

President's Message

The Very Real Challenge of Post-Zionism

By Mandell I. Ganchrow, M.D.



As we look back over the modern history of Israel, it is obvious that the many military and political victories could have occurred only through the *Yad Hashem*. Once we acknowledge the Divine connection to this unique Land of holiness, *Am Yisrael*, *Eretz Yisrael* and *Torat Yisrael* are inseparable.

Despite the fact that this view was not shared by every Jew, the State of Israel was always a unifying factor for all of us in the Diaspora, without exception. Regardless of our political orientation, regardless of our religious affiliation, there was unanimity. Each war, every skirmish, was a great tragedy to each and every one of us. We were united when we went to Washington to lobby the Administration and Congress. And in retrospect, it was

Adapted from Dr. Ganchrow's address delivered recently at a Yom Ha-Atzma'ut community celebration held in the Adolph H. Schreiber Hebrew Academy of Rockland in Monsey, New York.

quite easy to unite on this because there were no real issues that could possibly divide us. Foreign aid, economic aid, preventing the economic boycott, fighting "Zionism is racism," prevention of arms sales to Arab countries at war with Israel, battling OPEC: How could anyone be against these issues?

All of that changed a few years ago. With the development of the settlements, the peace process, political and religious divisions in Israel and America, as well as post-Zionism, the picture is much more complicated and dangerous. Despite Assad and Hezbollah, katyusha rockets and terror, and despite the Palestinian Authority's failure to live up to the Oslo Accords — even despite American pressure on the fate of Jerusalem — the unity and the passion have dissipated.

American Jewish disunity began with the fight for "loan guarantees." Americans for Peace Now bombarded the halls of Congress with a campaign to defeat this effort, primarily because of its opposition to Israeli settlements beyond the Green Line. At that time, we thought that such a break with the organized Jewish community was an anomaly. Its only precedent was a less organized and quickly forgotten effort by the Reform movement to threaten American aid to Israel if the question of "Who is a Jew?" was not resolved to its satisfaction.

The current battle of the Reform and Conservative movements for a pluralistic approach to issues of religious status in Israel waxes and wanes depending upon many factors and results in varying successes and failures. But as determined as they are to bring about the victory of their views, they begrudgingly sublimate these

efforts for the sake of the peace process. They believe that a successful peace process agreement between the parties will allow the Knesset, the government and the prime minister to then concentrate on issues involving "personal democracy" and "civil rights" without depending upon the religious parties for support to stay in office.

But their challenge is complemented by an even more serious onslaught: post-Zionism. The casual observer might place this movement solely at the doorstep of the extreme left in Israel's political life, the Meretz and Shinui parties, which have always displayed a lack of sensitivity to tradition and Jewish history. But the basic problems of post-Zionism lie within academia. Emanating from within the universities, Jewish and Zionist histories are being rewritten by individuals and groups coined "the new historians" by Benny Morris in a 1988 *Tikkun* article.

As an editorial in the Spring 5760/2000 issue of *Azure* magazine points out: the problem is not their willingness and ability to uncover disquieting "facts" of Israeli history — many of them half-truths — it is the unique perspective that they present to the public that features an overwhelmingly negative point of view, so as to bring into question Israel's right to enjoy a homeland. Our history as a people is marginalized. To them, Zionism is ethnic cleansing, or as Mr. Morris put in his article: "A colonizing and expansionist ideology and movement infected by European colonists, it is the mental obliteration of the natives." Thus they remove Zionism from its place of glory in Israeli textbooks.

It is more than mere coincidence that those participants in self-flagella-

tion are likewise the deniers of *Torah MiSinai*. The Tel Aviv University student council newspaper wrote the following recently, on Yom Hashoah:

Citizen: Religion is your enemy and it is the obligation of every Israeli to fight it. Every person whose heart is not stone must go to the religious people and secularize them. When a person chooses to believe lies of religion he throws the essence of his humanity into the garbage ... Some will say that it makes people feel good; many of those who joined the Nazi movement also felt uplifted and joyous.

These anti-religious activists are the grandchildren of those who advised their co-religionists that there was no future for a Torah community. Their fathers fought for the creation of the State and the Zionist dream as the culmination of modern Jewish peoplehood, free of its ancient religion. These children now believe that the creation of the State was the end point; and it is now time to move into the post-Zionist era, to witness Israel's transformation into a cultural, intellectual and economic center, devoid of Judaic content. To them, the concept of a Jewish State is an oxymoron. Thus we hear cries in the Knesset to create a binational state or to change the words of *Hatikvah* to reflect the "new reality."

It is important to note here that the revisionists' claim that Israel *was never meant to be a Jewish state*, but rather a state of Jews, has no foundation. In fact, primary documents prove that quite the opposite is true. On the 5th of Iyar, 5708 (May 14, 1948), the founders of Israel clearly and resolutely began the Declaration of Statehood: "*Kam ha'am haYehudi...*" [The Jewish nation arose]; and concluded with "...*anu mazkirim b'zot al hakamat medinah Yehudit b'Eretz Yisrael, he Medinat Yisrael*" [...we proclaim thusly the creation of a Jewish state within the Land of Israel, to be known as the State of Israel].

What is our task? Firstly, we must be proud Religious Zionists, eager to raise our voices, to meet the post-Zionist challenge reactively and proactively. We must tell the full story to the

world. When our media, politicians or world leaders distort facts, we must respond instantaneously with a phone call, letter or email. We should attempt to meet with editorial boards of local and national newspapers. We must encourage historians and scholars of Zionist and Israeli history to rise to the occasion, not for the purpose of whitewashing every act of Zionism, but to place each act into a proper perspective. (The cover story of this issue of *Jewish Action* contains precisely this kind of rebuttal by a prominent historian. I hope that other responsible publications will follow suit).

Most American Jews have never visited Israel. Encourage your friends and business associates to go to Israel, to see it for themselves, and assist them with an itinerary that will help them understand the history of the State.

I was asked a few years ago to speak at the World Jewish Congress on the peace process. Bibi Netanyahu, then a candidate for prime minister, was the other speaker. I would like to repeat what I said at the end of my talk:

We can debate what is the best peace process — Oslo 1, 2, 3, or 23. But in the final analysis, only the Ribbono Shel Olam knows which is the best peace process and what will protect the Jewish people. But one thing we know for sure: in an Israel which is devoid of Torah and Jewish culture, youth brought up as Israelis and not as Jews will bring about the destruction of the Jewish people and the Jewish nation far more quickly and far more thoroughly than any enemy. The greatest dangers facing us are Jewish ignorance and post-Zionism that seek to remove all remnants of Judaism from our lives and from the State.

As fearsome as these challenges are, it is important that as religious Jews we do not lose our confidence in the unity of our People, our Land and our Torah. Our faith is unyielding, despite all the problems. Though we may differ individually on political or religious issues, we stand together with all our Jewish brethren worldwide who are prepared to say we have *bitachon* in the future — God will not forsake us. 