

KOL MEVASSER

The Meaning of Israel: A Personal View

by David Harris, Executive Director AJC

Against the backdrop of recent efforts in some academic circles to vilify and isolate Israel, let me put my cards on the table right up front. I'm not dispassionate when it comes to Israel. Quite the contrary.

The establishment of the state in 1948; the fulfillment of its envisioned role as home and haven for Jews from around the world; its wholehearted embrace of democracy and the rule of law; and its impressive scientific, cultural, and economic achievements are accomplishments beyond my wildest imagination.

For centuries, Jews around the world prayed for a return to Zion. We are the lucky ones who have seen those prayers answered. I am grateful to witness this most extraordinary period in Jewish history and Jewish sovereignty.

And when one adds the key element, namely, that all this took place not in the Middle West but in the Middle East, where Israel's neighbors determined from day one to destroy it through any means available to them—from full-scale wars to wars of attrition; from diplomatic isolation to international delegitimation; from primary to secondary to even tertiary economic boycotts; from terrorism to the spread of anti-Semitism, often thinly veiled as anti-Zionism—the story of Israel's first 65 years becomes all the more remarkable.

No other country has faced such a constant challenge to its very right to exist, even though the age-old biblical, spiritual, and physical connection between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel is unique in the annals of history.

Indeed, that connection is of a totally different character from the basis on which, say, the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, or the bulk of Latin American countries were established, that is, by Europeans with no legitimate claim to those lands who decimated indigenous populations and proclaimed their own authority. Or, for that matter, North African countries that were conquered and occupied by Arab-Islamic invaders and totally redefined in their national character.

No other country has faced such overwhelming odds against its very survival, or experienced the same degree of never-ending international demonization by too many nations that throw integrity and morality to the wind, and slavishly follow the will of the energy-rich and more numerous Arab states.

Yet Israelis have never succumbed to a fortress mentality, never abandoned their deep yearning for peace with their neighbors or willingness to take unprecedented risks to achieve that peace, never lost their zest for life, and never flinched from their determination to build a vibrant, democratic state.

This story of nation-building is entirely without precedent.

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KJ Schedule Parashat Yitro

Friday, January 17th

Shaharit/Morning Prayer.....	6:30 am
Shir Hashirim	4:35 pm
Shabbat Candlelighting	4:50 pm
Minhah/Arbith	4:50 pm

Saturday, January 18th

Shaharit/Morning Prayer	8:30 am
Minha, Seudah Shlisheet, Arvit	4:00 pm
Motzei Shabbat / Havdallah.....	5:55 pm

Weekdays

Sunday, January 19th

Shaharit	7:30 am
KJ Kids Sunday School	11:00 am
David Kelly KJ Youth Choir	12:00 pm

Monday to Friday, January 20th to 24th

Shaharit	6:30 am
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Martin Luther King Jr. Day Monday, January 20th

Erev Shabbat

Friday, January 24th

Shaharit/Morning Prayer.....	6:30 am
Shir Hashirim	4:35 pm
Shabbat Candlelighting	4:57 pm
Minhah/Arbith	4:57 pm

Torah & Haftara Readings Parashat Yitro

from Exodus/Shemot pages 288 to 301
Haftara Shoftim / Judges 302 to 305

Shabbat Shalom

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Here was a people brought to the brink of utter destruction by the genocidal policies of Nazi Germany and its allies. Here was a people shown to be utterly powerless to influence a largely indifferent world to stop, or even slow down, the Final Solution. And here was a people, numbering barely 600,000, living cheek-by-jowl with often hostile Arab neighbors, under unsympathetic British occupation, on a harsh soil with no significant natural resources other than human capital in then Mandatory Palestine.

That the blue-and-white flag of an independent Israel could be planted on this land, to which the Jewish people had been intimately linked since the time of Abraham, just three years after the Second World War's end—and with the support of a decisive majority of UN members at the time—truly boggles the mind.

And what's more, that this tiny community of Jews, including survivors of the Holocaust who had somehow made their way to Mandatory Palestine despite the British blockade, could successfully defend themselves against the onslaught of five Arab standing armies that launched their attack on Israel's first day of existence, is almost beyond imagination.

To understand the essence of Israel's meaning, it is enough to ask how the history of the Jewish people might have been different had there been a Jewish state in 1933, in 1938, or even in 1941. If Israel had controlled its borders and the right of entry instead of Britain, if Israel had had embassies and consulates throughout Europe, how many more Jews might have escaped and found sanctuary?

Instead, Jews had to rely on the goodwill of embassies and consulates of other countries



Mr. Joseph Samuels
Guest Speaker
Shabbat Day services
January 18th, 2014

Dvar Torah for Parashat Yitro on
“The Ten Commandments:
The Jews Gift to the World”

Refuah Shlemah

Mordechai Cohen / Mordecai ben Avraham
Moselle Amron/Mazal Tov bat Salha Matana
Tilda Levy / Tilda bat Miriam
Joseph Sharaf / Yossef ben Jamila
Maurice Ovadia / Moshe ben Noosha
Pnina Herzbrun / Pnina bat Esther
Michael Herzbrun / Michael Baruch ben Sarah

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and, with woefully few exceptions, they found there neither the “good” nor the “will” to assist.

I witnessed firsthand what Israeli embassies and consulates meant to Jews drawn by the pull of Zion or the push of hatred. I stood in the courtyard of the Israeli embassy in Moscow and saw thousands of Jews seeking a quick exit from a Soviet Union in the throes of cataclysmic change, fearful that the change might be in the direction of renewed chauvinism and anti-Semitism . . .

And how can I ever forget the surge of pride—Jewish pride—that completely enveloped me in July 1976 on hearing the astonishing news of

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Thank You
Hilda and Touraj Rojhani
for your kindness and generosity in dry cleaning the synagogue's tallitot

Condolences
To our dear Board Member, Abe Abraham on the loss of his brother in New York

In Memoriam
We remember these yearzeit anniversaries for January 19 to 25, 2014. It is customary to light a memorial candle, donate tzedaka, & attend services the preceding Shabbat.

17 Shevat / Shabbat, January 18th
Simon Irani *Shimon ben Eliyahu*
Ashraf Nassi

18 Shevat / Sunday, January 19th
Raphael Mizrahie *Raphael Hai ben Eliyahu Mordehai*

19 Shevat / Shabbat, January 20th
Doris Shemtov *David Doris bat Kahela*
Sassoon Moshe *Sassoon Sasson ben Moshe*

20 Shevat / Tuesday, January 21st
Edward David *Ezra ben Meir Shemtov*
Nissim Moondani *Nissim ben Moondani*
Georgette Solomon

21 Shevat / Wednesday, January 22nd
Avraham Lubovsky *Avraham Yedidiah ben Aryeh*

23 Shevat / Friday, January 24th
Victoria Elie *Victoria bat Caden*
Maurice Shamash *Menashe Hayim*
Carl Zekaria *Katsuri ben Sion*

24 Shevat / Shabbat, January 25th
Norma Dabby *Naima bat Farha*
Morton Raymond Einy *Mordecai ben Rahamim*
Abraham Sales *Avraham ben Sassoon*

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Israel's daring rescue of the 106 Jewish hostages held by Arab and German terrorists in Entebbe, Uganda, over 2,000 miles from Israel's borders? The unmistakable message: Jews in danger will never again be alone, without hope, and totally dependent on others for their safety.

Not least, I can still remember, as if it were yesterday, my very first visit to Israel. It was in 1970, and I was not quite 21 years old.

I didn't know what to expect, but I recall being quite emotional from the moment I boarded the El Al plane to the very first glimpse of the Israeli coastline from the plane's window. As I disembarked, I surprised myself by wanting to kiss the ground. In the ensuing weeks, I marveled at everything I saw. To me, it was as if every apartment building, factory, school, orange grove, and Egged bus was nothing less than a miracle. A state, a Jewish state, was unfolding before my very eyes.

After centuries of persecutions, pogroms, exiles, ghettos, pales of settlement, inquisitions, blood libels, forced conversions, discriminatory legislation, and immigration restrictions—and, no less, after centuries of prayers, dreams, and yearning—the Jews had come back home and were the masters of their own fate.

I was overwhelmed by the mix of people, backgrounds, languages, and lifestyles, and by the intensity of life itself. Everyone, it seemed, had a compelling story to tell. There were Holocaust survivors with harrowing tales of their years in the camps. There were Jews from Arab countries, whose stories of persecution in such countries as Iraq, Libya, and Syria were little known at the time. There were the first Jews

arriving from the USSR seeking repatriation in the Jewish homeland. There were the sabras—native-born Israelis—many of whose families had lived in Palestine for generations. There were local Arabs, both Christian and Muslim. There were Druze, whose religious practices are kept secret from the outside world. The list goes on and on.

I was moved beyond words by the sight of Jerusalem and the fervor with which Jews of all backgrounds prayed at the Western Wall. Coming from a nation that was at the time deeply divided and demoralized, I found my Israeli peers to be unabashedly proud of their country, eager to serve in the military, and, in many cases, determined to volunteer for the most elite combat units. They felt personally involved in the enterprise of building a Jewish state, more than 1,800 years after the Romans defeated the Bar Kochba revolt, the last Jewish attempt at sovereignty on this very land.

To be sure, nation-building is an infinitely complex process. In Israel's case, it began against a backdrop of tensions with a local Arab population that laid claim to the very same land, and tragically refused a UN proposal to divide the land into Arab and Jewish states; as the Arab world sought to isolate, demoralize, and ultimately destroy the state; as Israel's population doubled in the first three years of the country's existence, putting an unimaginable strain on severely limited resources; as the nation was forced to devote a vast portion of its limited national budget to defense expenditures; and as the country coped with forging a national identity and social consensus among a population . . . geographically, linguistically, socially, and culturally heterogeneous.

Moreover, there is the tricky and underappreciated issue of the potential clash between the

messy realities of statehood and, in this case, the ideals and faith of a people. It is one thing for a people to live their religion as a minority; it is quite another to exercise sovereignty as the majority population while remaining true to one's ethical standards. Inevitably, tension will arise between a people's spiritual or moral self-definition and the exigencies of statecraft, between our highest concepts of human nature and the daily realities of individuals in decision-making positions wielding power and balancing a variety of competing interests.

Even so, shall we raise the bar so high as to ensure that Israel. . .will always fall short?

. . . Israelis, with only 65 years of statehood under their belts, are among the newer practitioners of statecraft. With all its remarkable success, consider the daunting political, social, and economic challenges in the United States 65 or even 165 years after independence, or, for that matter, the challenges it faces today, including stubborn social inequalities. And let's not forget that the United States, unlike Israel, is a vast country blessed with abundant natural resources, oceans on two-and-a half sides, a gentle neighbor to the north, and a weaker neighbor to the south.

Like any vibrant democracy, America is a permanent work in progress. The same holds true for Israel. Loving Israel as I do, though, doesn't mean overlooking its shortcomings . . . But it also doesn't mean allowing such issues to overshadow Israel's remarkable achievements, accomplished, as I've said, under the most difficult of circumstances.

In just 65 years, Israel has built a thriving democracy, unique in the region, including a Supreme Court prepared, when it deems appropriate, to

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Lunch & Learn

with Rabbi Daniel Bouskila, SEC Director

January 25, February 22 & March 29, 2014

following Shabbat Services

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**January 25: Women, Halakha & Modernity:
Irreconcilable Differences or Compatible Values?**

**February 22: Hebron, 1929: The True Origins of
the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict**

**March 29: Halakhic Genius, Political Revolutionary:
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override the prime minister or the military establishment, a feisty parliament that includes every imaginable viewpoint along the political spectrum, a robust civil society, and a vigorous press.

It has built an economy whose per capita GNP exceeds the combined total of its four contiguous sovereign neighbors—Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. It has built universities and research centers that have contributed to advancing the world's frontiers of knowledge in countless ways, and won a slew of Nobel Prizes in the process.

It has built one of the world's most powerful militaries—always under civilian control, I might add—to ensure its survival in a rough-and-tumble neighborhood. It has shown the world how a tiny nation, no larger than New Jersey or Wales, can, by sheer ingenuity, will, courage, and commitment, defend itself against those who would destroy it through conventional armies or armies of suicide bombers. And it has done all this while striving to adhere to a strict code of military conduct that has few rivals in the democratic world, much less elsewhere—in the face of an enemy prepared to send children to the front lines and seek cover in mosques, schools, and hospitals.

It has built a quality of life that ranks it among the world's healthiest nations and with a particularly high life expectancy, indeed higher than that of the U.S. It has built a thriving culture, whose musicians, writers, and artists are admired far beyond Israel's borders. In doing so, it has lovingly taken an ancient language, Hebrew, the language of the prophets, and rendered it modern to accommodate the vocabulary of the contemporary world.

It has built a climate of respect for other faith groups, including Baha'i, Christianity and Islam, and their places of worship. Can any other nation in the area make the same claim?

It has built an agricultural sector that has had much to teach developing nations about turning an arid soil into fields of fruits, vegetables, cotton, and flowers. Step back from the twists and turns of the daily information overload coming from the Middle East and consider the sweep of the last 65 years. Look at the light-years traveled since the darkness of the Holocaust, and marvel at the miracle of a decimated people returning to a tiny sliver of land—the land of our ancestors, the land of Zion and Jerusalem—and successfully building a modern, vibrant state against all the odds, on that ancient foundation.

In the final analysis, then, the story of Israel is the wondrous realization of a 3,500 year link among a land, a faith, a language, a people, and a vision. It is an unparalleled story of tenacity and determination, of courage & renewal. And it is ultimately a metaphor for the triumph of enduring hope over the temptation of despair.