



Dream or DISAPPOINTMENT?

By Yaffa Ganz

The Jewish State was conceived in dreams—dreams of a glorious past and hopes for an even more glorious future. Only dreamers, disdainful of reality and inspired by Messianic visions, could have taken on such responsibilities and made such momentous decisions. Yet, from its inception, the State was confronted with overwhelming difficulties and was forced to grapple with existential problems not faced by the Jewish people in two thousand years.

Have our dreams come to fruition? Today, sixty years later, there is hardly an area in Israeli national or public life that is functioning satisfactorily. Unsure of our Jewish identity, under constant military attack, subservient to foreign ideologies and powers, Israelis suffer from a general feeling of malaise and of having lost their way. In order to gain a better

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perspective on present-day Israel, perhaps we should take a look at our past.

The Past: Glorious or Dismal?

Avraham Avinu arrived in the Promised Land, full of hope and expectation, only to find the Land already occupied. He never did “take possession” of his inheritance. He remained a *ger ba'aretz*—a sojourner, often unwelcome in his own home—as did Yitzchak and Yaakov.

After the death of Moshe, Yehoshua led the fledgling nation back into Eretz Yisrael. Commanded by God to conquer the Land, he never completed the job. For four hundred years, the Philistines ruled the country. These were years of continuing idol worship and intermittent warfare and subjugation, interspersed with short periods of local peace. During the entire period of the *shoftim*, the vulnerable Jewish tribes never enjoyed true independence.

David Hamelech lived through seventy tumultuous years of political intrigue, warfare and rebellion, all of which are duly recorded in Sefer Shemuel, Sefer Melachim and Tehillim. His son Shlomo, who was king for forty years, was the only monarch who reigned

in peace. Shlomo solidified the kingdom and built the First Temple, but immediately upon his death, the kingdom split in two with the resultant power struggles, tension and wars. And even though miracles were a daily affair and prophets abounded, the worship of idols was widespread. Eventually, the Temple was destroyed and the Jews exiled.

The return to the Land of Israel after the Babylonian Exile was disappointing. Only the poorest of the poor came back with Ezra. Although they rebuilt the Temple, political instability and military machinations increased side by side with the blossoming of great Torah scholars. The Second Temple was finally destroyed and the present, seemingly unending exile began. It makes one wonder: Were things *ever* good for any extended period of time in the Land of Israel? Was our glorious past so glorious after all?

Yes, it was. Absolutely. Our past is the story of unending human effort to meet the challenge of the Divine. Were there failures? Of course. There were, there are, there always will be. Until the final Redemption, failure is inherent in the human condition.

The Present: Gratifying or Disappointing?

Our present exile is “seemingly unending” only to those who choose not to see. Sixty years after the horrific, incomprehensible Holocaust, more than five million Jews are living in a Jewish state—albeit a less-than-perfect one. A mere pinpoint on the globe, we are ensconced in a sea of enemies determined to destroy us. Vulnerable, beleaguered, unstable, the state is riddled with every problem imaginable—social, cultural, moral, political, economic, military, religious. Yet the eyes of God are continually focused on this “pinpoint” and our conflicted, dwarf-like state has turned into a providential giant.

Israel has become the spiritual center of world Jewry, with more *yeshivot* and Torah creativity here than in any other place on the globe. We are a military power to be reckoned with and an economic miracle. We are a world center of technology, communications, medical research and scientific development. We have resurrected a language and turned an arid, barren country into a Garden of Paradise; we are so popular in the Third World that if we opened our doors to all, we would be inundated with non-Jewish immigrants from across the globe. (Now if only our *own* brothers and sisters from across the world would join us...)



Photo courtesy of Nahal Haredi.

The Future: Confident or Despairing?

What then is our true “status”? Is the State of Israel truly *atchalta d’Geulah*, the beginning stages of the Redemption? Or perhaps it is only *ikvata d’Mashichah*, the preliminary to Messianic times? And if we have entered the beginning stages of the Redemption, why does so much seem to have gone wrong?

Whether we are now in the midst of the *Geulah*, or are only standing at the doorway, is a question for the rabbis to decide. But practically speaking, it makes no difference. The redemptive

process has been unfolding ever since man first sinned. It does not move forward in a straight line. Things go wrong even in a newly founded Jewish state. After two thousand years of exile and the horrific Shoah, however, our expectations for the State were very high. It wasn’t Realism we were looking for; it was Redemption. But who are we to dictate a schedule to God? Are we deserving of Mashiach *now*—of Redemption *today*?

Possibly not. (Although it would be nice if it came anyway!) Our current situation is a reflection of the present condition of the entire Jewish people. In the Diaspora, a Jew can choose his community and ignore the rest of his coreligionists. But here in Israel, we are bound together (as Jews should be). We are forced to contend with each other and to find a common language and a *modus vivendi*. In Eretz Yisrael, problems cannot be ignored; they must be solved.

And all Jews must remember that Redemption and the “state of affairs” in Israel is not just an Israeli issue. The children of Abraham are one nation, indivisible, under God. We’re all on the same voyage, hoping to reach the same shore. Even if every Jew in Israel were holy and pure—a paragon of peace, perfection and love—the Jews in the Diaspora (where more than half of Jewry still resides) would still figure into the equation. Perhaps if we *all* (or at least a



- 54 percent of Israel’s 18-year-old men are inducted into the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).
- The IDF draws about 10 percent of its staff officers, 15 percent of its combat support officers and up to 40 percent of its combat officers from the National Religious sector.
- *Hesder yeshivot*, which combine military service and Torah study, turn out 1,200 recruits each year—a 40 percent increase over the last 5 years (*New York Times*, 31 December 2007).
- The Nahal Haredi unit of the IDF was created in 1999 for *Chareidim* who want to serve their country while adhering to the highest religious standards. Currently, the battalion is about 70 percent *Chareidi* and 30 percent National Religious. Since its inception, more than 2,000 soldiers have gone through Nahal Haredi’s three-year program. There are about 700 soldiers in the battalion at any given time (www.nahalharedi.org).

Tourism—a key economic sector in Israel—jumped 25 percent in 2007, its highest in 7 years. Over 2 million tourists visited Israel in 2007, 24 percent from the US.

(Israel Central Bureau of Statistics)



majority of us) were in the Land, working to make it (and ourselves) holy and pure, the Redemption would take place more quickly. God has orchestrated history and made it possible as never before for us to come here en masse and do His work. Do we accept His challenge?

The Redemption will come in any event, eventually, in God's good time, whether we will it or not, whether we are worthy or not. But our tradition tells us that it will come sooner and more easily if it comes as a result of our efforts to renew, rebuild and spiritually prepare both the Land and ourselves.

The Right to Complain

Only those who are here in Israel dealing with all the problems and imperfections have the right to demand something better. Living here, in the midst of the tornado—the *tumah* and the *tabarah*—in God's Land, affords us privileges like complaining. And we know, deep inside our Jewish heads and

hearts that, eventually, all will be made right. Only after Hashem completed each stage of Creation does the Torah say, "And He saw that it was good." We aren't finished yet. We don't know how long things will take, or what the final price will be, but we are the world's womb and stage. This is where the action is.

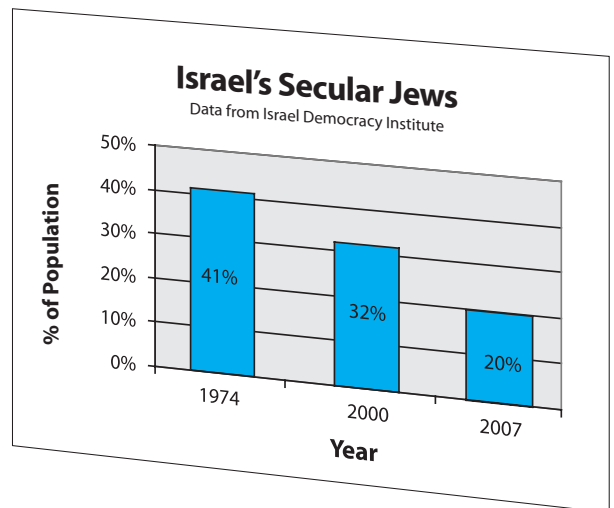
When I meet a Jew from the Diaspora who is unhappy with the State of

Israel, I ask: "You don't like the way things are going here? Then come and do something about it! Are you impatient or disappointed with God? With the way His plans are progressing? With His people? Then join them! Are you faring better in the Diaspora, or are you just leaving the hard work to someone else? Charity begins at home, so come home! Take an active part. Rebuild God's *'Bayit'*—your *bayit*." *Tikkun haolam* begins here. If even half of the observant Jews in the Western world would make *aliyah*, thanks to the power of the democratic vote we could wield enough power to change the face and the fate of the State. But to sit and bemoan from afar? Better to stay silent and let the countless good people here get on with their work. And there are so many good, wonderful, amazing people

New olim from North America celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut in 2005.

Photo: www.sassontiram.com

here. I want to shout to the heavens (and the media): *Mi keamcha Yisrael?* Who is like your nation Israel? As the descendants of Abraham, we are infused with the lofty ideals of mercy, justice and righteousness. Our national policies are directed towards improving society. Our national leaders, our army, our people all long for a better world. We may often-times be lacking in wisdom or strength, but our intentions are always worthy.

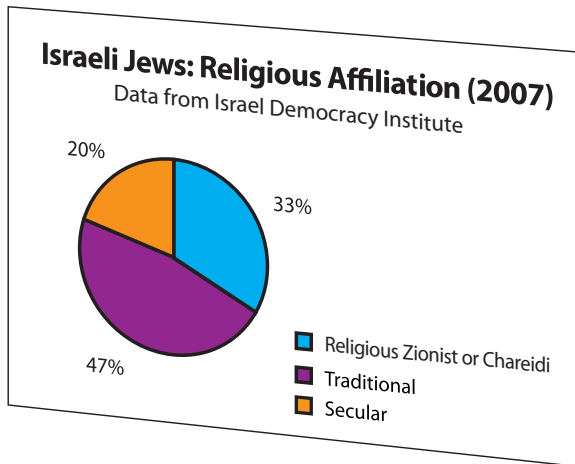


The percentage of Israeli Jews who describe themselves as secular has dropped sharply over the last thirty years.

Dayeinu

At the Pesach Seder we say, "Had You taken us out of Egypt and not given us the Torah, it would have been sufficient." But what good would leaving Egypt have been had we not received the Torah? Wouldn't it have been a job half done? No, it would not. Freedom from slavery in and of itself would have been sufficient for that time and place. The Torah had to be given; there is no Jewish nation without Torah. But it could have been given later, at a different time, in a different setting. At that moment in history, the Exodus from Egypt and the Splitting of the Red Sea were miracles enough. Perhaps, for the present moment, the State of Israel is also *dayeinu*—enough. It may not yet be the





final *Geulah*, but it is definitely part of the process.

There is a story of a minyan that took place in Bnei Brak one Yom Ha'atzmaut morning. After Shemoneh Esrei, the chazzan began to recite Tachanun, which is said on ordinary days but not on Shabbat or holidays. Suddenly, a man rushed up to the

bimah, pounded on it and declared in a ringing voice: "Tachanun? You're saying Tachanun? You aren't saying Hallel today? You aren't thanking God for the State? Can't you see? Don't you understand? I was in Auschwitz. I *know* what a Jewish state means! It means life, hope, a gift!" And he began a fervent recitation of Hallel.

By definition, the *Geulah* requires an actual political entity—a *state*—that will be the foundation of *mamlechet kohanim vegoy kadosh*—God's kingdom of priests in this world. The making of such a state is an ongoing challenge. It is *our* challenge. It will not descend from on high. It will be what we make it.

The Power of Joy

Rabbi Akiva laughed with joy as he viewed the remnants of the Temple, because within the destruction, he saw the promise of Redemption. How much more so should we, who have been privileged to see so much rebirth, take heart, have faith and be thankful. The road is bumpy, unpaved and unfamiliar; it has countless twists and turns. But with faith and vigor and an abundance of joy, we go forward.

And there really is no other place for a Jew to go. We are the farmers, and the State of Israel is the vehicle that allows us to cultivate our fields. Let us plant, irrigate, fertilize, weed and harvest. From the depths of his own tumultuous experience and prophetic vision, King David sang: "Those who plant with tears will reap with joy."

Let us be thankful and get on with our work.

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