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Liberal Judaism and the New State of Israel, 1948.

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LIBERAL JUDAISM AND THE NEW STATE OF ISRAEL

What effect will the establishment of the
State of Israel have on the development
of Liberal Judaism here and abroad

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The establishment of the state of Israel this year is bound to have an effect upon the future course of the Jewish people throughout the world, and upon Judaism resembling analogous events in the history of our people in the past. The destruction and the restoration of the state in the 6th century before the Common Era, and again, the destruction in the year 70 of the Common Era are milestones in Jewish history as well as turning points. They forced political, social, and spiritual adjustments on the people, and framed a new way of life for them. The re-establishment of the Jewish state this year is destined to become just such a milestone and turning point. The year 1948 will take its place among the three or four most important dates in Jewish history.

We are too close to the event to evaluate it properly, but we can already begin to see some of its vast historic implications.

The first is a psychological one. After 19 centuries the Jewish people has regained national status. It has rebuilt its national center in its ancestral home. The reconstruction of the state of Israel has received the sanction of the United Nations. Its government has been recognized by many countries including the two most powerful - the United States and the Soviet Union. While its exact boundaries are still under dispute, the fact of its independent and sovereign existence is most generally acknowledged, and its own military prowess has fortified it. The third Commonwealth of the Jewish nation is thus an accomplished fact. The state of Israel exists.

As a result the concept of the Wandering Jew is bound eventually to disappear along with the term "galut" - exile. When people can of their own free will return to their ancestral home, they are not in exile. Only compulsory banishment spells exile. All nations provide their quotas of immigrants all over the world. People are continually moving from one country to another, and

are changing their citizenship today, but they are not regarded as exiles. This fact alone - the end of national exile for the Jewish people as such - is destined to affect favorably the psyche of the Jew throughout the world. It will endow the Jew, wherever he lives, with a self-respect and a sense of security long wanting in Jewish experience. For the curse of Cain, the curse of being an outcast and a wanderer over the face of the earth, has been removed. Whatever the Jew is destined to create in any part of the world in art or in literature will, I believe, come to reflect this new attitude of dignity and confidence. There will be much less of the strain and the tension in his creative work, less of the spirit of dejection or of rebellion. There will be less obsession with anti-Semitism or with apologetics. This is not to suggest that as a member of a minority group everywhere except in Israel, the Jew will not be subject to those discriminations which, to varying degrees, are visited upon most minority groups in most parts of the world. But in this regard he will share an identical but not a unique or aggravated experience. It was always the double liability of Jewish experience - that of being a minority group - everywhere and a national center nowhere, which doubly exacerbated his position in the world. He will fight for his full and equal rights everywhere, more confidently and more resolutely, enheartened by the fact of this new status and dignity which have come to his people in the recreation and the defense of this state.

Another important consequence of this historic event which has taken place so recently is the certain emergence of a major Jewish population center in the East and the re-grouping of the world Jewish population. It is quite possible that if the present rate of immigration continues, the Jewish population of Israel by 1960 will be 2,000,000 or more. It might substantially increase in subsequent years. Three to four million is not an excessive figure. So that

outside of the United States and the Soviet Union, the population of Israel will be the largest Jewish population in the world. Thus, a great concentration of our people will again take place in the East, the cradle of Israel and of Israel's faith, and the East rather than the West will again become the decisive cultural milieu of the creative Jewish life of tomorrow. An interesting blending of the East and the West will again take place in that corner of the world which time and again in the past has served both as an entrepot and crucible of culture and religion. A startling new synthesis might conceivably result when Jews coming to that land which was in the past a natural seed-bed of seers, prophets and mystics will bring to it the science, technology and the political and economic conceptions which the West has developed. Many Jews from many parts of the world, over and above those from lands of persecution, will come to Palestine. Many Jews will settle in Israel for the same reasons which motivate other people to change their habitations. Jews will come to Israel from all parts of the world just as peoples have come to the United States from all parts of the world, and just as the United States became a melting pot of peoples, so Israel is destined to become a melting pot of the Jews of the world. In a sense, it is that already. Just as American life profited from the gifts and the talents which many peoples brought to it, so Israel is destined to profit from the skills, cultures, and enthusiasms which Jews from all parts of the world will bring to it. The dynamism, the amazing outpouring of creative energy already in evidence in Israel, will increase in the years to come. The life of the people in Israel will be characterized, I believe, by that same energy, initiative, and enterprise which have characterized American life. So that a very exciting and richly promising new chapter in Jewish history is beginning.

Two questions present themselves, among others, as we study the possible implications of what has taken place. What effect will the establishment of the

state of Israel have on the Jews throughout the world, and what effect will it have on Judaism?

One important fact must be borne in mind - that the majority of the Jewish people will always live outside of Israel. Assuming that Israel will in the course of time come to count three or four million Jews, the greater portion of the Jewish people will still reside outside its borders. This was the case, also, during the second Commonwealth, especially in the centuries immediately preceding the destruction in 70 of the Common Era. It has been estimated that in the closing centuries of the second Commonwealth about $2\frac{1}{2}$ million Jews lived in Palestine and about $5\frac{1}{2}$ million lived outside. There was a considerable dispersion of our people in the six centuries before the Common Era which extended from the borders of Persia in the East to Spain in the West, and from Ethiopia clear up to the Black Sea. Important centers of Jewish life existed, at the time when the Jewish state was in existence, in Babylon, in Egypt, and in Syria and Asia Minor, in the Islands of the Mediterranean, in Greece and in Italy. It has been estimated that every tenth person living in the Roman Empire in the first century of the common era was a Jew, and every fifth person living in the Eastern Mediterranean world was a Jew. The great dispersion - the result of expulsions - was not always involuntary. Jews emigrated from Palestine for reasons also of trade, commerce, economic opportunities, perhaps also because of crowded conditions in Palestine.

What was the relationship of the Jews who lived outside of Palestine to the Jewish state? They owed no political allegiance to the Jewish state, and the Jewish state exercised no political control over them. The Jews outside of Palestine did not interfere in the political affairs of the Jewish state. We have the testimony of the Jewish philosopher, Philo, who lived in Egypt in the first century, who writes:

No one country can contain the whole Jewish nation, by reason of its populousness; on which account they frequent all the most prosperous and fertile countries of Europe and Asia, whether islands or continents, looking indeed upon the holy city as their metropolis in which is erected the sacred temple of the most high God, but accounting those regions which have been occupied by their fathers and grandfathers and great grandfathers and still more remote ancestors, in which they have been born and brought up, as their country.

The country in which they lived was their country. The existence of a Jewish state did not diminish by an iota their loyalty to the countries in which they lived and in which they and their children were born. There was no dual allegiance. Dual allegiance was never a fact in Jewish experience. It is the frightened and the insecure Jew who is generally ashamed and unhappy about his Jewish lineage and who tries to curry favor with the non-Jewish world on the basis of self-effacement who invented the charge of dual allegiance against fellow-Jews who were not so frightened and servile.

The Jews who lived outside of Palestine nevertheless recognized Palestine as the non-political center of world Jewry, especially because it was the center of their religion. It was the Holy Land. In Jerusalem was the Temple dedicated to the God of Israel. They all were mindful of the prophesy, "Out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem". Palestine was their ancestral home and the center of Jewish religious worship. They, therefore, maintained the most sympathetic relationship with this land. They made frequent pilgrimages to Palestine. On the festivals the pilgrimages of thousands of Jews from all parts of the compass poured into Jerusalem. It was a revered custom of the Jews everywhere to contribute annually a half-shekel which at stated periods was collected and carried to Jerusalem as the voluntary contribution of world Jewry to the maintenance of their central religious institutions in Palestine. They helped the nation to defend itself when Rome attacked it, and they supported the rebellions of Bar Kochba against Rome in the second century. They wanted the Jewish state to survive. Even after the destruction

of the Temple, they continued to recognize the authority of the religious and spiritual leadership of Palestine, of the Sanhedrin and of the great religious academies, and to send their self-imposed tax for the support of the office of the Nasi and of scholars in Palestine. Even after Jewish communities in other parts of the world established their own academies and produced their own great religious leaders, they nevertheless accepted the superior authority of the religious leaders and center in Palestine. The authority of the patriarchs which existed in the 5th century and of the academies and their in such matters as the fixing of the calendar for world Jewry and the ordination of Rabbis was with but occasional exceptions accepted by all. The Jews fully understood the importance of maintaining a center, a unifying and organizing center of Jewish life, especially after the destruction both of the state and the Temple. They felt the need for some visible authority to hold them together against the forces which were threatening to disintegrate them.

It is interesting to note that there was a very vital and active religious life among Jews outside of Palestine while the state was still in existence - not everywhere, of course, nor in equal measure among all sections of the Jewish population. There were Jews in that day who were indifferent, who were assimilationists, who practiced a meaningless sort of Judaism or none at all, and some of them became apostates and left their faith. We have evidence of that period which justifies the comment made by Professor Wolfson recently:

Wealth in the Alexandrian Jewish community of the first century of the Common Era was derived from the non-Jewish environment through contacts with heathens. Such contacts with heathens thus became financial assets, and financial assets naturally became marks of a delusive social distinction, and the delusion of social distinction, in turn, led to snobbishness, obsequiousness, self-effacement, aping, simulation, pretense, and ultimately to a begging for permission to join whatever one had to join in order to become a heathen. This, we imagine, was the progressive pilgrimage of certain Alexandrian Jews from a seat in the front row of the synagogue to a place at the tail end of the mystery processions of the heathens.