FROM THE INGATHERING OF THE EXILES AND INTEGRATION OF ETHNIC COMMUNITIES TO ONE NATION

by

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The aspiration of those who envisaged and founded the State of Israel was that it be based on the pedestals of a reformed society. Yet, Israel remains trapped in a web of relations of hostility, contrasts and gaps. Are these truly irremediable? The sharpest contrast, of course, is between Jews and Arabs, residents of Israel. Israeli Arabs may find it easier to free themselves of the distress of a majority which became a (national) minority, if the State of Israel were to help them be peacefully woven into a confederation of nations of the Middle East: in this way there would be a dissolvement of the inferiority complex of a minority that is emotionally part of the majority in the confederation.

MERGING ETHNIC GROUPS INTO ONE NATION

The main internal problem among Jews in Israel, however, is the ingathering of the exiles and merging of the ethnic groups into one nation. Since the time when waves of immigration to Israel arrived one after the other, there surfaced — with each new wave — the contrast between the immigrants and the old-timers. Eventually the waves of immigration one after the other, absorbed and integrated and all contribute their due share in developing and defending the country, in building the state, the economy and the society. Yet the keenest contrast is still the one which divides the ethnic groups of the "East" and of the "West". At times it appears that its cutting edge has already been removed, and at times it again flares up. Has the problem actually remained as it was, or can one point to the advancement of a solution?

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At times the problem of the ethnic groups in Israel is compared to the racial problem in the Anglo-Saxon countries or in South Africa, to which these have difficulty in finding a solution. The example is irrelevant because the source of Israel's rebirth is in Zionism, to which the ingathering of the exiles is the bedrock of its vision. Ethnic integration in Israel is nothing

but a question of time and Israel would like to shorten it as much as possible. With the defeat of the Nazis, there came to an end the racial myth, which had placed a heavy shadow of disgrace on the science of man. This is the presently accepted opinion in the world of science. So much the more so, when one is talking about *ethnic groups*, which are distinguished by their cultural peculiarities and belong to *one race*. One must not look upon the problem of the ethnic communities in Israel as comparable to the racial contrasts and ethnic differences in other countries.

The assumption concerning the racial purity of the Jews is most likely exaggerated. (Does a nation exist that has preserved its "racial purity?"), inasmuch as, during the wonderings of the Israelites from Ur of the Chaldees to Egypt and later during the period of their settlement in the Land of Canaan and during the 2000 years of exile – new biological elements adhered to them. All the same, the ethnic origin of the people of Israel was relatively preserved. Even if there is no pure Jewish race, as anthropologists believe, it is not the ethnic origin alone which sustained the peculiarity of the Jewish people, but rather the legacy of religion, culture, way of life, modes of thought. These traits are not transmitted by the genes, but constitute a cultural legacy which is faithfully transmitted from generation to generation through study and education.

Kipling's saying that "East is east, and West is west, and never the twain shall meet" was racist extremism, refuted in its essence. All the more so when one is talking about the relations among the ethnic groups in Israel, which have not only a common ethnic origin, a common history and a single fate on account of the past, but are also united in the present – in their faith, culture and language, in their Zionist vision (ingathering of the exiles) and more.

PROBLEMS OF SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION

At the same time, it must be confessed that the social and spiritual integration has not yet been completed – due to the sediment of a prolonged historical separation among the centres of the diaspora. In the words of David Ben-Gurion: "There was a time when Islamic countries – and not only the Jews but the Arabs as well who lived there – were the pioneers of world culture and progress. In those days the Jews of those countries were the teachers of udaism. They bequeathed to us a great heritage: the writings of Sa'adia Gaon, Yehuda Halevi, Ibn Gavirol, Maimonide s and other thinkers, poets and philosophers of the Middle Ages. In the succeeding centuries, a process of impoverishment and decline set in these countries, and the focal point of Judaism was transferred to Europe: The Enlightenment, Jewish studies, 'Love of Zion' movement, Zionist movement, labour movement, the pioneer movement of four generations – all these were the work of the Jews of Europe. Europe had become the arena of Jewish

creativity, because Europe was the centre of culture and progress, whereas the Jews of the Islamic countries were oppressed and denied the opportunity of studying like the peoples among whom they lived. The Jews of Europe founded the state and gave it shape. But their relative proportion in the population is dwindling. Within twenty years most of the population of Israel will be Asian and African immigrants and their descendants. And we are faced with a crucial question: What will the image of the nation be in another twenty years? The answer will determine our very existence, materially and spiritually."[1] D. Ben-Gurion went on to say on another occasion that the danger which is lurking from the gap between ethnic groups is greater than that of enemy missiles, and we must hasten to extinguish it.

In practice, "the Oriental communities" is not a cultural-historical concept. There is the history of the Jews of North Africa, or Yemen, or India, and none of these have a common denominator. Nevertheless, they tend to be defined for simplicity's sake; the "Oriental communites."

To say that they arrived in Israel only after the establishment of the state is incorrect.[2] True, in the years 1919-1948 only 10.4% of the immigrants came from these two continents. Yet one must recall that the Jews in Asia and North Africa constituted in that period about 6-8% of the total number of Jews in the world. In all, the Oriental communities constituted in November 1948, 9.8% of the sum total of Jews in Israel; European and American-born, 54.8%, and Israeli-born, 35.4%. In the wake of the mass immigration after the establishment of the state, there was a rise in the proportion of Asian and African-born, and they presently constitute about 55% of all the Jews in Israel.

Already during the time of *Yishuv* (Jewish settlement) a certain cultural differentiation was to be noted; yet it was limited. The European elements, pioneering for the most part, were dominant, whereas the communally integrated groups were marginal. "East" and "West" went their separate ways, and there was scarcely any contact between them. The immigrants who arrived after 1948 did not come – for the most part – for ideological reasons; although the Zionist drive did serve them, consciously or unconsciously, as a main incentive to immigrate. There was a noticeable difference among the emigrants of the various countries – in conceptual baggage, in tradition of political life, and in general level of education. For many members of the Oriental communities, such as Yemenites, Kurds and others, immigration to Israel was the first contact with Western culture – with its different technology, different social and political relations, and new network of values. No wonder that, despite the Law of Return and the tremendous

[1] David Ben-Gurion, "An Academic Working People", 1962.

[2] Hayyim Y. Cohen, "The Problem of the Absorption of the Jews from Asia and Africa in Israel", in the journal: *The Hebrew University*.

efforts of the young state to absorb the waves of immigration which within the span of a few years multiplied the population of the country three or fourfold, there still exist gaps in education, housing, occupation, etc.

The *occupational-professional composition* of the immigrants originating from Asia and Africa reflects a higher concentration on their part in agriculture and industry, which provide relatively low incomes, whereas the immigrants of European and American origin and their offspring are concentrated in free vocations, clerical work and transport, which give the worker a relatively higher income. As a consequence of prosperity, there was a rise in the standard of the general population, but the standard of the "first Israel" rose more than that of the "second Israel".

The *difference in housing* is also conspicuous. The mass immigration from the Islamic countries arrived at the outset of the establishment of the State, whose means were meagre. True, the "transit camps" were quickly liquidated, but it was impossible to ensure comfortable housing for all. If even the institutions of the government and Jewish Agency had avoided discriminating among the immigrants, still, the same size of apartment was given to a family with two children as to a family of ten children, thus creating inequality. Thus it is no wonder that the dwelling-places of the Oriental communities, whether in development towns or in the suburbs of the big cities, rapidly turned into slums.

The most conspicuous gap, which is also the source of the other gaps, is in the *field of education*. After 25 years of the existence of the State of Israel, the situation was as follows: among those aged 14 and over, who had studied in school, 19.7% of the European and American-born had an education of 13 years or more, while among the Asian and African-born only 6.4% studied for the same number of years. The proportion, then, is $3:1$. The children of Oriental communities constitute 60% in elementary education, and their number drops to 45% in high school, and to 15% in the university. Their proportion among the recipients of the M. A. degree is lower still.

The "education gap" increases the "income gap" in a vicious circle. The first (top) two-tenths, most of them European emigrants, enjoy 44% of the national pie, while the bottom two-tenths (90% of them from the Oriental communities) enjoy 6% of the national pie. Nearly 200,000 people still live crowded three or more people to a room.

The gap in education, income and occupation heightens the intercommunal tension, particularly in a society that professes complete social equality. Thus the bitterness and frustration, and also relatively large measure of crime; the latter developing not only from a lack of opportunity but also from the breakdown of religious and family tradition, the decline in status of the head of the family and from feelings of inferiority as to one's ethnic background.

Many of the children of the Oriental communities did not properly take in their studies; for school is based, as said, on the assumption that the ability of generalization and abstraction has, prior to this, already been developed in the child. There is a connection between the level of education of the father and his occupation and the I. Q. of the child. A backward family (added to crowded living arrangements) does not help much to advance the younger generation. Prof. Frankenstein calls this situation "school without parents", that is, a school which cannot depend on the help of parents. Were the I. Q. of Sephardi children in a mixed neighbourhood in Jerusalem no higher than that of children in a neglected development town, one could attribute this to genetic factors. The fact is, however, that Sephardi children who learn together with Ashkenazi children are indistinguishable in their level because they benefit by the influence of a stimulating environment. The education gap is, in the words of Abba Eban (when he was Minister of Education) the result of 500 years of Jewish history; most of the immigrants from the Islamic countries came from backward states, and their children were often the first generation to receive an organized and comprehensive education.

So long as there is no transformation, first and foremost, within the immigrants themselves from the Islamic countries, in the manner of auto-emancipation, and instead, they continue to make demands from a passive stand, the longed-for change will not occur. Be the justification what it may, however − what has been done up to now, what achievements and obstacles are there in the effort to abolish the ethnic-community gap?

The feeling of deprivation and discrimination is ten times greater than the deprivation and discrimination which, in practice, exist. The major key to stopping the gap is, as stated, education; and what the state has accomplished in this field in the 29 years of its existence is no mean thing. First of all, there was the implementation at the outset of the state's existence (1950) of compulsory education. Israel is the only state among all the countries of Asia and Africa (with the exception of Japan) to have realized this act. True, in the poor neighbourhoods and development towns there were fewer certified teachers (the Oriental communities produced but few qualified teachers), and there was a high rate of turnover. Norm B was established to make it easier to enter school above the elementary level. A long school day was introduced, means were allotted for fostering gifted children, and differential methods of education were chosen in order to contend with the problem of the gap between the immigrants of different cultural communities. The education system has expanded sevenfold since the establishment of the state, double the growth of the population.

There is no quick route, however, to raising the cultural level, particularly when the gap between children begins at a tender age. (Efforts to establish more nursery schools have of late been increased.)

As for the difference in income, the gap between workers of the same level of education is actually not great. At a very low level of education (1 - 4 years of schooling) the income of people of Asian and African origin even exceeds that of Ashkenazim. An average calculation at every level of education demonstrates that the income of members of the Oriental communities is 95% of that of those from Europe and America at a parallel level of education. Income gaps which derive from seniority in and of itself, tend to diminish with a prolongation of the stay in Israel.[3]

It is known that *inter-communal marriages* are of decisive importance. In 1952 only 9% of the couples married in Israel were inter-communal marriages; in 1960 – 14.5%; in 1970 – 17.6%; and one may assume that by the end of the seventies they will reach 20% or more. Inter-communal marriages are more frequent among the Israeli-born than among those born outside Israel. And the more the education of the "Orientals" rises, so there is an increase in the percentage of marriages between them and the Ashkenazim. Mixed marriages also break the social and cultural barriers among parents and relatives.

WHAT KIND OF INTEGRATION?

What is the desirable image of communal integrating? In the Zionist vision it was sketched with the utmost simplicity: the melting-pot would transform the assemblage from the diaspora into one nation. The process, however, is more complex. The Oriental communities, faced with the dominant influence of the West, viewed such integration as contamination and a denial of their uniqueness.

The old *Yishuv*, claims writer S. Blass,[4] sees itself as an "institute of absorption", and the masses of new immigrants are the ones to be absorbed. The old *Yishuv*, which is a minority within the Jewish society in Israel, and which constitutes a dominant stratum in cultural and economic establishment, is in itself caught in a crisis of foresaken values; on the other hand, the multitude of new immigrants are destined for remodelling in accordance with the spiritual outlook and patterns of thought of the old *Yishuv*, whose image is fading. A son of the East is proud of his past. Culture and civilization are not one and the same. The peoples of the East, who did not forsake their cultural heritage, adopted for themselves the achievements of Western civilization, and proved that an old culture can live together with European civilization and even develop. Blass goes on to say; To look for the unifying factor, and to ignore what divides, would be too simplistic on our part. It is not in man's nature to be reconciled to the decree that he has no identity of his own. Why is it, though, that the his-

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[3] Rot Kalinov-Melol, in the collection "The integration of the Exiles", pp. 97 - 108.
[4] Shimon Blass: "Notes on an Old-and-New Debate", Amot XIV; also see debate in Amot XX, Tel Aviv, 1965.

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tory of the Jews of the Maghreb and of the Eastern countries of Asia is not given its rightful place in the curricula of the schools?

Avraham Amazlag, a Jewish composer originating from Morocco, writes: "I was born in Morocco, and brought with me the culture of Moroccan Jewry as imparted to me, and I ceremoniously declare: I renounce all integration. I do not want to 'integrate' – the meaning of which is to extinguish myself; I prefer to foster my own values. This and only this will prepare me to learn and absorb the values of others."

An objective examination of the process of socio-cultural integration would show that there is no small exaggeration in the above claim. We already dealt with the manifestations of real and imagined discrimination. We will now carry this further.

We are all Jews, and what we hold in common (religion and tradition, language and culture, national consciousness and an adherence to the idea of the ingathering of the exiles, an attachment to a democratic regime) immeasurably surpasses that which divides us. It is not true that the culture and education in Israel ignore the heritage of Sephardi Jewry. Jewish-Sephardi creative works are studied, mainly by Ashkenazim, and they are taught in the schools no less than the writings of East European Jews. (Not enough attention, perhaps, has been devoted to the later history of the Jews in Islamic countries, due to the multiplicity of countries, and this distortion must be corrected). The Sephardi pronunciation of Hebrew has suppressed the Ashkenazi one, and in the synagogal liturgy the Sephardi version is current.

If Ashkenazim do enjoy a certain preference, then it is not only for the reasons cited above, but also because the imitative urge among the younger members of the Oriental communities was stronger than their pride in their own tradition and heritage. And there are those who rightly ask: Is it predetermined that, alongside an acceptance of the Western way of life, there should disappear all those cultural assets which Oriental Jewry came with – due to its outer-directed self-effacement and inner-directed self-denial in regard to its religious and cultural tradition? And let them not come with complaints to others instead of wrestling with the problem.

In practice, there are differences of opinion in the Israeli society on the whole concerning the goal of development: Is pluralism preferable, or is it better that homogeneity be the guiding principle?

In the opinion of the sociologist M. Lisak, there is no "*Institutional pluralism*" in Israel, such as abounds in multi-social societies, in which one race dominates the other, and differing perceptions and frameworks exist side by side. Nor is there in Israel "*social pluralism*", which is founded on the existence of social groups whose contact with one another, especially at the informal level (marriage, membership in clubs, etc.) is governed by normative restrictions. It is possible, though, to view Israel's society as pluralistic from a cultural aspect.*

* See in this collection "The Integration of the Exiles", pp. 51 - 53.

In the opinion of the sociologist Rivka Bar-Yosef, the Jewish society in Israel of today, despite its multi-variety, is not a pluralistic society. It has a broad homogeneous base, which developed at a surprisingly rapid pace. For the Jews did come to Israel in order to be a part of the country, and not in order to foster an independent and closed culture for themselves. They want a mingling of the cultures, not a parallel existence of cultures. An integration of the cultural heritage of the Oriental communities is felt primarily in the expressive field, in folklore, in expressions of art and in ways of life. From the standpoint of social structure, technological level and ability to advance, Israel's society – like all developing countries[5] – is striving to catch up with the industrial world.

At the outset of the actualization of Zionism, it was a widespread opinion that an ingathering of the exiles meant a complete assimilation of the ethnic communities. There later grew a fear of "Levantinization" – due to the quantitative advantage of the Oriental communities, who would accept only the civilization together with superficial culture "in the spirit of the cynical and fickle Levant". Yet, "this nightmare was but a rationalization of the internal crisis in which European Jewry was embroiled".[6]

At any rate, *Israel is today a pluralistic society inclining toward the western model, but despite a cultural universalism there still remains some of the particularism of the various ethnic communities.* In the words of Aharon Yadlin, Minister of Education and Culture: "The assumption about the need for a melting-pot, a pressure-cooker, the coercion of certain uniform values on all the tribes of Israel will only cause superfluous tension and explosion. I do not hold cultural pluralism to be the final goal, rather, in order to facilitate mutual adjustment of all segments of the population, the ideal must be envisaged as the emergence of a new cultural synthesis."

Nissim Rejwan[7] wrote that a pluralistic society gives different groups the possibility of fostering their cultural, religious and other singularities on the condition of accepting the law of the political and social regime. Social ties along ethnic lines do not weaken the unity of a democratic society; rather, they even strengthen it: they prevent the individual from being crushed by the political machinery, and grant him equality through a feeling of group pride.

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THE PROBLEM OF REPRESENTATION

There are people who attribute excessive importance to the *problem of representation.* Others, and not only Ashkenazim, are of the opinion that

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[5] Rivka Bar-Yosef, "Integration of Cultures in Israel", *Dapim* – A publication of the Cultural Centre.

[6] Alex Weingrod, *Israel, Group Rehabilitation in a New Society,* New York, 1966, p. 77.

[7] Nissim Rejwan, "The Communal Front", *Jewish Frontier*, May 1969.

this is of secondary importance. It is no coincidence that at present the ethnic communities have no political parties, and even these community structures which have engaged in political activities ceased to exist as parties after the establishment of the state. Nine ethnic lists appeared in the elections to the Seventh Knesset, but they did not pass the percentage restriction. They only represented countries of origin, not an ideology or a public cause.

Need one pass through representation on the road to integration, or must representation come after integration? Preceding representation are many tasks, whose fulfilment is apt to speed up the process of integration and narrow the gap. For example, of every one hundred and sixty *yeshivot* in Israel only one is Sephardi, and all the rest are Ashkenazi, while the Oriental communities number 55% of the population, and the percentage of religious people among them exceeds their proportion among the Ashkenazi communities! Here it is not at all a question of representation, nor is it a question of discrimination, but rather of internal activity of one's own. The aspiration towards representation and the battle for a part in government and administration are, first and foremost, carried on the waves of feelings of discrimination and of hostility toward Ashkenazim, and election votes are usually captured by firing this sentiment.

It is impossible, however, to ignore completely the legitimate need of the Oriental communities to express themselves and participate in representation. Each person, in every generation, wants to leave his mark, and it is not enough that the righteous of the nation look after the communities that are considered deprived. And, indeed, noticeable progress has been made in the area of representation. Out of 951 members of local government, 421 of them come from the Oriental communities, mainly members of the Labour Party. Members of the Oriental communities presently constitute 37% of the mayors. Out of 610 membership, 135 members of the Labour Party centre from the Oriental communities (a greater representation than in other parties). At the conference of the *Histadrut* they constitute 21%. In the Central Committee, 25%. At higher levels, though, the percentage of those from the communities (still) is smaller. *Likud* has 39 Knesset members, 6 of them from the Oriental communities. *Ma'arach* has 50 members, 11 of them from the Oriental communities. Their representation in government is more limited.

CALL FOR AN APPROPRIATE SOCIAL POLICY

The integration of the communities is not solely a *cultural* problem, but also a *social* issue. The cultural question will not find a solution except through political-social channels and an appropriate social policy, that will do away with the gap — in income, occupation and education. After the establishment of the state, politicians and intellectuals felt, for some reason,

that the pre-state pioneering ideology was outdated, and that the aim should be toward "Normalization", the essence of which is occupational differentiation, state bureaucratization, social ranking and an economic gap. There reigned in Israel the principles of an "achievement-oriented" society (instead of social solidarity), and sanctity was given to patterns of a "stratified" society (instead of the "antiquated" concepts of a working class, a class struggle and constructive socialism). The mania of "status" set in; and whoever does not gain the rank of industrialist, banker, senior clerk or professor is condemned to being "just" a farmer, or "just" a factory worker, sees himself as deprived.

Thus the "bitter" lot of many of the Oriental communities. True, they are partner to the general advance of the population — but the members of the West, with a higher starting-point, advanced more rapidly. Furthermore, in the feudal regime, from which many members of the Oriental communities came, "everyone knew his own place". In an achievement-oriented or capitalistic society, everyone pushes to climb to "the top of the ladder"; some succeed, while others have their elbows crushed. Were they integrated into a society that was characterized by solidarity and partnership, they would remain unharmed — but the concepts of society had become confused.

Let us not delude ourselves that time alone will correct the distortion. Objective factors have been overwhelming in the first generation in creating the gap, but when it continues to exist into the second and third generation, this means a perpetuation of the fatal link between ethnic origin and cultural backwardness, and an increase in the imminent danger to democracy and the future of the state, with ethnic gaps coinciding with class gaps.

Enemy number one of backward peoples is indifference and lack of initiative; the deprived communities in Israel, though, are striving harder for education, which is the main guarantee of closing the gap. Planned action is called for on the part of the state, so that this thirst for education may be satisfied. As said, the differences in education are now the primary source of the social gap, and expanding and intensifying education are the primary solution.

A second factor for narrowing and dissolving the gap is the transfer of ethnic antagonism to the tracks of a social struggle. The class gap perpetuates the ethnic gap; and thus deprived ethnic communities cannot be saved by anti-Zionist and anti-social demagoguery, but rather by being integrated into a social movement whose explicit purpose is to narrow the gap and work toward a supra-class society.

It has been noted by researchers of the American immigration that one of the patterns of American life in the last century can be summarized in the sentence: "Class takes the place of community origins." That is, overtime, when the ethnic groups became more heterogeneous in their

class composition a person's position was increasingly determined by his class and decreasingly by his ethnic belonging.[8] The American sociologist Nathan Glazer wrote that the main reason for the success of the United States in absorbing its masses of immigrants resides in the fact that, in place of the ethnic factor of different communities, there appeared an ideology of "Americanism". One of the slogans of the newly-arrived immigrants was: Become citizens and join the trade unions (i.e. the federation of labour).

A process of convergence, or integration of the ethnic communities, among the people requires many generations. Because of the common basis of the communities in Israel, the time will not be long. The ingathering of the exiles certainly did not have a preparation of forty years of wandering in the desert; rather, there was a direct passage from exile to independent statehood. But time is pressing, and it is compelling us to become one people without delay on a level of quality that will compensate us for being a quantitive minority.

<div align="right">Translated by Linda Lown</div>

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[8] Aharon Antonovsky: "Political-Social Positions in Israel", *Amot VI*, June-July, 1963, p. 22.