

"IS BEN GURION AS GREAT AS MOSES"

Summary

Someone once said, "From Moses to Moses Maimonides, there was none like unto Moses". If ~~that person~~ author of that statement were alive today, he might possibly add, "There was none like unto Moses until David, David ben Gurion". This ~~unusually~~ ~~small~~ man of unusually small stature from an unusually small country has somehow physical

managed to attract the admiration of highly respected people throughout the world. CBS Television has devoted a nation-wide program to publicizing this Prime Minister of the world's newest democracy. The mass media magazines of America have run full-

length articles on his ~~amazing~~ life. ^{a few years ago} Americans in a recent public opinion poll voted him a more consequential person in world affairs than Nehru or Dulles.

What is the character of this man that ~~he has/had~~ is able to influence the thoughts of millions of people thousands of miles away from the desert that he inhabits?

~~Perhaps a story that he himself tells~~ Well, you can tell a man in part by the hero he admires. In Ben Gurion's mind, the greatest man in the world, until

his recent passing, was Albert Einstein. Of Einstein, Ben Gurion said, "he is the only scientist in the world who doesn't need a laboratory. His mind is his laboratory. Einstein carries with him his own tools and research lab wherever he goes". From his

admiration of Einstein we know that Ben Gurion would like most to be a scientist, and especially a theoretical scientist, one who delves into abstract theory and creates equations for future generations to revolve in a practical way. Ben Gurion would like to be above the mass of petty details which weigh down those involved in day to day routine problems. He would like to be free of the responsibility of dealing with thousands of people with differing views each with his own cause to plead. ~~Yet~~

In spite of B.G.'s private desires, however, he is a great man precisely because he is not a theoretical scientist or ^{abstract} moralist and precisely because no man ever has been more ingrained in the very earthy problems of a people with unparalleled difficulties. We begin our consideration of B.G. by ^{discussing} understanding ^{how} 1st that he is a man whose intellect soars above the problems of today and mingles with the great minds of the past and future, yet his heart holds him to the ^{overpowering} task of building a homeland for a people which has found and still finds enemies on every side.

In spite of B.G.'s yearning to deal with the world's long-range abstract problems, he shows a profound sensitivity for the needs of a few people searching to find meaning in history for themselves and their descendents. To a visiting American, he once said, "It is amazing to think that there were only 102 passengers on the Mayflower... yet from that beginning grew up this great phenomenon called America.. you have given the world a new concept of democracy". To understand the rarity of this ability to associate the importance of small beginnings to great endings, you have to contrast with this, the statement of President Eisenhower who said a few years ago, "We cannot send arms to Israel. After all there are 40 million Arabs and only a million and a half Jews". Ben-Gurion would answer Eisenhower, "If the early Americans had reasoned only in terms of numbers, they would never have had the presumption to attempt to win America from the Indians. ^{or to give me British}".

Someone once said, "The present is a cross-section of the ^{present} past and the future".

* B. G. uniquely thinks in these terms. To him, a small event in the ^{future} future is immediately enveloped by past associations and future projections. To him, therefore, numbers and quantity are not important. When a boatload of immigrants arrives in Haifa, he sees not merely these new, hopeful but untrained recruits, but the hundreds of thousands of Jews who entered Israel from Egypt under Moses, and the hundreds of thousands of Jews who will enter Israel in the future to live on the land that the new recruits will salvage from the desert. To B.G., the Bible is more than a Book of Faith, it is at once an historical lesson and a promise for the future. B.G. ~~does not~~ ~~study~~ ~~the~~ ~~Bible~~ ~~intently~~ ~~to~~ ~~obtain~~ ~~spiritual~~ ~~guidance~~, but to gain practical lessons for the building of modern Israel. There is no doubt that he has a mystical conviction of the fulfillment of the promise of the Return, and he is convinced that Israel today is writing a new chapter of the Bible, no less holy and no less meaningful than the previous chapters.

One day a member of his own political party, the Mapai, came out of B.G.'s office, obviously upset. Gesturing helplessly, he said, "I can't discuss anything with him. I speak of yesterday, and he talks about 3000 yrs ago. I speak of tomorrow and he discusses 2000 yrs from now. It is like trying to talk about today's meat shortage with Moses and some man who won't be born for another few thousand years."

Although B.G. would be classified in America as a Reform Jew or perhaps non-religious, the truth is that even the Orthodox Jew respect him. To them he is a timeless personality. He not only knows the Bible, he seems to be a figure directly out of it. In his biography of B.G., Robert St. John writes, "Other men quote history. B.G. gives the impression that those who act with him are living and creating history".

One of the great teachers represented in our Talmud declared, "The work is great.. the workers are few... and the Master of the House is urgent". B. G. does not seem to say that he acts on God's orders, but he has almost a mystical sense about his role in history. He spares neither himself nor those around him in advancing the cause which consumes him. The home in which he lives is small,; the furniture is sparse; the food is humble; his wages are \$400 a month; he dresses in a polo shirt; he drives a small European car. About himself, B. G. is austere and puritanical. He would be a misfit in modern America. We would call him a failure, because he could not accumulate material assets. In early America, however, he would be a leader among the pioneers, speaking a language that they understood, strength, dignity, and destiny. Men like Jefferson and Franklin would sympathize with his simple religious views and share his bent towards philosophy. Like them he has a belief in the limitless potential of dedicated men.

To understand B.G. and modern Israel, we have to go back to early American, to its ~~spor~~ problems and to its leaders. Placed against the modern American backdrop he would seem to be an overzealous busy-body, too well-informed, overly articulate, too idealistic. Eisenhower seeks his relaxation in golfing, but Thomas Jefferson relaxed by reading Philosophy. So Ben Gurion. He has become one of the world's authorities on the great Greek philosopher Plato, which he reads in the original Greek. A foreign diplomat who visits with him is startled to find the conversation swinging from the problem of Egyptian troops in the Gaza strip to the Platonic notion of using the army as a training ground for philosophers. Plato conceived of dividing the ideal nation into 3 groups, the workers, the soldiers, and the philosopher-king. B. G. conceives of training each person to be all of these 3 things, a worker, a soldier, and a philosopher. In truth, B. G. is all of these things.

B.G. is like G. Washington in that like Washington, he is essentially a man of peace who trained himself to defend his country against those who would deprive it of its right to freedom. He is like Jefferson in that he is versed in world problems not only in the realm of politics but in matters like under-sea plant life. He is unlike almost any American president in his combination of experience and virtues. Perhaps he is most like Lincoln, in that he had the most humble beginnings, was substantially self-taught, is a plain man, and a champion of social justice, and was unwittingly drawn into a war in which he had to be the commander in chief. If we ask ~~us~~ B.G. as great as some of the truly great Americans, we must answer that he obviously has similar characteristics which have been proven time and again in recurring crisis.

Was Is B. G., the leader of the new state of Israel as great as the Moses of old? There are some who will insist that he is. Certainly the two men share much in common. Moses redeemed his people from bondage. He led them out of Egypt. Ben Gurion led his people out of Europe, coming to Israel as a young man when few Jews had the courage or the vision to come there. Moses came with 600,000 Jews, the Bible tells us. B. G. came with a few friends. Moses could gain strength from the vast number of people who were with him. B.G. had only a vision to console him. Yet the people were soon to come, not led by B.G., but driven by persecutors, and they found B.G. waiting for them, with a plan and with a dream. To be sure there were other Jewish leaders during this period, but it is in the comparison of leaders that the true stature of B.G. emerges. On the one hand there was Chaim Weitzman who became the 1st

3. had no real power. Weitzman had obtained President of the new state, a position which was ~~really an honor and~~ a promise from Britain after the 1st world war that a Jewish state would be encouraged in Israel, but long after Britain had become a major enemy to the struggling

Palestinian Jewish community, Weitzman insisted that the only hope for the Jews was thru the benevolent mercy of Britain. The tragic failure of this hope came when Britain refused to permit Jews struggling to flee Hitler to enter Palestine lest the Arabs be disturbed and British oil rights be threatened. Weitzman was the gifted chemist and diplomat who was convinced that the only hope lay in the diplomatic approach through the great western powers.

Another potential Israeli leader was Vladimir Jabotinsky, magnificent orator, who headed a group of extremists. Jabotinsky's view was that the Jews should attempt to carve out a huge state in the Middle-east without regard to the rights of opinions of any nation large or small. Heir to his views was the Irgun and Stern gang which wanted to terrorize the Arabs and take an eye for an eye & life for a life. Ben Gurion had the seemingly impossible task of convincing the well-meaning abstractionist followers of Weitzman and the fanatic followers of Jabotinsky and the Irgun that his way was the only way of building a strong new state. He offered an empirical solution, to build not by getting the great nations to give present us with a gift; nor by sweeping aside the Arabs, but to build from the bottom up. Jews, he said, must become workers on the land. They must redeem the land, Jews must become soldiers. They must be prepared to defend their land they redeem. Israel, he taught, must be developed by Jews and defended by Jews independent of the aid of foreign powers, but Israelis must never become terrorists. The Arabs too, he said, have legitimate problems which we must help them to solve.

History was proven B.G. to be dramatically correct. Weitzman's influence ~~was~~ wained as ~~nation~~ the big powers one by one betrayed Israel, most of all Britain. Weitzman's great hope. The Irgun was crushed by B. G. when it attempted to act contrary to the moderate position of the Israeli govt. during the Arab war of 1948. Just as Moses had to crush the internal rebellion of Korach, so B. G. had to crush the fanatically nationalistic Irgun.

If the Irgun had not been crushed with such a fearless but dangerous action by B.G., the govt. of Israel today might well be dominated by this extremist faction, a fact that would be embarrassing to Jews thru the world. Had Israel waited with Weitzman for a show of generosity from Britain and the West, Israel would not today be a free nation. Israel exists today not merely because of the historic drive of this strange people, but because the right man was there to lead them in their hour of opportunity.

This was a man who sought to develop Israel thru 3 channels that of the worker on the land, the soldier defending his land, and the philosopher-king who was foundation and dispenser of good. He is seeking not merely to build himself in this image, but to build every Israeli in this image. Part of his motivation is his belief that Israel is a people of unusual potential. He calls them a "miraculous vitamin among the nations". He has said, "we are sons of a certain family. It is not only a Hebrew family. Properly speaking, it is a universal family. Its age is eternity; its home is the globe; its secret is faith; its banner is liberty; and its name is resistance... By resistance he meant not only resistance to Israel's oppressors but resistance to all forms of tyranny and injustice.

" He gave us a

When B. G. said that the age of Israel is eternity, we ~~have~~ a profound clue to his understanding of himself. He is acting not merely in the present, but in eternity, ^{he is acting} in a present, rooted in a living past, and tied to a living future. He imputes to all Israel, his own highly developed sense of historic and purposeful awareness. When the UN investigating commission visited Israel, he said to the delegates, "More than 300 yrs ago a ship by the name of Mayflower left Plymouth for the New World. It was a great event in American and English history. I wonder how many Englishmen and how many Americans know exactly the date when that ship left Plymouth and how many people were on that ship, and what was the kind of bread those people ate when they left Plymouth?"

Some of the investigators smiled, some shook their heads. "Well, B.G. continued, more than 3300 years ago, the Jews left Egypt, It was 3000 yrs before the Mayflower. But every Jew in the world knows the exact date. It was the 15th of Nisan. The bread they ate was matzah. " In this way did BG attempt to explain to non-Jews the attachment of the Jews to the soil of Israel and to the historic continuity of the Jews.

When BG resigned his position at the helm of the nation a few yrs ago, he was asked by his friends why he was going to leave the comforts of his home in established Israel to become a working member of a pioneer kibbutz in the desert. He replied ^{quoting} the prophet Habakkuk, "The righteous man lives by his faith. He will not preach to others, will not act the saint by calling on others to live justly, will not look for fault in his neighbor, but he will practice his faith in his daily life. He will live it". When he ^{got} into the car which was to take him away, ^{many people} crowds gathered ^{around} around with tears in their eyes, B. G. waved his hand towards the desert and said, "Do not weep. Follow me",

✓ Form 1

! continued

Ira Glickson