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EVERY HISTORIC community establishes its specific character by reflecting on three aspects of its life—its self-image, its attitude to the universal values of culture and religion, its posture toward other groups and humanity generally. Naturally, these phases of culture interact and affect one another. But, as a rule it is easy enough to study them separately.

In the case of the Jewish people, each of the three orientations of collective consciousness is problematic.

The relationship of the Jewish people to God was affirmed to be unique by the Jews themselves and in the Christian world. Their metaphysical status was believed to be inherent in their ethnicity and destiny, and it was irrevocable. Naturally, the self-image of Jewish people and their attitude to their neighbors were determined in large part by this dogma of the Chosen People.

It is commonly asserted that in Jewish life, there is no distinction between nationality and religion. But Jewish thinkers could not be unaware of the dividing line between these two categories. The majority of the Jewish people lived in the Christian world, where this line of demarcation was carved out through centuries in bloody revolutions and civil wars. The movement of Jewish people from the periphery of western European life to its center depended upon and coincided with the progressive separation of church and state. In countries of the ancien regime, Jews could only be heretics and pariahs. Religious hostility
overflowed often enough into the categories of nationality and race. In Spain, the theory of *limpieza* was evolved. It asserted that Jewish “blood” was corrupted by centuries of unbelief. This decay of religious bias into racist contempt was foreshadowed by the belief, which preachers read into the New Testament since the second century, that the Jewish people had been “rejected” by the Supreme Being, for having failed to recognize their Savior. Weaker and less dogmatic versions of this dogma persisted into the twentieth century in all the lands of Europe. It was widely believed that the Jew was separated from Christian society by a metaphysical barrier. In addition to the categories of race, nationality and religion, which distinguished other groups from one another, the Jew bore the stigmata of a special mystery, compounded of both a blessing and a curse, the grace of chosenness and the doom of rejection. The metaphysical gulf which set the Jews apart was encrusted in the course of time with many and diverse canards, which formed the mythology of Antisemitism.

A mirror-image of this complex of myths and fantasies has often bedeviled the self-consciousness of the Jewish people. The Jewish self-image was at times lifted out of the complexities of history and viewed as if Jews were a “people that dwells alone and is not counted among the nations” (Numbers 23:9). It does not merely cherish a specific body of beliefs and practices. It occupies a unique status, in relation to Providence, and in respect of all the nations of the world.

Collectivities are victims of vanity even more than individuals, and it is easier for the former to mask their pride in the adornment of idealism than it is for the latter. Once a tradition has taken root which appeals to the idealism of people as well as to their self-love, it becomes exceedingly difficult to disentangle the threads and to restore the original state of normalcy.

**JEWISH IMAGE IN PAST AND PRESENT**

In my book, *Jewish Identity in an Age of Ideologies*, I traced the diverse changes in the Jewish image and self-image that resulted from the movements of thought in the modern world.

So central was the Jewish heritage to the history of the western world that every change in the intellectual climate of Europe implied a subtle alteration in the image of the Jew, for better or for worse. Theology in the most general sense was long the “queen of the sciences”, and a
unique position in theology led to special consequences when in the last two centuries theologies evolved into ideologies. Every new vision of society influenced the character of the Jewish image and the nature of Jewish identity, whether it was a new understanding of nationality, or of social justice, or of the course of world history, or of the nature of evolution, or of the interpretation of Holy Scriptures; every upheaval in thought and society affected the concept of the Jewish people. Still, the more the Jewish image changed, the more it remained the same, in that it retained references to ancient stereotypes and the resonance of folk mythologies.

Is this situation likely to continue into the distant future? No one can answer this question with dogmatic certainty. The contemporary scene has been radically altered by the following sea-changes:

First, the vast majority of Jewish people now live in North America and in Israel. The American state is based on the principle of individual citizenship, with no special privileges being granted to any ethnic group. The ideology of American nationalism embraces all its citizens, regardless of race, color or creed. Naturally, the actual life of the American people does not always correspond perfectly with its ideal vision. There have always been some islands of exception, if not exclusion, in the American ideology—notably in the case of the American Indian, the Negro, the Mexican and others. But, the official ideology is the dominant force in American life, determining the main currents of its culture. Here is a nation that appreciates and celebrates the diverse ethnic components which generated it. So strong is its unity in law and culture that its pluralistic heritage can only reinforce its solidarity and its message to mankind.

The security of Israel is now included within the range of vital interests of America. While political alignments may be changed, the Israeli alliance with the United States appears to be firm and enduring. Even if America and Israel should go their separate ways in the unforeseen future, Israel is quite able to defend itself against its enemies. Furthermore, Israel's dependence upon American economic and military help serves to cement the relationship between American Jewry and Israel. American Jews feel that it is their duty to interpret Israel to America and America to Israel.

Second, the Christian world is engaged in a basic transformation of its view of the Jewish people. Since the Second World War there have appeared some fifty declarations on Jews and Judaism, which have
reversed the traditional “teaching of contempt” of Judaism, and set a new policy of appreciation of the Jewish heritage. The effects of the new educational approach will be felt in the future, though history teaches us that occasional reverses may still be expected.

In a society so vast and diverse, we cannot expect to see sudden transformations. Traditions of evil as of goodness possess a momentum that is roughly proportionate to their age and ubiquity. But, on the highest levels there is now a fresh sensitivity to the horrors of Antisemitism which are latent in the history of western society. Hopefully, the memory of the Holocaust will not easily be put out of mind.

Third, in the lands of Central Europe, where Antisemitism was an endemic mass-religion, there are few or no Jews. In Poland, Rumania, Hungary and in the smaller contiguous states, the Holocaust left only stray remnants, abandoned cemeteries and mute monuments. That area, extending from the Baltic states to the shores of the Black Sea, was at one time the heartland of the Jews of the world, and the fertile source of mass-emigration. Out of it Jewish people, bearers of Yiddish culture and traditional loyalties, flowed for centuries westward and to the lands of the New World. It was also the home and center of economic Antisemitism, with the ancient heritage of hatred being buttressed by the desperate pressure of an impoverished peasantry bent on acquiring positions in the urban centers, where Jews had long been entrenched.

Fourth, the mythological component of Antisemitism was given some plausibility by the pre-Israel image of the Jew as an individual and the Jewish people as a collectivity. As individuals, Jews appeared to be uprooted, detached from the soil, shallow, skeptical and critical. In the eyes of the recently urbanized masses, barely a generation away from plows and pigs, Jews seemed to be foreign invaders, barring their way to progress. Jews were seen by the uprooted peasants as unnatural people, “city slickers”, eking out a living by tricks and deceptions.

As a collectivity, Jews were seen as a ghostly phenomenon, a people landless and helpless, a “pariah”–people, cowardly and self-centered.

The emergence of the state of Israel served to cast these images into the dust-bin of the past. In Israel, the Jews proved themselves to be superb farmers and excellent soldiers. They have taken their place in the concert of nations, with the plow and with the sword. They are no longer a “wandering” people, homeless and helpless, but a people of flesh and blood, of passion and pride, altogether human.
Strange are the ways of history. When old movements disintegrate, some of their momentum is taken over by new ideologies. Antisemitism, nurtured under the auspices of Christianity for centuries, erupted with volcanic force in the nineteenth century under the aegis of secular ideologies—chiefly romantic nationalism, utopian socialism, Germanic historicism and Nietzschean glorification of power.

In the last decades, the ideology of Anti-Zionism has begun to assume the momentum of Antisemitism, especially in the Muslim and Third World countries. This phenomenon may well preoccupy Jewish leaders in the future, for the Muslim world is rising like a giant who is slowly waking up and shaking off the cobwebs of sleep.

Anti-Zionism is far more than a rational expression of antagonism to this or that policy of the state of Israel, or even to its very existence. In certain countries, Anti-Zionism may be used as a “code word” for the old social disease of Antisemitism, but it is essentially a new phenomenon. The U.N. resolution equating Zionism and racism is a serious danger-signal, an attempt to launch a world-crusade. In the long run, the significant aspect of Anti-Zionism is the mythology in which it is enveloped.

Israel is viewed through a distorting lens and seen as a titanic force of global dimensions, sinister and even satanic. It is not examined in its true proportions as a small state struggling to survive in a cruel world, but it is viewed “through a glass darkly” as the tip of a mighty mystery, a monstrous “conspiracy” of the industrial democracies to capture and conquer the underdeveloped world. The myth of the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” is taking new shape in the minds of millions.

When Jacobo Timmerman, editor of a daily in Buenos Aires, was kidnapped by right-wing terrorists and interrogated by army leaders he was asked three questions—“Are you a Jew?” “Are you a Zionist?” “Are you part of the Zionist Conspiracy?” He replied in the affirmative to each of the questions. In his view, his affirmative answer to the third question saved his life, for the Argentinian generals thought they could use him for a show-trial.

To us, the amazing phenomenon is the concern of Argentinian nationalists with a “Zionist conspiracy”. How many lives does a myth have?—How deep and dark is the fantastic credulity of those who are suspicious of all intellectuals!
Anti-Zionism does have a "religious" basis, not only in Muslim but also in Christian countries. There, the impetus of popular prejudice and medieval myths is likely to persist even when the higher echelons of leadership have arrived at a more humane and progressive position. To be sure, even in Protestant countries, pro-Zionist sentiment was often inhibited, especially in liberal circles, but as a general rule, Zionism in England and America enjoyed widespread support.

In his careful study of "Vatican Diplomacy and the Jews during the Holocaust, 1939–1943" (New York, 1980), Father John F. Morley writes:

"According to Maglione, Catholics all over the world looked to Palestine as a sacred land because it was the birthplace of Christianity. If, however, Palestine were to become predominantly Jewish, then Catholic piety would be offended and Catholics would be understandably anxious as to whether they could continue to peacefully enjoy their historic rights over the holy places". (p. 93)

This attitude was doubtless reinforced by the vague feeling that the reconstitution of the Jewish state would undo the belief that Jerusalem was destroyed in punishment for the crucifixion of Jesus.

However, with the passage of time, the state of Israel has been gaining in acceptance by nearly all Christian national organizations. The theological tradition of the Christian world contains the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the opinions of the Church Fathers. It is therefore natural for Christians to associate the Holy Land with the Jewish people. Also, in the face of an Islamic resurgence, Christians are likely to become more aware of their kinship with the Judaic heritage. Theological doctrines are not immune to changes induced by the great events of history.

Furthermore, Israel was born in response to basic human needs and by the freely expressed vote of an international body, the Assembly of the United Nations. It was therefore an all-human achievement, an attempt by the family of nations to provide some reparation for the horrendous crimes of the Holocaust. Christian nations shared in the burden of guilt for the crimes of Germany, because they participated in the millenial teaching of contempt for Jews. Hence, a special glow of idealism illuminated the image of the Jewish state. The sacrificial devotion of Jewish people all over the world was reinforced by the high
regard of the western world. Nor was this attitude confined to an elite of moralists. The common people of the West were won over by the spectacle of a largely European people beating back the invasion of hordes of enemies, who were non-European and non-Christian. In the successive wars of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973, the decisive victories of Israel contrasted starkly with the global retreat of European nations from their colonial strongholds in Asia and Africa. While the British, French, Dutch and Portuguese withdrew from their colonies, the Jews drove home the lesson of Europe’s supremacy in industry and science. By the same token, Israel became the mighty symbol and cutting edge of western imperialism, in the eyes of Arabs and Third World nations.

The negative image of Arabs in the western world was exacerbated by their military defeats, their seemingly hopeless impoverishment and their political ineptitude. Israelis had come to feel that if they must have enemies, they were fortunate that their enemies were Arabs—fanatical, incompetent, mostly illiterate and torn by parochial loyalties.

However, the war of ’73 demonstrated that a radical change had taken place. The war coincided with the emergence of OPEC as an all-powerful factor in the economy of the West. Suddenly, the Arab case acquired immense international weight. The wheels of industry, it turned out, could grind to a halt at the pleasure of Arabs. It became equally clear that the Palestinian Arabs were no longer ignorant peasants, but that the children of the fellahin, herded in wretched camps which were set up after the wars of ’48 and ’67, had become college-trained executives and engineers. Aided by scholarships from the oil-rich countries, the young men and women from the refugee camps filled the campuses of American universities, as graduate students, specializing in oil technology and petrochemical studies. Many of the young Palestinians penetrated into crucial positions within some of the oil-states. They acquired powerful leverage on the international scene. Yet, their newly won affluence did not cool their nationalistic ardor, and their sense of having been wronged. On the contrary, they nurtured the anger and anguish of their people in the refugee camps and wherever they were dispersed. The growth of Arab nationalism could no longer be disregarded by the statesmen of the industrial democracies.

To be sure, a widely dispersed people, like the Arabs, may take several generations to attain the unifying mentality of a nation. Political intrigues and conflicting ambitions, along with rival sectarian suspicions, are likely to frustrate this goal, time and again. But, as in the case
of nineteenth-century Italy and Germany, the national ideal becomes steadily more and more irresistible.

We must also take note of the fact that the moral image of Israel declined at the very time when the Arab case gained in credibility and power. The increasing nervousness of the Israeli government, the anxious haste to establish new settlements in the midst of Arab lands, the rough tactics used to suppress Arab demonstrations—all these factors helped to remove the aura of moral greatness from the cause of Israel. "The house of Israel" had become "like all the nations".

**DILEMMA OF AMERICAN JEWISH LEADERSHIP**

With the Jewish state besieged by enemies and perpetually in need of financial help and moral-political support, the leaders of American Jewry were impelled to center their collective efforts on aid to Israel. Even while the old rhetoric of Jewry as a religious community continued to be used, the substance of Jewish loyalty insensibly shifted from the pole of religion to that of nationality.

The needs of Israel fighting for its life were necessarily ranked ahead of any other concern.

Only on rare occasions do American Jewish leaders take an independent attitude, in keeping with their humane tradition of philanthropy. The Soviet Jews, who refuse to settle in Israel and elect to go to America and the West, continue at this writing to receive aid from American Jews. No one can tell how long the present situation will last—whether only a small trickle of emigration will be allowed, whether the Soviets will use their power to affect the situation one way or the other, whether American Jews will continue to put the individual rights of men and women above the manpower needs of Israel.

Jewish leadership in America today is in need of more subtlety and sophistication than ever before. It must not allow a temporary and partial coincidence of interests to distort its awareness of its enduring allies and antagonists. Traditionally, American Jews enjoyed the support of the liberals in politics and in religion. But in the case of Israel, the support of the liberals was always qualified. They could sympathize with Jewish needs and, when Israel was established, they could welcome the Jewish state as an ally of the democracies. But, this sympathy was counterbalanced and limited by the plight of the Palestinian refugees. As the moral claims of the Palestinians were pushed to the foreground
by the commercial pressures of the oil-rich countries, a paradoxical situation developed. Liberals and Fundamentalists changed places vis-à-vis Israel.

The liberals, traditional friends of the Jews, began to temper their enthusiasm for the Jewish state, which they saw as a regressive force, that might become one day the flash-point of another war. The future must be based on states granting equal rights to all citizens, not on the presumed rights of nations and their collective historic rights. On the other hand, the religious Fundamentalists and political Conservatives, previously hostile to Jews as unbelievers, humanists and social progressives, now joined the advocates of an aggressive anti-Soviet posture, hailing Israel as a military outpost on the battlefront against Communism. The possibility of an all-out war does not faze them, since their apocalyptic view of history anticipates an Armageddon. So, the preachers of “Christian politics”, “Christian Yellow Pages” and a “Christian America” are at this moment in favor of a “strong” Israel. At the same time, the liberal ministers of the mainline churches, whose staunch opposition to Antisemitism is unquestioned, became skeptical and even resentful of the “expansionist” claims of Israel.

This paradoxical reversal of roles may be only temporary. In any case, it must not be countered by stultifying slogans, such as “Zionism is Judaism”, or “Anti-Zionism is Antisemitism”.

Once an ideal has become a political reality, it cannot be protected by the immaculate banner of supernatural grace. The Ayatollah Khomeini has reminded us all of the sad truth that when religion bursts into the political arena, it becomes subject to the distortions of chauvinism, the limitations of earthly politics and the corruption of earthly instincts. No people has suffered more than the Jews from the unnatural union of politics and religion. Indeed, it has been the glory of historic Judaism to put in question the claims of sheer power, and to rank the law of God above all the laws of states and their rulers. The Jewish people emerged upon the stage of history, dedicated to the task of becoming a blessing “to all the families of the earth” (Genesis 12:2).

Of course, it is possible to criticize this or that policy of an Israeli government, without indicting either Judaism or the Jews of the world, and vice versa. This point need hardly be argued. But, we must acknowledge that in practice, a resolute policy of Anti-Zionism may, if sustained over a period of time, turn into the dripping venom of Antisemitism. Anti-Zionists may seek allies by reviving the old myths
of a Jewish conspiracy; also, they may seek to put Jews in the industrial democracies on the defensive by awakening the slumbering demons of Antisemitism. Jewish leaders may also assist unwittingly in this tragic train of events by their uncritical support of an aggressive Israeli policy. For example, the claim that the West Bank belongs to Israel because “God gave it to us” invites the injection into world politics of ancient mythologies, by Muslims as well as by Christians. And the occasional efforts of Jewish leaders in the free countries to put the cause of Israel above all other considerations of the national interest cannot but awaken the resentment of the free nations. The reasoning of the widely respected U.S. Senator Charles McMathias in his article on the distortion of American policy by the pressure of ethnic groups is a case in point (Foreign Affairs, Spring 1982).

More than a century ago, Leo Pinsker attributed the international pathology of Antisemitism to the homelessness of the Jewish people. A landless people acquires a ghostly quality in the eyes of the populace. And people fear ghosts. With the emergence of Israel, this source of the Antisemitic mythology is now blocked. But, we may well see a new kind of Antisemitism based on the myth of a Zion-centered people that keeps apart from the nations while manipulating and distorting their policies. In question is not the old bugaboo of “dual loyalty” but of a singular, meta-historical loyalty to Israel, a mystique that transcends all national loyalties.

The formation of the Jewish state occurred under special circumstances, when hundreds of thousands of refugees crowded the camps of Europe. At that time, the need of a “haven of refuge” for Jews was clear and pressing. The discomfort and displacement of Palestinian Arabs seemed in human terms but a small price to pay for the solution of the Jewish tragedy. The years of “the ingathering of exiles” generated additional momentum and led to the evacuation of Jews from Arab and some European lands. The case of Soviet Jewry was more problematical. A large number of Russian Jews feel that in the Soviet world they are not allowed to become either “good Russians” or “good Jews”. On the other hand, the masses of Russian Jewry are largely assimilated. After more than a decade of mass-emigration, the number of Jews in Russia is only slightly diminished. Also, most of the emigrants prefer to settle in the countries of the western world. It is freedom and the western style of living that they prize so highly, rather than the life and culture of Israel.
Once Zionism is perceived as no longer answering a great human need, it is questionable whether many nations would rank the nationalistic ideals of American Jews above the basic human rights of an indigenous population to dwell securely in the land in which they were born.

The task of Diaspora Jewry is to help Israel acquire fresh dimensions of moral and cultural greatness. With the aid of the Diaspora, Israel can attain new heights of achievement that will be meaningful to all men and women of good-will. In the field of interreligious understanding, Israel can become the natural center for basic studies and cultural events, celebrating the plural truths of the three great religions of the West. In the field of intercultural fraternity, the groundwork is already laid, since people from 50 different lands are living in Israel. In the field of scientific research and development, the greatest natural resource is the human brain and the resolve to apply it to the solution of human problems.

Hemmed in on all sides, the open frontier for Israel is the domain of intellectual and cultural greatness. If this horizon is explored, Israel may yet regain the adulation of the free world and demonstrate to the new nations of the world that it is through the high roads of culture that a nation attains its place in the sun.

In France and in Argentina, a new kind of Antisemitism is raising its head. If Israel does not gain peace, and does not regain its moral prestige, it is likely to become the source of a vile mythology in the lands of Islam primarily, but also in the countries of the West.

How shall we deal with this danger, especially as it is now barely "a cloud, the size of a man's hand" on the eastern horizon?

While we cannot plan the details of our strategy in advance, we can sharpen our intellectual perception of the choices confronting us at any point. We can learn to recognize our self-mythification, as it arose in history and provided the tar, which made the feathers of mythology cling to our image. We can note how the biblical claims of singularity and uniqueness were twisted into weapons which were turned against us. We can learn to repudiate the seductive fantasies of self-glorification and confront rationally and humanely the problems that trouble us. We can learn to build bridges of understanding with our Christian brothers, and, possibly also, our Muslim brothers.