

ARE WE IN EXILE?

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IN no community has the subject of exile played a more significant role than among the Jews. For millennia now, a profound consciousness of exile has pervaded Jewish thought, symbolism, art, and religion. In our time, with the emergence of the State of Israel, the involvement of the Jew with the notion of exile has become particularly intense. This involvement, however, has by and large been emotional, romantic, or political. Hard objective study of the meaning exile has had for Jews in the past, and of the meaning it should have for Jews in the present is not often undertaken. The result has been great confusion on the part of Jews living outside Israel regarding whether they should think of themselves as living in exile and, if so, what the nature of this exile is. This is unfortunate, for the meaning of exile chosen by the Jews today will assuredly have critical consequences for the future. The direction and even survival of the Jewish religious enterprise, as well as the continued existence of Jewish communities outside Israel, will in good measure depend upon the way in which we understand and deal with "exile." Every effort, therefore, must be made to open disciplined and dispassionate discussion of the meaning of exile for the Jews so that it may receive the disinterested treatment that it deserves.

The fact that appears first and foremost in a study of exile among the Jews is that historically there have been two concepts of exile, not one. It is, I believe, in the failure to distinguish between these two concepts that the most destructive potential of exile for contemporary Jewry exists. The first of these concepts may be termed "territorial exile," the other, "existential exile."

Territorial exile is defined in this way. As the name implies, its essential characteristic is physical separation from a land that is felt to be one's true home and the place where one wishes to live. Territorial exile is usually imposed by others but may be self-inflicted. Persons in territorial exile often undergo great hardships. Exiles have suffered from political and economic persecution, social ostracism and discrimination, as well as from feelings of loneliness and alienation. Still, it is not necessarily the case that those who exist in territorial exile must undergo such hardships. It is possible for a person to enjoy great material and social benefits in the country in which he lives yet still feel he is in exile. Note that the hallmark of territorial exile is separation from a homeland to which one desires to return. Accordingly, no matter the conditions under which a person lives, in whatever land he happens to be, if he no longer considers some other country the place where he wishes to return and live, he is not in territorial exile. We are thus clearly able to determine whether a person exists in territorial exile. Is he separated from a land that he regards as his home; and does he genuinely wish to emigrate and live there? If the answer is "yes" to both these questions, the person then exists in territorial

exile. The point might be emphasized that a person must *genuinely* wish to live in another land to exist in territorial exile. Some persons enjoy regarding themselves as exiles, but in reality they are only indulging in romantic or sentimental fantasies. One test, perhaps, for distinguishing between fantasy and reality is whether a person who considers himself in exile from a homeland does in fact return there when he is politically free to do so.

EXISTENTIAL exile is totally unlike territorial exile. It is not physical, and does not arise from geographic separation. Rather, it is a condition of psychic estrangement in which a person is separated from a state of being he has the potential to enjoy but cannot attain. The person, so to speak, is separated from himself, from his own possibility for intrinsically meaningful existence. In the state of intrinsically meaningful existence, the question "Why do I exist?" is answered with one's being, by the very pleasure and meaning the person finds in living. Existential exile is characterized by negative moods such as anxiety, melancholy, and despair that drain existence of meaning. Territorial exile, of course, can also be accompanied by anxiety and melancholy. We need only recall the despair of the refugees fleeing the terrors of Nazi Germany. Still the two kinds of exile are essentially distinct from one another; their causes differ and, accordingly, their remedies differ as well. The unhappiness associated with territorial exile is due to physical separation from a homeland, or to any hardships, such as persecution, that this separation might occasion. Consequently, the unhappiness of territorial exile can be removed simply by returning the person physically to his homeland. On the other hand, the negative moods of existential exile are caused by the very nature of man and the ultimate conditions of existence. The



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essential nature of man is the fact that he is finite but passionately longs for infinity. Owing to his "finitude," man finds himself vulnerable, radically alone, and subject to death. This finite condition generates moods of desperation that negate the value of existence and prevent men from leading meaningful, purposeful lives. As is readily apparent, the reason for the negative emotions of existential exile is not territorial. Neither is it economic, political, or social. Men are subject to aloneness and death no matter which country they live in, how wealthy they are, or how free and just their society may be.

The classic statement of existential exile appears in the biblical story of the Garden of Eden. Taken as a statement of literal truth, the story describes existential exile as understood in traditional theistic systems such as rabbinic Judaism; taken as an allegorical myth, the story points to a description of existential exile that is congenial to the thinking of many modern religionists.

According to the literal interpretation, Adam and Eve live in the Garden of Eden in a totally dependent situation. The miracle-working God who has created them takes care of their every need. As a result of his care, Adam and Eve enjoy perfect security. "And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:9). Still, there was a condition attached to living in Eden: perfect obedience to God. "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die'" (Gen. 2:16, 17). Adam and Eve were unable to resist temptation, however; they disobeyed God's commandment not to eat of the tree and thereby incurred the divine disfavor. As a consequence, they were expelled from

Eden and exiled from the state of meaningful existence they enjoyed when living in God's grace. Outside Eden, Adam and Eve discover their lives are empty and melancholy. Finite existence without infinite divine care is pervaded by insecurity, anxiety, and despair. Eve bears children in pain; Adam labors to live; and both are doomed to die. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19).

UNDERSTOOD as an allegorical myth, the story is stripped of its supernaturalism. The Garden of Eden represents the period of infancy, in which the human person lives in innocence, without knowledge of his finite condition. His needs are cared for by parental figures, who, to his infantile consciousness, appear as divine, all-powerful gods. The infant finds his passive, protected condition "Eden,"—*eden* being the Hebrew word for pleasure. Still, man cannot remain in Eden forever. The inherent, inevitable process of growth forces man out of infancy, into adolescent and adult awareness. Man has now eaten of the tree of knowledge and becomes aware of his finite condition. He is conscious of insecurity, aloneness, and death. The negative moods produced by this knowledge destroy the pleasure of his innocent, infantile existence, and thus, by gaining knowledge, man has become exiled from Eden.

Whichever of these two interpretations of the story of Eden is accepted, one fundamental point can be agreed upon. This is that man is confronted with problems that keep him from a meaningful life which cannot be resolved by living in any particular country, or otherwise satisfying material needs. These problems result rather from the finite structure he possesses by his very nature. It has been the fundamental purpose of the Jewish religious enterprise through the ages to redeem the Jew, not from territorial exile, but from existential exile. Territorial exile, physical separation from the land of Israel, has been of significance only to the degree that it has represented or been an aspect of existential exile. It has been of only derivative importance to the Jews to return to the land of Israel; it has been of primary importance to redeem themselves from the exile imposed upon man by the limitations of his finite existence. This point can be clearly illustrated by referring again to the rabbinic system of Judaism.

After the expulsion from Eden, according to rabbinic Judaism, man lived in a state of existential exile. This exile was caused not by the fact that Adam lived physically outside of Eden, but by the loss of God's grace. In the state of grace, the infinite God cared for every need created by man's finite nature and provided him with perfect security. Having lost the divine favor, man is condemned to meet existence alone. Beset by his limitations, he toils meaninglessly in sorrow and anguish until death finally overtakes him. Yet despite human disobedience, God did not abandon his divine intention in creating Adam to bring man to salvation, the state of intrinsically meaningful existence. Through Abraham and Jacob God brought into being the Jewish people and chose them to lead mankind back to divine favor. The mission of the Jews was to bring final and eternal salvation to man. To this end, God exercised a special providence over the Jews. He bestowed upon them the gift of prophecy and, in the revela-



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tion to Moses at Mount Sinai, the Torah, containing the commandments God wished the Jews and mankind to obey, was handed down. In addition, as a special mark of favor, God gave to the Jews the land of Israel.

YET despite the revelation of the Torah, and the gift of Israel, the exile which had begun with the expulsion from Eden had not yet ended. In the exile from Eden mankind had lost God's perfect grace and became subject to death. This was still man's condition. But with the revelation to Moses, the potential for the redemption of man from existential exile was now present. For by observing the Torah man could once again gain eternal life. The Jews, however, were not grateful for the special providence God had extended to them. They disobeyed the Torah and engaged in repeated acts of rebellion against Him. Not only did this deepen their existential exile by estranging them further from God, but brought them territorial exile as well. As a punishment for their disobedience, and as a symbol of their existential exile, God destroyed the Temple and expelled the Jews from the land of Israel.

Thus, according to rabbinic Judaism, the exile of the Jews continues until the present day. The mere fact that Jews live freely in Israel under Jewish political sovereignty in no wise affects or nullifies their true exile. For the true exile of the Jews is existential, not territorial. It is separation from a state of grace, and from the intrinsically meaningful state grace brings, rather than separation from a place. Return to a geographic location does not of itself affect existential exile.

Only when such inherent problems of finite human existence as aloneness and death are resolved, so that meaningful existence is absolutely secure, will the real exile of the Jews come to an end. This will occur when the Jews and mankind are once again restored to divine favor. Although some differences appear in rabbinic Judaism regarding the details of this deliverance, it is generally understood in the following way. History, as we know it, will come to an end. The beginning of the end will be signalled by the coming of the Messiah. At that time the resurrection of the dead will take place and all the Jews will be miraculously returned to Israel. Final judgment will be rendered; the just will be rewarded and the wicked will be punished. At the conclusion of the Messianic age, all men will die again, the universe will disappear, and the pious will be rewarded with eternal life in the World to Come. The existential exile in which mankind has existed since Adam's expulsion from Eden will now be ended. Man will have become infinite, and the problem of meaningful existence generated by the negative moods of his finite condition will be no more. It is significant to note that in rabbinic Judaism neither the means of overcoming existential exile nor the redemption itself essentially involves the land of Israel. The means whereby the exile is overcome is obedience to the Torah, which can take place outside Israel, and the actual redemption consists of eternal life in the World to Come.

FOR many Jews of our age, the rabbinic view of man's redemption from his finite condition is incredible in its literal form and fails, therefore, to provide any relevant solutions. Still, this view can serve as a myth that points symbolically to the depth of the human situation. Thus the judgment that man's fundamental problem is his finite condition and that he exists in existential exile until he comes to terms with it can be recognized as valid. Hence the fundamental question that arises for many contemporary Jews is how to cope with the meaninglessness produced by finite existence without recourse to the mythological beliefs of the past. The answer slowly emerging is that the negative moods generated by the finite condition can be overcome by a combination of maturation and resignation. The roots of this view in historical Jewish religious experience are found in biblical writings such as Ecclesiastes rather than in the rabbinic view of salvation. In the rabbinic view, as we have seen, man is redeemed from the meaninglessness of his finite condition by becoming infinite. Through right belief and action, man who is subject to death gains the reward of resurrection and eternal life. In the biblical view referred to, man accepts his finite situation as coming of necessity from the ground of being. Whatever the reason, the divine ground cannot sustain human life for more than a limited time, or so fashion man that he can exist without problems in that brief period. Man must leave Eden, not by reason of divine punishment, but by reason of divine necessity. Still, man can make the life he does have meaningful despite its limitations. To do so he must resign himself to accept with full being his finite nature. He must, so to speak, desire to be what he truly is. Once this act of resignation has taken place, the life man does have, albeit finite, is experienced as good. This view is expressed in the following verses taken from the third chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

I know that there is nothing good for men but to be glad and to enjoy themselves while they live. Indeed, if any man eats and drinks and enjoys himself in all his work, it is a gift from God. . . . For there is one fate for both man and beast—the same fate for them; as the one dies, so dies the other; the same breath is in all of them, and man has no advantage over the beast; . . . All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all return to the dust. . . . So I saw that there is nothing better than that man should rejoice in his work, since that is his lot; for who can bring him to see what shall be after him?

We have distinguished between two concepts: territorial exile and existential exile. These notions take on concrete meaning when translated into the everyday language of Jewish life. A Jew lives in territorial exile when he lives outside the State of Israel and wishes to dwell in Israel. A Jew lives in existential exile if, owing to his finite condition, his existence is threatened with meaninglessness. Theoretically, these two concepts of exile are not mutually exclusive. Both can be

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affirmed at the same time. Certainly this has been the case among the Jews since long before the Common Era, although the primacy of existential exile was, of course, deeply established. Nevertheless, despite the compatibility of these two concepts of exile, a conflict between them has developed that threatens to rise to the forefront of the difficulties confronting the Jewish world. This conflict arises from the gradual expansion of the notion of territorial exile to the point where it has begun to dominate the meaning of "Jewishness." Whereas existential exile has historically been the fundamental Jewish problem, territorial exile is today becoming the fundamental Jewish problem. And similarly, whereas redemption from existential exile by resolving the problem of finitude has historically been the fulfillment of "being Jewish," redemption from territorial exile by living in or concentrating on Israel is becoming the fulfillment of the Jewish identity. This situation, I believe, is unfortunate, and fraught with grave consequences for the future.

THE reasons for the substitution of territorial exile for existential exile as the principal motif of Jewish life are not difficult to discover. These are a few that come to mind:

1. Confronting existential exile is difficult. It is far more pleasant to avoid problems such as death than to face their inevitability. A Judaism that deals effectively with existential exile cannot help but probe deeply into the limits of existence, and thereby force men to an intensified awareness of their finite situation. We have, consequently, an inherent desire to escape from a consciousness of existential exile.

2. Territorial exile serves as a convenient way of handling Jewishness without confronting existential exile. Moreover, as a form of exile itself, it serves as a tangible object upon which to project in disguised form the elusive, deeper problems of finite existence. It is, for example, simpler and less painful for a person to attribute feelings of loneliness to the fact that he is a minority member of society than to his being ultimately alone in an infinite universe.

3. Israel has brought new glory, glamour, and status to the name Jew. It is satisfying, therefore, for many Jews to identify as closely as possible with the purposes of the State of Israel. Consequently, redemption from territorial exile, which is a fundamental Zionist ideal, is taken as the fundamental Jewish ideal as well.

4. Perhaps the most significant reason for the growing focus upon the concept of territorial redemption among the Jews is this. Redemption from existential exile is essentially a religious activity, and as such is carried on primarily by the Jewish religious institutions. The ideology almost universally employed by these institutions to deal with existential exile is the traditional belief and symbolism system, or some modification of this system. Yet this traditional ideology has become increasingly incompetent in our time to deal with the fundamental problems raised by existential exile. For many modern Jews, the traditional beliefs are incredible and the rituals irrelevant. And although new beliefs and rituals

are now being proposed, the religious institutions remain predominantly committed to the traditional procedures. The result is that many Jews simply do not have a "Jewish" way to deal with existential exile. There is nothing for them recognizably Jewish that enables them to cope authentically with their finite situation. In seeking to discover some meaning for their Jewish identity, then, they move naturally to a preoccupation with territorial exile and Israel as the ultimate concerns of the Jews. Ironically enough, due to flagging interest by their memberships in religious activities, the religious institutions themselves have become major proponents of the concept of territorial redemption as the principal purpose of the Jewish religious enterprise.

IF the preoccupation with territorial redemption should continue to dominate the Jewish world and, particularly, the Jewish religious institutions, it is difficult to see the continued survival in the future of the Jewish religious enterprise or of a Jewry outside Israel. The reason for this is not Israel, but the general situation of religion at this point in the history of human development. Modern man, as is becoming more and more evident, cannot accept the traditional religious ideologies handed down from the past. Consequently, the Jewish religious enterprise, if it is to be made appropriate to the modern Jew, will require a massive re-creation. This will not be done so long as territorial redemption is our principal interest and the resources of world Jewry are devoted primarily to Israel. The judgment of the historical Jewish experience that redemption from existential exile rather than territorial redemption must be the fundamental purpose and fulfillment of the Jewish identity is, I believe, sound. A concern for territorial redemption is simply not adequate justification for a significant non-Israeli Jewishness. This is not to say that territorial redemption is never of importance to the Jews. It has been of critical importance in recent times for the Jews of Europe and Africa, and will continue to have major importance for Jews in countries like Russia. But for Jews not in territorial exile, and clearly most Jews in the Western world are not, an ideology of territorial redemption is of no real value in coping with their basic problems, the problems of existential exile. The need of the modern Jew for a competent ideology with which to deal with his finite condition is rapidly growing in intensity. The failure of traditional religion has left a morbid empty space in the lives of many people today and has deepened the terrors of existential exile. The widespread use of drugs and other immature behavior to appease the negative moods of the finite condition are symptomatic of this failure. If the Jewish religious enterprise does not respond to the desperate need for a new ideology of redemption from existential exile, we must then expect Jews to go where they can receive such an ideology. Territorial exile can be of critical importance, but it is never of fundamental importance.

If the priorities of world Jewry are changed, and redemption from existential exile once again occupies first rank, will

this weaken the State of Israel? I should think the opposite would be the case. When, hopefully, Israel gains peace and security in the not too distant future, the intense interest of many Jews in Israel will certainly fade. For most Jews, the preoccupation with territorial redemption and Israel has been dependent upon the recurring Middle East crises. A Jewishness that is based upon concern for the survival of Israel will be irrelevant when the survival of Israel is assured. But a Jewishness that finds its meaning in redemption from existential exile will be relevant so long as man is man. Such a Jewishness alone, therefore, would always keep Israel in our hearts and minds. For in the Jewish religious consciousness, the land of Israel will always remain the revered symbol par excellence of the ultimate human drama, exile, and redemption.



THREE HUNDRED YEARS OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY: *The intimate intertwining of Jewish influence in the history of the United States is portrayed in the various elements of this stained glass window. These include: A letter from George Washington to the rabbi of the Touro (R.I.) Synagogue, "May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants. . ."; a map of the thirteen colonies with the dates of the earliest settlement of Jews in each; Jewish immigrants arriving in America; and a picturization of the march of American Jewry from pioneer days onward. A vine bearing three clusters of grapes suggests the varied and fruitful development of Jewish religious life and institutions in the United States.*