganda to try to win in the United Nations what they could not win on the battlefield. Since there are many Arab nations in the U.N., and since many non-Arab nations value their trade with the Arabs, they had an endless array of speeches on their side. Those who heard the U.N. sessions in 1967 could easily have been persuaded that the Israelis were the most wicked nation in history. The Israelis had only one speaker, Abba Eban. The debate was thus equalized.

Within the last week, the U.N. Security Council voted a resolution demanding that Israel halt certain kinds of construction in the "old city" of Jerusalem, which was captured in 1967 from Jordanian attackers. On Monday, Israel officially rejected the U.N. resolution. Now, one who was not familiar with the history of Palestine might think that the U.N. was trying to act on the side of justice and that Israel was in error. It behooves us, therefore, to review such facts as are available to us.

We all know that Palestine was never an Arab state. In recent decades, it was controlled by Great Britain under a mandate from the League of Nations. Prior to that, it was controlled for centuries by Turkey. If we go back as far as 1844, we can learn from the ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA that the Jewish population of Jerusalem was 7120, while there were only 5000 Moslems. By 1896, there were more Jews in Jerusalem than there were Moslems and Christians together. In 1948, there were 100,000 Jews in Jerusalem compared to 40,000 Moslems and 25,000 Christians. #1 When the United Nations partitioned

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#1 Many of the statistics quoted herein are derived from official research papers of the Synagogue Council of America.

Palestine, taking away from the Jews much of the land promised to them under the Balfour Declaration, the Arabs defied the U. N. and attacked the Jewish community. Part of the partition plan was that Jerusalem be internationalized. This was accepted by the Israelis. It was not accepted by the Arabs. In the course of the 1948 war, initiated by the Arabs, Jordanian troops occupied the "old city" which had been assigned to the Palestinian Arabs, and the Jordanian government subsequently incorporated it into the Jordanian Kingdom and held it for twenty years in defiance of the U.N. During the course of these years in which Jordan controlled not only Moslem but Christian and Jewish holy places, the U.N. Security Council did not pass a resolution to internationalize Jerusalem, and the Christian churches applied no pressure on the Moslems. The Jews, however, were denied access to their holy places in the "old city", and the Christian population in Jerusalem declined from 25,000 to 10,000.

During these twenty years of Jordanian rule of the "old city", all but one of the 35 historic Jewish Houses of Worship were destroyed or converted to stables or henhouses. The ancient Jewish graveyard on the Mount of Olives was desecrated, and tens of thousands of its tombstones were torn up and used as building material for Jordanian military installations. During this entire period, the Christian churches said not a public word, and the U.N. was silent on the issue of Jerusalem.

Vatican Opposition

Today, however, the internationalization of Jerusalem has emerged as a major issue in Vatican and in certain other Christian circles. The official Vatican publication OSSERVATORE ROMANO, in its May 22-23 issue, speaks of the "Judaization of Jerusalem at the expense of the non-Jewish population". On June 24, Pope Paul spoke before the College of Cardinals and urged that Jerusalem "be protected by a special status, guaranteed by an international legal safeguard". (It ought to be stated that the American Jewish Committee feels that the Pope has not asked for full internationalization as have the Arabs.)

Two out of the three bishops in Jerusalem signed a statement in 1969 accusing the government of Israel of setting fire to the Al-Aksa mosque. These two bishops officially charged that the man the Israeli authorities arrested for the crime (a mentally deranged Australian Fundamentalist Christian) was in reality a Jew who was part of a dark Jewish conspiracy against Muslim shrines. Bishop Diodoros, a Greek Catholic, declared, "It is not unlikely that they will lay fire to The Church of the Holy Sepulchre and say that it was the result of a short circuit."

It is easy to detect an anti-Jewish bias in the remarks of these representatives of Christendom in Jerusalem. What is at stake in the current debate has perhaps more to do with church politics than with Arab-Jewish problems. Now, let us be clear about another point; Israel does not object to the internationalization of the holy places in Jerusalem. She is perfectly capable of understanding the interest of faithful Christians and Moslems in their shrines. What

Israel objects to is the internationalization of an entire section of Jerusalem which means, most likely, the presence of foreign troops on Israeli territory. Israel is quite correct in saying that the presence of Russian troops has solved nothing in Berlin, so what can that presence solve in Jerusalem? Israel has only to look at the chaos that exists in other cities where internationalization has been tried to find an excellent case for resisting what has been demanded of her.

Since these particular church authorities and the U.N. did not complain when the "old city" was under Jordanian sovereignty, in violation of the U.N. partition plan, since all shrines have been more meticulously cared for under Jewish supervision than under Arab supervision, since the Christian community left Jerusalem in droves when the Arabs were in control, but are not doing so now, it would seem that the Israelis have a right to be suspicious of the present demands that Israel surrender her authority. #2 We might well ask, why is it that certain Christian churches were not alarmed over the Muslimization of Jerusalem but are concerned about the "Judaization of Jerusalem", as the Vatican newspaper expresses it. The fact is that Jerusalem is not only now, but has been from time immemorial, a Jewish city. It is as a Jewish city that Jerusalem first acquired its universal quality, as the home of David and Solomon, and as the site of the First and Second Temples. It has been a Jewish city for the past several centuries as well. The real problem seems to be a theological one. It, apparently, bothers some church authorities that there is renewed Jewish vitality and sovereignty in the very place where Judaism is supposed to have ended 2,000 years ago. It is really difficult to blame Israelis for being less than accomodating to such concerns.

Arabs Have Prospered

While the "old city" of Jerusalem has a special charm, it is impractical to break the city up into sectors once again. Indeed, to do so would be a tragedy not only for the Jewish majority but for the Arabs living there as well. When the Israelis captured the "old city" in 1967, their first step was to open the gates which the Arabs had kept closed to Jews for twenty years. This meant that Arabs could go into the new city, also; so, for the first time in twenty years, Arab and Jew intermingled on the streets of Jerusalem. Never have the Arab merchants done so well as they have done in the years since 1967, and never have more high paying jobs been available to Arabs. The Arab standard of living in Jerusalem has substantially benefitted from Jewish government of the entire city. One has only to measure the pay Arab teachers are receiving today with what they were receiving under Jordanian rule to see how much the Arabs have prospered since the Israeli victory.

It is in no way a detraction from the sacred character of

#2 The Christian population in Jerusalem over-all has increased slightly since 1948. The number of Christians in all of Israel since 1948 has multiplied sharply.

Jerusalem to say that the city is more than a collection of holy places. It is a living and breathing entity, a human community engaged in the matters of everyday life. As such, it can be expected to grow, as all living cities do today. The Arabs have complained to the U.N. that the Israelis are building apartment houses in certain sections of the "old city"; but the Israelis are building far more apartment houses in the new city. Urban renewal and slum clearance is as important a project in Jerusalem as it is in Miami or in New York. To be sure, the building must be done with a special regard for the historical character of the city, but the question of aesthetics is one that hounds every urban planner in every city of the world. It is not distinctly a Jerusalem problem, nor an Israeli problem. To my knowledge, the gentlemen at the U.N. have not demanded that the government in New York City show more sensitivity for aesthetics in the erection of that city's steel monsters.

The antics at the U.N. these days, I am afraid to say, seem to be little more than an extension of Arab propaganda. Some of you may know that the Arabs are flooding the United States with millions of dollars worth of pamphlets which are not only critical of Israel but critical of all Jews. The old cliches about "Jewish International Bankers" and Jews controlling the press have been revived and even the old and vicious "Protocols of Zion" have been around. Smooth and articulate speakers for the Arab cause are available at no fee on every college campus and in any church, and even some young Jews, I am sorry to say, have swallowed what these propagandists have had to say.

It would seem that Jews are supposed to feel guilty for claiming a city which has long been Jewish. Had Jordan succeeded in capturing the new city of Jerusalem in this last war as they captured the "old city" in 1948, I wonder if the U.N. would have passed a resolution favoring the Jews against the Arabs. The Arabs seem to like to wage war against Israel on this premise: "If we win, we win; but if you win, you have to surrender what you won".

Arab Potential and Arab Government

As one who has studied Arabic and Arab culture in post-graduate work at Columbia University, I confess to you an admiration for the ancient Arab culture which kept alive the wisdom of Greece when all the world had sunk into the dark ages. I believe that Arabs, like any other humans, can be redeemed. That is to say, I believe they, too, are made in the image of the Divine, capable of growth and high deeds; but it would be folly to confuse Arab potential with what Arab governments are doing today. The Sudanese Arabs talk through their governments about the evil of Israel, while they systematically extinguish the black natives in southern Sudan. Egyptians talk about their peaceful nature, while they drop poison gas on tiny Yemen. Jordanians talk about their innocent intentions, but American correspondents who viewed the war between the Jordanian Regular Army and the guerillas came back and said, "Never have we seen such cruelty shown between people as close as these".

The U.N. has done precious little to keep Pakistan Moslems from ruthlessly exterminating the people of East Pakistan. On July

20th of this year, THE MIAMI HERALD carried a story about 150,000 Moslems from East Pakistan who were forced to flee from their Moslem brethren in the Pakistan army. The article reads, "A party of foreign journalists who recently toured the remote areas of Tripura and Assam said many East Pakistan refugees told of looting and burning of Moslem villages and the rape of Moslem women by Pakistani soldiers...One aged Moslem...told reporters...What sort of Moslems they are I cannot understand!" He said, "They are burning our villages and raping our women even though we are Moslems."

Now the kind of cruelty that reporters described in Jordan and in East Pakistan is to be contrasted with the way in which Israeli soldiers treated the Egyptians after the war of 1967. The whole world watched on T.V. while the Israelis allowed the conquered army to walk home and supplied the defeated men with water along the route. Yet in spite of the obvious differences between the Israeli and the Moslem governments, it is the Israelis who are condemned in the U.N. and it is Israel which is asked to surrender territory voluntarily to those who would destroy them. If the world cannot see through this sham, we Jews certainly can, and we shall not be afraid to support the Israeli cause. We really have little choice in the matter, for we seem to be the only true friends the Israelis have.

Jerusalem is not just another city to the Jews. For us, it is also a symbol. It is symbolic of the fact that the wandering and the suffering of man has meaning and can have a happy ending. As Eric Hoffer (a non-Jew) has said, "If the Jews, the oldest people of history, can emerge triumphant in Israel after their tortured career, then, there is hope for all of us who live with frustration and disappointment."

Elie Weisel has said of Jerusalem, "It is more than a city; it is a secret. For the exiled, it is a prayer. For all others, it is a promise." Let us resolve to do all that we can to see that the promise for Jews and for mankind is not betrayed.