

Redefining Zionism

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I DO NOT KNOW PRECISELY WHEN ZIONISM became a term without meaning. Perhaps it was inevitable that when, beyond all practical or ideological expectations, the Zionist movement gave birth to the State of Israel, the care and feeding of that infant political entity had to take precedence over the cultivation of the dream. Perhaps, too, Zionism is the ironic victim of precisely the dynamic which it sought to remedy — it has been defined for us by the non-Jewish world. Whether it is the interchangeable use of the terms Zionism, Israel, and Jewish by the media or the protests by Jews that anti-Zionism is the same as anti-Semitism (which may sometimes be the case but adds to the unfortunate blurring of distinctions), the result has been the loss of the term Zionism as a significant, meaningful concept.

The degeneration of the term Zionism received added impetus in 1975 when the United Nations passed its infamous "Zionism is racism" resolution. Thousands of well-intentioned Jews donned the button "I am a Zionist" as signs of support for the State of Israel, but few knew what Zionism really stood for.

In Israel, the sense that Zionism died when Israel was born, having then achieved its primary objective, is prevalent. More often than not, when I try to speak to Israelis seriously about Zionist ideology, they laugh. "*Eyn kan shum ideologia*" I have heard more times than I care to recall. In America, Zionism is completely peripheral to the power centers of organized Jewry.

Recently, people have begun to write about the difference between Zionism and pro-Israelism. Much of this was motivated by the desire of *ohavei Yisrael*, lovers of Israel, and people of conscience to distance themselves from the policies of the Likud government which they found objectionable while, at the same time, not completely abandoning their commitment to Israel. Thus, a distinction was made between support for the policies of a particular government of Israel, and support for Israel itself. My motivation for redefining Zionism is different. It is my view that there is little to gain and much to lose when we define Zionism so generally that almost all Jews can claim the label. Surveys tell us that between 96-98% of American Jewry is strongly pro-Israel. All of those Jews cannot possibly be Zionists. It is precisely because I believe that Zionism, as an ideology and as a movement, has the potential to be the moving force in Jewish life,

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both in the diaspora and in Israel, that I believe the term must be sharply circumscribed. In the days before the State, when Zionism meant something and stood for something, it was a minority movement within the Jewish community. For it to become meaningful again, we must clearly and forcefully define what Zionism stands for and let those who accept that definition and the obligations that it implies preach it zealously to the rest of the Jewish world.

Before we propose a redefinition of Zionism for the contemporary situation, we must clearly understand certain forces that shaped classical Zionism, which was a response to a Jewry in transition and crisis. The transition was from the confining and oppressive world of the ghetto to an emancipated and seemingly open society which, nevertheless, was fraught with subtle, though no less real, threats to Jewish survival (e.g., the appeal of conversion and assimilation). The crisis was the breakdown of Jewish group cohesiveness coupled with the obvious fact that not all of Jewry enjoyed the fruits of emancipation. Finally, even where emancipation was extended, anti-Semitism was not going to disappear by governmental edict. As a result, the Zionist analysis of the Jewish condition was essentially negative and pessimistic (what Arthur Hertzberg has called defensive). Believing anti-Semitism to be endemic to the gentile world, Zionism saw the only real future for Jews in a restored homeland. Jewish life in a state of *galut*, exile, was doomed and thus there emerged the Zionist concepts of *shlilat hagolah*, the negation of the diaspora, and the great stress on *aliyah*.

While many aspects of this negative Zionism remain relevant with regard to the oppressed Jewries around the world today, it is not an ideology that is very compelling to the Jewries of the free world, most particularly America. The Jewish experience in this country belies the classical Zionist analysis. This is not to say that the American Jewish community does not suffer serious attrition from its ranks through assimilation, intermarriage and low birth rate. But concurrent with those phenomena is a core Jewish community that is dynamic, self-sustaining in every sense, and culturally vibrant. For these Jews a pessimistic Zionism does not ring true for they know that they are not doomed. In fact, as these American Jews look at Israel, they have reason to feel smug, for often they believe that their lives are more Jewishly fulfilling than they might be in Israel. If there is a Zionism that has the power to draw them it is the messianic variety — the strand of Zionism that recognizes that a Jewish state must be true to the prophetic vision of justice and peace. Ironically, just as we risk alienating such American Jews from Zionism when we tell them that adherence requires *aliyah* above all else, a Zionism that demands no more than being pro-Israel is hardly likely to inspire zeal.

Zionism and the Zionist movement thus suffer from two problems in the attempt to become relevant and meaningful for free diaspora Jewry. We must make clear that Zionism demands much more of Jews than

merely being supportive of the State of Israel. At the same time it must become clear that *aliyah* is only one among the many demands that Zionism makes of Jews. There are other ways to be a Zionist without making *aliyah* and not all who live in Israel are automatically Zionists.

Zionism is the unifying ideology of the Jewish people which recognizes our right to collective sovereign existence and seeks to strengthen the heritage, values and culture of Judaism so that Jews the world over feel linked to one another with a sense of a common past and a common destiny with Israel as its center.

Zionism has long sought to end the *galut*, exile, of the Jewish people through the ingathering of Jews to the land of Israel. Thus the persistent stress on *aliyah*. However, given a redefined Zionism, I would suggest that just as Zionist writers suggested that there was a *galut* mentality, so, too, can there be a *zionut* mentality which could be effected short of *aliyah*. In the post-State period the primary aim of Zionism should be the Zionist transformation of individual Jews — transforming them from a state of *galut* to a state of *zionut*. This has implications for how Jews see themselves, their countries and Israel. It is also the obligation of Zionism to set forth the beliefs and practices (*mitzvot*) that makes possible this transformation in a way that takes cognizance of whether a Jew lives in a free diaspora community, an oppressed diaspora community or in Israel. Once that is done, we will have a new set of definitions for who is a Zionist.

To set as our goal personal Zionist transformation suggests that where you live is quite secondary in the determination of whether you are a Zionist. A.D. Gordon and Rav Kook both pointed out that emigration, in and of itself, does not uproot *galut* from the personal or collective Jewish personality. Only when it does can the emigration properly be termed *aliyah*, a true upward spiritual journey. It is both possible to live in the diaspora and be a Zionist and to live in Israel and be in *galut*. These are two poles of Jewish self-perception and affirmation.

Galut is a condition which is essentially destructive of qualitative Jewish survival and it exists throughout the Jewish world. In oppressed Jewish communities, such as the Soviet Union, it is a condition that is imposed upon Jews, reminiscent of the state of most of Jewry throughout history. In Israel, *galut* can be found in those sub-communities that ignore or reject the sovereign existence of the State of Israel and where Jews live almost unchanged from how they would have lived in the diaspora (e.g. Neturai Karta, Ultra-Orthodox). A case could be made that the emerging brand of immoral nationalism that manifests itself in Jewish terrorism and exclusivist Kahanism is also an example of *galut* in Israel since it is so destructive of the social fabric of the Jewish State. Among free diaspora Jewry *galut* would characterize those Jews who are assimilated, self-hating or see their Jewishness as an unnecessary barrier to full social integration. A case could be made that *galut* is also the condition of Jews who are extremely aggressive about their Jewishness in public and who see in

every non-Jew an anti-Semite. Though often staunch supporters of Israel and Jewish rights, they ignore the fact that their host country is relatively tolerant of, and open to, Jews. In terms of mindset, these Jews are still living in a ghetto. (Ironically this posture is an example of negative Zionism misapplied. It leads to a basic distrust of gentile society. In Israel, too, the application of negative Zionism leads the country towards a siege mentality where no outsider can be trusted and peace with neighboring countries is made impossible.)

Zionut is the opposite of *galut* and is that condition and set of affirmations which maximizes the prospects for qualitative group survival. However, it must be pointed out that the majority of Jews fall in between the two poles of the Jewish condition. It is a state that classical Zionism called "normalization." The impulse in Israel was for the State to become "a nation like all the other nations," neither better nor worse. The term has not been generally applied outside of Israel but I think it well describes the condition of many Jews in the world today.

Who falls into this intermediary, "normal" category which is neither *galut* nor *zionut*? In oppressed Jewish communities, being normal is not possible. You are forced to choose between the poles because you are not allowed just to be. In the free diaspora communities normalization would characterize the majority of Jews who take their Jewish identity for granted, seeing it neither as a problem nor a virtue. There may be some nominal affiliation with a Jewish institution but only because it provides a service that is needed and convenient (*bar mizvah*, day-care). Little is done because of one's Jewishness or for it.

In Israel there are actually strong advocates for normalization and, again, that attitude probably characterizes most Israelis. Classically, Jacob Klatzkin was its main advocate and, more recently, Hillel Halkin has raised normalization to the level of principle. The position rejects the burden upon Israel to be an *or lagoyim*, a light unto the nations. Jews have a right to a nation-state like any other people. That nation has no obligation to be morally better than those other nations; preferably, it will be no worse. Many normal Israelis feel only tenuous ties to the diaspora and those ties are viewed more in terms of economic and political aid than as a cultural kinship with fellow Jews. Normal Israelis feel a widening rift between their Israeliness and their Jewishness (see Simon Herman's studies) and they are more concerned about their careers and families than about bringing to fruition the dreams of some long-dead Zionist thinker or a starry-eyed diaspora Jew.

All this is prelude to our attempt to identify the Zionists in the world and, in so doing, help to redefine the goals of Zionism for the post-State period. The Jerusalem Program, passed by the 27th Zionist Congress in 1968, is the clearest and most concise exposition of basic Zionist principles that has achieved consensual agreement among Zionists throughout the world. But the "Duties of the Zionist Individual," formulated by the 28th

Zionist Congress in 1972 (see the Appendix for both) do not adequately distinguish the different aims of, and *mizvot* required by, Zionism based on whether an individual lives in a free or an oppressed community. Neither statement adequately recognizes the need for Zionism in Israel. What follows, then, is an attempt to redefine Zionism, making those distinctions and recognizing that authentic expressions of Zionism already exist in each of the three communities.

The most heroic Zionists of our day are those found in oppressed Jewish communities. Prevented by their hostile societies from being normal, their only recourse to break the yoke of *galut* is by becoming Zionist activists. They do so at great risk to themselves and their families for it requires a total adversary posture vis-à-vis their governments. These Zionists organize study groups to learn Hebrew and Judaica. They are hungry for unbiased information about Israel and often need to read between the lines of their government's propaganda to know more about developments in the Middle East. These Zionists seek contact with Jews outside of their country who are often their primary source for material comfort, spiritual sustenance and political support. Finally, because in such oppressed countries there is little hope for cultural Jewish survival, these Zionists have as their main goal, *aliyah*. For them, Israel still serves as a beacon for *kibbuz galuyot*, the ingathering of the Jewish exiles of the world.

The Zionist movement has been most reluctant to recognize the Zionism of the free Jewish diaspora because it is often expressed in ways that fall short of a commitment to *aliyah*. As a result, those Jews who have a strong Zionist impulse have not been coalesced into a movement and this failure has denied them a strength which could be of great benefit to Jewish life and to Israel. There should be five elements required for being a Zionist in the free diaspora. They are:

1. Recognition of Israel as the focal point for the Jewish people, realizing the role which that center in Zion plays in the re-vitalization of Jewish life and culture. This suggests a variety of corollary actions:
 - a) regular visits to Israel, or extended stays.
 - b) learning Hebrew as the language of the Jewish people.
 - c) immersing oneself in the authentic Jewish culture that emanates from Israel (e.g. literature, music, art, dance, theatre, scholarship) and use of that culture to help create a vibrant Jewish communal life in the diaspora.
 - d) considering *aliyah* as the only real remedy to living in a place where one's self and one's heritage are not part of the main cultural current of life.
2. Understanding that being part of the Jewish people goes far beyond religious identification. One accepts religious, cultural and secular manifestations of Jewish identity as equally valid.
3. Support for the communal organs of Jewish life, recognizing in them the primary vehicles fostering Jewish group consciousness in the diaspora.
4. Willingness to participate in the political and cultural life of one's host

country, secure in one's Jewish identity and prepared to apply the values inherent in Jewish tradition to the policy deliberations of that society. This, of course, implies a commitment to acquaint oneself with the rich sources of Jewish tradition.

5. Unqualified, though not uncritical, political and financial support for the State of Israel, recognizing that Israel's survival is the prerequisite for the cultivation of the Zionist center which is our collective dream.

The fact that a Zionism for the free diaspora no longer calls for *aliyah* as a be-all and end-all of Zionist commitment is no betrayal of the Zionist dream. If Zionism is a movement for the strengthening and re-vitalization of the Jewish people worldwide, it must recognize that the free diaspora has already contributed significantly to that Jewish re-vitalization and will continue to do so. The insistence by Israeli Zionists that only in Israel can one be a true Zionist has the effect of turning potential diaspora Zionists into diaspora-autonomists who not only deny the centrality of Israel but who feel that diaspora Jewish culture is superior to the culture which is produced in Israel.

Once the Zionist movement comes to recognize that *zionut* is more a set of affirmations and a state of mind than a *place* of being, it will be able to articulate an ideology of Zionism addressed to Israelis. That ideology must call upon Israelis who want to call themselves Zionists to:

1. acknowledge the unity of the Jewish people worldwide and the partnership of Zionists in the diaspora and in Israel to create a certain kind of society or lifestyle;
2. foster the development of Jewish culture and tradition in Israeli society;
3. serve as a moral compass for the Israeli government, making her leaders aware that the State must not only operate according to the rules of international *realpolitik* but must also be accountable to a self-imposed higher standard of Jewish values and ideals;
4. encourage the Israeli government to accept the responsibility for the protection of Jewish rights and lives throughout the world.

These principles would suggest that Zionists and the Zionist movement within Israel challenge the State of Israel to strive for the highest standards of culture, spirit, and justice demanded by our Jewish heritage. Given a thirty-eight year history with the constant challenges of state building, a weak economy and the military footing required by hostile Arab neighbors, there is ample reason to take pride in the fact that Israel has fulfilled as many of the classical Zionist ideals as it has, most particularly *kibbuz galuyot*, the task of opening the doors of Israel wide to Jews from around the world. Still, there is a natural tendency for Israelis to say that keeping the State viable in less than ideal circumstances is all that anyone could ask for. Zionism should never allow the State of Israel to rest on past laurels.

Let us be clear. The Zionist spiritual, moral and cultural challenge to the State of Israel is not put forth out of any desire to "please the gentiles."

Nor is this a double-standard imposed upon Israel from outsiders. Zionism, as we have defined it, has a great stake in the State of Israel. Zionists, wherever they live, feel personally uplifted by Israel's triumphs (not only military) and they feel deep despair when Israel stumbles. It is, thus, out of an unqualified love for Israel that the Zionist movement might find itself impelled occasionally to take an adversarial stance vis-à-vis the Israeli government. A state is entitled to use force of arms to act in what it sees to be its legitimate national interests. The Zionist movement, though, should act as did the ancient prophets with the kings of Israel — to hold the political leadership accountable to higher ethical standards of behavior in keeping with traditional Jewish teaching. In this the Zionist movement might well find itself in league with diaspora Jews who have agonized over criticizing Israel when they have disagreed with certain policies. There are times when certain policies of the Israeli government might be judged to be at variance with what can be fairly expected of a state trying both to protect its citizens and be true to a visionary ideal. In those cases, Zionism should not only tolerate dissent from Israeli policy but should mobilize it. While dissent may come from many quarters, the dissent that should be taken most seriously is that which comes from Zionists as we have defined them.

A state must be expected to act in its own self-interest; it cannot and will not meaningfully check itself by a moral standard that other states do not abide by. If Israel is to become a light unto the nations the check must come from a Zionist movement whose commitment to the survival of the State of Israel is unquestioned but whose commitment to certain moral standards for the State is equally strong.

The fact that this lesson has yet to be learned derives from the historical triumph of political Zionism over spiritual/cultural Zionism. The predicament of Jewry in the first half of the twentieth century became so serious that the argument of men like Ahad Ha'am, who wanted to create a particular, qualitative settlement in Palestine that would be a spiritual and cultural light for world Jewry, became academic. The call of political Zionists to create a territorial refuge for the endangered of our people had to take precedence. When the tragedy of the Holocaust pricked the world's conscience into granting Jews Statehood in Palestine, it surpassed the expectations of most early Zionists. So elated were Zionists and Jews at their newly acquired national sovereignty and independence after 1900 years of dispersion that much of what Zionism sought in terms of a qualitative homeland for the Jewish people was forgotten. Zionists and non-Zionists the world over had their hands full in the exciting venture of insuring the survival and viability of the State.

Now is the time for a redefinition of Zionism in terms that will recapture the vision of spiritual/cultural Zionist ideology. This calls for a Zionist movement whose first and foremost commitment is to the principles expressed in the Jerusalem Program, understanding that the State of

Israel, as a real, functioning polity often has to face problems which classical Zionist ideology could hardly anticipate.

In the oppressed Jewish diaspora the Zionist movement must aid and abet those who struggle fearlessly against their governments for the right to express and practice their Jewish identity and who live for the day when they can emigrate. In the free Jewish diaspora the Zionist movement should aim at no less than the complete Zionization of the Jewish communal apparatus. At the very least, Zionism should be put forth as a badge of honor in the Jewish community, one that is earned, not by dint of money, but through a commitment to the principles and actions outlined above. The communities of the free diaspora are filled with individuals yearning for idealism, searching for heritage and longing for a sense of connectedness to other Jews. Zionism can and should provide the ideology for them. In Israel, the Zionist movement must be a constant reminder of the relationship of the State to Jewish history, Jewish values and to the diaspora so that Israel never becomes satisfied with simply becoming a nation like all the others.

In all three communities, the Zionist movement must start with individuals who must be challenged to undergo a Zionist transformation — from *galut* to *zionut*. This means that Zionism can no longer abide by the belief in *shlilat hagolah*, in the old sense that the diaspora is doomed. Rather, this concept must come to mean the commitment to overcome the *galut* mentality of Jews, or the normalization mentality for that matter, so that Jews might arrive at a higher state of Zionist consciousness and commitment. This is a Zionism that will mean something. The new Zionism must challenge individual Jews the world over to become a vanguard in the cause of revitalizing the Jewish people culturally and spiritually. The new Zionism will offer an ideology that will not be acceptable to all Jews but will have the power of conviction and commitment to a set of clearly defined goals. The new Zionism can, indeed, save world Jewry and Israel when it comes to understand that the greatest *mizvah* of Zionism may, indeed, be *aliyah*, but an *aliyah* that takes place in the minds and hearts of Jews the world over.

Appendix

The Jerusalem Program

The Jerusalem Program, adopted by the 27th Zionist Congress in June 1968, sets forth:

Aims of Zionism

- The unity of the Jewish people and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life;
- The ingathering of the Jewish people in its historic homeland, Eretz Israel, through *aliyah* from all countries;

- The strengthening of the State of Israel, which is based on the prophetic vision of justice and peace;
- The preservation of the identity of the Jewish people through the fostering of Jewish and Hebrew education and of Jewish spiritual and cultural values;
- The protection of Jewish rights everywhere.

Duties of the Zionist Individual

The 28th Zionist Congress, which met in Jerusalem in January 1972, formulated the "Duties of the Zionist as an Individual," as follows:

The tasks and functions comprised in the Jerusalem Program and membership in the Zionist Organizations imply the following duties:

- a. The implementation of aliyah to Israel;
- b. Active membership in the local Zionist organization;
- c. Continual effort for the realization of the program of the Zionist movement;
- d. The study of Hebrew, the provision of Jewish education for one's children and their education towards aliyah and the realization of Zionism in their lives;
- e. Contributions to the national funds, work on their behalf, and active participation in the economic consolidation of Israel;
- f. Active participation in the community's life and institutions, and efforts to ensure their democratic character, the extension of Zionist influence in them, and the improvement of Jewish education;
- g. Activity in defense of the rights of the Jews in the Diaspora. The local Zionist organizations should foster the consciousness of these duties among their members and urge that Zionist leaders should give a personal example to carrying them out.