

Dual Loyalty in a Post-Zionist Era

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"We must consolidate the unity of the Jewish People within Israel and between Israel and the Jews of the Diaspora. *We cannot afford the luxury of public disagreements, of public criticism that plays right into the hands of our enemies.* History has shown that when the Jewish people is united and stands together, we are unbeatable and unbreakable."

WITH THESE WORDS, PRIME MINISTER YITZHAK Shamir extended greetings to world Jewry on the occasion of the Jewish New Year of 5749 (Sep. 1988). Suffused with harsh, even belligerent language, with more than a tinge of paranoia, and with characteristic parochialism, Shamir's entire statement reads more like a broadside from his *Lehi* underground days than a message of good will and consolation. And though Shamir adopts, in certain parts, the rhetoric of unity, his words bear a thinly-veiled polemic thrust. It is not the Israeli public which can ill afford "the luxury of public disagreements;" the recent election campaign there dispels that notion rather compellingly. No, Shamir implies; it is the criticism of Diaspora Jews which "plays right into the hands of our enemies." The remedy to this danger is clear: Silence.

Of course, the whole question of the right to criticize has been raised by the recent events in the occupied territories, as well as by the revived controversy over "Who is a Jew." These events, and the Israeli government's response to them, have led some American Jews to abandon the principle of public silence which once muted their criticisms of Israeli government actions. Abandoning this principle has not entailed, nor need it entail, a wholesale abandonment of Israel; rather, it has led to a more refined distinction between the interests of the government of Israel and the interests of the state and people of Israel—a distinction which Shamir and others find convenient to refute. Those who have advanced this distinction realize that it is possible to affirm both their unceasing commitment to the preservation of the State of Israel as well as their right to criticize Israeli policies which violate their moral and political sensibilities.

In doing so, these responsible critics, unwittingly or not, prove the existence of a powerful axis linking Diaspora Jews, Israeli Jews, and the Jewish State. Recognition of this axis is frequently buried under the weight of shifting circumstances and motives. Still, one major and con-

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sistent source of denial is the Israeli politician who refuses to Diaspora Jews a legitimate voice in Israeli affairs, while unfailingly seeking material support from them. It is with this double-edged sword that Shamir lunged when issuing his Rosh Ha-Shanah call for silence.

However, the time has come for Diaspora Jews to elude what amounts to a pernicious and cynical assault on their identity, by re-evaluating the terms of the debate between Diaspora and Israel. Most significantly, I would propose that the nature of the bond between the Jews of Israel and the Diaspora be recognized as of a "national" character. By the term "national" I mean to encompass more than the narrow contemporary sense of political allegiance which characterizes the relation of a citizen to a state. Rather, "national," as I apply it in this paper, describes the identity of a group of people linked by a common historical and cultural heritage—a heritage that does not necessarily find its embodiment in the apparatus of government of a sovereign state.¹

This recasting of Jewish identity in "national" terms rests on an awareness that the conventional categories of religion, ethnicity, language group, or political state do not individually comprehend the parameters of Jewish peoplehood and community.² At the same time, it has as pillars of support both the traditional Jewish principle of *kelal Yisrael* (the unity of Israel), and the erstwhile Zionist aim of creating a Jewish identity more expansive than that forged in the previous two centuries of Diaspora existence.

Undoubtedly, there is a considerable danger in choosing a semantic vessel—"national"—which has already been filled with a determinate meaning. Especially so since I am positing a distinction between the *political* loyalty of an American to America, and the *historico-cultural* loyalty of a Jew to the Jewish nation. Still, while obvious differences in function and organization exist between the two kinds of loyalty, it is clear that rights and obligations obtain to members in both. Common to both—indeed, integral to them—is the right to self-expression, which, unfortunately, some members of the Jewish nation seek to deny others.

This essay argues for an affirmation of that right, and its extension to all members of the Jewish nation.³ An important consequence of ac-

1. This usage resembles the medieval connotation of "nation"—as a subset of people brought together by a common origin, culture, language, or class. For a discussion of the pre-19th century conception of "nation," see Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London, 1960), p. 13ff.

2. The difficulty in categorizing Jewish communal identity has been recognized by Robert Gordis, who chooses the Hebrew "am" (people) to describe the Jews as a "religio-cultural-ethnic group." See his superbly lucid discussion of the matter in *Judaism for the Modern Age*, (New York, 1955), p. 47.

3. Among potential critics, the writer, Anton Shammas, may find this essay most unsatisfying, for it assumes a degree of participation by Diaspora Jewry in Israel's affairs which he, as an Israeli citizen of Arab descent, is not always accorded.

knowledging this right is that Jews will invariably hold loyalties to two kinds of nations, one defined by geographic borders and passports, the other by the borders of memory, consciousness, and a sense of shared passage. What follows is an attempt to explain and justify this shared loyalty as a necessary, and even desirable, Jewish position.

I

At the turn of this century, the great Russian Jewish historian, Simon Dubnow, advocated a sort of dual loyalty as a response to the crisis in Eastern European Jewish life. Violent outbursts of anti-Jewish activity (in the 1881 and 1903–5 pogroms), and the emergence of movements for national and class liberation in Russia, prompted a plethora of ideological responses by Eastern European Jews, including many shades of Zionist and Jewish socialist activism. Dubnow himself favored the idea of an autonomous Jewish political and cultural entity situated within the framework of a larger multi-national state. He thus turned on its head the charge that Jews constituted a "state within a state" or a "nation within a nation." Hitherto, this charge carried a wholly pejorative connotation—most notably, in the debate over Jewish civic emancipation at the end of the 18th century, and later as a stock phrase of ideological anti-Semites in the last quarter of the 19th century. However, Dubnow argued in affirmative terms that Jews were a "nationality among nationalities," and, thereby, entitled to autonomous communal organization.

Looking further back into medieval times, we see that Jewish legal and legislative autonomy not only existed, but was encouraged by the corporate nature of feudal society. There were no centralized nation-states with individual subjects, but, rather, a complex and formal division of authority, obligations, and rights among discrete bodies or classes. As a result, local, regional, and imperial rulers—as well as the Church—all granted "charters" or "privilegia" which dealt with Jewish subjects collectively. When Jews were "tolerated" by a particular sovereign, they were accorded, as a whole, physical protection and the right to self-organization and adjudication; conversely, when they were expelled from a certain region, the entire community was affected.

The phenomenon of Jews existing as a distinct collective entity within an alien religious and linguistic culture is the condition of Exile *par excellence* prior to modern times. However, as the medieval political order began to give way to "enlightened despotism" in the 17th and 18th centuries, the nature of the Jewish community (in Hebrew, the *kehillah*) also changed. Corporate bodies organized on the basis of common religious, economic, or social interests were now seen as threatening to the state. Ruler-kings fostered a new sense of allegiance—an individual bond with the state—which required not merely the dissolution of cor-

porate affiliations, but also an outlay of rights and privileges to the private subject. Logically, Jews, if they yielded their communal autonomy, should be bestowed with the same rights and privileges accorded to others as individuals. This, at least, was the view of liberal thinkers like John Locke (1689) and John Toland (1714) who pushed for the application of general principles of toleration to Jews on both altruistic and utilitarian grounds.

And yet, while logic (and liberalism) dictated it, Jewish equality was not always quick or uniform in coming. France was the first country in which Jews (Sefardim in 1790 and the rest in 1791) were granted citizenship rights. The sentiment among advocates of Jewish emancipation was pointedly summed up in the words of Count Clermont-Tonnere, a delegate to the French National Assembly, who urged that "Jews should be denied everything as a nation, but granted everything as individuals." According to these terms, which were accepted by some French Jewish leaders, emancipation entailed the end of Jewish communal autonomy and, consequently, an end to lingering manifestations of Jewish separatism (e.g., dress, language, etc.).

In Germany, where the intellectual and cultural values of Enlightenment most deeply influenced Jews, political emancipation proved far more elusive than in France. While Prussian Jews did receive equal rights in 1812 (though shortly thereafter retracted), it took more than a half century before they finally received equal status in the various German-speaking territories. What so poignantly characterizes the life of Jews in these lands is the lag between their intellectual and cultural achievements, on the one hand, and political recognition, on the other. For many, the alluring promise of liberation held out by *Aufklärung* (German Enlightenment) and its Jewish cognate, *Haskalah*, was never realized. In some places, legal emancipation was not forthcoming; in others, where legal emancipation was achieved, full social acceptance was not, thereby leading to frustration and despair among those Jews with the most to gain, the educated and the enlightened. The despair of one such Enlightened Jew, Heinrich Heine, led to a path frequently followed by others, conversion, which Heine saw as his "ticket of admission to European culture."

Present in both the French and German cases of the late 18th and 19th centuries was a rather insidious mechanism which held out the promise of full emancipation in exchange for the diminution or outright denial of Jewish identity. The imperative to dissolve communal autonomy had been communicated to Western European Jews as a necessary price to pay for liberation. And, often times, they profoundly internalized it. One stark example is a French Jewish leader of Revolutionary times who called upon his co-religionists "to divest ourselves of that narrow spirit, of corporation and congregation, in all civil and political matters. . ." This message anticipated the more concentrated

and systematic efforts of 19th century German religious reformers to define Jewishness as a confession of faith. The German Reformers envisaged Judaism as a *Religionsgemeinschaft* (i.e., a community defined in religious terms alone), which reflected their own acknowledgment of a contraction of Jewish identity. Thus, in the expectation of becoming full and active participants in society, they were prepared to place severe limits on Jewish communal identity, and to profess undivided loyalties to the German nation.

For those reformers and other Enlightened Jews, Jewish expression was now consigned to the private or domestic sphere, a tendency memorialized in the *Haskalah* refrain that one "be a man in the street and a Jew at home." This adage mirrored what one unsympathetic observer, Karl Marx, would call in his essay, "On the Jewish Question," the "decomposition of man" into political and religious, or public and private realms. A more sympathetic 20th century Jewish voice, that of the great scholar, Gershom Scholem, spoke in despondent tones of the same phenomenon, "the progressive atomization of the Jews as a community in a state of dissolution, from which in the best case only the individuals can be received. . ."

That condition to which Marx and Scholem were reacting, the bifurcation of identity (into Jewish and non-Jewish components), sets the stage for the central drama of the modern Jewish experience in the West—the struggle to preserve a modicum of Jewish identity while absorbing modern cultural and intellectual values. It is a condition which emerged out of the ashes of the medieval *kehillah*, and of the holistic Jewish world-view which enveloped it. It is a condition in which the impulse to return to Zion was utterly effaced, and vestigial feelings of *kelal Yisrael* were significantly diluted. And it is a condition to which Zionism, as formulated by Theodor Herzl, offered a definitive response.

At this point, it should be emphasized, though no doubt platonically, that the problems of the West were not those of the East. For the Jews of Russia and Poland, cultural assimilation was not considered a desired end until much later than in the West. Indeed, while the first half of the 19th century did witness strong state efforts at reform of the Jewish community, they were not always accompanied by the promise of emancipation or equality. Consequently, these government efforts, alternately authorizing and dismantling Jewish communal institutions, received little positive response from the large concentration of Eastern European Jews. What did ignite a veritable explosion of Jewish ideological activity in the last quarter of the century was a convergence of various forces: the example of a relatively beneficent attitude by the state to Western Jews, the failure of advocates of reform to effect significant change in Czarist policies, violent anti-Jewish pogroms, and the rise of national liberation and socialist movements in Europe. Zionism

was but one of the ideological creations of this tumultuous period in Russian Jewish history. In the end, it was the most successful.

II

Uniting the efforts of Zionists in both the East and the West was their attempt to reconstitute the Jewish nation in its own homeland. And that attempt rested on one assumption to which Zionists of all persuasions and lands would agree—that the status of Jews in the Diaspora was unacceptable. All would also agree that the expectation of external assistance—e.g., of a magnanimous bestowal of emancipation by the state—was no longer to be awaited patiently. Consequently, the struggle of emancipation became that of “auto-emancipation.”⁴

To be sure, the particular forms which early Zionist views took were not monolithic. One strain, that of the Russian essayist Aḥad Ha-am, understood the need for self-help in terms of a “spiritual center” in Palestine which would send out rays of cultural and spiritual sustenance to Diaspora communities. Another prominent strain held that the continued existence of Diaspora Jewish communities and patterns of life suppressed the national character of Jewish identity. The only remaining option was “the negation of the Diaspora,” (in Hebrew, *shehilat ha-golah*). In the case of Theodor Herzl, this option appeared to him while he was in Paris observing the depressing dénouement of the Dreyfus Affair. His observations crystallized into a plan for the establishment of a Jewish state, which he published in pamphlet form in 1896. Herzl’s manifesto of political Zionism aimed to shatter the illusions which Emancipation had propagated. According to Herzl’s friend, the eminent Viennese doctor, Max Nordau, these illusions had engendered a new class of Marranos in the West, a group of Jews caught between two worlds and, yet, fully belonging to neither. On such terms, there was no compelling reason for them to survive as Jews. Either they abandon any residual bond to Jewishness (in which case they are still not assured of full social acceptability) or they choose to reassert their national identity in a Jewish state. Because, as one radical exponent of political Zionism, Jacob Klatzkin, put it, “(t)he Judaism of the Galut is not worthy of survival.”

The theme of negating *galut* continued to inform Zionist thought as the Zionist movement shifted its center of gravity from Europe to Palestine, and even as it sought and garnered more and more support in Diaspora communities.⁵ David Ben-Gurion, who, as Zionist leader

4. This is the title of an important proto-Zionist essay from 1882 by the Russian Jewish doctor, Leo Pinsker.

5. It should be noted that, in its first decades, the Zionist movement frequently straddled the two poles of theory and activity: the first devoted to negating the Diaspora, and the

and later as Prime Minister of Israel, regularly solicited Diaspora Jews for assistance, would provocatively ask visiting American Jewish students if they had more in common with Anglo-Saxons from Virginia than with Jews in Palestine. Underlying his inquiry was a fundamental lack of faith in the viability of Diaspora existence, and a similarly fundamental belief that only through *aliyah* to Eretz Yisrael could the Jewish nation survive. Apparently, this belief has obtained until today, as Israeli government leaders (Mr. Shamir notwithstanding) continue to berate Diaspora Jews for failing to make the ultimate Zionist commitment, immigration. And, yet, the call for *aliyah* does not prevent the same government leaders from encouraging and accepting, with perhaps more than a drop of cynicism, the generous gifts of Diaspora Jews.

It seems, on the basis of this reading, that Diaspora Jews are getting the short end of the stick. And this, despite the fact that they have attained a large measure of affluence and stability, even in this most threatening of centuries. How, then, have they benefitted from the somewhat imbalanced relationship with Zionism? The answer is rather obvious: in return for their contributions, Diaspora Jews have obtained a sense of belonging to the Jewish state. Indeed, for many of them, Israel has become the focus of their Jewish identity and affiliation. A more select group, the communal leaders, is wined and dined and made to feel important in Israel, the more so in proportion to the amounts that its members give. Their seminal contribution to the State and the Jewish people is proclaimed by government ministers, parliamentarians, and generals.⁶ The accolades are part of the relationship between Israeli leaders and Diaspora Jewry, which, in essence, is a contract between two parties; in return for a contribution, a Diaspora Jew can purchase a share of pride in the Jewish state. As with all contracts, there are ancillary and qualifying clauses to which both sides must hold and one of the most important of these in the Israel-Diaspora contract has been that whoever does not come to live in, and defend the land of Israel, has no right to express him/herself on the affairs of the state.

For almost a decade now, during the Lebanon war and in the current crisis in the territories, transgressions of this contractual clause have been committed. Some, in the Diaspora, have begun to realize that

second to the current material problems of Diaspora Jewry. As a result, the long-term goal of negation was, at times, replaced by work focused on present-day concerns and crises (known as *Gegenwartsarbeit*).

6. But not so by Knesset member Shulamit Aloni. In a speaking tour of America in the spring of 1988, she blasted the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations as “rich and fat people . . . who go to Israel to rub shoulders with important people at nice dinners, and then come back to the U.S. and rub shoulders with more important people.” (*Jerusalem Post International Edition*, June 4, 1988).

the provision of support and contributions without the right to free speech and self-expression violates their own sense of responsibility. In fact, provision of support without this right rests on a certain historical fallacy—that Zionism has absorbed, *in toto* the national dimension of Jewish identity, that it has become the legitimate voice of the Jewish nation to the exclusion of others. On one hand, it can hardly be denied that Zionism has succeeded in fulfilling a long-standing political aspiration of the Jewish people—to return to their homeland in Eretz Yisrael.

On the other hand, the grand success of Zionism, ironically, has validated—or has the potential of validating—the “national” identity of Diaspora Jewry. The seeds for this development were sown when Zionists assailed the suppression of national identity in Emancipatory ideology. In proposing to create an independent territorial base for Jews, Zionism also created the opportunity for developing a wider range of expression—cultural, intellectual, linguistic, political—for Jewishness than that implied in the 19th century *Religionsgemeinschaft*. Moreover, the Zionist effort to gather together all of the communities of the Diaspora (known as *kibbutz galuyot*) pointed to the revival of a deep historical bond among Jews, regardless of their birthplace or citizenship.

Perhaps to the chagrin of the “negators of the Diaspora,” this bond is not confined to the boundaries of Eretz Yisrael nor, for that matter, to those of a political state. Indeed, it flows to and from Diaspora Jewry, which has faced and overcome a powerful impetus to cultural assimilation and the terrifying threat of physical annihilation. In graphic terms, this bond, which draws from the reservoir of common experience, consciousness, and destiny that Zionism helped refill, forms an outer circle in which the smaller entities of Israeli and Diaspora Jewry exist. This outer rim, in turn, functions as a modern incarnation—and reification—of the time-honored principle of *kelal Yisrael*.

If one accepts this characterization, then no longer can, or should, it be maintained that Israel is the sole repository of Jewish national identity. Indeed, Israel is part of a larger Jewish nation which includes as full participants the diverse collections of Diaspora Jews. To suggest, as some still do, that Diaspora Jews have no operative role to play in that nation is simply a tired recitation of an ossified Zionist position. Conversely, for Diaspora Jews to accept silent partnership is to succumb to the same outdated view, and worse, to risk violating their own values and sense of obligation.

The point to be made is this: a responsible analysis of the relationship between Diaspora Jews and the Jewish state should be mindful of the intimate national bond which links all Jews. In recognizing this national bond, one must also be prepared to accept the consequences of divided loyalties—between a conventional political loyalty, as embodied in citizenship rights granted by a state (e.g., America or Israel),

and the more complex historical-cultural loyalty which may be unique to the Jewish nation.⁷

Of course, this raises a number of pressing questions. In terms of the discussion here, one wonders whether the division of loyalties simply returns us to the old bifurcation of identities—into private/Jewish and public/national spheres—which Zionism sought to repair? Isn't dual loyalty yet another symptom of the malaise of modernity—the breakdown of, and subsequent yearning for, community—which a liberal order engenders? It would be disingenuous to answer with an unequivocal no. Undoubtedly, the dual loyalty whose acknowledgement I am calling for, can not completely heal the rift of identity occasioned by modernity. Yet, it can avoid the explicit self-abnegation of earlier Enlightened Jews, who accepted the contraction of their Jewish identity and its subordination to a more dominant political national identity, because it rests on a conscious awareness of the broad range of Jewish national expression, including its cultural, religious, and communal dimensions.

That this sort of national commitment does not always sit harmoniously with a political national allegiance was patently clear to the late Jewish leader, Nahum Goldmann. While addressing what he called the “Jewish paradox,” Goldmann observed that “(a) man has loyalty towards his country, his family, his religion and his social class, and there can be conflicts among all these loyalties” (*The Jewish Paradox*, p. 84). No doubt, for some Jews, there are more conflicts now that the state of Israel has emerged as a logical focus of Jewish allegiance and pride. But those conflicts are, and will, remain unavoidable unless we choose to belong exclusively to one of the two “communities” with which our loyalties currently lie, at which point we would inevitably deny the other. In the meantime, by acknowledging the national base of our Jewish identity, we are already admitting to a wider spectrum of Jewish expression than was contained in the *Religionsgemeinschaft* model (or, for that matter, in a segregated ultra-orthodox community). And while this yields a tension-laden predicament, it is one with which some of us can, and must, live.

III

Frequently, the mere mention of “dual loyalty” sends American Jews into rounds of emphatic reiteration of their undivided attachment to America. One sees this particularly in the responses of the organized

7. In a way, these two conceptions of national identity parallel the differences between the political Zionism of Herzl and the cultural Zionism of Aḥad Ha-am. For the former, membership in the Jewish nation would redound only to citizens of a territorially-defined Jewish state; for the latter, a more expansive definition of national identity would transcend the boundaries of a state to include, in some form, Diaspora Jewry as participants.

Jewish community, whose leaders have often asserted that their support for Israeli governmental policy is primarily a matter of America's best interests. Underlying this claim is the implication that they can easily overcome their "subjective" ethnic and national bonds in advocating "objective" (read American) foreign policy options. But this thinking loses a bit of credibility when we hear an official of an American Jewish organization who claims to support "American interests" in the Middle East, repeating *verbatim* the positions of the current Israeli government which may be at odds with the American administration. The convoluted semantic game of affirming the ascendancy of American interests (while, in fact, advancing Israeli government propaganda) serves only one obvious goal: suppressing the claim of dual loyalty.

The fact remains that only by acknowledging dual loyalty—not between two political states, but between a political state and an historico-cultural nation—can one participate in the shaping and reshaping of Jewish national identity. A good way to begin acknowledging and participating is by imagining an archaeological excavation of the edifice of Jewish history. At the foundation lies a firm monotheistic faith; at later stages, one sees that this faith assumed institutional and literary forms which themselves became foundations from which new strata of Jewish identity emerged. These forms, which were preserved by, and in, the community, fostered a sense of a shared passage through history, as well as a sense of belonging and mutual responsibility.

It is the residue of these forms and the consciousness of such a distinguished and distinctive passage which bind Jews into a people and a nation. Undoubtedly, Israel stands at the geographic and emotional center of the national constellation. As such, it not only reflects the cultural and linguistic heritage of the Jewish people; it also embodies the political aspiration of Jews to independence in their land, an aspiration with roots in the traditional messianic impulse.

Today, however, the state of Israel is one segment, albeit important, of a Jewish nation which spans the world. Diaspora Jews must recognize that they, too, belong to that nation and have a stake in its well-being, that New York, Paris, Buenos Aires, Moscow and other cities are centers in their own right. They must no longer submit to the *diktats* of Israeli government leaders who claim to be the sole arbiters of when and which Jews can speak on matters affecting the Jewish nation. Insofar as they, too, belong to the Jewish nation, Diaspora Jews have a right and obligation to get involved in matters affecting it, including what goes on in Israel. Indeed, the old pattern of exchanging money and unconditional support for a sliver of national pride is not worthy of the partners. A new relationship of mutual respect and responsibility, and a recognition of common belonging to the Jewish nation, must replace the out-moded and undignified pattern which has obtained until now.

Chief among the responsibilities and rights is that of self-expression when a member is morally-troubled or when the Jewish commonwealth is threatened. Self-expression should not be confused with self-hatred, as it regrettably has been by certain segments of the Jewish community. Perhaps some Jews do relish the opportunity to vilify Israel in the world media, but the far greater number of Jewish critics of Israeli government policy are sincerely concerned with the state's preservation and well-being. Indeed, it is their very concern which impels them to voice their opinions.

Interestingly, the impulse to speak out has deep roots in Jewish history. We hear of it in an exegesis of the second century *tanna*, R. Shimon bar Yohai. In interpreting the maxim "All Israelites are responsible for one another," Rabbi Shimon explained: "It may be likened to a company of men who were in a boat when one of them took a drill and began to bore a hole next to his feet. Said his companions to him: 'Why do you act thus?' He answered: 'What do you care, is it not beneath my own place that I am boring?'"

For us, the boat can represent the body of the Jewish nation. When one member drills away beneath his/her own place, that action concerns us all. It is our right and obligation, at the very least, to point it out.