Will Our Boys Fight Again?

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Throughout the centuries, historians, philosophers and anthropologists have struggled with the concept called Israel more than with nearly any other idea. While attempting to place Israel within the confines of conventional history, they experienced constant academic and philosophical frustration. Any definitions they suggested eventually broke down due to significant inconsistencies. Was Israel a nation, a religion or an altogether mysterious entity that would forever remain unexplainable? By some, it was seen less as a nation and more as a religion; others believed the reverse to be true. And then there were those who claimed that it does not fall into either of these categories.

In fact, it was clear to everyone that “Israel” did not fit into any specific framework or known scheme. It resisted all historical concepts and generalities. Its uniqueness thwarted people’s natural desire for a definition, which can be alarming and terribly disturbing. This fact became even more obvious once Titus the Roman forced the Jews out of their country, and specifically after the collapse of the Bar Kochba rebellion. It was then that the Jew was hurled into the abyss of the nations of the world and has since been confronted with a new condition: ongoing insecurity. While mankind has always faced moments of insecurity, it is the Jews who have been denied even the smallest share of the dubious security that others possess. Whether Jews were aware of it or not, they always lived on ground that could, at any moment, give way beneath their feet.

In 1948 Israel once again became a country. But many forgot that it was not only a country. All the other dimensions, such as nationhood, religion, mystery, insecurity and lack of definition continued to exist. The people of Israel today do

not find themselves exclusively in the land of Israel, and instead of one Israel the world now has two. But the second, new Israel has until now been seen as responding to the demands of history, geography, politics and journalism. One knows where it is. At least one thinks one knows where it is. But it becomes clearer and clearer that this new and definable Israel has already become as much a puzzling and perplexing entity as the old Israel always was.

Throughout its short history, the State of Israel has experienced the most inexplicable events modern man has ever seen. After an exile of nearly 2,000 years, during which the old Israel was able to survive against all historical odds, it returned to its homeland. There it found itself surrounded by a massive Arab population that was and is incapable of making peace with the idea that this small and peculiar nation lives among them. After having suffered a Holocaust in which it lost six million of its members, it was not permitted to live a life of tranquility on its tiny piece of land. Once again, the Jew was denied the right to feel at home in his own country.

From the outset Israel was forced to battle its enemies on all fronts. It was attacked and then condemned for defending its population and fighting for its very existence. Over the years it had to endure the international community's policy of double standards. Today, as in the past, when it calls for peace it is condemned for provoking war. When it tries, as no other nation does, to avoid hurting the citizens of the countries that declare war on it, it is accused of being more brutal than nations that committed and still commit atrocities against millions of people. Simultaneously, and against all logic, this nation builds its country as no other has done, while fighting war after war. What took other nations hundreds of years, Israel accomplished in only a few. While bombs and rockets attack its cities, while calls for its total destruction are heard in many parts of the world, it continues to increase its population, generate unprecedented technology and create a stronger and more stable economy. But the more it succeeds, the more its enemies become frustrated and irritated, and the more fragile Israel's security becomes. The more some nations aspire to destroy it, the more the world is forced to deal with this small country and its miraculous survival. By now, Israeli politics and diplomacy occupy more space in major newspapers than any other political issue or general topic ¬¬– as if Israel is actually at the center of world events.

Jews must ask themselves what this non-classification really signifies. Is it due merely to lack of vision and insight on the part of the nations? Is it that Jews could really fit into a system but the nations have not yet allowed them entry? Is it a

negative phenomenon? A temporary one, until it will rectify itself in the future?

We have only one way to comprehend the positive meaning of this otherwise apparently negative phenomenon: faith. From any other viewpoint, the failure of Jews to fit into any category would be intolerable, a meaningless absurdity. We need to understand that the Jews' inability to conform to any classification is the very foundation and meaning of their living avowal of Israel's uniqueness. Israel's very existence is the manifestation of mysterious and heavenly intervention in history to which the Jews must attest. Only in Israel do history and revelation coincide. While other nations exist as nations, the people of Israel exist as a reminder of God's involvement in world history. Only through Israel is humanity touched by the divine.

The realization of this fact has become modern Israel's great challenge. Its repeated attempts to overcome its geographic and political insecurity by employing world politics will not work. Driven by its desire to overcome its vulnerability, it wavers between geography and nationhood, appealing to its history and religious culture while unable to find a place that it can call its existential habitat.

Reading about Israel's prophets, we see how they warned against such false notions of security. They predicted that Israel would perish if it insisted on existing only as a political structure. Yet, it can survive – and this is the paradox of the reality of Israel – as long as it insists on its vocation of uniqueness.

Israel was summoned to remind the world of God's existence, not only concerning religion but also as a historical reality and above all as a unique moral voice. We must understand that our enemies want to uproot our system of values and principles by drawing us into situations in which we are forced to make moral decisions that are so complex that they become nearly impossible to implement. In that way, they are able to accuse us of war crimes and the worst atrocities. The world has not yet forgiven the Jews for the Holocaust. As long as their direct or indirect participation in the massacre of the Jewish people proves their total moral bankruptcy, these nations cannot live at peace with themselves. They must therefore prove that Israel's moral standards are worse than theirs. Only in that way can they cleanse themselves of their own moral failure.

We must convince our children that the reason why we are here and why we need to fight war after war is not for our phenomenal high-tech, our military power, or our capability to build a modern state out of barren desert. All those accomplishments are means, not ends. We are here to fulfill an extraordinary

mission that is deeply rooted in Jewish religious and moral values.

We don’t fight wars just to survive; we don’t even fight to merely overcome evil. We fight wars because we believe that man must surpass himself so as to become righteous, and that is possible only if the great evil that surrounds us has been eliminated. Israel needs to be a powerhouse of moral audacity, defying the world’s mediocrity and hypocrisy.

We cannot endlessly continue to send our children into the battlefield unless they are convinced that they are fighting for a supreme mission. While they are, at this hour, highly motivated, we have no guarantee that this will continue tomorrow. Only when they know that they fight for the soul of all men and that a highly inspiring Judaism is our invincible weapon will they continue to fight for all of us. After all this is not a war like all other wars, this is a Jewish war with a four thousand long history of spiritual heroism. But this requires a revolution in Jewish education, a drastic reorientation of what Judaism is really all about, and extraordinary boldness on the part of our rabbis.

If the government wants our children to continue fighting, it will have to give primacy to this Jewish mission and ensure that it becomes deeply engraved in their souls. If not, it will one day lose our children and be left without a supreme army. We cannot fight just because we are Israelis. We must fight because we are, first and foremost, Jews. The decision will be between putting band-aids on our wounds or performing a long-overdue surgery and getting things right.

There is no security for Israel unless it is secure in its own destiny. It must assume the burden of its own uniqueness, which is nothing less than taking on its role as God’s witness. And it must draw strength from this position, especially in times such as ours when Israel’s very existence is again at stake. Paradoxically, once it recognizes its uniqueness, it will undoubtedly be victorious and enjoy security.

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