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ISRAEL

A Nation among Nations

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Israel: A Nation among Nations

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I remember, ten years ago or more, dining in Paris with a distinguished historian of philosophy who was also a high official of the French Government. In the course of conversation it emerged that I was, and had since my schooldays been, a convinced believer in the need for a Jewish state in Palestine. He was plainly taken aback. That the Jews (he was a Gentile), with their rich and extraordinary history, miraculous survivors from the classical age of our common civilisation – that this fascinating people should choose to give up its unique status, and for what? To become Albania? How could they want this? Was this not, he asked, a failure of national imagination, a betrayal of all that the Jews were and stood for?

His was not, perhaps, a common reaction, but it was not uncharacteristic of some members of the intelligentsia, both Gentile and Jewish. I assured the late M. Alexandre Kojève that this was indeed so: that however it might look to the world in general, to condemn the oyster for wishing to avoid the sufferings that led to the disease that might, in some cases, result in a pearl, was neither reasonable nor just. The oyster wished to live an oyster's life, to realise itself as an oyster, not solely to serve as the unhappy means of enriching the world with masterpieces of art or philosophy or religion that sprang from its sufferings. Men had a right to unharrassed existence, normal conditions of life and work, normal opportunities for developing relationships with others, without, at the same time, being a perpetual problem to themselves and others, an exception and an anomaly, no matter how interesting, or even valuable, from the point of view of historians of culture or connoisseurs of the unusual and the unique. Surely every nation had a right to be a majority somewhere, and not to be condemned to the role of remaining a minority in every society, never to know what it was to be fully at home, to live in perpetual danger of 'special' treatment by 'the others', of serving solely as a test of the civilisation and tolerance of their neighbours. Was it so

very unreasonable to wish – to quote Herzl's celebrated phrase – to 'live at last as free men on our own soil, and die peacefully in our own home'?[1] And then I repeated some of the familiar arguments for Zionism.

My friend then told me a story, which indeed I had heard before, of how Franz Rosenzweig, the German Jewish philosopher and theologian, who had come so close to being converted to Christianity but at the last moment returned to the faith of his fathers, and then, perhaps under the influence of Martin Buber, developed a sympathetic understanding of Zionism, defended it to the old and eminent founder of the neo-Kantian school of philosophy, Professor Hermann Cohen. Cohen was a fervent German patriot and believed in a special spiritual affinity between Jews and Germans: 'So the gang wants to be happy!' he observed indignantly.[2] It was not lofty enough. He rejected this aim with contempt. It was absolute justice, the ideal of a single undivided humanity obedient to a single, universal, rational moral law – that was the true mission of Judaism. It was this pure and sublime ideal, transcending all earthly comforts, that had brought Judaism close to Kant's ethical doctrine, not the pursuit of happiness, still less of mere contentment. He spoke much as Luther had done, when someone suggested to him that men's purpose was happiness: 'Happiness?' he is said to have exclaimed. 'Pain and suffering! The Cross! The Cross!'[3] Nietzsche unexpectedly continued the same tradition when he said that man did not seek happiness, only the Englishman did.[4]

[1] Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question*, trans. Sylvie D'Avigdor (London, 1896), 102.

[2] 'Die Kerls wollen glucklich sein!' Franz Rosenzweig, introduction to *Hermann Cohens Jüdische Schriften*, ed. Bruno Strauss (Berlin, 1924), i, *Ethische und religiöse Grundfragen*, lx.

[3] Apparently a misremembering of the context of Luther's 'Leiden, Leiden, Kreuz, Kreuz, ist der Christen Recht, deß und kein anders' ('Suffering, suffering, the cross, the cross is the Christian law, this and no other'), 'Ermahnung zum Frieden auf die zwölf Artikel der Bauerschaft in Schwaben' (1525), in his *Sämmtliche Werke* (Erlangen, 1826–57) xxiv 271.

[4] 'Der Mensch strebt *nicht* nach Glück; nur der Engländer tut das.' Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Sprüche und Pfeile' no. 12, *Götzen-Dämmerung, oder,*

So we argued, my host affirming that their historical position rendered the Jews unique agents of universal moral and intellectual transformation (even if they suffered or were exterminated in the process), while I defended their right to the kind of conditions enjoyed by the vast majority of other men. Neither of us maintained that Jews were bound to remain aliens always and everywhere, for some among them had in fact become assimilated in many civilised communities, and in some none too civilised ones also. But both of us conceded that the circumstances in which they lived at present entailed a risk, not necessarily of actual persecution, but of the fate of outsiders and strangers. For my companion, this was the price to be paid for spiritual distinction – a high, if painful privilege. For me, like poverty or physical disability, it constituted a mere privation, even if it generated virtues of its own. To elevate suffering to a sacred vocation seemed to me to make a virtue of avoidable misery. We reached no agreement.

No doubt, as our ancient teachers have taught, one should be with the persecuted and not the persecutors. But I saw no intrinsic merit in being the oldest and most innocent victim of the strong and the cruel, only pathos: a wicked anomaly and an **[29]** injustice that demanded to be put right. Every human group, it seemed to me, had the right to a history, and not merely a martyrology.

Has the creation of the State of Israel provided a remedy for this state of affairs? Before I attempt to answer this question, let me say something about the hopes and ideals of some of those who served this cause and, in many cases, gave up their lives to it and for it. They started from the assumption that the Jews are not a solely religious community. Without accepting the implications of any bogus racial theory, they believed, and believe, the Jews to be a worldwide community connected by bonds that are nowadays called 'ethnic': a body held together by common descent, memories, customs, institutions, loyalties, common social and moral, as well as pre-eminently religious, values and conduct – a proposition accepted far more widely today, even among those who are critical of Israel and Zionism, than it was in the days of Edwin Montagu and Claude Montefiore.

Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert (1889): Nietzsche, *Werke*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin, 1967–), vi/3, 55.

Not everyone who calls himself a Jew is conscious of, or desires to promote, so great a degree of solidarity. Some, particularly in Western countries, have in varying degrees lost the original colouring of their ancestors and have assimilated to other forms of life led by the communities or nations or states of which they have for a long time formed a part, or else by international or cosmopolitan associations, classes, parties, social, political or ideological movements. At times failure to recognise their assimilation by their Gentile neighbours, who still look upon them as Jews and so, to some degree, an alien element, upsets them, and, on critical occasions (as for example, in the Dreyfus Affair and, much more dreadfully, in the case of Central European and German anti-Semitism, with its inhuman consequences), produces violent shocks which awaken a dormant sense of Jewish identity. This has been so in the case of many an ex-assimilationist convert to Zionism, including Herzl himself.

Many familiar examples, some of them modern, could be cited of painful Jewish anxiety to convince their neighbours that they were worthy of their trust or at least of toleration. Let me quote only one, which I came across while reading the recently published study of the behaviour of the French Jewish community at the turn of the century.[5]

In 1881 the assassination of Alexander II of Russia was followed by a series of anti-Jewish pogroms which were duly denounced in France by a committee **[30]** consisting of prominent Gentiles and Jews, headed by Victor Hugo, Gambetta, the Archbishop of Paris and other notables. Ten years later there was a Franco-Russian political rapprochement. Anti-Semitic journalists in France wrote that 'international Jewry', 'Judaeo-German banks' and the like were working against this, and therefore against the national interests of France.

When a Russian naval squadron visited France in 1893, a Jewish playwright, Albin Valabrègue, published an 'Appel aux Israélites' which declared, together with other similar sentiments:

> at a time when an effort is being made to besmirch all of our co-religionists, accusing them of the faults of a few

[5] Michael R. Marrus, *The Politics of Assimilation: A Study of the French Jewish Community at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair* (Oxford, 1971), 156–7.

> unscrupulous cosmopolitan Jews, it seems to me that we have a duty to show our warm association in a special way.
>
> We are not legitimate children of France, we are only adopted children, and as such we have the obligation to be twice as French as the others.[6]

Valabrègue, sometime afterwards, was converted to Christianity. But even the Rabbi Israël Lévi advocated Jewish prayers for the recovery of the Russian Emperor Alexander III, a notorious anti-Semite, saying he 'greatly persecuted the Jews' but 'was a sincere believer […], and he acted in accordance with his conscience in attacking us as severely as he did. […] Above all, we must remember that […] in the interests of our country his life is precious.'[7]

As for public protest against Russian persecution of the Jews, 'any public demonstrations on our part', wrote M. Daniel Lévy in 1891, 'would even *here*, in certain quarters, be given an odious interpretation, and would immediately be followed *there* [sc. in Russia] by the most terrible reprisals.'[8] Many parallel examples could be cited, from many lands, during the last hundred years until the present day. *Plus ça change* … But can even that be said? Have things, in fact, changed so very much?

The shock of recognising their identity is salutary for some but leaves others confused and embarrassed; they do not know where they belong, and float downstream without being able to land comfortably on either bank. But apart from these wanderers and stragglers, many of them sensitive, honourable and gifted persons, there exists, and has existed for the better part of a century, a sufficient body of Jews who consciously desire to lead a national existence. These are the persons whose feelings have been well summed up by Walter Laqueur in his illuminating *A History of Zionism*. They believe that the Jews have a common past and future, and in virtue of this form a distinctive group: that a national

[6] *Le Matin*, 14 September 1893, 2, and other newspapers; trans. Marrus, 156/1.

[7] 'Nouvelles diverses', *Archives israélites*, 25 October 1894, 359; Marrus, 157 (translation altered by IB).

[8] 'Les persécutions russes et la presse parisienne', ibid., 4 June 1891, 178. Marrus, 156 (translation altered by IB).

existence is the sole adequate response to the misery of their lives, particularly in Eastern Europe, and to the endemic anti-Semitism which their mere presence appears to excite. Most of them reject assimilation as in principle morally unworthy, and all of them recognise it to have proved, in the majority of cases, a humiliating failure in practice, of which the fate of the German Jews (and today the experience of some of the Jewish citizens of the Soviet Union) provide ghastly testimony.

For such Jews, Israel alone offers the sole and sufficient solution of the problem. Lack of a country, they feel with Mazzini (cited by Laqueur), makes men 'the bastards of humanity';[9] or, in their special case, foundlings whom no one wishes to adopt, ultimately bound to exasperate others by the very wounds which they cannot hide and the discomfort they visibly endure in societies in which they have not been allowed to feel sufficiently at home. It is the great mass of these men and women, welded together by the apartheid practised against them by tsarist Russia and in many Muslim lands, who formed the core of what today is the Israeli nation.

Has the State of Israel fulfilled their aspirations? Reality always falls somewhat short of the ideal; moreover, the original ideals were too many and too diverse to be capable of wholly harmonious realisation. Among Russian Zionists there were, as among other Russians, conservatives and liberals, both religious and irreligious, clericals and anti-clericals, socialists and individualists, populists and elitists, militarists and pacifists, each of whom saw in the new Jewish state the possibility of realising their dreams. The Oriental Jews were pious and traditionalist, steeped in the Bible and medieval ideals.

There were the German Jews with a yearning for a fusion of the old with the new, the ancient East with the modern West, in some new spiritual synthesis. There were Americans with a belief in the release of vast socio-economic energies for the transformation of the entire Middle East, and the ending of destitution and disease and ignorance among all its inhabitants by modernisation, carried out by means of vast, New Deal-like schemes and experiments.

[9] 'I bastardi dell'Umanità', *Doveri dell'uomo* (London, 1860), chapter 5, 57. Giuseppe Mazzini, *The Duties of Man and Other Essays* (London, [1907]), 53.

There were British Jews who believed that unless the new state performed an ecumenical civilising mission and exercised the kind of spiritual influence preached by Ahad Ha'am (in which his disciples, men like Leon Simon and Norman Bentwich, so fervently believed), unless light once more shone from the East, the enterprise might end, as my friend in Paris had predicted, in a materialistic little Levantine community, a sad anti-climax after the splendours and the miseries of the whole Jewish past.

There were Jews from Czechoslovakia inspired by the liberal ideals of President Masaryk, Jews from Poland affected by the military-nationalist regime of Pilsudsky and his colonels, and finally there were those who believed in the revival of a kind of idyllic theocracy, of men, each under his vine and under his fig-tree, living in the light of the ancient precepts of the Bible, the Talmud and the commentators, simple and devout, 'a nation of saints' dedicated to the eternal truths of the law and the prophets.

I do not wish even to attempt to conduct an inquest into how much of this has been realised and how much has not; how much may still be hoped for by optimistic idealists and how much must be given up as lost or unreal or unattainable. The point I wish to make is a different one. It is that even if the kibbutzim had not provided us with one of the few, if not the only, examples of socialism free from the disregard for liberal and democratic values that stains great stretches of the Second and the Third Worlds; even if the degree of social justice and democracy were not as high as it still is among Israelis, where differences of wealth are not great, and the poor and unimportant can say what they wish to the rich and the grand with a freedom unknown in most countries in the world today; even then, the society that has been created fulfils and indeed **[31]** over-fulfils the desperate needs that brought the Zionist movement into existence. It has achieved the essence of what it set out to achieve: inner emancipation. Compared with this fact, the degree to which it may have realised or disappointed the expectations of its various founders and supporters matters relatively little.

The citizens of Israel are not racked by self-consciousness, by wondering uneasily what they look like to 'the others', by over-anxiety to please suspicious fellow citizens, or, alternatively, by the arrogant defensiveness caused by the humiliating spectacle of such social anxieties on the part of fathers and mothers and brothers

and sisters. The citizens of Israel are a nation among nations, and their virtues and vices are not the products of some abnormal social distortion.

Those who hoped for a swift flowering of intellectual genius, an unheard of renaissance of the creative imagination on the part of native-born novelists and poets, painters and composers, scientists and philosophers, historians and critics, or for a degree of moral sublimity and spiritual splendour far beyond that of other peoples, may be disappointed. No doubt every human community wishes to achieve what it can, and is proud of its great men and its most gifted sons. But what the Zionist movement set out to promote was in the first place the restoration of health to a social organism that, for notorious historical reasons, had had an abnormal development, and became maimed and afflicted by diseases that were pointed out, not always without malice, by friend and foe, Jew and Gentile alike. The fact that agriculture rather than **[32]** finance, technology, applied science and physical well-being rather than abstract thought, or chess, or avant-garde literature are characteristic of Israel today is surely a sign not of spiritual poverty but of recovery and convalescence, the very opposite of neurosis and decadence.

The Israelis are accused of militarism and chauvinism. Apart from the fact that the emergence of such characteristics was almost inevitable in Israel's beleaguered conditions, these attributes are by no means universal. Israeli opinion is not monolithic; there is much passionate discussion, much open disagreement. Even though the tone of some of Israel's public statements, especially concerning its relations with its neighbours, are not a cause for complacency, still less for congratulation by even its most devoted admirers and friends, they should nevertheless be seen in proportion, as something that the lifting of yokes almost invariably brings about.

In a remarkably candid, original and penetrating address which Baron Guy de Rothschild delivered in Paris not long ago, on the occasion, if I am not mistaken, of the centenary of the *Alliance Israélite*, he declared (it seems to me with great truth) that the creation of the State of Israel had had the effect of psychological decolonisation on Jews everywhere – a process which often causes sharp and, at times, irritating reactions on the part of the newly liberated. The idea of the recolonisation of Jews is a brilliant simile

for describing the beginning of their emancipation from that form of spiritual slavery, both political and psychological, of which Ahad Ha'am had written so incisively. This unhappy alienation went with the abnormal conditions that gave rise to such fantastic figments (to take only English literature) as Shylock on the one hand and Sidonia on the other: it is responsible for Pinsker's image of an unlaid ghost of a murdered people wandering among and frightening the living nations, and for the variety of caricatures of Jews in *Doctor Zhivago* and in the works of the New York School of Jewish novelists.

It is this last inheritance of the position of Jews in feudal societies that has persisted into industrial societies, capitalist and socialist, that seems at last to start becoming obsolescent as a result of the mere existence of Israel. There may yet be horrors in store for us, national and racial conflicts, oppression and murder of individuals or communities, for there is unfortunately little evidence of the abating of evil passions – as Trotsky once remarked, those who wanted a quiet life did ill to be born in the twentieth century[10] – but the grotesque, yet peculiarly shaming, contortions of assimilation, do appear to be nearing their end.

Whatever the future of the Diaspora and its relations with Israel (and it seems to me that, whatever some of us may wish, the gulf in the natural course of events, is likely to widen, unless things go badly for either side), the old, painful self-conscious**[33]**ness is waning, the agonies of ambivalence, personal and social, the insecurity that leads to excesses of self-protective behaviour – of anxiety to please, or of defensive arrogance, or of anxious and, in extreme cases, insatiable, pursuit of honours or wealth – or, alternatively, of nervous self-effacement – all these things are now less than they were.

[10] A typical Berlinian 'improvement' of 'Any contemporary of ours who wants peace and comfort before anything has chosen a bad time to be born', from Leon Trotsky, 'Hitler's Victory', *Manchester Guardian*, 22 March 1933, 11–12 at 11, reprinted in *Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1932–33), ed. George Breitman and Sarah Lovell (New York, 1972), 133–6 at 134; for the Russian original, 'German Fascism in Power: Origins and Perspectives' (10 March 1933), see e.g. ‹http://web.mit.edu/fjk/www/Trotsky/sochineniia/1933/19330310.html›.

To be a Jew need not be a source of either pride or shame. Despite the abnormality of its position, despite the disfavour with which this foundling, now grown to man's estate, is viewed by a multitude of disturbed groups and individuals in many lands, Israel is a nation among nations; Jews are, and are seen to be, what they are. The word 'Jew', which could not be uttered without causing some degree of embarrassment, at any rate in some circles in the West, is, with the word 'Israeli', becoming one word among others, denoting what it denotes, without causing kind and tactful liberal persons, in 'mixed' company, to wince a little. All this is of cardinal importance.

Such too – part and parcel of the same process of 'normalisation' – was the historic role played by the introduction of the Hebrew language as the language of Israel. It has a utilitarian justification – some common language historically connected with Jewish life was plainly needed if so many immigrants, speaking so many languages, were to develop a common culture or even a natural means of communication. However, this was not, as everyone knows, the primary motive that moved its champions. If utility, or even folk memories, had been the primary consideration, Yiddish might have done at least as well, since fewer immigrants would have had to learn it; the arguments of its defenders were, and are very well known.

The principal reasons for Hebrew were spiritual and moral. When men are liberated from imprisonment, they cast off the convict's uniform and don a new suit of clothes, that of free men. Hebrew stood for the free past, it conveyed to those who were in need of it the consciousness that they belonged to a community which possessed a history, not merely to a religious or cultural grouping, but to a nation. Yiddish, for all its charm and intimacy, its expressiveness and flexibility, was associated with the ghetto, humiliation, the bitterness and stoicism and black humour of exile.

Karl Marx somewhere remarked that one of the functions of the coming revolution would be that of purification – it would wash off the mud and dirt that clung to human beings from their benighted capitalist past.[11] Language embodies categories and concepts in terms of which we think and act, and Hebrew alone is free from the taint of the particular past with which Zionism was

[11] Untraced.

determined to make a clean break. No doubt Hebrew tends to insulate Israelis from the larger world, to increase **[34]** provincialism, perhaps even chauvinism. Nevertheless, it has performed its radical task of emancipation. Nothing could have replaced it. Modern Hebrew literature, for all its poets and storytellers, remains promise rather than fulfilment: the more fervent cultural hopes entertained by the pioneers have not always been realised. Nevertheless, the language is flourishing: the literature is growing: *dayenu*,[12] we may say.

When I was a child during the First World War in Petrograd, the Ivrit B'Ivrit movement[13] transformed those who were drawn into it under the direct and indirect influence of such dissimilar men as Ichernikhovsky, Idelson, Bialik, Ahad Haam, Buki ben Yogli, Frischmann, Trumpeldor. The psychological self-liberation of the generation of which the President of Israel, Zalman Shazar, is a representative figure of great distinction, was a most moving phenomenon. Perhaps the founders of the Gaelic League, Dr Douglas Hyde and his allies, felt similarly, even though their experiment has, for easily explicable reasons, been relatively less successful.

This movement of what Pinsker, in a clumsy but precise expression, had called 'auto-emancipation', of which I was a very young and privileged observer in those far off years, more than half a century ago, rose to national proportions in Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s. It set free the Jews in Palestine, and seems to me to be a powerful force in promoting the 'decolonisation' – the personal liberation – of the Jews in the Diaspora, whether they choose to remain in the Jewish community or not. Every conscious, deliberate act of choice in the service of an ideal goal is a blow for liberty.

The creation of the State of Israel, despite every just criticism that may be made against its external or internal policies, was a unique act which set free a large number of human beings who before this, for many centuries, collectively had no way out. It is a state beset with terrible problems. Its economic condition is anomalous. Its security is in perpetual danger. There is, I suspect,

[12] 'It is enough for us' (i.e. we should be satisfied), the title of a Passover song of gratefulness for gifts received.

[13] The teaching of the living Hebrew language by speaking it.

scarcely a foreign ministry in the world that does not look upon it as a troublesome problem, a kind of stumbling block the disappearance of which would be greeted with an ill-concealed sign of relief. It has the social problem of integrating the great Oriental Jewish community which its own acts have brought to its shores. Its relations with the Arabs – both the Arab states outside its borders and its own Arab population – is by far the greatest and most agonising of its problems, moral as well as political. Indeed, it is a problem that torments some of its own best and most honourable citizens and exercises its well-wishers in other lands. It does not present the usual conflict of expediency and moral principle, justice and *raison d'état*: on the contrary, in this case injustice and lack of realism often seem to coincide.

But discussion of this issue, to face and to avoid which seems almost equally painful, would take me too far. The place in which to criticise the policies of the State of Israel, at any rate for Jews, is Jerusalem rather than London or New York. The state and government of Israel has, in any case, had more than its just share of public criticism. It is not so much this or that act or attribute as its very existence that tends to be questioned – openly or covertly.

This provokes justified resentment even among the mildest and most idealistic of its citizens. They complain, rightly, it seems to me, that the standard by which their conduct is judged is higher than that applied to other peoples; this seems to them not so much an implicit compliment to their moral quality (as their critics sometimes pretend), as evidence of being viewed as being somehow on probation, as being required to demonstrate their fitness for equal consideration with other nations, which they naturally claim, but which has not been entirely accorded to them by the outside world.

I remember that when I was in Jerusalem at the time of the Eichmann trial, and took part in one of the innumerable discussions about whether he should be executed, an Israeli diplomat said, 'I am personally against the death penalty for him or anyone else. But I wish our foreign visitors did not feel it necessary to preach to us about this: why should we automatically be expected to behave so much better than anyone else? Why do English bishops come here and tell us that it is particularly heinous for us, with our great spiritual tradition, to commit such an act, when they did not lift their voices against such verdicts and their

execution by Frenchmen, Italians, Dutchmen, Russians, Poles? Why must we be a kind of Caesar's wife, expected to live by standards so much loftier than anyone else?'

I, too, was against Eichmann's execution, but I understood and sympathised with this point of view. And yet, even though crimes committed during two millennia against the Jewish people have been more frequent and more horrible than any of which they have, on the worst reckoning, themselves been guilty; despite the massacres of innocents during this century in Hebron, Safed, Mount Scopus, or the black despair created by the disregard of the world, more than thirty years ago, for the plight of the Jews in their hour of mortal danger; in spite of Hitler and Eichmann and the deportations and death camps, which the world finds it tedious to remember but the Jews will never forget; despite Bevin and the *Exodus* and other 'incidents' – still, Deir Yassin and Kibiya cast a shadow.

Men, one is told, are compelled to do things for their nation which they would not do for themselves; especially in war or where their very survival is threatened. Nevertheless, generosity and humanity and justice have been wise and rewarding policies on this earth and not merely morally right (as if this were of somewhat smaller account) especially in the case of small states, which, in the end, depend not on strength alone, but also on the decent opinions of mankind. The desire to be as other nations are need not extend to their least glorious hours. Perfect justice may be unattainable in public life, but at least one should strive for the least degree of social injustice and social inequality, a principle upon which Dr Weizmann, who did not pretend that the Arabs had no case, based his just claim to Palestine. Weizmann, in the perspective of history, seems to me to emerge as the wisest and most civilised of all the Jewish leaders of our age: above all, he combined strength, understanding of what moved the minds and hearts of his people, and intuitive certainty, at once moral and practical, of what was and what was not permitted in public life.

It is, I believe, his path and not that of the zealots that the State of Israel, in the end, must and will pursue. But I am in danger of contravening the very rule – that directed against criticism (and sermons) by outsiders – which I myself have advocated. Besides, this is an occasion for celebrating a great and miraculous deliverance, not for weighing Israel in the balance – an uncalled for

task, invidious even for its own citizens and leaders, and how much more so for those who remain in the Diaspora, and derive light and warmth from the mere existence of the state without shouldering its burdens.

It would be mere hypocrisy to deny that the existence of Israel has not wounded the pride or added to the miseries of many Arabs – even though their lives under the Mandate were far from idyllic. It is true that the new Arab governments, for plainly political reasons, have refused to do anything to alleviate this situation; it is no less true that some of the most painful and intractable problems are traceable to blunders, moral, psychological and political, of British governments and administrators – blunders often rather than ill will, caused by human fallibility or due to impersonal historical forces from which none of us is exempt.

Yet even if all this is so, even if none of the actors involved in these conflicts can claim an unblemished record, it still seems to me undeniable that the good that has been done greatly predominates. The righting of a fearful wrong, the resurrection of a people buried by its enemies and given up for dead, sometimes even by its own sons, is a stupendous human achievement, the righting of the oldest, cruellest, most continuous and most widespread wrong done to any group of human beings in recorded history.

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