

The bitter controversy over the place of "religion" in the State of Israel lends special timeliness to Mr. Livneh's agonizing re-appraisal of the relevance of secular Zionism under present conditions. The author, a leading intellectual and noted writer as well as a former member of the Knesset, was expelled from the Mapai for his independent views. His penetrating article "Secular Civilization at an Impasse" appeared in the Spring 1959 issue of TRADITION. The following essay was originally published in the Israeli journal *Ammot* and was translated from the Hebrew by Naomi C. Wurzbarger.

## DOES ZIONISM HAVE A FUTURE?

Let us first of all reach an agreement on what Zionism is. I am not referring to the love Jews of the Diaspora feel for Zion or to their contact with it. This love exists more than 2,500 years, since the Babylonian exile. If it should disappear from amongst the descendants of the Jews in the Diaspora, it would indicate the disappearance of the Jewish nation, or its remnants. Zionism is a communal movement (formed in Europe in the last third of the nineteenth century) which became organized as the World Zionist Organization in 1897. This movement is characterized by certain definite qualities, without which it would have lacked meaning and historic identity and would not have accomplished its work: the in-pouring of 600,000 Jews to the land of Israel before the state was established, and the creation of the state despite great obstacles.

What were the characteristics of the Zionist movement? First of all, it was a national-secular movement. It was formed by men who were brain-washed by the *Haskalah* (the Enlightenment) and Western assimilation. It was not a continuation of the religious tradition of Israel nor of the world of its *Mitzvot*, with

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their derivative rules for living. In the eyes of its visionaries and founders, Hess, Pinsker, Herzl, Nordau, Jabotinsky, the Zionist movement was seen as one of the nationalistic problems (in Europe). While from the beginning religious orthodox individuals and groups joined the movement, they were not the ones who determined its form and essence. The future Jewish society in the land of Israel was pictured by the Zionist leaders as a branch of secular European society. The literature of Zionist Utopias—of Herzl, Levinsky, etc.—attested to this. If the movement had been formed in the days of Rabbi Yehudah Chai Alkalai and others of his ilk it would have been an altogether different movement from its very beginning. It is the fact (a distressing and fateful one, perhaps) that Zionism was formed and consolidated after the advance of secularism among Jews by men who had gone through the process of secularization.

Secondly, the Zionist movement came on the scene as a "solution" of a Jewish problem which arose at the beginning of the Emancipation. The concept of the Jewish problem did not mean the general relationship between Judaism and the (Christian) environment. The specific Jewish problem of the 19th century was brought into being after the disintegration of the ghetto and because of it. The Jews could not—to be more precise, they were unwilling to—live within the bounds of their segregated environment. On the one hand they were not absorbed, or else they were not absorbed graciously within the Christian environment. The tension and pressure which developed from this dilemma resulted in a precarious economic condition for the Jews, mass migrations, brutal anti-Jewish reactions, and that whole oppressive and fermentative syndrome which was called, both by Jews and Gentiles, "The Jewish Problem." The Zionist movement aimed to solve this Jewish problem for Gentiles and Jews alike.

Thirdly, the essential principle and nucleus of Zionism was *Aliyah* (settlement in Israel). No quibbling for the sake of polemics can ignore this historic fact. The Zionist movement was founded in order to stimulate *Aliyah* in the land of the movement and to direct whatever migration there was to the land of Israel. Had it not been for the *Chovevei Zion* (Lovers of Zion) and the Zionist parties in Russia, Rumania, Poland, Austria, and Hun-

The Jews of South America are the last remnant of what was Eastern and Central European Jewry. The processes of assimilation are not decisive there at the moment. The Jewish languages—Hebrew and Yiddish—fulfill some function. A Zionist movement exists along the lines of the earlier European one, and there is a limited *Aliyah*. We shall not attempt to predict whether Latin American Jewry will follow the North American way or whether they will feel impelled for their part to emigrate. We will not deal with the question of where the Jews of Argentina and Chile, to the extent that they will emigrate, will go, whether to other lands in the Diaspora or to Israel. We must admit that we have no clear-cut answer. It will perhaps be simpler if for the purpose of sociological investigation we treat Latin American Jewry as a unit. What are the forces that caused, in their time, the birth of the Zionist movement in Europe—the echo of which still reverberates among the Jews of Argentina? Do these forces exist today for Jewry in general? If not, are there in their place, below the surface, new drives for an effective love for Zion?

How do the 7½ million Jews of the Western world of today (with the exception of Latin America) differ from the Jews of Russia, Poland, Roumania, Czechoslovakia, Austria, etc., of the past?

First of all, they lack a Jewish culture; their Judaism has become secular. Their estrangement from a religious, traditional way of life for the past two or three generations has demonstrated that there is no great significance to Jewish secular culture. With the exception of habits which are in the realm of mental reaction, urban Jews of the United States and Britain act like their Gentile neighbors of comparable status. The crumbling of the Ghetto, as a result of which the Zionist movement was formed, came to an end during the period of modern Western civilization. Jews of America, England, Canada, and Switzerland are, however, separated from society in general in different ways. By more or less subtle means society (we will not define it as Christian in order to avoid unnecessary problems) pushes them to separate domains. But within these separate limits Jews live the life of the non-Jewish environment—the same language, concepts, customs, and experience. The point is that both sides accept this recip-

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rocal relation as proper and expedient. A "Jewish Problem" in the pre-Nazi sense does not exist there.

The Jews of the West are sure that they will be able to continue where they are in the same form in which they live now—and they consider this the desirable pattern for their future. Jews are not "superfluous" in the American or British economy as they seemed to be in the Russian, Polish, etc., systems at the beginning of the development of capitalism. They do not need to fall back upon unproductive occupations; they are not involved in the process of "de-productivization." All these concepts which were emphasized in their time by Zionist ideologists from Pinsker to Borochoy have no meaning for Western Jews of today. Return to Zion cannot be based upon an economic foundation as it was at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. There is, certainly, widespread in the Diaspora a love for the State of Israel, the main manifestation of which is intensive giving to funds for Israel and publicizing the fine qualities of the land. But this activity is the opposite in its spiritual and social aims from similar activities which marked the Zionist movement. I emphasize the word "similar," for the similarity is skin-deep, but the vitals are altogether different. Jews formerly considered their contributions to Zionist funds a means of facilitating *Aliyah* for their compatriots, and, in a certain respect, for themselves; they had a personal interest in Israel, in the positive sense. Because of this there were many arguments about ways of *Aliyah* and settlement in the land at the various Zionist conferences. It was a single-minded partnership for the purpose of achieving realization of their goal. Their contribution brought them closer to the land of Israel and gave them the right to "interfere." For the same reason Zionist discussions were replete with criticisms and disclosures of failings and flaws, not only regarding developments in the land, but also regarding their own shortcomings; thus it was from Achad Ha'am to B. Katzenelson and Nechemiah de Lieme. The contributors and the fund-raisers, the propagandists and the pro-Israel propaganda machinery of today have entirely different internal drives and social aims. The average Western Jew does not fulfill the *Mitzvot*, does not want a separate Hebrew school, has no intention of speaking or reading Hebrew, does not

invest his resources or savings in Israel, and neither considers *Aliyah* for himself nor would he instigate such a movement for others in his community. When he establishes his Jewish identity (and not without pressure from the non-Jewish community) he seeks to do it in a superficial symbolic way which intrudes upon neither his substantive assimilation nor his roots in the Diaspora (which he is unwilling to view as Diaspora). A monetary contribution to Israel is the least demanding way of exerting oneself for Jewish life. For the Zionist, his donation was one link in a many-sided Jewish network. For the modern contributor, the act of giving is separate, dissociated from his over-all aims and motivations. It is merely an indulgence which aids him in carrying on his daily routine.

Furthermore, the aim of today's pro-Israel public relations is non-Zionist, if not to say anti-Zionist. The Jews in America, England, Canada, France, Australia and Scandinavia are not at all interested in knowing the truth from Israel; they do not want to hear about faults and failures or complex and serious problems. They are certainly unwilling to become involved in any affairs of the land. The existence of Israel serves Western Jewry as the raw material for synthetic, smooth propaganda for Israel. Praise of Israel is their main compensation in return for their funds. And they are in *need* of the praise in order to maintain their good name in their countries so that they can take root and hold their ground with a firmer base and greater honor. Pro-Israel publicity serves, on the one hand, as a safety shield between them and the problems of Israel; on the other hand, it is an easy bridge to the surrounding non-Jewish society: a link in the apologetics of the *Galut*, in the manner of anti-defamation and, in reality, an important branch of anti-defamation. The Zionists viewed anti-Semitism as a factor in strengthening and justifying a return to Zion; they did not consider the fight against anti-Semitism deserving of the expenditure of great energies. Today's scattered Jews consider Israel as a means in their war against anti-Semitism. Their love for Israel has an ulterior motive.

What has been termed "the Jewish problem," the unwillingness of the non-Jewish community to accept the existence of Jews as they are, does not exist today in the main centers of

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Western civilization. With the twilight of halakhic and mystic Judaism, which the Haskalah interpreted as Jewish nationalism (similar to the nationalistic movements of Europe), the social and spiritual background of the Zionist movement disappeared. Moreover, the nationalistic movements, of which Zionism considered itself one, lost their magic, at least in the developed nations of the West in which are concentrated the large Jewish centers. The premise that every nation and ethnic unit deserves its own state was considered progressive and almost self-evident at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Now the temper of the times blows in the opposite direction—towards multi-national inclusive realms and unions, like the common market, the Soviet Union, etc. By itself, a national state neither attracts devotion nor rouses enthusiasm any more and the era of nationalistic movements is drawing to a close.

Would the dispersed Jews have suffered depletion of their substance and would their will for self-determination have been eradicated even if the centralized and traditional communities of Eastern and Central Europe had remained in existence today? No one can give an answer to such a hypothetical question. It is quite possible that Polish Jewry, numbering 3½ million, would not have sunk in the American way from emancipation to egalitarianism. It is possible that continued existence of Eastern European Jewry, whose immigrants bolstered the Palestinian *Yishuv* population, would have changed the spiritual image of this *Yishuv*.

But European Jewry was wiped out. The Zionist movement viewed its mission as the establishment of a state for the nation. During the period of horror and destruction from 1939-1945 its main efforts were directed towards immediate establishment of the state. Saving of the people appeared to be a secondary goal. Because of their psychological and political dependence the large Jewish centers in the Allied countries refrained from attacking what was in fact acquiescence with the extermination. The *Yishuv* took the same stand on account of its concentration on its Zionist political struggle. In this struggle there were revealed both considerable heroism and also serious differences of opinion. But for all the dissension between the Mapai, the Revisionists, the Haganah, the Irgun, and the Lechi, they did

not disagree on the need to conduct more effectively the struggle for political independence against the government of the Mandate. They all agreed that this action was the urgent necessity. The struggle to save Europe's Jews—by every method and means—was not considered to have priority over the Israeli campaign. The choice was not made with thought or conscious deliberation but as a self-evident axiom. It apparently derived, with the power of a compelling force, from the spirit and ideology of the Zionist movement: by the very establishment of the state the people will also be saved.

A few thought otherwise. They saw with their own eyes how European Jewry was being transported to their graves, perhaps avoidably. "If there is no nation without a land there can certainly be no land without a nation, and where is the living nation of Israel if not in Europe" cried the Rabbi of the community of Nitra in Slovakia when he saw daily the destruction of the Jews of his land, forgotten by their brethren in the democracies and the Holy Land.\* But the only Jewish community that was spiritually free and true to itself—the *Yishuv*—continued on its one-sided pattern according to its usual manner. It achieved its goal: the state was established. Meanwhile European Jewry was destroyed. Was the state left without a nation?

With the obliteration of European Jewry the Jewish state lost its main source of vitality. Zionism even lost its roots. Its complete degeneration was the fruit of historic logic. It is also a historic verdict which was signed by its own hand during the years 1939-1945. The Zionist movement was finished from both a theoretical and moral point of view. It achieved what it was capable of achieving and lost what it did not know enough to value—it was true both to its great awakening and to its crying limitations.

After the state of Israel lost its Jewish-European background and its traditional horizons, more than its source of immigrants and active love of Zion was lost. Israel of today is becoming an outcast province of modern Western civilization, without Christian roots—one of the Levantine copies of the West, at the moment a relatively improved version. Is it any wonder that it is

\* Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel, *Min Hameitzar*, Emunah, 5720, New York.

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unable to exert any spiritual influence on world Jewry, to fill their void with a compelling guiding force? Is it surprising that Hebrew has no emotional or intellectual appeal? It is only natural in these circumstances that English has rapidly become the common language of Jews all over the world and in Israel. And I do not refer to language alone. The scale of values of Western Jews—their concepts and customs, their aspirations and way of life, from the home to the field of entertainment and leisure,—have become the standards and ideal of the Israeli masses. Spiritual decline precedes abandonment of Eretz Israel; the former becomes more and more entrenched even when there is no actual emigration.

It is hard to say that Israel serves as a center of religious guidance for those few Jews in the Diaspora for whom Judaism is a religion of obligation. The orthodox *Yishuv* did not contribute to the fateful confrontation between the world of Halakhah and modern technological civilization, which, along with its success, is losing its way. It is possibly a matter of long standing, but the fact remains that meanwhile the orthodox *Yishuv* has been infected by Levantine ways. This is one world, and time does not stop, either in Israel or in the Diaspora.

No one knows when the gates of the U.S.S.R. will be opened and if Soviet liberalism in respect to allowing Aliyah will precede general liberalization within the country. If the former comes first, as an isolated political act, we will certainly acquire a substantial *Aliyah* from Russia, this time without a Zionist movement. But if permission to emigrate comes step by step as a result of internal liberalization in the U.S.S.R., the size of the *Aliyah* will be extremely limited. Russian Jewry will develop then according to the American example and precedent.

And what about the Jews of America and the West? Will their purpose always be the maintenance of a Jewish framework, impoverished in Jewish content? Will they continue to assimilate without losing their identity or will they slowly become extinct? Most certainly the aforementioned purpose will remain dominant for some time. But on the horizon we can see a few new signs.

A very small minority has begun to feel the imperfection and shame of Jewish existence in the free world. A yearning for per-



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fection and a need for self-respect are always the lot of the few. They are beginning to recoil from the image of "Americans like all the Americans." They know that Americans—Protestants and Catholics—do not consider the Jews as such. And as for the Jews themselves, their emotions do not coincide with their public expressions. The Dr. Soblen affair proved their lack of self-assurance; they were ready because of this to convert Israel into a contemptible satellite of Washington and to undermine its democratic responsibilities in order to defend themselves against an imagined anti-Semitic reaction—a classic example of "Slavery in the Midst of Freedom."

The more the prosperity of American Jews becomes stabilized and produces its anticipated psychological results, the greater will become the sensitivity of their spiritual elite, and the contradictions of their spurious existence will produce feelings of anger and perhaps embarrassment. Not because of economic hardship but in the footsteps of nauseating satiety the elite of Western Jewry will turn to Israel.

Moreover, as the economic, social, technological, and scientific achievements become greater and the standard of living rises and leisure increases and financial security is assured, the spiritual distress becomes deeper. A profound restlessness, a frustrating dissatisfaction and a restrained indignation seethe to a surprising degree. Among Western mankind there has not been for a long time a period so rife in pessimism in literature, art, and thought, as there is today.

Prosperity seems to produce evil, pleasure results in sickness, entertainment leads to despair, Eros disintegrates into perversion, togetherness accentuates loneliness. At the threshold of the conquest of nature, the conqueror reveals loss of thoughts. What use is there in travelling to space or to the planets if emptiness dominates the heart and there is no escape from the glaring terror within? Man cannot escape from himself, not even to the stratosphere. He is made, perhaps, to evaluate himself with regret for his past.

Western man turns to his own resources, or to other spiritual, religious, and esoteric sources to seek an answer to the stresses of "the good life." A substantial number of Western Jews are in

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the forefront of success and progress. It would not be surprising if they were to be among the first to search for spiritual return. Will a portion of them not turn their eyes back to their own sources? Will they not seek in Zion, where the remnant of the nation and the tradition is rooted, the way to their source in order to re-establish the continuity of the thread which was broken and to bemoan the treasure which they forsook for the sake of the rags in which it was wrapped? The results of their search will be largely dependent on conditions in Israel.

A Levantine province which imitates either demonstratively or quietly the "good life" of America or of Italy will not reach the hearts of the elite of Western Jewry. But we will not deal here with this aspect. Our question is what form will the new groups of returnees to Zion take? It is certain that at first they will be a small and exceptional minority which will attack the worthless, contemptible life of the Diaspora which flourishes and they will steer clear of the familiar Jewish institutions, including the Jewish Agency and the Zionist Organization which is joined and blended with it. They will not need authorization or a contract from the government of Israel. They would not aspire to official recognition and they would not even honor it.

If a movement for return to Zion arises among Western Jews, it will be a new beginning, outside the Zionism of today and beyond the range of its concepts.