

THE POSTURE OF THE JEW IN THE WORLD TODAY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY *

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THE Jewish community of the United States has not yet achieved its ultimate form. In a fluid and free society, change is the one constant factor; therefore, I do not imply that our Jewish community is headed for a rigid, inflexible, never-changing format. What I do mean is that certain forces are at work, externally and internally, that are driving our American-Jewish community towards goals and characteristics not yet clear, but, nevertheless, to changes which can be for the better or the worse. The burning question is, "will we pause long enough to recognize the existence of these forces and attempt to guide our own destiny or will we let these pressures alone formulate our future?" Let us examine a few of the elements which are patently creating a call for decision. Not the least of these is the posture of the Jew in the world.

Posture of the Jew in the World

The world outside exerts a powerful influence on the nature and movement of American Jewish life. Generally speaking, for the many problems that arose overseas in the wake of World War I and that were intensified by the tragic events before and during World War II (a) a solution has been achieved for some; (b)

a pattern exists for the solution of others; or (c) in some respects, in both quality and quantity, the solutions are not at hand or else in the complete control of events beyond our capacity to handle. This latter category is obviously less pressing for action no matter how urgent we may consider it in feeling.

The enormous problem of the Jewish refugees is not presently a monumental challenge. True, it ebbs and it flows with the fancy of a few governments. But even in its most favorable aspect, the doors that open now to permit exit are relatively few. All in all, with the great sacrifice of the Israeli community and with a fair measure of generosity by other Jewish communities, the present and foreseeable refugee load is within existing capacities to manage. This is not to say that resources flow freely or ideally. Nor is the exodus from some areas as great as we wish it, but the challenge is being met on a standard with results that are not altogether demeaning to the historic role of Jewish tzdokah.

The Soviet Union

Of course, the great enigma is the Soviet Union and its policies. Equally puzzling to me is our own capacity to understand the problem and if we come to understand it, what to do about it. There is no question about the carry-over of

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anti-Semitism in the Soviet. Whether or not it gets official encouragement as frequently as some Jewish leadership complain about it is quite another matter. On this point I am not so sanguine. As one competent Communist spokesman once said to me in a moment of confidence—"We have laws against anti-Semitism but no set of laws and a generation can overcome a national habit that existed for a very long time."

The extent of official, as distinguished from unofficial, anti-Semitism is a key question. No less important are the real statistics of the number of Jews in the Soviet Union and in other Communist countries who have given up any claim to Judaism. It is not easy for one to maintain a religious affiliation against the power of an atheistic state. I saw evidence of this behind the iron curtain. We must press for this knowledge. We must also press for open doors, whether for the reasons continually given or simply because it is a recognized human right, endorsed by the universal declaration of the Rights of Man. Which approach we use is a question of fact and of tactic, which is yet another subject.

If we mean to salvage what is left of real Judaism in the Soviet, it is my present judgment that well-founded appeals, based on openly accepted and generally endorsed international principles can and should be more effective, where a proud and sensitive government is involved, than a campaign of vilification and charges, some based on fact and some on sentiment and embarrassment. At least, it might be desirable to try a new tactic for a change. But this is not a problem that will be solved by campaigns for funds or national or mutual harangues. If we have learned anything about the Soviet, it is that it does yield now and then, but it picks its own time and seeks its own advantage. The views of American Jewry could help or could conceivably even hinder the solution of

this problem, depending entirely on external events.

North Africa

The grave decisions which faced many thousands of Jews in Algeria, the fluctuating fates of Jews remaining in Morocco and Tunisia were the result of political ramifications in which the problem of the Jew was a minor factor to almost everyone but the Jew. The agonizing hours of indecision which surrounded Jewish life in Algeria while the blood-letting went on in the struggle for independence have now been ended for the major portion of what was Algerian Jewry. Those who remain will face the same domestic questions which have faced sizeable Jewish communities in Morocco and Tunisia. The role of a Jew, a member of a small minority, in a country predominantly Moslem at a time when the future of the nation itself is still uncertain is at best a shifting one. It is often influenced by the pressure from other Moslem countries who are only excited about their continuing quarrel with Israel. Fortunately, this pressure is frequently offset by the desires of the new governments to maintain a friendly relationship with the West. Therefore, these Jewish communities which remain are, in a sense, cast upon the waters of international conflict. Their futures and hopes are related to the ebb and flow of international relations—the problem of Israel's relations with her neighbors and the intensity of the desire of governments to maintain friendly relations with the West.

The revolutionary upheaval in Algeria and other collateral events may have shifted the demographic line-up of world Jewry. There are those who claim that in 1961 and 1962 the French Jewish community became the fourth largest in the world after that of the U.S.A., U.S.S.R. and Israel. Statistics of this character are always less than foolproof,

but they do indicate a trend and they do disclose changes in communal behavior which such pressures induce. The problems of the French Jewish community have been among the most difficult of any host community in recent years.

South America

The South American situation is decidedly different. Here there is some slight influence of the fact of Israel on some nations, but by and large the exposure of Jewish minorities to uncertainty and harrassment is primarily due to a serious economic situation in so much of Latin America. True, many of these states are predominantly Catholic, but prior to recent economic events this fact did not play a major role in the personal safety and security of the Jews. In some countries it did affect the ability of Jewish citizens to play significant communal roles, but this was in the process of cure. The unsettled political and economic scene has put a great question mark in the minds of parts of Latin American Jewry. The upsurge of open anti-Semitism is but a manifestation of the growing social unrest in some places. I still have confidence that the Alliance for Progress will work. It was never wise to expect it to work quickly. In the process of becoming effective the Alliance for Progress may result in a re-shuffling of many social and economic patterns in parts of Latin America. Any re-shuffling process can ignite forces which could make life difficult for many people and especially for minority folk. So, while I view the long term outlook for Jewish life in Latin America as hopeful, once the shakedown takes place, I look at the short time prospect with some uneasiness. Social and economic change must come, and which way it comes will determine the fate of relatively large Jewish populations.

American Jewry can be helpful to Latin American Jewry in short term ad-

justments. Fortunately, large segments of these populations have managed to find a degree of financial security. The decision as to whether to stick it out or to leave is never completely a community decision. It is a highly personal question as we have witnessed so frequently in North Africa and elsewhere. The ultimate destiny of Latin American Jewry is largely dependent on the effectiveness of the Alliance for Progress. I can only utter the hope and belief that it will succeed sufficiently to avert a major disaster.

South Africa

As for South African Jewry, what can one say? Too many have already spoken of the volcano atop which white populations are ensconced. The South African Jew is caught in the vise of a race problem so deep-seated that it begins to defy any reasonable treatment for solution. Here is the classic example of a conflict between loyalty to the concept of "man in the image of God" and loyalty to the government of one's land. I have sat through many meetings when the attack against the Union of South Africa for its apartheid policy was at fever heat. Some still think that it is an adequate defense to the attack to demonstrate the general prosperity and governmental responsibility of South Africa. Indeed, South African Jewry is a fine example of a responsible, successful and extraordinarily generous community. But all this counts for naught when the stake is human freedom and dignity. No one can predict the ultimate in such a situation with anything but the humility born of great concern for all peoples involved. Some will berate me for candor, but I see no future for the white man be he Jew or non-Jew so long as the only thing he can offer to his African colored neighbor is apartheid. This is the period of the common man and the era of disappearing colonialism. The elemental

forces are too powerful to be held at bay in a small corner of the world no matter how sincere and how well meaning may be the adherents of a contrary concept. In my judgment, unless a new approach emerges quickly accompanied by a reversal in attitude, dangerous days may turn into fatal days in South Africa. The delicacy of the Jewish position is illustrated by the flare-up that arose when Israel voted for a sanctions resolution against South Africa, its old friend. The number of Jews in South Africa total no more than those in Detroit or Cleveland. Their quality is high and their generosity without equal; but their fate at the moment is deeply involved in the bitterest of race issues. Whether they see it through or leave is within only their own control as persons. They need our understanding of their predicament. But, this is a community mature enough and responsible enough to make its own decisions.

So while there may be some differences in viewpoints, understandably, as to the way the remaining problems of Jewish unhappiness in some nations should be treated, the aims and objectives in the treatment of the refugee or potential refugee problem are pretty well settled and generally accepted.

Israel

Equally settled and generally accepted is American Jewry's interest in the security and progress of Israel. Fifteen years have established varied patterns of helpfulness. They have been modified as time suggested and they will doubtless be modified again. This is especially so as Israel's economic stability becomes more certain and Israel's position becomes more solid.

There still remains the whole question of Israel's future because of security problems in the area. While, on occasions, American Jewry in common with other Americans can bring its views

to bear on political issues affecting Israel's security, we should recognize that its ultimate solution depends on world events and Israel's ever-growing strength among increasing numbers of friendly nations. The more Israel adds to her complement of sovereign friends, the less eager will be hostile forces to carry out blatant and belligerent boasts. If there will be no other way, then attrition may be the answer. Some optimists have expressed the hope that the recently organized new federation of Egypt, Iraq and Syria may give the UAR enough confidence to negotiate with Israel. I wish it were so—but I have grave doubts that anything but a balance of military power will stay the evil day.

American Jewry's role in this situation is, by now, reasonably clear except to a small fringe. Certainly there exists and will again arise occasions for interventions, pleas, representations, and the whole gamut of now traditional responses and reactions. But there is no important ideological rift that divides the mass of American Jewry on this phase of American-Israel relationships. We may be said to have arrived at a plateau of understanding on basic economic and security matters. The big task remaining since it has barely begun is in many ways more difficult if not as dramatic. That is the question of how to assure a continuing dialogue between the two most important Jewish communities in the world, America and Israel. For this, both communities may need new means and much organization to reach a mutual understanding.

A Breathing Spell in Pressures on Organized Jewry

And, finally, the problem of reconstruction of old Jewish communities torn to bits during World War II and of aid to communities arising in new areas has occupied a great deal of the attention of the more fortunate and more established

Jewish communities of the world, including our own. In the discharge of this task, no one must underestimate the contribution made by the Conference of Jewish Material Claims under the Luxembourg Agreement, a kind of international Marshall Plan for Jewish communal reconstruction and recreation. The principal resources still had to be provided through local leadership and local assets but, like the Marshall Plan, the infusion of a small or relatively larger amount of outside help provided both the stimulus and the essential difference between failure, deferral or successful reconstruction or recreation.

While it would be a mistake to conclude that the largest and wealthiest Jewish community in the world can now forget about overseas Jewish needs, it is equally faulty reasoning not to recognize a pause in some of the pressure that has heretofore existed, a kind of pause perhaps to permit enough time to be devoted to some domestic questions that have been too long deferred. No one can be assured that this situation will subsist for long but certainly nothing is of any greater importance to world Jewry than taking the time, if it is available, to strengthen and deepen American Jewish activity and interest. The implications of such a strengthening and deepening are enormous and should not be lightly regarded.

There are some who will take issue with the conclusion that the present situation presents somewhat of a breathing spell. Perhaps, even with them it is a matter of degree and, therefore, it is beyond debate. For those who might be excessively perturbed about diverting any attention from overseas matters, let me say that this is being done anyway by continued domestic debate about the future of the American-Jewish community. Some, who see only the dark shadows, have even predicted or prescribed the ultimate demise of the Jews as a

community unless some radical corrective measures are taken at once. Others, and I am among them, are far more optimistic. But among all, there persists a conflict over the question of voluntarism versus enforced or democratic community unity of some type.

There are many needs, either unmet or considered as low priority, here in the United States. Our fund-raising efforts ebb and flow but, by and large, in recent years they have not produced great increases for recurring expenditures. As a matter of fact, many of the increases that have been forthcoming have been offset by growth in population and by the inflationary process. We have had a virtual boom, however, in new capital construction of every type. Usually with new buildings come new and higher budgets. There is a general acceptance of the need for substantially greater resources for Jewish educational efforts, both formal and informal.

In the community relations field, noticeable shifts in organizational ties and in the character of the programs are in the making. No one can foretell with certainty the full significance of Jewish community relations activity in light of the persistent, welcome, and somewhat successful emphasis on the situation of non-whites in America. Will this abate the need for such activity or, as in some cases already evident, increase the requirement for a different type of program or alertness. The problems of youth are by no means limited to education, be it formal or informal; nor have we begun to cope with the challenging and desirable aspects of the increased numbers of aging among us. There are many local and national institutions and organizations at work with respect to all of these activities but yet, at times, there exists a gnawing suspicion that too few of the same people are talking to one another about all of these pressing problems. Are we able to arouse the giant

which is the American Jewish community when necessary or only in moments of dramatic emergency?

Forces Inclining Jewish Community Toward Cohesion and Cooperation

These fundamental needs of a relatively huge and scattered populace get their airings and their hearings but not the fulfillment of which we are capable as a community. In the mid-twentieth century American Jewish life is, in one sense, more simple and yet in another sense as complicated if not more complicated than ever. It is becoming more simple at least because it is growing more homogeneous. Most Jews are now second and later generation Americans. They have, in most cases, passed the stage of bitter scrounging for a living; they are, in large measure, college-trained or they certainly possess the benefits of a high school or better education. The day of the caste system in the American Jewish society, based on who arrived on these shores first, is about as archaic as the concept of royalty or having a Mayflower ancestor. We are moving toward each other in so many ways at the same time that the pressure of some overseas issues which once divided us, having abated or being put under control, tends to provide an atmosphere for more cohesion. Even in the great and all-consuming test by the fire of religious affiliation at a time when religious institutions in America are beginning, fortunately, to show increasing strength, it is becoming more difficult in some places, except for external accoutrements, to distinguish between a Reform, a Conservative and an Orthodox Jew at prayer. All in all, this tends to simplify the coalescing possibilities of what is the present day American Jewish community.

On the other hand, certain old and deep-seated loyalties persist. Some are religious, some are organizational, some

are historical. During this period of general American prosperity, Jewish life, organizationally as well as in personal terms, has also prospered. Many local and national organizations have grown in membership, in strength and in influence. Voluntary association is, after all, the very bulwark of a democratic society. It should be counted a good sign that the average American and, from our vantage point, the average American of the Jewish faith, seeks to associate himself with both general and Jewish movements which are devoted to bettering our society. This is a positive hallmark of freedom and liberty of which we can all be justly proud. This tends, however, to complicate communal life as well as to help it. It creates currents and cross-currents as well as competitive areas where, perhaps, cooperation might be better indicated. Anyone who values unbridled competition in a free society is a fool but I don't intend these words to condemn competition itself. All I am trying to do is to recognize that competition, even like cooperation, has its great strength and, on infrequent if not more frequent occasions, severe limitations.

For example, in the period immediately following the creation of the state of Israel, American Jews and their organizations were properly overflowing with good will toward this event which our generation was blessed to witness. There ensued a competition among all organizations to see who could pester our public officials most in the interest of helping the fledgling state. Out of this welter of conflict and confusion grew a new kind of instrument called, "The President's Conference", calculated, deliberately, to soften the contest and the rivalry in the interest of a greater cooperation toward a common, worthwhile end. It did not come into existence to do the impossible—to substitute for existing loyalties in organizational life. It came in existence to find the areas where

these loyalties could merge into cooperation instead of competition when it was in the common interest to do so. It was limited to American-Israel relations and to action unanimously agreed upon or, at least, it preserved the right of a president and his organization to disassociate themselves from a specific act or program.

No one should contend that this was and is a perfect answer or that, in retrospect, it acted correctly in every instance. It did act when called upon so to do. On the other hand, I shudder to think of what might have been in the absence of this instrument during the Sinai and Suez crises. This, then, was an agency created to meet a specific need and, at the same time, to preserve the attributes of voluntarism so vital to a free society. Even in this instance, however, at least one important organization determined not to associate itself with this effort and elected to choose to cooperate if and when it chose to do so in a specific case. This is still called "ad hoc" cooperation, whatever that means.

Today we are besieged by some to create a united Jewish community in America. Some seek a *kehillah* type community. I fear that some who advocate it or speak about it openly or behind closed doors are not too knowledgeable as to the depth of feeling against such an instrument and the real disunity that could be generated if an attempt to create it was seriously undertaken. I am convinced, apart from my personal bias, that such a campaign or effort would set back the cause of cooperative engagement a good number of years. On the other hand, I am not at all convinced by those who use the argument of voluntarism as a mandate for unorganized chaos or as a license that permits only "ad hoc" cooperation. At times I believe that this viewpoint is a sign of insecurity. It expresses itself as almost an unwillingness to exercise the maximum

rights of voluntarism which is to make the most of freedom to organize through cooperation and harmonization in such areas and by such means that voluntarism as a concept is either not involved or, if anything, is advanced. After all, American Jewish organizations are not sovereign states. Yet even these found it desirable and possible to create a United Nations without the sacrifice of sovereignty. Sovereign states with all the jealous protection of that sacred element of sovereignty were able to contrive a charter that lays the groundwork for voluntary cooperation in areas of mutual interest. True, such an institution has had a difficult time but it persists and exists because even among sovereign states there is an urge in mid-twentieth century to seek one another and to work together where it is possible. Are Jewish organizations and Jewish communal groups in America more sovereign than either the United States or the Soviet Union? Certainly they have much more in common ideologically no matter what their differences than have these two sovereign powers.

Under any but national emergencies, it is the right of an organization or a person in America to refuse to enter into any program. But it is questionable whether that right is not abused when it even rejects entering into an effort to find out if there is some means by which there can be increased harmonization and cooperation. To my knowledge few, perhaps only one, major American Jewish organization goes that far. May I say that while I don't agree with such a viewpoint, I recognize that under my own philosophy of American life, an organization enjoys the right to maintain such a position. If an organization wants to be alone under any and all conditions, it is entitled to do so. The community to which it belongs is likewise entitled to assess its value and its philosophy in the light of today's world.

There are correlative rights which I hope may some day be openly acted upon when separation in its entirety sets in. In this era, the concept that we will serve you from afar but not associate with you except when we choose is no longer valid. It is high time such movements be examined by the community to determine whether they do good or harm to the total needs of American Jewish life. The greatest improvement might result if we could all discipline ourselves to provide or withhold community support based on such an assessment. Let organizations who want to be aloof attain their support from those who believe that such a view is valid.

But be that as it may, I cannot escape the belief that American Jewish life faces some fundamental decisions which it should make deliberately. It should not be pressured into making them by events themselves. One of the key questions crying out for decision is the form new cooperative efforts, if any, should take. This should be examined after fair, adequate probing and thought. It should not be accepted or rejected because of history, organizational commitments or prejudices that have not been permitted to see the light of day.

Proposal for First Steps Toward Cooperative and Integrative Community Structure

In April, 1962, at the biennial meeting of the National Jewish Welfare Board, while I questioned many claims for a *kehillah* type organization, I suggested that the time had come when perhaps a group of respected and informed people should examine the question of new cooperative structures deliberately and calmly. I should like now to elaborate a bit on this notion.

1. I would hope that a foundation or a group of individuals would provide a fund of, let us say, \$50,000 to \$100,000 to convene a well-prepared conference of

fifteen to twenty-five selected individuals. The money would be used for any costs incidental to bringing the conference together, for preparing it, and for publishing its conclusions.

2. These individuals would meet in a preliminary session to consider: (a) an agenda for the main meeting, and (b) the time and place of meeting. After the main meeting, it might be necessary to hold a concluding session to consider the report, together with any dissents or minority views that may be set forth in the report.

3. This working group would hold its principal session for a period of one to two weeks, if necessary, to think out loud and to talk about this general problem and to produce whatever conclusions they can arrive at, unanimous or not. The working group should be selected for their knowledge of the problems of Jewish organizational life in America and should also represent differing viewpoints about the need for improving or for creating new means to increase cooperation or provide greater unity in the community.

4. The motivating objective would be to find a formula which, while preserving the principal of voluntarism, would spell out the path that the American Jewish community could follow to function generally in a more orderly and non-competitive fashion in the areas where such ends are desirable. In searching out the answers, the working group would be expected to regard the right of organized groups to abstain from their conclusions and the right of American Jews to associate in any fashion which they deem most desirable for purposes which they consider constructive.

5. To give some indication of the quality and character of the group, I would suggest that it be chosen by a committee made up of the presidents and chancellors of Hebrew Union College, Yeshiva University, the Jewish Theological Semi-

nary and Brandeis University. These presidents should, automatically, be members of the working group. They too could set up the rules for the convening of the conference and the publication of the report. One of the group could be selected as the temporary chairman to invite the others, be they eleven or 21 additional members, to serve with them.

6. The main session should be held as a series of seminar discussions with an effort to arrive at a consensus on each item on the agenda. The discussions should also be held in private, in order to encourage free and uninhibited exchange of views as well as honest efforts to arrive at mutually agreeable conclusions.

7. There would be no intention to make of the working group a campaign or organization committee to achieve the recommendations of the report it produces. It would be understood that the working group would dissolve after publishing its report. Its sole purpose would be to try to find a basis for a live and modern discussion of the problems of community organization rather than the sterile debate of unity versus voluntarism. Perhaps out of an orderly and thoughtful, if argumentative, dissection of the issues, there can come a basis for reasonable discussion in the community, resulting hopefully in constructive action.

What is suggested here is not without pattern in community life in America. There are general organizations who set up special groups to study special problems and to make a report as a basis for government or community discussion. The Committee for Economic Development has been working on this basis for many years. It provides a platform, a place and a group, and then leaves the participants independent to do their thinking and do their writing. The United Nations and its organs frequently assign bothersome problems to task

forces to clarify the issues and to make recommendations.

If, in these proposals, it appears that I am vague, then let it be said that this is deliberate. I am not seeking to answer the question. All I am seeking to do is to get us started on the pathway to getting an answer we can live with. I would be unfair if I did not say to you that I do have certain notions about what can and cannot be done to improve American Jewish communal life. Some of them are improvements over what I expressed in my book, *No Easy Answers*; some of them are more specific than some of the general thoughts that I expressed; and some of them are more modern in the light of the world of change in which we live. I abstain from spelling these out even though today I can speak without the restraint of organizational commitment. For the first time in many years, I am completely free of entangling alliances or positions of top responsibility in organized Jewish communal life. But I can see no purpose in one man, no matter who he is, trying to develop a plan and then proceeding to sell it, if he can, to a community. This may have been responsible in the past for the failure of efforts to increase cooperation in our community. The ideas should be developed by consultation among people who differ before they are foisted upon a community as proposals or mature ideas. There must be a period of gestation and of cross-fertilization of ideas if whatever is ultimately evolved is to have a fair measure of hope of success. The task at best is difficult. There is abundant room for many people to participate—there is no room in American Jewish life for one man or a combination of people to lay down an edict or ukase.

If we mean to do something seriously about this troublesome problem, we should learn from our history of attempting in the past to *kehillahize* American Jewry. One of the first proponents

