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ISRAEL, THE DIASPORA AND JEWISH SPIRITUAL VALUES:

An Analysis of the Report of the
International Economic and Social Commission of the World Jewish Congress

Daniel J. Elazar

Editor's note: This is the second of two Viewpoints dealing with the recent World Jewish Congress report dealing with the implications of Israel-Arab peace on world Jewry.

The Report of the International Economic and Social Commission of the World Jewish Congress is a wide-ranging, cosmopolitan, sober look at the world situation and the place of the Jewish people in it, much to be praised for being a statesmen-like approach to the problems which confront both. It is to be praised for taking the Jewish people seriously as an actor on the world scene and as the cutting edge of western civilization.

It is also Zionist in the sense that it sees in Israel the true center of Jewish life. Indeed much of it is almost a cry to Israel to fulfill diaspora Jewry's expectations of it with regard to, as the Report puts it, "quality and way of life," which it sees as being deeply eroded.

At the same time, there are forms of expression, especially the discussion of the state of world Jewry, that reflect serious difficulties in the Report, difficulties which should not be ignored. For example, though it begins to abjure the wishful thinking which once characterized a diaspora Jewry unwilling to face the realities of Israel, it does not do so except in glittering generalities. Nor does it come to grips with the people who speak for Israel today -- the Likud and the National Religious Party who are not represented in it -- or those who constitute the majority of its population -- the Sephardim, who have a token diaspora representative.

The sharp and disturbed reaction on the part of Israeli government and Jewish Agency officials and the Israeli press to the Report is symptomatic of Israel's present weakness, and is in its own way an affirmation of the accuracy of certain elements of the Report which came in for the greatest criticism. In those aspects, the Report itself hardly does more than reflect the long-standing ideology of the World Jewish Congress, and indeed of much of diaspora Jewish leadership -- here stated in a new document and perhaps more forcefully than has been possible for a Jewish group to state publicly since the the early 1950s in the days of the Blaustein-Ben Gurion exchange. But it is the same theme.

If Israelis have sought to avoid confronting the reality of the existence of this view in the past it is because they were tempted to live in a fool's paradise.

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Not the least of those temptations came from the "Israelolotry" of those segments of diaspora Jewry who were cultivated by Israel's leaders. Since Israelolotry is much weakened, such positions can be stated without risk.

Less acceptable is its strong diasporist orientation. In its most extreme form for example, after praising the virtues of political sovereignty the Report goes on to state (p. 41): but to live under Jewish sovereignty the Jews of Israel pay a heavy price "which is not only security-related," but also that "they must give up what must be termed the historical Jewish occupational structure" of concentration in the business, the professions, and academia. This is quite a reversal of the original Zionist aspiration to do just that and to return to a more normal occupational structure.

What is even more significant is that so many leading Israelis were members of the Commission yet none of them filed any dissent from any of those aspects of the Report which drew criticism, including this one. That, in itself, is a sign of how many Israelis in the heart of the Israeli establishment reject the Zionist dream. That sign is even more evident in the way Israelis tremble over Jewish assimilation in the diaspora. Unable to content themselves with the strength of Israel (in whose strength they, themselves, apparently have doubts), they unconsciously make the health of Israel dependent upon the state of the diaspora rather than vice versa - an utter reversal of Zionism. This may, indeed, be an accurate perception of present reality, but it is not one that encourages belief in the continuing validity of the Zionist vision, at least with regard to the present state of Israel.

Not that this concern over Jewish survival has much content in it for most Israelis including most Israeli leaders. It seems to be more a survivalist instinct interested in preserving Jewish bodies, that is to say manpower, rather than a concern for any qualitative dimension of Jewish survival. Oh yes, everyone will say that they want a Jewish life of quality, but in fact there is no real vision outside of the religious camp as to what should be the character and content of such a Jewish life. It is unlikely that the Israeli members of the Commission would have much to contribute on that score.

The Commission

What of the Commission itself? Philip Klutznick, in his wisdom, rightly understood the importance of beginning a dialogue designed to refocus Jewish thought about Jewish public policy at this particular point in Jewish history, not only because of the peace with Egypt, as catalytic an event as that is, but precisely because the conventional thinking of the post-holocaust generation which witnessed the establishment of the State of Israel had long-since ceased to be adequate. He correctly perceived that the only way to do this was with a blue-ribbon commission, the reputations of whose principal members would be such that it could not be ignored. The fact that he used the WJC as his vehicle reflects the sensible use of a tool which would command attention despite the facts of its objective weakness. Hence the importance of having the Baron Guy de Rothschild as its Chairman, someone whose importance is not a result of holding a position in the World Jewish Congress or in any other Jewish organization, but because he is a Rothschild.

The other members of the Commission were heavily weighted toward people from the business community. After all, it was an economic and social commission. On the other hand, the words "economic and social" are also code words for "political" in the World Jewish Congress lexicon which seeks to publicly downplay its role as a political body so that it can embrace Jewish communities in countries whose governments might not like the notion of an international Jewish political connection. Of the 33 members of the Commission, eighteen were identified as businessmen; two business and industrial consultants; one a professor of international economics; and one an attorney with substantial business interests. Six, including the economist, were academics, two of whom were university presidents and a third a dean, all three of whom came

out of economic disciplines. There was one labor leader. Three were identified only by their present or former voluntary leadership roles in Jewish life.

This business orientation was particularly pronounced in connection with the Israelis, every single one of whom is in business, or has an economics background. One of the Israeli businessmen originally distinguished himself in military affairs. Three of the Israelis were considered for Minister of Finance in a future Labor government and two would have been minister and deputy minister had the Labor Alignment won the recent elections. Indeed, virtually all of the seven Israelis are from the Labor camp -- the old establishment with its roots in the pre-State *yishuv*, all strongly Ashkenazi. (Indeed, there was only a token Sephardi in the Commission, one who could double in brass as one of the two women as well.)

The diaspora delegation included a number of key Jewish leaders, most of whose leadership positions did not flow from any World Jewish Congress connections. These included a former president of the Council of Jewish Federations, another leading figure in the Jewish Agency, a major figure in the Canadian Jewish Congress, a former president of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, a former president of the New York United Jewish Appeal, the former president of the Los Angeles Jewish Federation Council. What was even more characteristic of the diaspora representatives was how many of the people were chosen because of their reputation in the non-Jewish world rather than because of their Jewish involvements. At least a third of the Commission fit into that category. While there were a number of academics represented, in the manner of such commissions which try to include notable academic figures, there was not a single academic whose strength lay in Jewish scholarship or academic activity.

The membership of the Commission more or less assured that the Report would be prepared by Louis Walinsky, the able staff director, but that it would have relatively little input from the Commission members, many of whom served on a *pro forma* basis more than as active commission members. The general ability and talents of the members of the Commission in itself may have been useful but it did not make for the kinds of expertise which could carefully consider the variegated elements of the Report. Indeed, after the Report was released, evidence began to accumulate that many of the Commission members had not even had the opportunity to read through the final version -- presumably because of the necessity to publish the document in time for the meeting of the plenary assembly of the World Jewish Congress in January 1981.

In this respect, a word must also be said with regard to the staff. Dr. Walinsky and Professor Hirsch are undoubtedly men of ability but, once again, neither has specialized in the subject matter considered by the Report. While this may have given the Commission the advantage of a fresh look at familiar subjects, it also led it to produce a result that at best reflected the conventional wisdom and did not achieve Philip Klutznick's purpose of stimulating discussion based upon new lines of thought.

The Premises of the Study

One of the most heartening aspects of the study is its emphasis on the Jewish people as a whole as the subject of its inquiry. This emphasis is certainly not new for the World Jewish Congress whose great merit lies in the fact that it is the primary diaspora-oriented spokesman for Jewish peoplehood. The premise is implicitly reaffirmed in the letter of transmittal introducing the Report which suggests that the Israel-Egyptian peace treaty has implications for the entire Jewish people. Thus the very existence of the Commission can be seen as a statesmen-like effort on behalf of the Jewish people as an entity.

The second premise of the Report is "to anticipate the shape of coming events... to influence them." This is to be done through "objectivity, realism and candor."

It is stated that "the Report reflects a consensus, rather than a unanimity of view," among Commission members whose "approval is a general one." In this connection

a disclaimer is included, to wit: "The World Jewish Congress has in no way sought to guide or influence (the) study or its findings, and is naturally not responsible for or committed to accept any of (its) conclusions or recommendations."

The Report emphasizes that the Jewish people have no way to a secure and better future unless we recognize, address, and attempt to resolve the extremely serious problems we face. Calling for such recognition and action, "we believe we are being constructive and basically hopeful," despite the fact that "some readers may find our Report depressing or gloomy."

What is significant about the premises included in this letter of transmittal is that they are presented in general terms, not as being economic and social responses to the peace with Egypt. In other words, once the reader gets beyond the general literal titles, the Commission's mandate is much expanded and the results must be judged accordingly.

The Report presents forty-four "summary conclusions and recommendations" grouped into five categories: peace (7 recommendations); Israel (19 recommendations); the diaspora and Israel-diaspora relations (one recommendation); the emancipated communities (17 recommendations).

Recommendations on Peace

As might be expected, given the membership of the Commission, the continued thrust of the World Jewish Congress on such matters, and the Labor orientation of the Israelis, the recommendations on peace are what can be termed in contemporary jargon, moderately dovish. The Commission is concerned, of course, with Israel's security, critical of Arab rejectionism and European short-sightedness, and delicate when it comes to the Palestinians. The legitimacy of the recommendations is certainly not a matter to be called into question. This is not a sneak attack on Israel from the left wing as some of the initial media reports suggested.

On the other hand, it does not make Israel's case either. For example, it does not challenge the conventional view that Arab countries like Saudi Arabia are more moderate, even though it places the term moderate in quotation marks. The Report's description of the situation does nothing to redress the conventional presentation of the facts outside of Israel, a description which many Israelis would reject as biased in the direction of certain conclusions.

In an effort not to antagonize, the Report does not explicitly attack the Begin government's policies, but does so indirectly and implicitly by rejecting any notion that Israel has other than security interests in the administered territories. On the other hand, the Report does make a case for continued Jewish presence on the West Bank in a situation short of sovereignty and for Jordan as a Palestinian state. In that respect, it represents a useful contribution to the discussion about a peace settlement and may represent another step towards the crystallization of a common minimal Jewish position on the future of the territories. It is important also in that it does not neglect to indicate how the Middle East is a region of tensions, most of which have no direct connection with the Israel-Arab conflict. The Report also criticizes Egypt for not fully living up to the Camp David agreement and makes explicit what further steps are needed on Egypt's part to be considered as doing so. The further recommendations included under paragraph seven offer a good blueprint for an Israeli public relations offensive in the West.

Recommendations on Israel

This is the most critical section of the Report, taking Israel to task on a number of fronts in a way that reflects the general opinion of the moment. There can be little quarrel with the first two of the three "major priorities" which the Report suggests confront Israel at this time, namely "to build a secure peace" and "to put (Israel's) internal house in order." The third, which the Report defined as a "healthier, more constructive relationship with the diaspora," is somewhat more

problematic since what the Commission seems to mean by that is a relationship with the diaspora that accepts their strongly diasporist premises as to what the relationship should be, rather than continuing the present situation in which the Israeli leadership functions on Zionist premises and the diaspora leadership on diaspora premises and the two come together in pragmatic ways to deal with common tasks rather than attempting to resolve their fundamental ideological differences.

Israel and Jewish Values

Finally, the Report suggests that there is a fourth "major priority goal" which lies immediately beyond the first three, namely, "progressively to embody in (Israel's) way of life the values and spiritual goals which Judaism brought forth and contributed to the world." This latter point, while seemingly unexceptionable, raises a different set of problems, especially considering that in the whole Commission there are probably no more than a handful of people who in any way can be considered as embodying in their personal lives a major concern with anything approaching a normative Judaism, whether Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, or whatever. The list is heavy with people whose Jewish commitments are entirely civic, rather than religious, which is not to denigrate those commitments but certainly does raise questions with regard to their ability to serve as spokesmen for Jewish values and spiritual goals or critics of Israel's achievements in that regard.

Sephardim and Ashkenazim

This is not the only way that this section of the Report needs to be taken to task. For example, in Recommendation 10, as in other places in the Report, references are made to "strained relationships between Western (Ashkenazi) and North African and Asian (Oriental or Sephardi) Jews." Except for the fact that we know who the members of the Commission are, we would expect the Report to do better than that. Once again it repeats the old shibboleth that the Ashkenazim in Israel are "Western" instead of essentially from Eastern Europe, no more Western than Jews from the Eastern Mediterranean, only perhaps advantaged by obtaining indoor plumbing a generation earlier than the latter. Nor, for that matter, are all Sephardim from North Africa and Asia. The large Sephardic population from the Balkans which has suffered from many of the same problems of being left out of positions of influence in an Ashkenazi-dominated society is here excluded altogether.

Sephardim did not need this report to repeat the shibboleths established at the founding of the State or earlier. In order to make a contribution to the problem it delineated, it should have moved beyond such myths to clarify the situation. But then again it did not even commission a single paper or hold a single hearing dealing with the issue to give the Commission appropriate background information. The closest they came was to ask us at the Center for Jewish Community Studies to include something about Sephardim and Ashkenazim in our paper on Project Renewal. We not only did so, but even pointed out the problem of shibboleths, although this obviously attracted no attention on the part of the Commission.

Israel's Political System

Another bias found in paragraph 10 can be seen in the reference to "intensely factional and highly unstable politics." If anything, the politics in Israel are extraordinarily stable, if not always appetizing. Every political scientist of note who has studied the situation has commented on that fact. If media reportage presents a different picture and the political system of Israel does not suit the taste of the predominantly American and Canadian Commission, that is no excuse for the projection of a prejudice where clear data are easily available.

Nor is the reference to the "disruption of behavioral norms in group and interpersonal relations which have become increasingly selfish and even violent or criminal," precisely in place. The Commission has grasped a real problem and their emphasis on it reflects their expectations as Jews of a Jewish state, which certainly cannot be faulted, but there is a tone of smugness which ill-behooves any of the non-

Israeli members of the Commission, all of whom come from societies which are plagued by similar problems, in most cases to a far greater extent than Israel. (Even Switzerland can no longer escape this issue.) The problem may need to be mentioned, but it must be mentioned in the context of the world-wide situation and not as if Israel is somehow decaying because its policies do not meet the approval of Commission members. In fairness, the Report does make reference to "similar or analogous problems ...in most industrial societies," but Israel is singled out for the "degree of intensity of these general problems," which is simply inaccurate.

Since the Report's criticism of Israel's electoral system is basic to even its economic sections, that criticism must be addressed first. Much can be said against Israel's present electoral system. I, myself, am a strong supporter of electoral reform, but the kind of criticism made by the Report is essentially based upon aesthetic considerations and shows no appreciation whatsoever as to why Israel has such a system or how well Israel was served by the system for its first generation of statehood. This is frequently the case with reformers. What bothers them is what is offensive to their aesthetic sensibilities more than what has been demonstrated as unworkable.

The Commission never instituted any inquiries into Israel's electoral system. It did not even commission a paper to discuss why Israel has the electoral system that it does. It simply took it as an article of faith that the system is no good. In American eyes, of course, any system that is not based upon territorial constituencies and two parties is considered deficient. Anglophile Americans accept the idea of a parliamentary system; others are unhappy with that form of governmental organization as well. That issue is not addressed here.

Of course, no one pays any attention to the fact that the present party system in Israel may be the product of necessity and not the creation of some misguided constitutional architects or worse. In this respect, it parallels systems that exist in many of the most stable countries of Western Europe -- the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, for example. Not only that, but it has proved remarkably stable in Israel in terms of providing governments, although, of course, at the price of compromise. One suspects that it is the character and content of those compromises that is not pleasing to the Commission but nevertheless they reflect the realities of Israeli politics.

As I indicated above, I believe that the system is now outgrowing its utility -- not that I expect to see a two-party Israel any more than an intelligent political observer will expect to see a two-party Netherlands or Norway or for that matter Germany or Great Britain. The character of the political cleavages in those countries -- and in Israel -- does not permit it. However, one can expect the Israeli structure to accommodate a kind of territorial division which would enable the citizens of Israel to have a greater say in the nomination and election of their representatives than at present even with a multi-party system. That, indeed, is the problem, not the instabilities of an electoral system based on proportional representation but the fact that the proportional representation system of Israel, structured as it is, gives too much power to the party centers to determine who advances in politics and who will not, thereby stifling talented individuals who are not willing to hue to the current line or follow the current leaders. It is this system that has lowered the quality of Israel's politicians and has reduced opportunity for talented people to enter politics on other than a professional basis. There is no sign of recognition of any of these problems in the Report. On the contrary, the criticisms are shopworn and inaccurate, relating to stability of the governments and not to the quality of government which is the real problem. One wonders where were the Israelis when this issue was being discussed.

Israel's Economic Problems

Who can disagree with the recommendations that Israel concentrate on fighting inflation: increasing productivity, efficiency and output throughout the economy.

and restoring a healthy rate of economic growth led by greater exports. As a non-economist, I am puzzled by the Report's downplaying of the costs of peace as a major factor in Israel's economic problems and a lack of recognition that the price Israel paid for industrialization was relatively modest, considering the alternatives. Hans Morgenthau, in comparing 19th century American development with that of 20th century Russia, often commented that there are two ways to industrialize: One is the capitalist way which turns a lot of money away from social purposes, causes certain inequalities, but essentially preserves life and liberty, and the other is the Communist way which treats both life and liberty as expendable and ends up not doing better with money or equality either. Israel's development in the past generation or two has been a variation of the capitalist way, with considerable waste, in part because of the attempt to prevent evils intended upon purely capitalistic development, namely the mass of the population absorbing the social costs of development while the developers get rich and powerful. Unquestionably, Israel has to change its practices but, given the alternative, the situation is not all that black nor can the realities of balancing development with humanity be so easily ignored -- especially by a Commission that makes a point of wanting Israel to live up to Jewish spiritual values. Indeed, I would argue as has Moshe Sanbar, the former Governor of the Bank of Israel, that it is precisely the commitment of the successive Israeli governments to preserving a humane society during the period of development which has brought on the state's economic troubles. One wants to protect workers from arbitrary dismissal and, as a result, one gets the problems of over-tenuring and inefficiency. So, too, with the extension of social benefits far beyond the capacity of the state.

While one can argue that what Israel has done has not been in its best interests, one must recognize the humane, and indeed, Jewish intentions behind the present system. The present system of supports does present a drain on the economy and has contributed to the country's economic problems, but it also represents Israel's effort to live up to Jewish values in the finest sense of the term. None of this is reflected in the Report, which again, relies upon conventionalities and does not try to come to grips with the real problem, mainly, how do we deal with the need to do both. Had the Commission been able to make some recommendations on those lines, the Report might have had something serious to contribute.

In my opinion, then, the Report's general endorsement of profit-sharing, a position which is not really developed, is its best part, one which would have been more in harmony with the Jewish psyche by building enterprises on shares rather than wages. Similarly, the Report's recommendations to the U.S. with regard to the use of American aid to encourage Egypt-Israel economic cooperation deserve to be attended to.

Understanding Diversity in Israel

The Jewish world suffers from a mutuality of misinformation, the diaspora *vis-a-vis* Israel as much as Israel *vis-a-vis* the diaspora. The bulk of information provided the Israeli in the street about the diaspora is either about anti-Semitism, lobbying for Israel, or people born Jews who happen to occupy distinguished places in the non-Jewish world. For obvious reasons, far more information is given about Henry Kissinger's Jewishness (or for that matter about Caspar Weinberger not being Jewish) than about the life of diaspora Jewry.

On the other hand, diaspora Jewry suffers from a similar problem albeit in a different way. The information they get about Israel is primarily crisis-oriented or problem-oriented, as conveyed in drops by the mass media, with all the limitations of haste and shallowness which characterize the media. Diaspora Jews know little about the diversity of views that exists within Israel on a wide range of issues. Israeli Jews, even if they do not know details, think of the free world as pluralistic and the North American communities as particularly so. Therefore, they start with the assumption that there is a diversity of views. Diaspora Jews, on the other hand, often think of Israel as monolithic and do not come close enough to perceive the diversity within

Israel, especially since it is a diversity which does not follow along lines with which they are familiar. The existence of different forms of diversity should not obscure its reality. Nor should one community assume that its form of diversity is better than the other's, a tone which runs through the Report.

Israeli Policies and Diaspora Communities

In this connection I cannot help but read beyond the delicately phrased "government of Israel policies and actions (which) have seriously embarrassed national Jewish communities in one country or another," to note a concern on the part of diaspora Jews for "what will the *goyim* think?" One cannot object to the principle that "Israel shall act out of concern for the knowledge, sensitivities, concerns and interests of the Jewish communities in those countries and consult with them, to the extent practicable." But the problem with that kind of vagueness is nowhere better illustrated than in the relationship between the World Jewish Congress and the Jewish community of South Africa. The WJC, for reasons of conviction and reasons of state, has regularly attacked apartheid in South Africa, even though the local Jewish community has requested them not to do so in order not to be embarrassed in their country of citizenship. WJC has responded by indicating that it feels a moral obligation and a political necessity to continue its attacks.

In other words, this is a problem which is not unique to this particular period when once again we have a Jewish state. The fact that the Jews are a world people means that Jewish communities somewhere will be in the position of being embarrassed by the actions of spokesmen for the Jewish people outside of their borders. It is quite appropriate to try to minimize such occurrences but no community, certainly not the Jewish state which bears the heavy responsibilities of political sovereignty, can be limited in this regard when it believes its vital interests to be at stake.

Granted, there is a problem in the Israeli government's expectations of unquestioning support for its policies, but even so, there are responsibilities to close ranks which fall upon all Jews as members of the Jewish people. In part, that is the price Jews must pay for returning to the political arena. It is one of the elements that separates the Jews in Israel and those in the diaspora. Jews in the diaspora have the luxury of standing aside from hard political decisions more often than not. Somebody else can be the Secretary of State (on one level) or the policeman (on another level) while they confine themselves to easier fields of endeavor. Thus, too many of them have become used to being above the battle -- undirtied and untested. Jews in Israel have no such option. Indeed, Israel exists to return Jews to a situation in which no such option exists. As I understand them, Jewish values demand that of us. We are charged with building the good commonwealth which means taking full responsibility for its governance. That may be Israel's problem; it is also its glory.

Aliya

The section on *aliya* is diasporist but balanced. It is certainly fair as an expression of the majority of Commission members. It is surprising, however, how easily the Israelis accepted this viewpoint, apparently without qualification. At the very least, they might have suggested that when Jewish spiritual values are mentioned, it is appropriate to remind Jews that living in a Jewish cultural and religious environment is a positive factor impelling Jews to settle in Israel. The issue is confined to whether or not a Jew wants to live under Jewish political sovereignty, without any sense of what that means other than the narrowest political sense. This reflects the essential problem of the Report, namely the absolute lack of a sense of the existence of a Jewish civilization. The Report reflects a well-developed sense of Jewish peoplehood and understanding of the political dimensions of peoplehood which would have been absent from the minds of such a group even two decades ago. But the price that seems to have been paid for this transformation is the demise of a sense of Jewish cultural vibrancy or civilizational distinctiveness.

What is surprising and disappointing -- and worthy of the most serious consideration -- is the position of the Israelis or, better, their lack of position on the subject. They seem to be no more conscious of Jewish culture and civilization than their diaspora counterparts. If this is so, then the implicit assumptions of the Report may not be far from the mark, to the extent that it may be possible to be in Israel without consciously relating to Jewish culture and civilization. Perhaps these Israeli industrialists and academics have no sense of the Jewishness of the Jewish state on other than an "ethnic" level, but that is not an accurate description of most of Israel and certainly not of those people who do decide to come to settle here. If so, there is, indeed, a failure on the part of Israel, but it is not universal. As my colleague Dan Segre has pointed out in his recent book, it is more a sign of the deficiencies of the Israeli establishment than of anything else.

On the other hand, the movement that has taken place in the position of Western Jewry during the past 10-15 years is marked, as this document clearly reveals. The discussion of *aliya* is positive and serious, encouraging those who do wish to settle in Israel to do so, even if it reaffirms the classic diaspora position on the subject. Similarly, the Report's emphasis on forging links with Israel through home ownership and investment and the division of time between Israel and the diaspora on the part of those who do not make *aliya* is to be welcomed as a means of strengthening Israel-diaspora ties and the links of Jewish peoplehood even though it flies in the face of conventional Zionist doctrine. My own opinion is that such partial arrangements will result in permanent *aliya*.

The general thrust of the Commission's recommendations with regard to Israel represents a contemporary statement of the classic vision of the Jewish state and its people as a light unto the nations. As such, it reflects a deep Jewish spiritual need shared by Israelis and non-Israelis alike for Israel to be more than simply another state. It is a view which one cannot but heartily endorse even if one does not find the Report of much help or guidance for improving the present reality and bringing it closer to the vision we share.

Diaspora Relations

After a general introduction which captures the reality of contemporary diaspora Jewish life, the Report turns to consideration of the emancipated communities. It begins with a statement which has been overlooked in most comments about the Report and which may be surprising to some, namely that "the security of Jews living in the free democratic societies of the West is only relative." The Report then explicates this statement in a sober and, in my opinion, accurate way. An inescapable if not clearly enunciated conclusion of the Report, then, is that all Jews -- in Israel and the diaspora -- are, in a very real sense, in the same boat. Confronted, as always, by a hostile world, those in Israel and the emancipated communities have achieved relative security, but that none of us should be misled into thinking that is more than that.

Unfortunately, the recommendations which follow are disappointing in their generalities, conventionality, and inappropriateness. In paragraph 29, after citing real problems of "aging and population decline, intermarriage and assimilation, growing secularism and problems of generational change," the Report turns to an attack on "overlapping or duplicate activities which result in work lacking in depth and waste of available resources."

The American Jewish community is singled out in this regard. The recommendation concluding the paragraph is even set apart in italics, a style reserved for the few operative recommendations contained in the Report, and calls for a "serious joint study to eliminate the unnecessary duplications and permit a strengthening of Jewish organizational activities through better allocated and more cooperative, coordinated and intensive efforts." As a student of the American Jewish organizational scene, I have elsewhere commented at length on the duplication question which is really one of two generations ago. While not entirely lacking in validity today, the issue is confined

to one or two spheres of Jewish organizational life. It is certainly one of the minor problems faced by that great community. It can hardly be compared to the difficult problems mentioned in the beginning of the paragraph.

While presumably considering the diaspora, the Report turns to Israel once again -- almost like the old story of the egotist who has monopolized the conversation with his dinner date all evening but finally turns to her and says, "Now, let's talk about you. What do you think of me?" Paragraph 30 focuses on how disturbed diaspora Jews are by "Israel's economic, social, political, and religious problems, and by her inability to cope with them effectively." The Report correctly points out that "with increasing visitations and contacts over the years, and the more intensive media coverage of Israel since President Sadat's visit to Israel in 1977, diaspora Jews are better informed about conditions in Israel than formerly. Many see Israel more realistically and are disturbed by what they see." This is certainly the case but the question must also be raised as to how deep their exposure has been and what kind of understanding have they gained to shape their perceptions. I am certainly not arguing that were diaspora Jewry to know Israel better, they would have fewer criticisms. Israelis who understand Israel very well share many of the criticisms implicit in this statement made in the Report as a whole. But the Report should have emphasized at some point the need for greater diaspora understanding of Israel, much as it argues for greater Israeli understanding of diaspora views.

Here the Report becomes more reflective of the Commission members' personal positions and hence should be taken with great seriousness. Paragraph 32 is the key paragraph. Let me quote its second sentence; "If many secular diaspora Jews are heavily dependent on their concerns and support of Israel for their sense of Jewish identity, criticism and differences with Israel may have seemed to them to threaten to violate that bond and sense of identity, and hence presented them with an intolerable problem." This gets to the heart of the matter and it is this which suggests quite correctly what is changing. Those secular Jews who are so dependent upon Israel as the core of their Jewish identity are now willing to face hard questions about the Jewish state and to differ with its leaders with regard to Israeli policies. This may be the one common denominator that links the members of the Commission, who to the best of my knowledge, are more or less secular Jews (indeed, there is not a single seriously observant Jew in the lot although they undoubtedly are serious about the Jewish observances they do maintain). This tone of crisis derived from Israel's changing character pervades the Report.

I say all this while agreeing with their analysis and recommendations in this regard. Aside from recognizing the idealization problem, the Report cites the operational problems such as the lack of an appropriate institutional framework for diaspora input and the problem of assymetry between a politically sovereign state and the Jewish communities of the diaspora. Its recommendations are appropriately modest, namely that "when Israel and diaspora representatives meet, they should put on the table and attempt to resolve the issues which have been festering in the absence of open discussion, to the end that a true partnership and consensus among the several components of the Jewish people may be forged." The other operative recommendation is that "ideally, a body broadly representative of the diversity of the diaspora should engage in constructive dialogue within the State of Israel on all issues and problems of mutual concern." This is something calling for less than a world Jewish parliament but it does follow the tradition of the World Jewish Congress which has sought to be such a body. The Commission itself simply suggests that the WJC be the vehicle for exploring the matter and does not claim that it can be such a body. (It is interesting to note that one of the few supplementary statements, that of Professor Ben Shazar, suggests that such a body should represent Israeli and diaspora Jewry.)

Neglecting Jewish Education

Significantly, the Report says very little about Jewish education other than to indicate that it is a good idea. It does explicitly state (paragraph 37) that there

was such a difference of opinion among Commission members with regard to whether or not to encourage day schools that no recommendation could be developed.

At one point the Report, while discussing Jewry, reference is made to day schools as "parochial schools," which is not a term ever used by Jews in discussing such schools, and one which is technically incorrect since it describes Roman Catholic schools attached to parishes. The term "parochial" has acquired a certain negative connotation in the sense of being narrow and limited. Its choice, then, cannot other than reflect a built-in bias on the part of the Report. This is reinforced in the use of the term parochial again, albeit in quotation marks, in contrast to the "general" concerns of the larger society. In other words, the hidden message is, "the more Jewish, the more parochial."

The Israelis Agmon, Ben Shahar, and Blumenthal filed a supplementary statement with regard to Jewish education, which ranges from the platitudinous to the impossible, reflecting their own innocence with regard to diaspora Jewry. In the latter case, they recommend that a world Jewish education center be established in Israel which would have the responsibility for designing and developing a common approach to Jewish education to be used world-wide and to provide the necessary services for its implementation. They write as if the diaspora were all of a single piece and just waiting for Israelis to tell them what to do in a field where Israel, itself, has obviously failed. From the wording of their statement, these three Israelis seem to be unaware of either the Hebrew University's Center for Jewish Education in the Diaspora or the new Joint Education Fund established by the Government of Israel and the Jewish Agency for that purpose. Again, one is struck by the shallowness of the Israelis' participation. It is nice to note that the Commission does recognize the need for Jewish policy studies (paragraph 38), although it is unclear as to whether or not they see this as a substantive need of world Jewry or simply as a means to involve more Jewish intellectuals in the common life of diaspora Jewry by appealing to them on their level. However, after listing a number of existing institutions and activities which they acknowledge that they have not examined, they call for the establishment of yet another body, "an International Institute for Israel-Diaspora Affairs, to provide the policy analysis essential to the formulation of cohesive strategy by Jewish decision-makers embracing the entire range of Israel-diaspora relations," -- this after decrying duplication in the American Jewish community.

The major recommendation of the entire effort is the last, namely the development of a "joint Israel-diaspora effort to devise constructive solutions to Israel's basic economic problems," including the development of a comprehensive multi-year national economic plan, all done through a "single economic commission jointly constituted" by appropriate Israel and diaspora groups including members designated by Israel's governmental and major economic organizations like the Histadrut and the Manufacturers' Association, and "truly outstanding financiers, industrialists, economists, and engineers" from the diaspora, all selected on a non-partisan basis. This is a concrete step which deserves consideration. Would that the Commission have focused on such a recommendation and prepared the groundwork for it.

Israel's Materialism and Jewish Values

The discussion of Israel's growing materialism, while not incorrect, is both insufficient and a little difficult to take, coming from a group of people who have benefited so tremendously from financial success in the West and whose own lifestyles (to use their term) certainly do not reflect the simple life. Were Israel's newly affluent charged, as they can be, with failing to devote a sufficient proportion of their income to public purposes, to *tzedakah*, then the discussion would have some meaning. As it is, the suggestion that "individual and group competition for larger shares of (material) rewards hastens the erosion of the old idealism and Jewish values," is difficult to justify. Since when is getting comfortable, even rich, against "Jewish values," provided the money is used correctly? (There is a kind of Christian asceticism hidden here, such as befits a group thoroughly assimilated to modern western culture.)

Here, as in so many other places in the Report, one senses that the Commission endorses the notion that Israel should live up to a kind of ideal of self-denial which diaspora Jews hold in front of them as a vision, but would not like to practice themselves. In other words, Israel is to secular Jews what modern rabbis are to their congregants -- the people who are supposed to behave in an ideal way while their congregants are free to live in the real world as they please. I do not believe that many Israelis would like to play that role, nor should they.

Jewish Values or Western Cosmopolitanism

The section on Israel in the body of the Report ends up with a curious juxtaposition which can be understood more as a reflection of western Jewish cosmopolitanism than as a reflection of the Jewish values it claims to be, namely an attack on the spirit of nationalism as reducing the Jewishness of Israel. This should have come as a surprise to Israelis (although the Israelis on the Commission do not seem to have been bothered by it), and for that matter, to historians of the Jewish experience, most of whom have counted nationalism as an essential ingredient of Jewishness from the first. Without going into the philosophic questions underlying the juxtaposition, it is sufficient to note that this is perhaps the crux of the hidden dilemma in the Report, namely, a certain discomfiture over Israeli assertions of independence and self-interest, rather than subordination of its goals to what is essentially an American view of the needs of western democratic civilization.

The essence of this view is to be found on page 36 in the most eloquent passage of the whole document: "At the heart of the world perspective we have drawn, we recognize an assault on the security, the well-being, the civilization and the values of the deomocratic world...If our unhappy past, as Jews, has made us more sensitive and alert to the signs of such dangers than most of our fellow citizens, is it not incumbent upon us, and the better part of wisdom, to try to alert them to the dangers which threaten us all? *If this be so, then the emphasis and scope of our organizational activities must be enlarged accordingly...not only to continue our present activities, but also to sharpen Western perceptions of these broader dangers and to strengthen Western resolve to confront and repel them.*" (Italics in the original.)

Undoubtedly, most Jews share this commitment to and concern for Western civilization of which we are among the founders. In endorsing this role for the Jewish people, we dare not lose sight of Israel's role as a focal point for Jewish civilization and what that means. No segment of this Commission fails to do so more than its Israeli members. That, in itself, ironically makes the Report a more accurate reading of the contemporary Jewish scene than it might seem to be on its face. The World Jewish Congress would do us a further service if it now convened a body more representative of the panoply of Jewish civilization to inquire into that question.