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ON THE HOME FRONT: NEW CHALLENGES TO ZIONISM

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Meanwhile Back on the Home Front

Now that we may gain the blessings of peace by making sacrifices beyond those the vast majority of Israelis ever thought that we would make after 1967, the changing times may be bringing us to make other sacrifices that could end the last major Zionist aspects of Israel. Oh yes, there may remain vestiges to which people will point in pride, if not in hope, but we may have given up the essence of Zionism. Here, too, history has a way of reinforcing itself. Within the same week of the Rabin-Arafat signing in Washington, we had a visit from Michael Jackson, the superstar. For the first time, we had pictures of teenyboppers lined up outside of his hotel, or along his route, screaming and crying, in wait for him. One cannot blame subteen girls for this. That is the way of subteen girls. (Earlier generations kept them home until they passed through that period; in our democratic age nobody can be kept from anything.)

And when does that happen? On Rosh HaShanah, with his great concert with its obscene gestures taking place during the ten days of penitence. Jackson wanted to buy CDs, so owners of music stores in Tel Aviv opened them specially for him on Rosh HaShanah and he obligingly spent thousands of dollars. So we had two "firsts": Michael Jackson in Israel and Jewish shops open for business on Rosh HaShanah. Then Madonna came two weeks later. If our presence in this land is indeed the result of God's promise to us and a covenant made in fulfillment of that promise, we have certainly violated our part of the agreement. We know what has happened every time we have done that in the past.

Hedonism Confronts Idealism

The peace process is, of course, not responsible for Michael Jackson or Madonna since their visits were arranged long before. But it is al-

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ready sharpening other cleavages within Israel. In unbridled enthusiasm for the peace agreement, many attack the settlers in the territories who stand in the way, in essence saying, "Look what Zionism brings us now. Let us turn away from those who, as Zionists, may be among the last idealists among us, the people willing to make personal sacrifices to advance their understanding of the Zionist dream, and find our support among those masses who simply wish to be like all the other masses in the world — to be left alone to pursue their individual lives." Those masses are not to be blamed or even criticized for wanting to live their own lives. That has been the way of the world. But neither are those others to be blamed, among the best and the brightest, the more energetic, when they decide that leading their own lives means that they should go to New York or Los Angeles or Toronto or Sydney, Australia, to do better than they can do in Israel. That is why the United States, Canada, and Australia were populated in the first place. Englishmen and Poles and Scandinavians and Italians and so many others who felt the same way (for good reason) and were willing to make the effort, transported themselves across oceans to try to better themselves, as Asians and Latin Americans — and Israelis — are doing now.

Here Jews came for other, more idealistic reasons. Not everyone. There were many who came here because they were refugees who had no other place to go. But those who set the tone for the society saw theirs as a pioneering effort for the Jewish people, not simply for themselves. They were the *halutzim* who made real sacrifices, including their lives. Our latest pioneers will have to pay and pay dearly for having answered the call, while new generations pursue the superstars of the new world culture and their parents will continue to make money now that peace gives them even greater access to the sources of money-making.

One can argue that this is for the good. Maybe the settlers in the territories were wrong. Maybe the Zionism of the old days has outlived its time. After all, Zionism did seek the normalization of the Jewish people and now that seems to be within our grasp. Herzl did call for a state of the Jews, as normal as turn-of-the-century Austria, not an abnormal Jewish state. But as a friend of mine said, "What will happen to aliya?" Who wants to move from an affluent country to the Middle East? Jews may have

wanted to move to a Jewish state for ideological reasons, but nobody thinks the Middle East is or is about to become America or Western Europe or Australia in its wealth or material and career advantages, not even the Russian Jews who have no intrinsic reason to prefer Israel over America, especially since while Israel may improve in affluence, its greater crowdedness will certainly lower the quality of life that people in the West seek, in other ways.

Israel's relative quality of life has been improving considerably in the last fifteen years, based on a combination of communal solidarity which has united its people, an attractive land open to its inhabitants, a pleasant climate that has given them much sun and outdoors exposure, fine produce which has given them among the best fruits and vegetables in the world, and an easygoing style of life that enables them to have all of this with less of the personal stresses and strains found in richer centers. We are now in the process of weakening most of those elements one by one to become part of the larger hedonistic world with its ersatz pleasures and its random violence.

Deepening the Cleavages in Society

Our solidarity is being threatened by a number of great cleavages that are growing in strength, not only that old standby, between *hilonim* (secular Jews) and *haredim* (ultra-Orthodox), but a broader cleavage between those whose life measures are secular even if they do preserve some traditional practices and those whose life measures are religious, though not necessarily ultra-Orthodox. To that is being added the cleavage between those who have settled in the territories and their supporters and those for whom peace means that these territories will have to be evacuated back to pre-1967 lines; and between those who want the pop culture of the world to become even more accessible in Israel and those for whom the Jewish and Zionist culture of the country is more attractive.

Army Chief of Staff Ehud Barak tells us to expect changes in the army that will bring greater cleavage in that great institution's solidarity as well. Those who end up as the backbone of the army, the combat forces, will have to serve many more days on reserve duty than the "jobniks," those who have behind-the-lines responsibilities and whose time will not be needed so much. Is this justice? Those who take

the bigger risks will have to take them more frequently, while those who take less risk will get more time off? That is fine in a volunteer army, but in any army of Jewish conscripts for whom equality has been the basis of the willingness to serve, this kind of discrimination will only increase the search for exemptions from service.

The socioeconomic cleavage in Israel is also growing. More people will be relegated into what will seem to be a permanent lower class, while those who make money will make more of it. These latter two cleavages have less to do with the kind of peace we are moving to than the former, but the cumulative affect will be that solidarity in this country declines. Soon people, I fear, will begin avoiding army service when they can, not necessarily illegally, just by pulling all the strings they can find. Nor will the army want them all, so it will connive in that effort. That is enough. Jews are egalitarians and inequalities raise their hackles, so the consequences can be foreseen.

I do not know what the effects of the decline of the other elements in the quality of life equation will be. Most Israelis, like most Jews, seem to prefer being close to one another, together on the beach rather than alone in the mountains. So perhaps the crowds that will grow as the population grows and the land in which Jews can travel safely diminishes will not make so much difference to them, but even there there may be a limit, a breaking point. Who knows? Experience the traffic jams today at the entrance to Jerusalem and around Tel Aviv and wonder.

New Challenges to Israel's Jewish Heritage

Perhaps the most important casualty of these new turns will be Israel's Jewish heritage. Like Zionism, but even more than Zionism, the Jewish way of life makes its demands. Moreover, it stands in stark contrast with the hedonistic individualism of contemporary society which approaches and sometimes crosses the line into paganism in new ways. Part of the normalization movement in Israel today is the embracing of that hedonistic individualism which has won in the West, in order to be like the West. It is led by many of the most "sophisticated" members of Israeli society — the artists, the intellectuals, the academics — who are products of that milieu, in their training if not in their early education, and, with

some exceptions, have embraced it wholeheartedly.

In contrast, Israel's Jewish way of life, which would have difficulty expressing itself against the current trends in the best of cases, has been taken over by the most fundamentalist elements who increasingly set its tone and are publicized by the media as if they were the only practitioners of Judaism. The religious Zionists, who were once strong, have become an increasingly smaller part of the diminishing middle. They have tried to hold the two sides together, but much of their effort has been directed toward settling the territories acquired in 1967, providing the idealists for the task. In other spheres of religious life they have had the ground cut out from under them by the *haredim* and the secularist opponents of the *haredim* who would rather have *haredim* as their opponents since they are easier to oppose. Now, in this the last area in which the religious Zionists are dominant, they will, perforce, lose. The reasons for that may have validity but the unanticipated consequences are likely to be great.

Carriers of the Zionist Dream are Made the Enemy

This is by no means an argument that we must embrace the position of the more militant nationalist settlers. The opportunity for peace is worth sacrifices and risks and is to be truly and sincerely welcomed and pursued. But even if we reject their position, we must turn to them with understanding and, indeed, sorrow at the situation. Reality and reason dictate sharing the land with the Palestinians, but to treat those who settled the territories after 1967 as our prime minister — their prime minister, too — has, even suggesting that they are the enemy, while embracing people who, while they may have changed, were not very desirable characters in the past, to say the least, is not only gratuitously insulting and inflammatory, but also gives us a true sign as to who is really wanted by the establishment in this country. That (in the words of Samuel Goldwyn) includes many of us out.

It has never been suggested of Mr. Rabin, even by those who appreciate many of his fine qualities, that tact is among his greatest virtues. That is the most charitable thing that can be said about his response to those settlers. Nor has he been any nicer to the rest of us who still believe that there is a place in our lives for other Jewish ideals as well as that one

overriding ideal of peace, which he has adopted as his own.

One need not be a religious fundamentalist to view the changes that have come as likely to bear deleterious consequences as similar changes have in the past. One can and should, in my opinion, take a balanced position, that peace is as desirable as territory, and also understand those who seek peace out of convenience or weariness. While their views may be legitimate, they cannot be weighed as so much more important than those who are prepared to struggle on for the most legitimate of Zionist beliefs. For, in the last analysis, our right to Hebron is the same as our right to Tel Aviv and vice versa. Prudence may require that we relinquish exercise of the former but, from a Jewish and Zionist perspective, the right remains the same and the Tel Avivis are just as much "settlers" as those in Kiryat Arba.

If in order to live in peace we have to give up the Zionist vision, for the aforementioned internal as well as external reasons, let us be aware of the consequences. Three times in the twentieth century the Jewish people have been offered the opportunity to massively resettle the Land of Israel and thereby drastically reduce the power of the Arab opposition to a restored Jewish state in that land. In 1917, following the Balfour Declaration and the British conquest of the land from the Ottoman Turks, there were a few years during which immigration was open. Had the Jewish people come in massive numbers, we would have easily become a majority in the land then, before the Palestinian nationalist movement had crystalized. Beginning in 1948 when the Jewish Yishuv (settled community) in Israel succeeded in establishing the state, again a massive immigration of diaspora Jews, not only Jewish refugees, could have achieved the same goal, albeit against a mobilized Arab world. Then again in 1967 when the leading Arab confrontation states mistakenly

attacked Israel and lost so decisively on the battleground, a massive immigration of Jews could have turned the demographic tide. If all or virtually all of the Jews in the diaspora had come on any of those three occasions, the results would have been indisputable. But even if 20 percent had come, they probably would have been decisive. An infusion of close to three million Jews at any of those three stages would have transformed the entire situation. We missed all three opportunities. Perhaps, as in baseball, a batter has only three strikes before he is retired. We must now be prepared to take the consequences of our failure to respond, but there are consequences.

While Jews may survive as individuals in Israel, just as Judaism is disappearing in the diaspora for all but a small minority because of the warming of different winds, so, too, it appears that the disappearance of Judaism will accelerate even in what was once the Jewish state. Pockets of thousands, maybe even a few hundred thousand Jews will remain, both in Israel and in the diaspora, not necessarily representing the best that Judaism has to offer. What we had within our grasp — a strong, vibrant, productive, Jewish people — is rapidly slipping from us. That may be the way the world was destined to go in the twenty-first century. But some would have it differently. For those who would, this is the time to strive for peace with our new opportunity in hand, yet, at the same time, understand the larger implications of the times and strive equally against their negative character and impact.

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