
This image of the "model state" endured in the mind of American Jews for over half a century. Its longevity was due, in part, to its extraordinary political value as a symbol. A "model state", cast in the image of America, served not only to defuse the sensitive issue of dual loyalty, it actually worked to strengthen the position of America's Jews by permitting them both to bask in the reflected glory of those engaged in building the state, and to boast of their own patriotic efforts to spread the American dream outward.

The image of the "model state" also came to serve an important religious function for its adherents. It offered American Jews, many of whom had become disenchanted with the traditional beliefs, rituals and practices of Judaism, a sacred "mission" that both linked them to other Jews and infused their own personal lives with meaning--the lofty satisfaction that comes from pursuing work of transcendent importance.

Seeing the Real Israel

Myths die hard, and so the image of Israel as a "model state", akin to America at its birth, bravely fighting for freedom and democracy, welcoming immigrants, praying for peace, taming the land, singing and dancing, lived on long after the State of Israel came into existence in 1948. It was nourished in no small part by successful films about the birth of the Jewish state, particularly *Exodus* (1960) and *Cast A Giant Shadow* (1966).

The Israel depicted in these films actually revealed more about American values and ideals than about Israeli society, then caught up in a welter of social, economic, political and religious problems. Nevertheless, the positive image lingered, reinforced by educators, fundraisers and public relations experts alike. Since most American Jews had never visited Israel for themselves, the country continued to be for them what they had long imagined it would be and wished it to be--an American-style Utopia.

The past two decades have witnessed the collapse of this idyllic image. The Israel regularly seen on American nightly news looked different indeed from what American Jews had expected, and hardly comported with their images and ideals. On a broad range of religious and political issues, American Jews also suddenly found that they diverged from their Israeli counterparts. Nothing had prepared the American Jewish community for this eventuality, and confusion reigned.

Today, with the Labor Party back in power and a new era in the history of the Middle East poised to begin, the opportunity arises for American Jews to recast their image of Israel yet again. In the past, as we have seen,

these images always spoke to the needs of *American* Jews, and reflected *their* ideals and fantasies rather than the contemporary realities of Israel and the Middle East. The question now is whether the American Jewish community can do better, forging a new image of Israel that is at once credible enough to pass the test of reality, inspiring enough to command a following, and powerful enough to carry the relationship between the two communities into the 21st century and beyond. □

Is Zionism still relevant?

Ronald Kronish

Is "Zionism" dead? If so, what has replaced it? What meaning does it have for diaspora Jews anymore, if any? Is it still a significant term for Israeli Jews?

The purpose of this article is to address some of these questions and to raise many more which flow from them.

Diaspora Zionism: A Contradiction in Terms

It is important, in my view, to state at the outset what Zionism is and is not. Zionism is not merely love and support of the land or state of Israel. One can be an avid supporter of the state of Israel from afar and not necessarily be a "Zionist". As Professor Steven M. Cohen has argued cogently, "being pro-Israel and being a Zionist are not co-equal". Many Jews (and non-Jews) do all kinds of wonderful things to support the state of Israel--financially, politically, morally, culturally, spiritually--but that does not make them "Zionists".

Zionism is a modern Jewish ideology--a set of ideas with a concrete program of action--which grapples with the two central problems of Jewish survival in the contemporary world--antisemitism and assimilation. It argues that these problems are endemic to diaspora existence and that they can essentially only be overcome by establishing *and living in* a Jewish state. By living in their own state, Jews will rule their own destiny and consequently no longer be subject to antisemitism. At the same time, they will create and maintain a *Jewish* state--one whose culture, calendar, customs and ceremonies are distinctively Jewish in ways that are simply impossible in the diaspora. Accordingly, Zionism is an ideology that can only really be lived in Israel, and therefore, the

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singular aspect of Zionism that might be relevant in the diaspora is *aliyah*, namely, making the preparations to fulfill Zionism by coming to Israel.

It should not be surprising, therefore, that with the establishment of the State of Israel, Zionism as an ideological movement has become largely outmoded in the diaspora. The term "diaspora Zionist" is a contradiction. There is really no difference between Jews outside Israel who call themselves "Zionists" and those who are "pro-Israel" except that the so-called "Zionists" are guilty about not having made *aliyah*. The rest of the community (which is certainly the overwhelming majority in America) has come to terms with the legitimacy of the diaspora in which they live.

It is completely illogical to maintain the concept of Zionism in the diaspora today. *Aliyah* is the only thing that distinguishes a "Zionist" from a "Pro-Israelnik". Those who argue that one can be a Zionist in the diaspora on a permanent basis by participating in Zionist culture (Hebrew song, dance, art, etc.) and by supporting the upbuilding of the land of Israel from a distance are deluding themselves. Zionism as an alternative form of Jewish cultural identity outside of Zion has proven to be virtually impossible. If Zionism is to have any meaning for diaspora Jews, it must be connected with the mitzvah of *aliyah*, settling in Israel, which is clearly the basic imperative of any Zionist ideology. But most American Jews are simply not interested in fulfilling this mitzvah (or even hearing about it).

Using Israel

Zionism as a movement in American Jewish life has been moribund for a long time. The ranks of Zionist organizations and Zionist youth movements have dwindled from decade to decade. Zionism has long ago been replaced by Pro-Israelism, as exemplified by the enormously successful fundraising work of the Federations/UJA, Israel Bonds, American Friends of every Israeli university, hospital, and so many other institutions, and by the political work on behalf of Israel by AIPAC, The Conference of Presidents and other Jewish organizations. American Judaism and Jewish institutions have rejected the notion of "negation of the diaspora" which was inherent in mainstream Zionist thought; yet, they have made Israel central to their Jewish identity, exploiting it largely for their own purposes. Therefore, Pro-Israelism has become one of the major expressions of Jewish identity and commitment for American Jews; it has nothing to do with classical ideas of Zionism which were (and still are) antithetical to most American Jews.

Only if *aliyah* were to become a serious option for a larger part of the community, due to threat to Jewish continuity in America stemming from antisemitism or assimilation (the classical motivator of Zionist ideology and action) as has happened in other parts of the Jewish world, would Zionism have a chance to become a meaningful ideology for American Jews. While this is not an impossible scenario--especially with all the current anxiety about Jewish continuity today--it is not very likely in the foreseeable future.

Zionism in Israel

Not unsurprisingly, "Zionism" is not faring much better in Israel either. Most Israelis believe that it ended with the creation of the state. For many young Israelis, "Zionism" is something to be put in quotations--it is a thing of the past, a phenomenon which ended in 1948. One can, and in fact does, learn the history of Zionism in Israeli schools, but that is essentially it. Zionism, for most Israelis, has become a matter of history. In fact, the very term "*tzionut*" in contemporary Hebrew has a negative ring to it in Israeli society today, and is usually identified with old-fashioned preaching and long speeches. As a result, there has been a serious educational effort during the last two decades to recast the teaching of Zionism by exploring the student's own Jewishness and their relationship to the Jewish state.

Zionism did not run the course with the creation of the State of Israel. Such thinking confuses ends with means. The state was never really meant to be a goal in and of itself; rather, it was meant to be a means to an end, a framework for ensuring the survival of the Jewish people. And so, the critical question, after statehood, is: what kind of Jewish survival are we, or ought we be, ensuring in the State of Israel? Now that the framework of the national home has been constructed, what will be the inner contents in the home.

Will it be both Jewish and democratic? What will be its relationship to the Jewish tradition? to Jewish history? to Jewish values? to "the stranger" in our midst? to the Jewish people who will continue to live in the diaspora? to Jews who may never make *aliyah*?

For those who still consider themselves Zionists of the cultural school (including myself), these questions remain very central and relevant. They need to be addressed if we are to preserve and maintain Israel not only as a state of Jews but also as a Jewish state.

Zionism has never been an abstract philosophy, reserved only for an intellectual elite; rather, it has been a powerful ideology, i.e., a set of ideas which lead to action. At the very least, it has been a movement which

has concerned itself with saving and redeeming Jews. "The Ingathering of the Exiles from the four corners of the earth" was certainly one of the central tenets and tasks of Zionism and now of the State of Israel and the Jewish people worldwide. That is why there has been so much excitement--both in the diaspora and in Israel--about the *aliyah* of over 20,000 Ethiopian Jews, hundreds of thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union, and most recently hundreds of Jews from Yemen. This excitement is not limited to Jews who call themselves "Zionists"; rather, it is the *nachas* of the pro-Israel Jewish community in North America and all over the world, irrespective of whether one belongs to a "Zionist" organization or not.

Still an Ideology For Israel

Zionism was not, however, a movement only about saving Jews. It was also created as a school of thought and a movement to redeem Judaism from the outmoded and anachronistic pre-modern forms which appeared to be strangling and stultifying Judaism in the Exile. This was certainly the case in late 19th and early 20th century Europe, when classical Zionism rebelled against traditional *galut* Judaism.

But, at the same time, it was a revolution which offered radically new ways of being Jewish in the contemporary world. In particular, cultural Zionism offered exciting and energizing alternatives to religious Jewish expression for modern Jews via the revival of the Hebrew language, the redemption of the land of Israel, the re-entry into and re-interpretation of Jewish history and the creation of modern expression of Hebrew literature, songs, dance, art, theater as part of a thriving old-new culture, all of which were developed to ensure the Jewish character of the Jewish state.

If Zionism is to be relevant at all in Israel, it must offer something meaningful to Israelis in the cultural and spiritual realms of their lives. In other words, Zionist ideology and action in Israeli society must be connected to Jewish identity. It must help Jews in Israel--young and old, new immigrants and veteran immigrants, *sabras* and scientists--connect themselves to the Jewish past, present and future, to Jewish tradition (pluralistically understood, of course) and Jewish history. It must teach them concern and caring about the fate of their brothers and sisters in the diaspora, whether they intend to make *aliyah* or not. In so doing, cultural Zionism can serve as a bulwark against assimilation (abandonment of Judaism or Jewishness) on the part of so many secular Israeli Jews. In the final analysis, it may only be a semantic issue of whether we call this educational agenda by the name of Zionism

any more; what is more important is that this agenda be addressed seriously and systematically by concerned Jews in Israel, and by those in the diaspora who care about the Jewish nature of this state and their relationship to it. □

Reform religious zionism

Lawrence A. Hoffman

The Crisis in Zionist Thought: Zionism as Landedness

Zionist thought today suffers because its classical theory was constructed on an assumption that has ceased being obvious: "exile" (*galut*) as an actual metaphysical state inherent in Jewish life outside of Israel, marked by an ineradicable environmental disease called antisemitism, and thus, by an equally diseased and attenuated form of Judaism itself.

It is not that we are not Zionists; we are! But we have lacked the terms to talk about it. History has been unkind to the romantic notion that a return from exile will organically and automatically produce a healthy Judaism; and we are unwilling to cash in the diaspora as so many devalued chips left over from a bad bet with history.

Zionism is like medieval metaphysics, in that it is an ongoing fascination with the human place in the world, but in this case, the Jewish place in a world which contains among other things something utterly inalienable and absolutely irreducible, something called The Land of Israel (*eretz yisrael*). We are Zionists, therefore, if we raise *eretz yisrael* to the same theoretical level as God, Torah and People of Israel (*am yisrael*), the three other irreducible realities that we take for granted because they too cannot be argued, proved or demonstrated, but only ~~assumed as the ground of our Jewish being~~. Moreover, as long as history is as it is, the ~~Land of Israel~~ (*eretz yisrael*) must also be The State of Israel (*medinat yisrael*).

We were all once taught these three irreducible essences in our metaphysical map of reality: God, Torah and People of Israel. But why privilege them over Land? Land is hardly inconsequential--it is ubiquitous in our tradition. Exodus from Egypt and entry to our Land have never been separable--the first supplied People; the other, Land; and in between there was Sinai, that is, Torah, all three being signs of God.

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