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The emergence of the modern State of Israel is one of the wonders of world history. After nearly 2,000 years of dispersion, the Jewish people have reclaimed their historic homeland. We feel the power and joy of the Psalmist's words: "When the Lord turned back the captivity of Zion we were as in a dream." We are experiencing the fulfillment of centuries of Jewish dreams.

Israel has created a vibrant democracy. With a tiny population of around 10 million people (20% of whom are not Jewish) it has become a world leader in science, technology, medicine, agriculture and more. It has developed a remarkable military to defend its citizens from intractable enemies. It is ranked among the happiest and most creative countries in the world.

Yet, amazingly, some Jews have not shared the profound gratitude for the Jewish return to Zion. Not only have they not embraced Zionism, but they have been vocal and active opponents of the State of Israel.

Some of the Jewish anti-Zionists are found among Haredi Jews. Others are found among far left-wing Jews who buy into the anti-Zionist preachments of the "radical left." Yet others are highly idealistic Jews who focus on Israel's real or imagined faults and don't want themselves to be associated with those faults.

Although the Jewish critics of Israel are diverse, they seem to have one thing in common. They insist that the Jewish state be inhumanly perfect.

The Haredi opponents will only be content with a miraculous establishment of Jewish sovereignty in Messianic times. They see modern Israel as the creation of a secular movement led in large measure by nonreligious Jews. For such Haredim, a Jewish state will always be illegitimate until God sends us the Messiah and when all Jews become thoroughly observant of Torah to the satisfaction of Haredi rabbis.

To “left wing” and “idealistic” opponents, a Jewish state will never be satisfactory as long as Jews have to wage wars, kill enemies, rule over non-Jews, engage in political infighting, deal with social inequalities etc. For them, these are unseemly things that must not exist among Jews. Yes, all other nations have these issues, often to a far greater degree than Israel; but all other nations are not expected to be perfect. Only Israel is supposed to be above all negative features of modern statehood.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935) noted that “the great idealists seek an order so noble, so firm and pure, beyond what may be found in the world of reality, and thus they destroy what has been fashioned in conformity to the norms of the world.” Such people, through their unrealistic religiosity or idealism, in fact are part of what Rav Kook called “the world of chaos” rather than “the world of order.” Misguided idealism is destructive. Insisting that Jews be “angels” rather than real human beings is also a form of antisemitism.

Already in the 19th century, Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai (1798-1878) lamented that rabbis of his time opposed resettlement of Jews in Israel until Messianic times. He rebuked those “who say with full mouth that Jerusalem was only created for the sake of Torah study. While their intention is acceptable, their deeds are unacceptable. It is impossible to conduct life in this world as though it were the world-to-come, where there is no need to eat or drink.”

The reality is that Israel is composed of actual human beings living under challenging conditions. Israel has to deal with Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis and others who seek its destruction. It has to deal with terrorism, anti-Israel attitudes in the Arab world and beyond, economic boycotts and sanctions. Israeli society is faced with rivalries between political left and right, religious and

nonreligious, Sephardic and Ashkenazic, rich and poor … and more. Yes, Israel is a real country with real problems; Israelis are human beings who must make decisions that often involve unpleasantness. We are not living in Messianic times.

The future of Israel and the Jewish People will be secured by those who share the dream of a Jewish homeland that strives to be a “light unto the nations.” The goal is to make Israel as great as humanly possible.

For Jewish critics to demand the impossible is not only unrealistic: it is dangerous and self-destructive.