

"HERE AND THERE"

This Shabbat, the eve of *פרשת בהר* , commemorating the reunification of the Holy City in 1967, has been proclaimed "Aliyah Sabbath" by the Orthodox Union and other national Orthodox organizations. It is therefore appropriate, at this time, to touch on the relationships of two communities which the Babylonian Sages of the Talmud called *א"י* / *בבל* , "Here and There," the Diaspora and Israel.

The theme of Aliyah is not new to this pulpit. And this congregation is far too sophisticated for the simplistic platitudes which have for too long obscured clear thinking of this subject.

We can no more accept the Ben Gurion thesis that one can be a Jew only in Israel, than we can the old super-American canard that preaching or practicing Aliyah constitutes an act of disloyalty to America. And certainly, we want to avoid conforming to the cynical image of the Zionist, who has been defined as one who tries to persuade a second that a third should give money so that a fourth can go on Aliyah to Israel.

American Jews are particularly fortunate in this respect. They are not driven to Israel by oppression; adverse and tumultuous

social conditions are not the same as persecution. We can afford to encourage an orderly Aliyah, not in panic. The motive of American Aliyah must be idealism -- religious or national -- mixed with an enlightened self-interest.

Every American Jew ought -- and, I believe, the great majority probably do -- have Aliyah in the back of their mind; especially for those beginning their higher education, for young men and women or couples just starting on their careers, for retirees who want to spend their remaining years in the Holy Land, for those retiring a bit early so that they can still bring to bear the benefit of their experience for the State, and those in their middle years who are financially capable of making this change.

Our parents and grandparents came to this country, to the Land of Promise; there is no reason that we and our children should not go to Israel, as did our forefathers in ancient days, as to the Promised Land.

It is reassuring to know that national Jewish organizations are now making every effort to aid such families who choose Aliyah, with advice and experience and other assistance in making their kelitah (absorption) easier and more painless.

What is it that Aliyah accomplishes for the oleh (emigrant)? Above all, beyond the idealistic ends and beyond the escape from the deteriorating conditions of the United States, is the feeling of at-homeness. It is the one overwhelming impression I experienced during my four or five months in Israel.

In speaking of the Jubilee year, with its manumission of slaves and return of family estates to their original owners, the Torah says something that, in a manner of speaking, yields this same meaning:

וְיָגִידוּ בְּכָל עִיר וּבְכָל מְדִינָה שֶׁנִּשְׁבְּטָה וְיָגִידוּ לֵאמֹר שָׁנַת הַיְּבוּל הִיא וְיָשָׁבוּ בְּעִירָם וּבְמִשְׁפַּחָתָם וְשָׁבוּ אֶל אֲדָמָתָם וְשָׁבוּ אֶל אֲבוֹתָם וְשָׁבוּ אֶל אֲדָמָתָם וְשָׁבוּ אֶל אֲבוֹתָם

"And ye shall proclaim liberty throughout the land and to all the inhabitants thereof, and ye shall return each man to his inheritance, and each man to his family shall ye return." That is the feeling that so happily siezes the oleh: he is returning to his home, he is now with his mishpahah or family. A Jew does not "go" to Israel; he returns. And, looking about him, despite the variety of ethnic and racial features, he recognizes that he is in the bosom of his family. He has returned home.

Aliyah is not as uncomplicated an ideal as some of us imagine it to be. There are some who raise objections, for they have serious reservations about an American Aliyah. They believe that, by draining off the best and most idealistic young talent from

American Jewry, it hurts our community in the United States. And indeed this does present us with a very serious problem. We are a talent-starved community that can ill afford to lose the best of our sons and daughters, who might have contributed so much to the survival and flourishing of American Jewry.

Yet, while in the short run this does present a grievous problem, in the long run it has quite the reverse effect. For ultimately, Israeli and American Jewry do not compete; there exists a symbiotic relation between them. An American Aliyah will lead to a more intimate personal bond between both communities, as there will be a sizable group of people who belong equally to both communities. American influence on social and economic and religious institutions in Israel will have a reciprocal beneficial effect on American Jewry.

On the first part of the verse quoted -- *וְקָרָאתִי צִדְקָתִי בְּיָמֶיךָ*, "And ye shall proclaim liberty throughout the land and for all the inhabitants thereof" -- the Talmud (R.H. 8b) comments as follows: the "liberty" referred to in the Biblical verse is the Jubilee year, when slaves are emancipated, debts released, and family estates returned. A literal reading of the verse would lead one to believe that the Jubilee year applies only to *ארץ ישראל*, "the land," i.e., only Israel and not the Diaspora. Yet the

Talmud asks, we know that the laws of Jubilee liberty apply also to *ארץ חינו*, the Jewish communities outside Israel; why then does the Torah refer only to *ארץ*, "the Land?"

And the Talmud answers:

*אמר ר' יוחנן כל המצוות שבתורה נאמרו ליהודי ארץ חינו וכל המצוות שבתורה נאמרו ליהודי ארץ חינו*

The Torah means to teach us that when the laws of Jubilee year apply to the Land, as during the times of the Temple, then they apply equally to Jewish communities outside the Land; but when the Jubilee release does not apply to the Land, as when there is no Temple, then it does not apply to Jewish communities in the Diaspora.

This is the law stated strictly; yet its implications go beyond the particularities of the laws of Jubilee. We may deduce from it a general principle: when the Land enjoys *חירות*, liberty, then so do Jewish communities throughout the world; and vice versa. If there is liberty for the Jewish soul to flourish, if there is an opportunity for Judaism to achieve progress and for Yiddishkeit to be enhanced in its natural habitat of the Land, then so will it progress in the Diaspora. "There" and "here" are indissolubly tied together. If it will be well for us "there," it will be well for us "here." And if, Heaven forbid,

things will not go well for us "there" in the Land of Israel, then it shall be ill for us "here" in the United States and in Jewish communities throughout the world.

Hence, Aliyah from here to there is more necessary for the good of Jews and Judaism in the United States than it is for Israel! The more we can build up the State of Israel, the more we can determine its collective character and make sure that it will not emerge as another modern neo-pagan nation-state, but as the legitimate heir of the Jewish past, so will its collective character impress American Jews and direct our future in the proper channels. For since the rise of Israel, the greatest educational effect, for good or evil, upon American Jewry is the model that Israel presents for our youth. So whatever we send over from here to there, ultimately will affect us here by what happens there.

And what holds true for the "here" and "there" of America and Israel, also holds true for the relations of Israel to all the Diaspora countries.

Consider how alienated Russian Jewry has been for over half a century. Over two generations of Russian Jews have grown up naturally adjusted to the Communist principles and ethic, from the ideology of dialectical materialism to the social apparatus of

the Communist youth clubs and loyalty to Soviet Russia. How polyannish and unrealistic were those who still believed, all during this time, in the stubborn Jewish idea that in every Jewish soul, no matter how alienated and remote from the sources of Judaism, there still thrives a pintelle yid, a sacred dot of Jewishness that refuses to give up its ghost. How naive and innocent such a faith appeared -- until about five years ago!

After the War of Independence, and especially after the Six Day War, that little "dot" of Jewishness suddenly exploded, it burst into great flames!

25/11 20/11 19/11 18/11 17/11 16/11 15/11 14/11 13/11 12/11 11/11 10/11 9/11 8/11 7/11 6/11 5/11 4/11 3/11 2/11 1/11

As freedom and liberty and a new spirit of Jewish identity and Jewish purposefulness flourished in the Holy Land, so did its echo arouse that same spirit of Jewish liberation in the most *far* of *the far*, in the deepest recesses of alienated Jewries behind the Iron Curtain. And Russian Jews suddenly declare that Israel is their home, their *Yisraeli* *uzink*, that they want to learn the Hebrew language, that they wish to study the Bible. For the first time, children of those married according to the dictates of Communism insist upon being married with *Yisraeli* *marriage*, in accordance with Halakhah



and in the presence of a Rabbi and in a synagogue; and teenagers previously uncircumcized, because of their parents' fears or convictions, now gladly submit to berit milah as a sign of identification with the heritage, the people, and the destiny of Israel!

What heroism! Consider that it is now a crime not only to actively seek to emigrate to Israel, but merely to ask legal permission to leave for Israel! In the first Leningrad trial, for instance, Hillel Gutman was accused of -- soliciting another Jew to sign with him on a telegram of condolence to the parents of the children of Avivim who were killed when Arab terrorists bombed their bus. Condolences, too, are a crime in Soviet Russia!

In the present trial of the Leningrad Nine, even if we should accept as true that two of them had some remote connection with the hijacking attempt, the major crime of subversion consists of such items as possessing Israeli postcards, singing Hebrew songs, learning the Hebrew language, and studying Tenakh! And God knows what will happen when the new trials that are planned for Riga -- with that splendid heroine, Ruth Alexandrovitch, who continues to observe Shabbat even in her prison cell! -- and in Kishinev and in Odessa. *And the Nine --* Jewish liberty in the Diaspora! And these Russian Jews, self-taught, are inspired



by deror ba'aretz, the great rediscovery of Jewish identity and destiny in the Land. And these nine and their compatriots are the newest addition to the gallant annals of Jewish heroes and martyrs, headed by Rabbi Akiva himself.

Indeed, I confess for myself and my people, that the heroism of Russian Jews makes me somewhat embarrassed as an American Jew. Look at what they have to go through, the suffering they have to risk, in order to study Hebrew, study the Bible, or observe the Shabbat, or go to Israel. And here we, in unparalleled economic affluence, unequalled educational facilities which go begging for students, religious freedom heretofore unknown in our history -- how we ignore these treasures for which they have to sacrifice so much! How many of us have recently made a genuine effort to learn Hebrew fully? How many of us regularly undertake the intellectual exertion to study Bible or Talmud? How many of us over recent years have added how much to the level of our Jewish observance, growing spiritually? And how many of us -- are seriously contemplating Aliyah?...

Is it not, then, true that Judaism can thrive only in adversity and persecution and poverty? Are we American Jews going to affirm that a little anti-Semitism is a good thing,

and therefore, by implication, a lot of anti-Semitism is a very good thing...?

What will save American Jewry is not the pompous, self-gratulating super-Americanism so long beloved of too many of the great Jewish Establishment organizations; not the new super-militancy which seek alliances with the Mafia; but a voluntary rededication to study and observance, to ethnic pride reenforced by understanding and education, helped along by contemplating Russian Jewry and thus restoring our own perspective, learning how precious Judaism really is -- *יהודה נאמא* -- from those willing to risk from one to fifteen years of hard labor (and a spell in a Russian prison camp is not just "hard labor," it is death!) to learn Hebrew, to read Humash, to settle in Israel.

And finally, increased Aliyah from the United States to Israel, especially by committed Jews, will exercise beneficent effects upon American Jewry, and by directing the collective character of the State of Israel, will reenforce our own Jewish commitments here in America.

So we must continue to encourage those fortunate ones in our midst who are prepared to go home, *למולדתם ולביתם*, and to ascend from "here" to "there." And until the rest of us will have the opportunity, the will, and the zekhiyah, to do

likewise, we will rousingly reaffirm our resolve, on this eve of Jerusalem Day, to be in the forefront of those who seek the peace and integrity of Jerusalem, who will venture all and spare nothing to keep the unity of Jerusalem intact and to enhance the spiritual goals for which it stands.