

SUMMARY OF THE ARTICLE:

ZIONISM AND JUDAISM

by

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Zionism – Ahad Ha'am taught – was no *conditio sine qua non* of Jewish identity. Though Judaism denoted nationhood, it could not be defined exclusively in territorial terms. Rather than constituting the cornerstone of the national idea, statehood was but a means for warding off inimical pressure. It followed that one could be consciously Jewish even though not a Zionist, in spite of the historical need for a Zionist solution.

Ahad Ha'am's strictures retain their poignancy when set against current secularist claims equating Judaism with Zionism and Israel. The upsurge of world-wide Jewish fellow feeling generated by the Six Day War may have somewhat blunted the edge of this ideology. The protagonists of Israel-Zionist particularism think otherwise. Was it not Israel's power of attraction that evoked latent Judaism in the diaspora? Surely, once Israel consciousness began to fade, assimilation would once more set in. Though superficially convincing this argument is self-defeating. Ironically enough those who consider Zionism as the sole bond of diaspora Jewry have no use for it themselves having become citizens of Israel. But if Zionism is the only alternative to estrangement from Judaism, what is the position of the "post-Zionist" Israeli?

Yet Ahad Ha'am too came close to identifying Zionism with Judaism despite his rejection of narrow territorialism. Popular writings continued to identify Judaism with Messianism, of which Zionism was an authentic expression. Thus the originator of this movement was none other than Abraham, the first pilgrim to the Promised Land,

Zionist roots, to be sure, did receive nourishment from the soil of traditional Judaism but this is a far cry from full identity. Rather than being messianic in character, modern Zionism grew out of the 19th century movement of European nationalism and assumed distinctly anti-traditionalist aspects. Moreover it is incorrect to equate Judaism with Messianism and the latter with the Zionist enterprise, as much as these are essential elements of historical Judaism. Here interdependence is nearer the truth than particularism of either the Zionist or anti-Zionist brands.

* in: "Leumiut Yehudit" (לאומנות יהודית) by Dr. Eliezer Schweid (Collection of articles), published by S. Zack & Co., Jerusalem, 1972; pp. 108 - 122.

The precursors of modern Zionism combined traditionalism with post-emancipation realism. Time was ripe to implement the age-old longing for a reunion with the Land – not least, this was essential for the safeguarding of traditional Judaism. In a sense this was so even in the view of Zionist socialists who rebelled against the Jewish way of life. To them a return to the Land spelt a renewal of Jewish creativity which they themselves had imperilled by their iconoclasm. The Western-oriented Herzl and Nordau belong to a different category. Disenchanted with the high hopes of the Emancipation they sought a political philosophy capable of providing genuine freedom – to live as cultured Europeans. It was only at a later stage that they came to realize that national revival also entailed the reanimation of Judaism's spiritual heritage, whatever its precise interpretation. Zionism thus acted as a two way catalyst. Through it the traditionalist came to embrace "unorthodox" ideas and modes of action whilst the secularist was willy-nilly brought face to face with traditional Jewish culture.

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Seen in this perspective, Zionism ceases to constitute a self-sufficient ideology. In one form or another it retains an intimate correlation to Judaism. The basic Zionist programme of establishing a Jewish State has at no time defined the aspirations of its component streams. Whether liberal, revisionist, socialist or religious, Zionists were soon faced with the question – what manner of state? The answer invariably came from extra-Zionist sources and was then integrated into the Zionist schema. This process was inherent in Zionism's demand of total individual immersion in its programme. Whereas in the case of General Zionism activity remained limited to the public domain, the socialists and religious labour movement considered Halutzit (pioneering) as an indispensable element in the struggle for national revival. Here are two typical instances of hyphenated Zionism, each searching for meaningful existence beyond the national-political horizon but insisting on incorporating it into the Zionist schema.

How has this reciprocal relationship affected the Religious Zionists? Though an organic outgrowth of Judaism, Zionism has in turn affected the religious *Weltanschauung* of this movement by exposing it to the contemporary scene. Zionism was to provide a suitable framework for a revival of Halakhah and religious thinking, felt to have become ossified. As for the socialists, their ideology evidently derived from the 19th century European cradle of this movement. Yet they were bent upon relating socialism to the Judaic tradition, so as to compensate for their severance from normative Judaism.

The Hebrew prophets were brought into focus because of a substantive need for spiritual continuity rather than logical connection with modern

socialism. Chassidic elements too percolated into socialist Halutz thinking for similar reasons. The search for traditional Jewish roots is particularly evident in the Kibbutz movement where the once rejected familiar Sabbath, Festivals, Barmitzva, matrimony etc. are being sympathetically re-examined. Zionism has here assumed the function of a bridge through which diehard secular Halutz socialism is once more treading albeit cautiously on the ground of hallowed Jewish tradition.

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Ostensibly Zionism is but a political formula of national liberation. In the process of implementation, however, it has drawn from the depth of Jewish existence and may thus be defined as no less than the *totality of Judaism in action*. The active element is stressed advisedly, inasmuch as it encompasses a much wider periphery than that of confessed Zionism. The implications of this viewpoint in the sphere of education are readily apparent: in order to persist, the Zionist enterprise requires cultural nourishment it is unable to draw from sources other than traditional Judaism. Zionist education must proceed *ab ovo* from the dawn of Jewish history, literature and way of life and thence to a dynamic application of traditional norms to the contemporary scene. The accent is on reciprocity. Just as Zionism is unthinkable without its Jewish substratum, so Judaism must stagnate without the impetus of the Zionist challenge.

The question as to the content of Zionist ideology has bedevilled the thinking public ever since the establishment of Israel. Whereas heretofore the pioneering challenge of colonization, self-defence and social reconstruction provided all the elements of a vibrant *Weltanschauung*, the position was radically transformed after the rise of the State. There was an ever-growing feeling that with the very setting up of Israel the Zionist vision had come to fruition. Though patently fallacious, what with the overwhelming majority of the Jewish people remaining in the diaspora, and the continued struggle of the State for mere survival, the psychological motives for this transformation are not far to seek. The call for voluntary exertion of the pioneer had given way to a governmental appeal for civic duty. Having become fully institutionalized, Zionism could no longer evoke the same fervid response, not even after the Six Day War with its renewed summons for pioneering settlement. More and more the centre of gravity has been shifting to problems of immigrant absorption and integration of diverse communities into a newly-built society and culture. This is the area wherein Zionist thinking must rise to the occasion in order to bring about the hoped-for rejuvenation. Material conditions for the resumption of life in a new country, though of crucial significance, are but a preamble to that spiritual process which alone ensures acceptance at the deeper level. The diversity of

the elements and opinions involved again raises the question of common ground and once more we are led to the *terra firma* of the Judaic tradition. The Israeli scene no doubt encompasses areas with no apparent bearing on the time-honoured Jewish way of life. The same may be said of the potential or actual immigrant. Indeed in this respect the meeting between veteran and newcomer is one of strangers. All the more is it necessary to strengthen the Judaic bond as the sole common denominator of Jewish groups and individuals. A fully committed Zionist point of view necessarily leads to this position, whatever its original shade and interest. But, it might be objected, is there an agreed definition of the Jewish way of life acceptable to the vast majority of Zionists, let alone Jewry at large? Orthodoxy, the only substantial system of Judaism, can hardly claim such a position. The point is that the Zionist confrontation with Judaism of necessity carries us beyond the limited scope of the latter. There is no element in the Zionist spectrum that does not bear in the direction of historical Judaism one way or another. An open mind towards, and conscious fostering of the Jewish heritage at the hub of the historical process of the ingathering of the exiles is therefore an inescapable necessity. It highlights the reciprocal fertilization of Zionism and Judaism.

Summary by Avner Tomaschoff