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The Mission of Israel, 1967.

THE MISSION OF ISRAEL

The Temple
Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver
Sunday, January 29, 1967

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. Hyperbole is the language of exaggeration. Hyperbole is the pressing of an argument beyond its logical limits. Generally, hyperbole is born of a lack of preparation or an excess of emotion. Whatever its origin, hyperbole is a danger because it distorts a basically sound idea. Recently, I came across such an example; and it is with this text I should like to begin. It was written by a contemporary Jew and is by way of an explanation of Jewish survival. "No, Jews will not vanish; for even if we do not choose to be Jews, the world needs Jews -- and Jewish values. If there were no Jews, the world would have to create us. Jews without Judaism are nothing; Jews, living out their Judaism are a leaven of civilization and must survive for the sake of the world."

I love Judaism. Needless to say, I delight in being a Jew; and I firmly believe that such wisdom as I possess comes in largest measure from a lifelong exposure to our tradition. But can I say with honesty that the fate of two billion earthlings rests upon the shoulders of thirteen million Jews? -- That, if there were no Jews, the world would have to create us? Is there an adequate reason to continue the Jewish enterprise? What is the virtue of stubbornly carrying on, knowing as we do that prejudice and even hate will be a constant background to our history? Why keep the good ship Judaism afloat? Why persevere? Even though it is the whiner and the sniveling who generally ask this question, it is a legitimate question.

How would I justify the continuance of Israel? Why should we continue to be?

Our generation is not the first to ask this question. It was first asked some 2,600 years ago. In the seventh pre-Christian century, the armies of the Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar conquered little Judea, pulled down the walls of Jerusalem, razed the Temple and marched off our forefathers to be slave labor on the emperor's vast public works projects in Babylon. As they trudged wearily eastward, our poets expressed the anguish and the tears of exile in a moving lament:

"How doth the city sit solitary,
That was full of people!
How is she become as a widow!
She that was great among the nations,
And princess among the provinces,
How is she become tributary!
She weepeth sore in the night,
And her tears are on her cheeks;
She hath none to comfort her."

Years passed, soul searing years of back-breaking toil. Their labor was that of pack animals. There seemed no end to this punishment. Men began to wonder if it would not be better to forget Jerusalem, forego the faith, and assimilate into the Babylonian environment. At least their children would not be treated as enemy aliens and pariahs. Fortunately, a wise and sensitive prophet came forward among the exiles. We do not know his name. All that remains are a few of the sermons that he preached to the encampment. At a later date, these were written down on a parchment scroll which was stitched, for some reason, onto the scroll of the writings of an earlier prophet Isaiah. This chance editing caused historians to name the unknown seer Deutero-Isaiah, or the second Isaiah, and so he is known to us. Whatever his name, every Jew, indeed all Western civilization owes him a profound

debt of gratitude. He gave his generation the courage and understanding to remain steadfast. He taught them to carry on. He explained to them their anguish. He encouraged them with a sense of purpose. Why the exile? "The exile", he said, "is a refining fire". Just as a metal worker needs to boil down the ore so that he can skim the dross, the impurities off the top, so God had to boil down the people to separate out the weakling, the self-pitying, the gluttons, the greedy, those who had polluted Judea. Once God had refined the nation, the exile would end. God would pardon his people, return them to their Holy Land and there the selected remnant would create a society based on the Mitzvot and the Torah -- on the moral teachings and the faith. Such an Israel would not only be a graceful and pleasant place, but an example to all Mankind -- a light unto the nations.

" I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness
And have taken hold of thy hand,
And kept thee, and set thee for a covenant of the people,
For a light of the nations;
To open the blind eyes,
To bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
And them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house. "

First the refining fire, then the return to a Zion alight with the way of God; then the admiration and, hopefully, the emulation of the nations.

To the question, "Why remain Jewish," Deutero-Isaiah answered, "Because Judaism is a unique faith. If Jews will organize their communities after the highest disciplines of the Torah, not only will their lives be inspired, but other nations will be encouraged to reach for a quality of national life more principled than that of the ordinary pagan, caste ridden class divided, autocratic state.

Modern Zionism drew its inspiration from these teachings of Deutero-Isaiah. The New Israel was not to be simply an ordinary State or even just a convenient refuge for those who had to flee Hitler. Israel was to be a Jewish State. Amos and Jeremiah had written its Bill of Rights. Seventy years ago, Theodore Herzl took

time off from his political activities to write a novel. He called it "The Old New Land". In it he offered his description of Zion reborn. Israel was to be a participatory democracy, humane, just, concerned with human welfare. Herzl describes a series of unique industrial and agricultural cooperatives, a well-articulated educational and social welfare apparatus, and the visits by ambassadors and technicians from many states, who came not to visit the archaeological sites, but to examine these model collectives and the unusual social order. Herzl's Utopian vision, of course, came to be. Teachers, engineers, city planners from Central Africa, Central America, and Southeast Asia have come in large numbers to Israel to see the kibbutzim, the rehabilitation settlements, the new towns, and the new agriculture. Israel, in many ways, has been a light unto the nations and in Israel, there has always been a loyal opposition who might properly be called the Deutero-Isaiahniks. Whenever, in the name of economy, someone tried to cut the school budget or to scrimp on immigrant house, or was careless of the rights of the religious minorities, or demanded that an Arab settlement be uprooted for some minor reason, someone was sure to remind him that Israel should be a light unto the nations.

Deutero-Isaiah spoke intelligently and forcefully. The essence of his message was, and is, that Israel as a nation must be inspired by the highest religious duties and that such a nation would not only be a happy place to live but a compelling advertisement for the Torah. Other nations would be moved to adopt many of the same disciplines. Being an Israeli can never be -- or should never be -- a routine citizenship.

I have cited Deutero-Isaiah at some length because his text is the classic modern starting of most answers to the question, "Why remain Jewish?" The point I wish to make is that Deutero-Isaiah's arguments are helpful in the homeland but inadequate for the Diaspora. Indeed, that they were not intended for the Diaspora made the apology for our survival. Such arguments assume some strange forms.

Jews, whatever their ordinary vices, signify Judaism. By no more than being identifiably Jewish we remind the world of the prophets and Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself. We are an omnipresent symbol of the world's greatest spiritual tradition; Q. E. D., it does matter what we are, but only that we are "Jews living as Jews, a leaven to civilization and we must continue for the sake of the world."

Your children reject this logic and rightly so. They will not remain Jewish simply because Canton couldn't have an NCCJ without Jews, or because Christian-Messianism is based on the existence of Jews. Half the world is non-Christian and their world view is unembarrassed by the Judeo-Christian love-hate relationship. This generation will not be outer directed. It will remain Jewish only if being Jewish positively and helpfully affects their lives.

No, it is at all clear that there would be no one to light the way if there were no Jews -- "That if there were no Jews, the world would have to create us." Twenty-five centuries ago, Judaism had a unique and radically different teaching. Only Israel insisted on human worth and human equality. Today, there are many dedicated groups of men and women who are lighting the lamps of civilization, who are encouraging others to reach beyond the ordinary. There is the quiet, courageous

teaching of reconciliation of the Quakers. There is the magnificent refinement of the structure of social welfare by the Scandinavians; there is the non-violent gospel of racial rebellion among the disciples of Martin Luther King. We can no longer say that if there were no Jews the world would have to create Jews, that's too much chutzpah, even for us; though we can say and do say Judaism offers a significant spiritual and ethically sound way of life, and that our world has very few such enlightened cultures.

Deutero-Isaiah spoke of a Judea reborn, organized according to Torah Law, promising not only a decent life to its citizens, but by its very existence suggesting to other nations the virtue of justice and truth; and in that way speeding the millennium. Just as parents, by their example, set a standard for their children, just as Ghandi or Schweitzer, or Einstein, by their sacrificial achievements, encouraged many men and women so Israel would be, and could be, a shining example to other nations and faiths.

Neither stubborn pride nor an appeal to a symbolic role provides a satisfactory answer to the question, "Why remain Jewish?" It is not enough to teach anti-Semitism and competitive religions. Nor is it sufficient only to teach and preach what our nineteenth century grandfathers called the mission of Israel -- that our justification is to be a light to the nations, to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. Put another way, center city tutoring and the urban coalition -- whatever their intrinsic merit -- are not adequate strategies of Jewish survival.

Reform Judaism has been particularly prone to this emphasis on lighting every communal dark corner save those of the Jewish community itself. The explanation is in part historical. During the Medieval Ages, religious allegiance was automatic. The state required it of you. You were born a Jew, you remained a Jew because your passport said you were a Jew. To this day, Russia continues this ancient system. Nineteenth century political emancipation began to break down these high walls of sequestration. For the first time, there were other options open to the indifferent Jew save that of grin and bear it. Loyalty demanded its pound of discomfort and even danger, and many of weak faith wondered if the price was worth it. After all, German, French, and English culture were high cultures. Could not one be just as adequate a person as an Episcopalian or an Agnostic? Conversion or assimilation at least freed one's children of the disabilities of a prejudiced world. The early leaders of reform Judaism were born into this tension, and they tried to counter it by emphasizing the limitations of the various European and Western cultures. True, Germany was a scholarly and skillful nation, but could one prize German nationalism and the Germanic love of authority and the obvious tolerance in Germany of religious and racial prejudice? Many of the observations made by these early reforms were perceptive and helped prepare Jews to be on their guard against excessive nationalism and materialism. It was true that in Germany man served the state while in Judaism the state must serve man. Such analyses helped to make clear wherein Judaism differed. Well and good and necessary. Indeed, we still need that careful analysis which will show that Americanism and the Torah are not synonymous. Chochma is something more than the current conventional wisdom. But these reformist preachers were

children of their age; and the overriding need of the age was political and economic acceptance. They wanted to be part of, not apart. They trembled at every thought of community and distinctiveness; so they took Deutero-Isaiah and pulled his nationalistic teeth. They emphasized the struggle for a better Germany, not the struggle for a purified Israel. Deutero-Isaiah's Zionism was anathema to them. Their congregations were child centered. The congregation was justified as a school house in which to prepare the young with denaturalized ethical principles for an essentially secular existence. The adult didn't have to come to Temple. He enlisted in liberal crusades, the revolution of 1848, or he understood the ten commandments and the good natured decencies of the Rotary as one and the same. Deutero-Isaiah became transformed into Don Quixote riding off in all directions to solve all of the problems of the world as long as they were no in his own community. It won't wash. It's not functional. Even if all thirteen million Jews in our world were lamplighters, we couldn't erase obdurate evil. The mission's high-flown idealism was a useful standard for Yom Kippur sermons, but is embarrassing theology. More often than not, unyielding reality forced the missionaries to fall back not on specific examples of saintliness -- how saintly was a German burgher? -- but on uncertain claims of primacy. "Our faith is older than their faith", that simply by being, we remind the world of God and Sinai. Our mere physical presence somehow triggers the super ego of Western man.

N. 1000 climber on scrub small fruit at
~~around~~ - 2 small bees to be seen at the fruit at
measured to be - to be measured fruit at
must be distinct - yes clipping (and fruit - yes)
but fruit) Can it be seen at the fruit at

indifference to culture & general, in places we always have
among us all the way of the world is the same way

TO INDIFFERENCE — ALLEGATION — The great

community — which has been a practical experience life —

is substantially not to be under — creation & the death

Full and uninterrupted — the past

There are no secrets to justify the
hard life — a re-creation of it is

living — Tragedy may never for the

Chadwick



To bring out the person from the darkness
& lead out all in darkness out of the prison-house

By accepting the Torah, by changing bad - social moral standards
these people to be cultured of these superstitions, beliefs, ideals -
& to be civilized under these ancient traditions and customs
science & refinement these nations & other peoples according to
the higher values

P.T. speaks to the people of a juster religion - organized one to
the Torah law - providing not only a great help for the alien land
to it very helpful helping to provide the spread of justice and
morality across the world. Just as present of these people and the
world for these children, just as a child in a school or
in Europe by its example sets a standard for many others
across the globe - an example unlike any other people to
other nations & peoples

P.T. was not a means - to achieve test in and just to
bring social justice as an example.
leads on return to the morality & justice and law
distinguished people generation " the best Indian in the world "
source, These will offer all the benefits of a different religion -
but of social justice as you - the benefits of life will be
captured & enriched by the large unimpaired

Awake, awake,
Put on thy strength, O Zion
Put on thy beautiful garments
O Jerusalem, be holy etc

of Israel, the people, our role is to be Israel. Our role is to seek to find a ^{way} ~~role~~ in our homes, in our congregations, in our communities to come alive to God, which is the immemorable burden of our teaching. To be men of decency and men of sensitivity, to be men of feeling and of _____ feeling. To create relationships which are basically sound with all the basic respect for the other person. To create rules and charters and regulations which are founded in human dignity and in social righteousness. To work for a society of peace and of opportunity and of abundance. I must add to this discussion on the message of Israel this comment. ^A About a hundred years ago Jews were faced with another crisis of faith much like the crisis which they faced in the days of Deuter, Isaiah. ^{during} The medieval age, when one's allegiance was automatic, required of you by the state, you were born a Jew, and you remained a Jew because the ~~paper~~ said you were a Jew, ~~is about at an end.~~ A Jew knows full well the disabilities and disadvantages of being Jewish. The quotas, the restrictions, the regulations which were imposed on him only, the curses and the hate. And he saw the appeal by the cultures and the philosophers of other intelligences and he wondered, [?] Was it worth the price to remain a Jew. Couldn't he be just as human, just as fine a man if he took some other path. [?] ~~If he took the orders of some~~ ^{CONVERTED to some} other faith. [?] A faith which would at least free him and free his children from certain socially imposed disadvantages. [?] And there were REFORMERS who were very sensitive to this tension because they themselves were children of the same age. Refurbish Deuter, Isaiah to explain to the Jew of the 19th century why it was important for him to remain with his birth faith. It reminded him of the prejudice that was all about, ~~of~~ the loyal nationalism, of Zionism, of Kaiserism and German militarism, ~~of~~ the extreme ideologies, political and economic, which set man below the state, which insisted that man had no dignity, that it was the state which he must serve and they reminded him of the basic ethical mix which is our faith, which insists on the dignity of man and the decency of all men and the blessing of a just society. It was said to him, it is your responsibility

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"The 19th century offers a humanity less number
of civilization

"The 14th century will come, the sword
 of liberty will be totally routed; the
 crown & scepter will be dashed in pieces
 upon the ruins the banner of liberty will
 be unfurled; the nation will be free &
 free men will stand a nation's head
 directed by the American people, unity,
 in glory to the world, and
 liberty, our freedom, the whole of
 civilization, the world is united.

Donnell was looked upon as a deal man & young man -
 who would not let the name of man in the bank to
bring the rights of university, which the responsibility
 of Donnell had been put to set the man in order -
 we paid 1000 attorney to fight in connection - the
expensive was on second order - the year of 1940 -
but it was not

To purchase fuel oil and coal
To collect water - 100 lbs

denial. One must be confident - and it is a good way - a long
long way - very long.

Let me add another thought - 100 years ago - Jews
suffered a crisis of faith and unlike the rest of the world P.T.
was so long ago. The day of unbelievable Jewish survival was
ending. When you look at renewal a few - because the state said
you were a Jew. Political organization had been conquered
by separation - the Jew found himself isolated by alien learning
to alien values, to have to discontinue of renewal a few -
the intuition, the question, the answer - and he found it
difficult to understand, why he should renewal a way of an
alienated people, legally denied - high price - & he renewed
if the price was worth it.

The early leaders of reform Judaism were the main force
of this transformation - a very important need for an organization
renewal - P.T. was renewed - to renew the old
to renew, renew, renew, renew, renew, renew, renew
ideology of all these years and need for a renewal of
the spirit of renewal, the importance of renewal and the truth of
denial.

But renewal P.T. had found in people renewed - to
an understanding of renewal - to the renewal of a just faith
community - the renewal had in renewal people of
community - renewal of the people of renewal.

