

"REACTIONS TO THE YOM KIPPUR WAR"
Evaluations and Directions

Last week, I discussed the "mood" in Israel, and reported that it was mixed: shock and sadness had replaced some of the old ebullience, and yet I found resolve, determination, and hope. There was dejection, but no despair; they were concerned, but not hopeless.

Today I would like to offer some pertinent information culled from the seminar that I attended in the House of the President, and sponsored by the Hebrew University. The participants, many of whom were distinguished scholars from all over the world, ranged over the entire spectrum of reactions. Obviously, they are too many to condense within one talk. I should like, this morning, to concentrate on the reactions of the intellectuals of the world and on the response of the American Jewish community, and see whether these can yield us any conclusions as to directions for the future.

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A major concern of our Israel brothers was the attitude of the intellectuals. In many ways, this is a symptom of the traditional Jewish over-evaluation of men of the mind. Sir Isaiah Berlin reminded us that we ought not to worry too much about intellectuals, that they are not all that important in the world. But they do have a certain crucial significance. They are the teachers of the opinion-makers and politicians and diplomats and journalists of a few years hence. In that sense, they mold the opinions of the opinion-molders.

The Israelis were worried -- as no doubt all of us were -- by the silence of writers and artists and professors when Israel was brutally attacked on Yom Kippur. Why were these people, so articulate and obstreperous for every other cause, silent when it was Jews who were suffering?

Many reasons were offered for this strange silence. Many intellectuals are obsessed with the Third World, and seem to regard it as the incarnation of all virtue, and since the Third World was solidly against Israel, they could not bring themselves to speak up for Israel. A number of other intellectuals, liberals that they are, are embarrassed by the fact that the vicious villain of Watergate proved to be a great hero for Israel. Yet others suffered from what has been called "battle

fatigue" on Israel, from simply having expressed themselves too often and been worried too much in the past.

The most devastating explanation of all was: boredom. Many intellectuals found the whole subject a crashing bore, devoid of intellectual stimulation.

If that is so, it constitutes a major scandal, a shameful confusion of the intellectually titillating with the morally compelling. It tells us a great deal more about our intellectuals than it does about the State of Israel. There is not much we can do about it, save to recommend to the Israeli government that its Foreign Ministry appoint an attache in charge of academic entertainment.

Jewish intellectuals divided into two groups. There were many who were very active for Israel, indeed much more active than in the past. But some, and a not insignificant number, were opposed to Israel.

These were, to a large extent, those intellectuals who questioned the justice of Israel's cause, who felt that it was too rigid and perhaps imperialist. Of course, everyone has a right to question the rightness of Israel's position. In an era when very little is sacred, one cannot deny to Jewish intellectuals the right to keep their distance from Israel, even when it is obviously in the right -- as in this instance of an unprovoked Yom Kippur aggression.

I suppose there is no way to satisfy some people. These Third-World-oriented Jewish intellectuals, at least some of them, were against Israel after the Six Day War because Israel won. One would think that they would be pro-Israel now that Israel has suffered. But no, Israel does not come out well either way. One understands now what the late Prime Minister Levi Eshkol once said. When Minister Shimon Peres was appointed by Eshkol to go to the United States after the Six Day War, he asked the Prime Minister what posture he should adopt to the American public. Eshkol told him: present us like a נערבכל שמשון, like a pitiful Samson...

But personally, I will not give up on them. Many of these alienated intellectuals will not come back, not ever -- not if they abandoned us in this time of need. But many of them will come back, after experience and history will have again proven the emptiness of their words and the vacuity of their position.

In our Sidra this morning we read the astounding news that Moses forgot to circumcize one of his two sons, and that the Lord wished to kill him for this, but that his wife Tzipora circumcized the child and saved the family in the last minute.

How does one explain this amazing lapse? The Rabbis solved this difficult problem with a solution that proves even more difficult, more strange, and more bizzare! The Mekhilta tells us that when Moses first came to the home of Jethro and wanted to marry Tzipora,

אמר לו יתרו למשה קבל עליך דבר
זה שאומר לך ואני נותנה לך לאשה
אמר לו מה הוא. אמר לו בן ושיהיה
לך תחילה יהיה לעצד, מכאן ואילך
לשם שמרים. וקיבל עליו.

Jethro said to Moses: "Promise me this one thing and I will give you my daughter for a wife." Said Moses, "What is that?" Jethro answered: "Your first son must be dedicated to the worship of idols; thereafter your children may be worshippers of one God." And Moses accepted and made the promise.

That is how the Rabbis explain why Moses' oldest son, Gershon, was not circumcized by his father, but had to wait his mother's precipitate action.

Truly, this is shocking. There is nothing in the life or ideas of Moses as they unfold from the Bible itself that can possibly support the theory of such a promise by the greatest figure in Judaism. I feel inclined to accept the suggestion by Hassidic master, author of the **חידושי הרי"ם**: Moses never intended to yield any of his children to idolatry. Instead, Jethro said to Moses: you have been a worshipper of the one God all along, and that is how you attained your greatness. But is it not just as well that your son first test other beliefs, first experience other systems and faiths and then, disappointed in them, arrive firmly at the belief in one God? Moses agreed to this. There is something to be said for that point of view. He probably suspected that Jethro himself, who had changed religions often, would eventually become a monotheist. Therefore, let the first son recapitulate the adventure of the life of his grandfather Jethro. Moses agreed to this, so that one son would come to Judaism from his very cradle, and the other would arrive at it after a long journey.

Perhaps, Moses thought, this first son who would first be exposed to the falsehood and moral ugliness of all paganisms, would then learn to appreciate Judaism all the more. (One hears an echo of contemporary parents who fear that a yeshiva education is too "parochial" and confining...)

The agreement of Moses now becomes more comprehensible, but it is still wrong. **ויבקש ה' להמיתו**, he deserved to be punished for it. If not for the action of his wife Tzipora, his decision would have proved tragic.

Moses's theory was erroneous. But a theory of Moses is worth something, even if it is fallacious and discredited.

So, I am optimistic about those, especially those intellectual Jews, who are flirting with all kinds of strange loyalties. Many of those intellectuals who are even today remote from us -- to use the Biblical metaphor, **ערוּלֵי לֵב**, uncircumcized of heart -- and who worship at the altars of the Third World and other popular ideological icons, will yet come back! Only after their current fads will have disappointed them grievously, will they appreciate what they had rejected. It is not the most desirable path, but it is viable.

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American Jews in general underwent a polarization as a result of the Yom Kippur War. The process we had noticed in religious life all along has now become more evident in American Jewry's relation to Israel. Those who were for Israel, loyal to it, have now -- after the Yom Kippur War -- become even more committed than after the Six Day War. Those who were indifferent, remain more intensively indifferent. And those who were opposed to Israel, are now even more hostile.

Normally, un-Jewish Jews seem to come back home as a result of anti-Semitism. This time, because of fears that the energy crisis would lead to wide spread anti-Semitism problems, such Jews reacted against Israel and their own Jewish background. They felt that they were faced with a choice between the welfare of American Jewry and all it had produced and built, and the safety of Israel, and their decision was that "our" security comes first. Of course, this presentation of alternatives is thoroughly inauthentic, because Israel and American Jewry are totally interdependent. But they made a decisive choice, unnecessary though it was. To me, it is a paranoid internal reflection of the "dual loyalty" problem -- and it is a

dreadful, grievous, and tragic choice.

The indifferent did nothing, although in their hearts there was sympathy for Israel. These are the new "Jews of Silence." Of such moral cowardice one can say little that is appropriate to the pulpit.

But the most important feature of the reaction of American Jewry was its overwhelming support, unprecedented in history. Committed Jews proved themselves to be even more loyal, they performed spectacularly, and this is something of which we may be proud. The fact that the truly committed segment of American Jewry is not its majority, is not a happy one, but we must remember that it is rarely the majority of the community that moves.

The analysis of this marvelous response yields three important conclusions for the future.

First, the importance of organization. At the Yom Kippur War, American Jewry had already the makings of a coordinated system, which it had learned after the Six Day War. American Jewry put this organization into immediate and effective use.

After years of sarcasm about Jewish organizations -- and everyone has suffered from this, and from the consequent neglect, from Zionist organizations to sisterhoods to communal institutions -- the organizations proved their mettle and their worth.

Incidentally, the synagogues too proved their importance. Apparently, at every moment of crisis, whether dealing with Israel or even with America itself, the first place committed Jews repair to, in times of crisis, is the synagogue.

The second lesson is the importance of personal experience with Israel. Those who had visited Israel as tourists, or had spent a bit of time studying there, were the ones most easy to involve. Especially important is aliyah, for those who had relatives in Israel who were emigrants, felt most deeply involved. It is hard to feel remote when your own relatives are threatened, as they were during this war.

I wish to add only this: some of us, committed Jews, are also afflicted with more than a bit of fear. I plead with you: **חַס וְקַלִּילָה**, do not allow fear or cowardice to deter you from doing your duty to Israel. I refer specifically

to tourism. Too many people I have spoken to act as if the remote possibility of danger is sufficient to discourage them at this time. Heaven forbid! When we American Jews needed encouragement all these past 25 years, we went to Israel to draw upon their reservoir of courage and confidence and bravery. Now it is our task to bring them a smile, a comforting word. Do not worry: any risk is minimal, and that iota of danger is both negligible and always worth it!

When Moses and Aaron went on their first diplomatic mission to Pharoah, we read that they consulted with the זקנים, the elders. ואחר באו משה ואהרן, and afterwards Moses and Aaron came to Pharoah. Where were the elders? A tradition, quoted by Rashi, gives us the answer:

אבל הזקנים נשמתו אחד אחד מאחור משה ואהרן עד שנשמתו כולם קידם שהגיעו לפלטין לפי שיראו ללכת.

The word "ואחר" means not "afterwards," but "behind." The elders, to use a contemporary phrase, "chickened out." They became apprehensive, and each one in turn slipped away from behind Moses and Aaron, until at the end there was no one left but Moses and Aaron who alone made their way to the palace to confront the mighty Pharoah.

But in the end, when the Israelites came to Sinai to experience the great reward of Revelation, only Moses ascended the mountain by himself, and the elders were not permitted to accompany him. Moses turned them back. He turned his back to them. Those who were afraid to brave danger when it came to a moment of crisis, they do not deserve to receive the reward that God will bring to his people.

I hope that the message is clear.

So the conclusion is that tourism and studying and aliyah must be encouraged if only to retain the loyalties of American Jews.

Finally, the most important element of all is education. Formal education proved to be the sure way to commitment, and from commitment to work for Israel. The best response came from the best educated. Easiest to rally were those whose Jewish education had prepared them for it. Also informal education, such as that which is fortunately now being offered to such groups as the UJA leadership, and the Welfare Fund leaderships, proved worthwhile.

A beautiful phenomenon was something which I experienced in this synagogue, and which those who prepared the reports found all over the country as well, and that is that Jews, so often raised with the idea that they can fulfill all their commitments by writing a check for Israel (the contemporary version of "The People of the Book" -- the checkbook), kept on asking: "what else, what more, can I do for Israel besides giving money?"

That is a healthy sign. It shows a degree of spiritual perception that goes far beyond the merely philanthropic.

The answer, of course, is that in crisis, such as the Yom Kippur War crisis, there is little more that one is able to do at such a time. The time to do things is now, before any new crises erupt. And what can be done? What can be done is to build a Jewish home, enforce Jewish love, deepen Jewish loyalty, make sure that Jewish education is not only skin deep, and encourage Jewish commitment.

It is that kind of program that will keep us as a viable community and fully interdependent with Israel.

It is that kind of program that will make us conscientious Jews.

It is that kind of program that will sensitize and prepare our young and teach them how to answer our most vicious critics. So that when a Bruno Kreisky suggests that the concept of chosenness, of עם סגולה, is what is making us unpopular; when this Austrian meshumad tells us to forgo our belief that we are a chosen people in order to win friends -- presumably the friendship of the sorts of his country -- our answer will be a resounding "No!" We are dayka a chosen people, a people of Torah and commandments. We are a different people. We are not like those who submit obsequiously to the blackmail of terrorists. We are ashamed that the likes of Bruno Kreisky comes from us. But we are proud to be a separate people, and never want to be like his country, which was ready to close down refugee centers, and to abandon human beings fleeing from persecution.

With continued organization, with more personal experience of Israel, with a deepened Jewish education, we will grow in our commitment.

And with it will grow, too, our faith and our hope and our confidence that הנה לא ינום ולא ישן שומר ישראל that the Guardian of Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers.