



New Directions for Zionism

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Hope, power and justice form the second triangle which together with the first (see article "Judaism after the Holocaust") - faith, people and land - form the Magen David (Shield of David).

New Directions for Zionism

Speaking in London, England, at the 1983 convention of the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland, Professor Anita Shapira of Tel Aviv University said that Zionism was born of the Jews' simultaneous encounter with modernity and anti-Semitism. "The vaguely articulated notions of Jewish nationalism became significant and potent when the integration of the Jews into the modern world clashed head-on with the spectre of antisemitism." She also said that for the Jew at the turn of the century, "a secular Jewish nationalism could be his answer to the secular nationalism which refused him entrance," and she quoted with approval Yehezkel Kaufmann's dictum that "Zionism was not born out of the fear of assimilation but out of the recognition that assimilation was impossible."

A second characteristic of the early stages of modern Zionism, according to Shapira, was its revolutionary nature. Speaking of the men and women of the second *aliyah*, she said that "their road to the modern world led through a belief in revolution, in socialism, in the remaking of society, the brotherhood of man, internationalism and utopian schemes."

Reviewing the history of Zionism, Shapira concluded her description with this question: "In which direction is Zionism moving today and what is the role which Zionism in the West can play in determining this direction?" To answer this question is, of course, to formulate Zionist ideology today.

To start with, we must remember that Zionist ideology today is being formulated in conditions quite different from those that characterized the emergence of Zionism. For Jews today can, especially in the West, assimilate without too many obstacles. The antisemitism that inhibited earlier generations of "emancipated" Jews from integrating into western society is much less potent today. The principal manifestation of what remains is anti-Zionism, which suggests to some Jews that distancing oneself from Zionism improves one's chances of assimilating. Therefore, we cannot persuade our contemporaries to embrace Zionism to express themselves as modern, emancipated secular men and women; they can do so, and they do so in other ways. Affirmation of Zionism is today a firm statement against assimilation.

Similarly, we cannot fuse our children's revolutionary zeal, such as it is, with commitment to Zionism. Even if revolution means to them what it meant to the *chalutzim* of the second *aliyah*, it can no longer express itself in Zionism. For today, Zionism is perceived as particularist, elitist, bourgeois, even imperialist. Many of our children want nothing to do with it and – perhaps because they are tainted by a touch of Jewish self-hatred – they give their support to the opponents of Zionism. To them, alas, Zionism spells more often oppression than revolution.

Those who see themselves as Zionists do so not because they want to assimilate but can't, and not because they want to change the world, for assimilation is easier without Zionism, and

revolution more accepted when expressed in anti-Zionist terms. Today's Zionists are committed to Judaism because Judaism today is not really possible without Zionism. Out of the despair to which western civilization has brought many of us and because of our disappointment with revolution, some of us have turned to our religious roots and found Zionism. When we wanted more of Judaism than we were given, we turned to Zionism and found our people through it.

Zionist affiliation comes to us nowadays, literally, with our synagogue membership. Whereas the membership of Diaspora Zionist political parties is decreasing, synagogue membership of religious Zionists is increasing.

Zionism, for most of us, has ceased to be a secular-revolutionary force and became a religious-bourgeois manifestation. It no longer negates our Diaspora existence. We must acknowledge this reality and actively pursue a policy of education and information in an updated version of the Zionist vision of Achad Ha'am and Martin Buber. The political response that led to the creation of the State of Israel in the land of Israel has made it possible to offer a spiritual-cultural framework for the renewal of the people of Israel and the faith of Israel. What follows is an attempt to formulate this old-new Zionism.

The achievement of Zionism, that is, the establishment of the Jewish state, completed the triangle that is Israel (see [Judaism after the Holocaust](#)). Until then, and for most of its history, Israel had been faith and Israel had been people. Israel as land was a dream that permeated faith and people. The reality of the land completed the triad and changed the nature of all three; it made Israel whole, and it made it different. Jewish thought is wrestling with the implications of how the faith of Israel and the people of Israel have been transformed by the possession of the land of Israel. Judaism has entered a new phase: it is not only suspended from heaven, but rooted in the soil. As a result, every conscious Jew has become something of a Zionist, and every Zionist and supporter of the land of Israel, has become involved with the people and the faith. The distinction between religionists and secularists has disappeared, despite the institutions that suggest the contrary.

The completion of the triad of Israel as faith, people and land produced a new triad. The existence of the land brought a new dimension of hope in the perception of the people of Israel in relation to the faith of Israel. Similarly, the new situation made the people relate to the land as a new category: power. And, finally, the relationship of the faith to the land expresses itself in a new struggle for righteousness. Therefore, if faith-people-land form one triangle, hope-power-righteousness form the other.

Since hope is the outcome of the encounter of faith and people, power of people and land, and justice of faith and land, this second triangle forms – with the first – the *Magen David*.

As Gershom Scholem has shown, it was Zionism that gave the *Magen David* new vitality and new meaning.¹ It may, therefore, be appropriate to plagiarize Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* and describe the prospect of deliverance that Zionism constitutes with the same symbol. Rosenzweig's interconnecting triangles are grounded in philosophy; those that Zionism created have their roots in history; both have profound theological implications.

The emergence of Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel have transformed Judaism in all its aspects. Therefore, it is not enough to speak of the centrality of Israel. If there was such a term, we should rather speak of the "Israeliness" of Judaism, epitomized in this illustration that tries to make the *Magen David* a metaphor for contemporary Judaism and Jewishness.

The triumph of Zionism made Judaism whole, yet our task is not complete. The birth of the State of Israel may have completed the task of Zionism as far as the first triad is concerned, but it has not yet tackled the second. Therefore, we must ask ourselves: How does the existence of Israel as

faith, people and land affect our understanding of hope, power and righteousness?

Attempting to point to the theological implications of the Six Day War, Eugene Borowitz, a prime exponent of liberal Judaism, wrote at the time that “to our own surprise we sensed the presence of a transcendent reality operating in history that we had almost come to believe could no longer make itself felt there.”² That surprise had already come to many Holocaust survivors in 1948. To them, the establishment of the Jewish state was evidence that, despite everything they had been through, life was worth living. It was worth bringing children into the world and rearing them as Jews. Jews who have experienced the Holocaust see Zionism as a metaphor for hope, whether or not they live in Israel.

The establishment of the State of Israel based on faith, people and land has rooted hope in reality. That it has been “secularized” in the process has only increased its significance and, perhaps paradoxically, made it even more a function of the sacred. The redemption of the land by secular means has given hope, inherent in the impact of our faith on our people, even greater poignancy.

The connection between Holocaust and sovereignty means many things to Jews. It is the nearest we have to a guarantee that the Holocaust will not recur as long as there is a Jewish state. That is the basis of our hope. When we say that with Zionism Jews came to control their own destiny – at least to the same extent as other peoples, since we are no longer solely dependent on the actions of others for our existence – we are saying we have become actors on the arena of history. Because we are actors, rather than mere objects, what happened to us under the Nazis cannot happen again. That is the message we convey to our children and, if they don’t understand it in theory, many of them feel it when they are in the land. To bring them to Israel, to visit or to settle, must, therefore, remain a crucial practical task. It is how we live out the hope of our people rooted in faith. Tourism has become a lesson in the ideology of our time.

The existence of the State of Israel is the foundation of the existence of the people and the faith, manifested in hope. Nothing that threatens that existence can, in terms of Jewish self-understanding, be morally justified. It is for Zionists to articulate this by their unconditional commitment to the state and its security – whatever government is in power. Those who established the Jewish state made hope the patrimony of the Jewish people. Those who subscribe to the ideology of Zionism regard it as their duty not to squander it.

Hope compels us to support Israel in its quest for continuity and security, whatever other objectives and objections we may have. Hope also compels us to dispel the myth of our viability in the Diaspora without Israel. But it can only be sustained by power.

The existence of Jewish power enables us to test our teachings. The State of Israel will confirm the truth of Judaism or destroy it. If the Jewish state acts like all other states in its exercise of power, it will have rendered Judaism obsolete. Therefore, inevitably, special demands are made on Israel. In the debate about whether the task of Zionism is to normalize the Jewish people or bring the messianic era closer, we cannot remain undecided but must opt for the messianic alternative. Without it, the first triangle is rendered meaningless, for it only replaces faith with land and is still not a triangle – the whole structure collapses.

How then, do we affirm power, support those who exercise it and, yet, remain true to our messianic aspirations? Or, to put it differently, how do we retain hope *and* power? Memory is the key to our morality.

As Jews, we must accept the reality of history that brings us into the realm of power. But, as Jews, we must also remember our long history of powerlessness; if we don’t, we will have denied the past, even betrayed it; if we do, we will have remained true to our heritage. The memory of the Holocaust should not be a tool in the ruthless exercise of power, but, on the contrary, a corrective

to it.

This, in turn, means that our unconditional support for Israel is not identical with our unconditional support for the government of Israel. The political orientation of Israel must be a matter for the Israeli electorate. If we want a say in it, we must draw the obvious conclusion and make *aliyah*. But, as Jews, we have the right, nay the duty, to ally ourselves with those forces in Israel that appear to exercise power with the memory of powerlessness. By remaining apolitical and committed to the depoliticization of the Zionist organization, we must feel free to speak our minds on any issue that affects the *Magen David*.

For Israel is the state of the Jewish people and its life and orientation concern us all. Sometimes, our line will be identical with the policy of this or that party; sometimes it will not, for truth is not easy to label. But our criteria should be clear: we do not interfere in any way in the process that brings about a democratically elected government in Israel, whether we like the outcome or not; we do criticize any move by that government, or anyone, that threatens to jeopardize the Jewishness of Israel, for then we are all affected and the *Magen David* is in danger.

The necessity to support Israel as a function of hope, which in turn is the outcome of the interaction between people and faith, and the need to be critical of Israel in the light of our perception of power, as the outcome of the interaction between people and land, lead us to the consideration of righteousness as the outcome of the interaction between faith and land. If we are to support Israel unconditionally, and yet allow ourselves to be critical of those who exercise power in Israel, our guidelines must be rooted in righteousness to the land and in the land. And that quest for righteousness inevitably must lead us to consider our attitude to the Arabs.

If the hope of Israel is to remain a reality, it cannot be founded on the despair of others; if the power of Israel is to be exercised with the moral corrective of memory, other people must not be vanquished. War can only be justified if it leads to peace, not if it leads to more wars. Righteousness must be the basis on which we build our attitude and our policy to all humanity.

Working for Arab-Jewish understanding must, therefore, remain an integral part of Zionist ideology. It is an aspect that Zionism has until now neglected at enormous cost. As we affirm our support for Israel as vested in hope, we must also find ways to co-operate and understand for the sake of righteousness, otherwise the *Magen David* will be broken.

Prudent men and women will tell us that this is a noble enterprise, but an unrealistic one. For our quest for righteousness will be distorted and abused by a hostile propaganda machinery in the Arab world and in the West. Our qualifications of Jewish power will be seen as a loss of nerve to be exploited by enemies. And our affirmation of hope will be viewed as lack of loyalty to the countries in which we live. Therefore, even to utter the sentiments expressed here may be seen as opening Satan's mouth. However, we may have to take that risk and speak that which our tradition and our consciences bid us say.

How do we translate this ideological stance into practical action? Our first task is educational. It is a fallacy to assume that Jews around the world are ideologically committed to Israel and that they recognize it as essential for their future as Jews. To educate our people, young and old, to this truth is a primary responsibility. The "Israeliness" of our Judaism is ignored or denied by many of our fellow-Jews who still believe that lofty universalism or tepid piety is all that the Lord requires of them. To alert them to the truth, and to educate them in its implications, remains the main task of today's Zionist movement.

We must also help each other adjust to the new era in Jewish life and accept that we have the right

and the means to shape our own future. That carries with it responsibilities but, however grave these may be, they do not entitle us to refrain from acting. If we refrain, we return to the state of powerlessness, hankering, like our ancestors in the desert, for the security – and the degradation – of slavery. To accept the reality of the new era, and to act on it, should enable us to formulate our Judaism in a new light and find a new basis for affirmation *and* criticism of Israeli policies. We must see ourselves as ardent students of Israeli political life *and* as exponents of Judaism in relation to that life. If the first task is to bring Zionism to contemporary Judaism, the second must be to bring back Judaism to Zionism.

The basis of our critique is righteousness. This means, not only righteousness and justice for Jewish minorities, but for all. As a Reform Jew and a Zionist, I would like to belong to those who spearhead a fusion between the noble principles of universalism and the lofty ideals of social action. Israel is our only opportunity to make Judaism relevant and authentic. My opposition to Israeli Orthodoxy is based on the knowledge that it has set out to block every attempt in that direction.

The new vista for Zionism may appear too grand. However, unless we opt for the grand design, we will remain in the shifting confines of inept party politics, instead of striving towards an ambitious vision for the future. And it is the future that ideology is all about.

Notes

1. Gershom Scholem, "The Star of David: History of a Symbol," in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1972).
2. Eugene B. Borowitz, "Hope Jewish and Hope Secular," *Judaism* 17:2 (Spring 1968): 145.

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