

Don't Mess Up: Zionism Reflects Legitimate Longing to the Ancient Homeland

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The worldwide spread of anti-Zionism has branched out of the more general hatred of Judaism (antisemitism) that rests mostly on prejudice ideas and ignorance. To clarify the evil motivation of anti-Zionists one needs to recognize first the history of Israel and the basis of the Jewish longing to Zion:

The Rise of the Israelites

Two thousand years prior to Jesus's birth and rise of Christianity, the 12 tribes (Israelites; offsprings of Jacob's sons that constituted the Hebrew (Israeli)* nation) inhabited the geographic region of Canaan (the so called 'promised land' to Abraham by God). However, years later many Israelites moved to Egypt due to a great hunger in the entire Middle East region, where they were allowed to settle in the region of Goshen (ref. 1). In Egypt the Israelites kept their national characteristics and were exploited as slaves until Moses (saved as a baby from death by Pharaohs' daughter) took the lead and demanded the release of his nation from slavery. Moses (considered the 'father' of all prophets) united the Israelites and consolidated their nationality by convincing them that since the time of Abraham they were chosen by God (no reasoning provided). This clever ruse seems to have been successful for more than 4000 years, holding up even under the toughest pressures (e.g., the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition demands in the 14th and 15th centuries that Jews must convert to Christianity). According to the Bible, Pharaoh let the Israelites leave Egypt only after being beaten by ten divine plagues. The 'Exodus' led by Moses including crossing the sea and receiving the 'Ten Commandments' and 'Torah' at Mount Sinai required forty years (a long duration that was seemingly important for renewing the generation that would return to the ancient homeland Canaan). Tragically, Moses did not get to enter Israel and died on Mount Nebo (east of Israel) within sight of the promised land after handing the leadership to Joshua. On their entrance to Canaan, the Israelites defeated local nations (Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, Hittites, Jebusites and Perizzites; ref. 2) that inhabited the region prior to and during the years of the missing Israelites. After re-settling in their homeland, the Israelites were ruled for approximately 385 years by judges (prophets/moral priests/military leaders; ref. 3), while withstanding offensives of neighboring enemies, particularly the Philistines ('Plishtim' in Hebrew), offsprings of professional soldiers of the Mycenaean origin (e.g., Crete), who inhabited the southern-west coastal region of Canaan already at the beginning of the Iron age). The name Philistines was given to these people by the Greeks meaning 'uneducated and missing any intellectual or artistic values' (Oxford dictionary), but was the basis for the name Palestine given later by the Romans to this land, as well as Palestinians, the inhabitants of Palestine (Canaan). When the pressure of the enemies intensified, judge Samuel coronated Saul as King of the Israelites, with the intension to improve their military capability (ref. 4).

Disintegration of the Israeli Kingdom

The repeated Philistine offensives against Israel are mostly memorized through two main confrontations: one was their fight against the Israeli judge Samson and his capture upon the betrayal of Delila, and heroic death when he destroyed the Philistine temple on himself as well as on top of his captors. The second was the battle against Israel, in which their champion, Goliath, was killed by David, a young Israeli shepherd (ref. 5). As King Saul and his three sons died in this battle, Samuel coronated David (son of Ishay), who established a strong kingdom with fruitful, stable relations with neighboring nations. David ruled 40 years, before his son, Solomon (Shlomo in Hebrew), took the lead for additional 40 years. When King Solomon passed away, the 'Golden era' of the Israeli kingdom, that geographically included regions of Southern Lebanon and Syria, Western Jordan and Israel including the Gaza strip, ended, and the kingdom was divided to two monarchies, Judah (Judaea), inhabited by the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and ruled by Solomon's son, Rehoboam (with Jerusalem as capital), and Israel, a northern monarchy of the other 10 tribes (Asher, Dan, Ephraim, Gad, Issaschar, Menasseh, Naphtali, Reuben, Simeon, Zebulun), ruled by Jeroboam, Rehoboam's brother (capital changed among Shechem, Penuel, Tirzah and Samaria in the region called nowadays the 'West Bank'). The weakening of the Israeli kingdom led approximately 200 years later to conquest of the northern monarchy by the Assyrian king Tiglat Pileser the III (720 BCE). His successor, Shalmaneser, captured the Israeli capital, Samaria, while his descendant, Sargon, transferred the Israeli population to exile in Assyria (the fate of the ten Israeli tribes remains unknown ever since). Then, after additional two hundred years, Judaea was conquered too by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, and the famous temple built by King Solomon in Jerusalem was destroyed and looted, while the Jewish elite was exiled to Babylon.

Return of the Jews from the Babylonian Exile

Seventy years after the conquest of Judaea, the Persian empire, with King Cyrus, defeated Babylon and allowed the return of the Jews with their holy vessels (derived from the temple) to their homeland. Most of the Jews returned in two waves, the first in 538 BCE headed by Zerubbabel and the second in 532 BCE headed by Ezra. Zerubbabel revived the Israeli nation and their religious customs, still under the Persian control, as well as initiated the rebuilding of a second temple in Jerusalem. Then Ezra and Nehemiah continued the construction of the temple initiated by Zerubbabel. On 337 BCE, Alexander the Great from Macedonia defeated the Persians and conquered also the entire Mediterranean region including Judaea. Upon his death twenty years later, the Macedonian general Seleucus I Nicator took the lead and one of his offsprings, Antiochus the V, tried to force the Jews toward Hellenistic culture and pagan religious customs, which instigated in 159 BCE a rebellion headed by the Hasmonean family (Maccabees). In response, Antiochus captured Jerusalem, destroyed and looted the second temple built by the Jews returning from Babylon. In the end of the Israel-Greek fighting, the Jews succeeded to withdraw their enemies out of Israel and gained independence that was holding approximately 100 years before being conquered multiple times by various enemies (e.g., Fatimids, Seljuks, Turks, Crusaders, Egyptians, Mamluks) until 63 BCE when Israel was conquered by Pompey and became a Roman province till 313 CE. The Roman senate nominated Herod (half Edomite) as king of Judaea. Herod was known for his murderous, often insane acts, but also for the construction of multiple monumental sites as well as a new temple in Jerusalem. However, upon a Jewish revolt in 70 CE (headed by Simon Bar Kokhba), emperor Titus and his warlord Hadrian punished the Jews and destroyed once again Jerusalem and the temple built

by Herod. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were slaughtered and many were taken as slaves (the Roman victory is depicted on the Titus Arch in Rome, a famous archeological monument), while many of the remaining Jews spread over Mediterranean countries. In an act of revenge, the Romans renamed the Jewish homeland "Syria-Palestina" in an effort to obliterate Jewish ties to their homeland. As Rome lost power during the 5th century, the rising Byzantine empire took control including the entire Middle East region until 1453 CE when defeated by the Ottoman empire that conquered the region. Notably, when the Ottoman rule ended in 1917 CE (WW I) and Great Britain took over the control over the region, they have adopted the name Palestine, and established a mandatory ruling system (1922 CE). Importantly, there was no Palestinian national identity or political borders at the time (ref. 6), but the flag of Palestine under the British Mandate had a Star of David, the currency had Hebrew words on it, and Jews were identified as Palestinians, as also endorsed in Resolution 16 of the Arab League.

Rise of Christianity

Christianity emerged during Herod's ruling years in times of Hellenistic cultural spread under Roman control. The trigger to the establishment of the new religion was the crucifixion of Jesus (Hebrew name Yeshua; born to the Jewish couple Miriam and Joseph from Nazareth). Jesus gathered a group of loyal Jewish followers, and by exhibiting an exceptional modest way of life and humility concomitant to healing capabilities, exploited his high performing potential to preach about improvement of human characteristics (e.g., modesty, morality, honesty, kindness, empathy, compassion, consideration, generosity) and social relationships (resembling in a way the subjects preached by Buddha in the 'Far East'), while proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God. Jesus's increasing attraction and religious appeal annoyed the Jewish religious leadership, who complained to the Roman Perfect Pontius Pilatus. The dislike of the new movement by the Romans led to crucifixion of Jesus (a common extermination habit of the Romans intended to deter the mob from further crimes). This was a shocking scene to Jesus's followers, particularly Paul (Paulus; Hebrew name Saul), who convinced the admirers that Jesus had resurrected to continue his 'divine mission'. This entire event and formulation of miraculous episodes (e.g., resurrection; walking on water) provided a sacred basis that consolidated the new religion. In the beginning, the Christian minority was persecuted everywhere, but 300 years later, when adopted by the Roman Emperor Constantine, Christianity was distributed in the entire Roman empire.

Rise of Islam

The establishment of Islam by Mohamad and its rapid distribution was highly successful most probably as it satisfied at the time social and spiritual needs of the Arabs living in the region known nowadays as Saudi-Arabia. In the beginning of the 7th century, Mohamad and his close followers, have actually repeated the Christian strategy 600 years earlier by preaching mostly about improvement of humanistic issues, but also of social relationship between people and between people to Allah, all accompanied by a new written set of commandments (the holy Qur'an). Not surprising is the fact that the issues preached by Mohamad were in a way similar to those preached by Jesus (written after his death in the 'New Testament'), as well as of the Jewish Torah and Ten Commandments provided to Moses thousands of years earlier. Unfortunately, however, the positive intentions of the founders of Christianity and Islam have changed into a bloody crusade against non-believers (ref. 7), and so rather than fulfilment of the positive principles emphasized by both prophets for a better future of humanity, shortly

after the foundation, the original aims turned into efforts of gaining power and wealth, as well as religious intolerance (e.g., the Christian crusades in Israel in 1099 CE; The Christian Medieval Inquisition in Europe during the 12-15 centuries; The Jihad offensive by the radical Islam that continues even nowadays; the worldwide rise of anti-Semitism). Noteworthy are the main differences among the three religions: While Judaism was based on a divine revelation experienced by the entire nation, Islam was based on the prophetic claims of an individual and his success to convince his audience, much like Jesus's success to preach and convince his followers. Furthermore, elements like God's revelation to Abraham, Jacob, and Moses that appears in Judaism, or Moses receiving the Torah on mount Sinai are mimicked in the Islam, when Muhammad meets Allah on Jabal-Al-Nour (a mountain in the Arabic peninsula near Mecca of Saudi Arabia). Another interesting question pertains to reasons for the rapid dissemination of Islam and why so many individuals have converted to Islam even lately. It seems that very seldom do people convert to Islam due to theological principles. The common response to the question 'why did you convert to Islam' is 'I want to be righteous' (quite a ridiculous answer considering the bloody Jihad), or often due to a momentary impulse provoked by a peculiar interaction with another individual. A putative additional reasoning for the successful dispersion of Islam might be associated with the tendency of humans to live under organized social and religious rules (obedient servants of Allah), particularly primitive males seeking obedience, which they easily find in their Islamic familial life without special spiritual requirements (ref. 7).

The Jewish Nationality and Perpetual Longing to Zion

The national feelings of the Israelites had initiated already at the times of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and was cleverly consolidated by Moses's declaration that they were specifically selected as God's favorite nation. This feeling of national unity was further buttressed when they received the Torah and Ten Commandments, as well as upon the establishment of all religious ceremonies and rituals. Importantly, although the orthodox Jews define themselves the real offspring generations of the Israelites, this is just a flaunt self-convincing idea. In fact, all Jewish males are circumcised; all Jews celebrate the main holydays of 'Pesach' (Passover), 'Hanukkah', (New year), no matter whether religious or not; and most Jews are convinced about the superiority of Judaism over the other two monotheistic religions (Christianity and Islam) that arose thousands of years later. The success of the Jews to maintain their nationality, despite their distressing history (under occupation or in exile), might have bothered surrounding gentile populations, that likely could not stand these spiritual conviction and national pride. The longing of the Jews in exile to Zion is a built-in feeling that was always reflected in prayers and in over and over attempts to reconstruct Jerusalem and restore the temple despite all difficulties, as well as their return to and establishment of independent Israel after two thousand years since the Roman conquest.

Infiltration of Arabic Refugees and Bedouins into Israel

Although Israel played always an important role as a geographic commercial junction between East and West, it was quite deserted when most of the Jews were taken to exile, leaving a vacuum in which Arabic/Muslim refugees and Bedouins (mostly of regions residing nowadays in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, and Jordan) settled during the years. In such a way the basis of what is called nowadays 'the Palestinians' has been established. On the other hand, this name is misleading as all inhabitants of the Israeli land named by the Romans 'Syria-Palestina'

including the Jews, were Palestinians (Palestine is a geographical name and does not pertain to nationality). In their claims for ownership of the land of Israel, the Muslims (known presently as "Palestinians") often argue that they are ancestors of either Canaanites or Philistines, who lived in the region, even prior to the arrival of the Israelites, but these claims have been shown to be fake. In any event, the affiliation to this piece of land is not based entirely on who was there first, but on the following facts (ref. 8): (1) proven historic affiliation of the Jews to Canaan since the days of Abraham; (2) proven religious affiliation of the Jews to this land; (3) legal confirmation in the UN following Balfour's Declaration and the British proposal in 1947 to divide the land between the Jews and the Arabs; (4) moral-based support and compensation for the world apathy to the extermination of the Jews during the holocaust; (5) lack of any claim of nationality of the ancestors of the current Palestinians. Since the neighboring Arabs did not accept the gracious offer of dividing the land between the Jews and the Arabs, and immediately attacked Israel hoping to win it all, their defeat is not just 'tough luck'! A new geopolitical situation was created after the 1948 war and so those expecting the destruction of Israel, lost it all ('Palestinian Nakba') due to false promises of the Arabic leaders. Such a situation may be compared to the Israeli conquest of the Golan Heights in 1967 after non-stop Syrian shelling and sniper shooting down to Israeli villages. As a result of the 1967 war, Syria lost for good the Golan Heights, an evidently justified consequence of their aggression. Together, the Palestinian claims about ownership of Israel lack any realistic basis. Actually, the claim that the Jews took over or stole Arabic land is inaccurate. Except for the land owned by Jews already living in Palestine, Jewish organizations (Jewish National Fund; Palestine Land Development Company; Palestine Jewish Colonization Association) purchased much of the land in the Jezreel Valley, Jordan Valley and Galilee where the Arab population was sparse, and soil was poor. Furthermore, at the time of the UN partition vote in 1947, most of the land not already owned by Jews was public, while very little of the land was privately owned by Arabs. Still, it does not mean that the present aspiration of the Palestinian Arabs to establish their nationality cannot be understood, but their intention to replace the Jews in Palestine, whose roots in this land have been proven and confirmed by the United Nation's vote (refs. 6, 9), is unthinkable. Moreover, although reaching about 600000 (a bit lower than the approximately 715000 Jews, who lived prior to 1948 in the Galilee and large communities in Safed, Tiberias, Hebron and Jerusalem, it is important to note that the Arabs living in Israel prior to 1948 never had national aspirations. As mentioned earlier, the main reason to the unsolved issue of Palestinian refugees resulting of the 1948 war lies at the door of the leaders of the neighboring Arabic countries and their promises to defeat Israel and enable return of the Arabic refugees. Moreover, to maintain a continuous pressure on Israel, these leaders kept the evacuating Arabs in 'Refugee Camps' (~250000 in the Gaza strip belonging to Egypt, and ~40000 in the West Bank belonging to Jordan), instead of incorporating them in the many Arabic countries of this area.

The Emergence of Zionism (ref. 8)

The initial Zionist organization, Hovevei Zion or Hibbat Zion, was formally founded in 1884 in a conference led by Leo Pinsker in Kattowitz (presently in Poland), as a result of 'pogroms' in the Jews during 1878 and 1882 in Russia. Prior to the conference, Pinsker published his 'Auto-Emancipation' stressing that Jewish dignity and spiritual health require return to their homeland. His concept emphasized the need to exchange the 'Diaspora tradition' and 'Passivism' of the Jews by a modern central perception with elimination of fatalism, while striving to control their fate by adopting democracy and territory, as well as preserve an

independent way of life. Despite the 'Jewish renaissance' and joining of more Jewish leaders to the new movement, not much was achieved until the political turn prompted by Theodor Herzl in response to the worldwide growing anti-Semitism. In his view, Herzl argued in the 1897 Zionist Congress at Basel, Switzerland, that the solution to antisemitism requires a national territory for the Jews. The congress ended with a call to establish a Jewish state in their homeland (Israel=Palestine) that would be secured by public law. As the Ottoman government refused Herzl's request on this matter, he applied to the leaders of Great Britain (prime minister Lloyd George and Lord Balfour, the UK Foreign Minister), who supported Zionism in an attempt to solve the Jewish need for territory, as well as hoping it would help gain Jewish support for help of the allies (United States and Russia). In a letter to Lord Rothchild (1917), Lord Balfour suggested that the Jews would gain a territory in their homeland, while protecting in parallel the rights of the local Arabic inhabitants. Balfour's letter, named ever since 'The Balfour Declaration', reflected the opinion of the British cabinet and triggered further steps, by Theodor Herzl, Nahum Sokolov, and Chaim Weizmann, that finally were realized in Ben Gurion's 'Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel' in 1948. Interestingly, Balfour's Declaration that raised international support and Jewish hopes everywhere, was praised also by an Egyptian journalist (ref. 9). The re-establishment of Israel faced a violent opposition of the neighboring Arab States that immediately attacked Israel. Amazingly, Israel succeeded to deter all these enemies and protect its independence. Notably, the number of Arab inhabitants, who left their homes in Israel following promises of the Arab leaders that soon after the defeat Israel, they would return to their homes, was lower than the number of Jews (approximately 800000) forced to leave their homes and property in the Arabic countries, as the result of the 1948 Israeli win.

Concluding Remarks

There is no other nation that survived thousands of years of murderous bullying, humiliations, military conquests, and fanatic religious antagonism as did the Jews. During several millennia empires appeared and dissipated, and amazingly the Jewish nation survived**, raising most likely the envy of the gentiles. The longing of the Jews to Jerusalem, their capitol since the great kingdoms of David and Solomon, constitutes the basis of Zionism as was also implicated in their prayers and enduring attempts to regain the national unity and resettle in their homeland. Comparison to other ancient nations reveals the outstanding success of the Jewish people to preserve their nationality and customs despite all pressures and invasions of various kingdoms. A unique feature of the Jewish nation is their religion that preceded the other monotheistic religions (with belief in an abstractive super-being, the creator of the world), a breakthrough spiritualistic advancement at the time. Moreover, the Jews were always unique in their educational system (every child knew reading and writing early in life), and their belief in a divine assignment to be 'light to all nations'. In comparison, the leading culture and achievements of the Egyptian empire, constituted from the Lower and Upper Nile civilizations by Narmer (=Menem; Ancient Egyptian king, whose reign began around 3173-2987 BCE; ref. 10, many centuries prior to the rise of the Israelite nation), almost dissipated ever since the invasion of the Mamluks (*slave offspring soldiers fostered by the Abbas caliphate in the 13th century), while turning into a backward rural muslim country that lost its cultural and scientific superiority. The uniqueness of the Jewish people, and their success to unite after thousands of years in exile and re-establish the modern State of Israel, reflects once again their solid national feelings and longing to Zion, where David's kingdom existed. The 1947 vote in the United

Nations was a proven recognition in the historical and religious connections of the Jews to Zion (Many historical and archeological proofs are still valid), and even the Qur'an clearly states the rights of the Israelites over the promised land (chapters 5:20 and 17:104). The clarity of the Jewish affiliation to Zion, is most likely among the main reasons of the hatred and continuous attempts of radical Islam supporters and anti-Semitic individuals and organizations to delegitimize Zionism, the very central issue of Jewish feelings and longing. All denials of the Jewish legitimacy over Zion are in fact desperate, deceptive attempts to rewrite the history of Canaan and the Jewish affiliation to their homeland (refs. 11). It is well documented that Jews preceded the Muslims in Israel (Palestine) by 2600 years if measured from Abraham, or by at least 1600 years if measured from the time of the kingdom of David. Most Muslims, named currently Palestinians, had actually invaded Israel when most of the Jews lived in exile. Furthermore, these Arab settlers in Israel never raised national aspirations nor did they demand priority on the land of Israel (Refs. 6, 11). Maps from the 19th and early 20th century of 'Palestine' demonstrate a country connected historically to the Jews, and various maps through time indicated that the term Palestine was used much earlier to the rise of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, it is inaccurate to claim that Jews are interlopers in the Middle East and that they only came to the land after the WWII Holocaust. In fact, the number of Jewish refugees from the Holocaust allowed by the British Mandate to immigrate to Israel was only 18000, and so only a small percentage of the Israeli population, both at the day of formal establishment (Independence Day) and later, was composed of Holocaust survivors. Importantly, while Jews were dispersed at various times over many countries, a significant portion always lived in their historic land (Canaan), including through Babylonian, Persian, Roman, Byzantine, Muslim and Crusader conquests. The legitimate rights of the Jewish nation over Israel were also recognized very clearly by Arabic journalists like A. Al-Hadlaq from Kuwait, who declared: 'Israel was an independent and legitimate sovereign state and there was no occupation, but instead, people returning to their promised land; When the state of Israel was established in 1948, there was no state called Palestine' (ref. 6). Another example is provided by the Egyptian journalist A. S. Ashour praising the Balfour Declaration and its consequences (ref. 9).

Overall, the fact that Zionism reflects legitimate feelings of Jewish affiliation to the ancient homeland (longing to Zion) should be respected rather than criticized.

References

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*Jacob was the son of Issac, son of Abraham. His additional name was Israel, expressing his struggle with an angel (Hebrew Bible).

**Mark Twain's note: "The Egyptians, the Babylonians and the Persians rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and faded away; the Greeks and Romans followed and made a vast noise, and they were gone; other people have sprung up and held their torch high for a time but it burned out. The Jew saw them all, and survived them all". Quoted from *The National Jewish Post & Observer*, June 6, 1984.