

SUMMARY

AGAINST THOSE WHO WANT TO SEPARATE THE JEWISH RELIGION FROM THE JEWISH STATE

by

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With the sobering-up after the establishment of the state, after seeing it as the be-all and the end-all, there should have sprung up a movement for "the establishment of the people as a nation", of spiritual rehabilitation, of the beginning of the redemption of the soul, of making everything holy and sacred in Judaism lovely and loved, of a cultivation of the national culture.

Those who conceive of the State of Israel as an insurance agency giving security of intellectual life and standards of living to a certain group of people, are insulting those dreamers and fighters who envisioned the rebirth of Israel. The original vision never included a material well-being *per se* but as an instrument for the revelation of the spiritual aspect. In Maimonides's words, "The sages and the prophets did not hope for the messianic days in order to rule over the whole world, nor to eat and drink and be merry, but in order to be at leisure for the Torah and her wisdom."

The State of Israel is an efficient tool for detecting the genius of the people, its intellectual depth, and for the spiritual-mental wealth to appear. The independent state we have won is not only a privilege for our generation, but an obligation as well. A holy and great obligation, for *destiny* is not a privilege but an obligation. We are an ancient people with a glorious past, and the glory of its past commits us to the glory of the future.

In practice, however, we see the opposite: the sweetness of the "cake", the independent state, caused many to lose all proportion and exploit it for their own betterment. Many of those who suffered and toiled for the establishment of the new state have since handed in their "promissory notes", with an attitude of first come, first served. The outcome of this turmoil was a spiritual confusion. After throwing off idealistic ideas, the values of the pioneers, there came a moral degeneration and with it a deterioration in the status of religion.

Talk was started about the separation of religion and state. But, we ask, what religion and what state? The Law of Moses and Israel is under

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discussion and the word *Law* defines the difference from other religions. We are discussing the State of Israel which has been re-established against all laws of history. It is well to know that the dictum "religion is a private affair" is used with relation to *other* religions, but not to us. The Law of Israel is at the same time a Law of State. There are, to be sure, commandments of the Law (Torah) which are personal. But there are also very many which are dependent upon the way of life of the nation. Our people is a holy one, not just as individuals but as a whole, an elected people. Judaism has its mainstay in the practical commandments, not only penetrating into one's personal life, but defining the way of life of the people and the state. So also the return to Zion and the redemption of Israel were not to be personal but general, for all Jews. The Law of Israel is not only a religion, but a constitution, a covenant of the people. General national values are above private interest and it is legitimate for the authorities to bind them upon the people. But "this is the Law of the Torah" is much more than a regular national concept: all have to join to realize it.

You too [talking to his non-religious audience] are still Jews. You haven't thrown off all Jewishness. You don't raise your voices against circumcision, or against religious marriage! Herein lies the answer to the much-raised question: what good does a commandment do when performed under pressure or coercion? The answer is that even if it doesn't benefit the individual, it benefits the whole. However, the word "religious coercion" is misplaced. This so-called coercion doesn't coerce anyone to do anything against his conscience, but only something to which he is indifferent, at worst. No one has yet argued that travel on Shabat is for him conscience-dictated. Therefore it is not religious coercion, but just limitation of personal freedom and isn't that general practice among all nations? I know your answer, and it is: everywhere the majority forces its opinion on the minority, here it is the opposite. But I say: we are not a minority, for even non-religious Jews, so-called, feel themselves Jewish. And even if we were, we would be able to say that we are the true representatives of Judaism, as de Gaulle, during the war, was the real representative of France, and not Pétain who headed the majority. There is also our majority if we consider the past generations. The separation of religion and state in Israel means separation of the Jews from Judaism, separation of our history from our state. Nothing can take the place of religion, not literature or language, not *Tanakh* without God! Your teachers have committed a great injustice teaching you how Jews *died* but not how they *lived*, what kept them alive in the face of so much death. What do they teach you about Rabbi 'Akiva, the Gaon of Vilna, Maimonides? Did you know that Maimonides was so religious that he wrote a Torah-Scroll himself? Our heritage is our books. They have made us into what we are, they are our guides in life, they instruct us in our ways twenty-four hours a day. If Jews were persecuted

their *houses* were destroyed, but not their *world*, their inner life stayed intact.

A lot is heard about separation of religion and state, but not about separation of anti-religion and state. Yet it is a terrible fact that leaders of the state use her to achieve their private ideological goals. Not few are the cases where state functions are exploited for the ever-continuing cultural war. Through the powerful instruments of the state they wipe out religious traditions and impress the nation with a secular stamp.

The independent State of Israel has an obligation to gird her loins and bring the whole nation to a new spiritual height through the Torah as it was revealed throughout the ages.

Summary by Chanah Arnon

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