

The Concept of Return in Zionist Ideology

This essay was written by Dr. Faisal Daraj, in connection with the new mass immigration of Soviet Jews to occupied Palestine.

Since the revelation of the danger of the immigration of Soviet Jews to Palestine, the reaction in the Arab world has been one of fear in the face of an unexpected surprise. But the fact of the matter is that this new onslaught is far from being a surprise, because the concept of immigration to Palestine is a basic theoretical and practical component of Zionist ideology, if not the most decisive one. This situation illustrates the distinction between the alertness and consistency of the Zionist position on the one hand, and the naivete and brittleness of the Arab position on the other - a distinction that is worthy of contemplation.

The concept of immigration in the Zionist ideology takes on different forms. It appears as a reflection of religious consciousness, loyalty to Jewish history, and the way to the liberation and salvation of the Jewish people. It begins with the myth of the «Promised Land» - the only place where the Jews will ever be liberated from their worldly troubles. The «Promised Land» is God's gift to the Jews, and if God gives such a gift, it must be cherished, or his wrath will be evoked. Thus, yearning for the «Promised Land» serves two purposes: belonging to a special homeland and fulfilling God's will. Inversely, separation from the «Promised Land» is God's punishment in as much as it means depriving «the chosen people» of the «Promised Land». Hence, the myth of the Jew who has lost his soul because of detachment from the homeland. Accordingly, the restoration of his soul requires repatriation to the lost land. In this view, the return of the Jews to the «Promised Land» is a basic condition for their material and religious existence.

In the Zionist frame of reference, the history of the Jews is the history of their misery because of detachment from the homeland and longing for it. Thus, they are not worthy of affiliation to their history unless they experience misery and longing simultaneously, making «Next year in Jerusalem» a perpetual cause and justification for their existence. Thus, being Jewish means constantly returning to this spiritual and ideological experience and its relationship to the original root-the «Promised Land.» In Zionist ideology, the existential experience of the Jews is determined by two components: alienation and diaspora. Alienation is viewed as diminution, and diaspora as deprivation and the continuous quest for the lost paradise. This leads to the conclusion that Jews can only realize the conditions for their Jewishness through their belief in the necessity of return, and working towards its achievement. This doctrinaire theological consciousness necessitates specific educational and cultural principles to produce a Jewish consciousness which is in harmony with

its source as well as its destiny. Deviation from this innate spiritual experience is viewed as an act of heresy which erodes the Jews' uniqueness. This theological consciousness glorifies isolation and warns against assimilation.

Zionist ideology takes its point of departure in religious roots which quickly dissipate and become shrouded in different cloaks; religious consciousness is transformed into religious ideology which, in turn, is subordinated to a dominant ideology. Zionism, which conceals politics behind religion, and militarism behind piety. Zionism, as a contrived ideology, is constantly alternating between the secular and the religious. The slogan of «Greater Israel» is a political slogan which fulfills the ambitions of the Zionist movement. However, justifying and substantiating this slogan requires the evocation of Jewish religion and culture, whereby realizing one's Jewishness is to be attained through land annexation. Annexation satisfies both the fundamentalists and those who reject religion and resort instead to a fraudulent interpretation of history and culture. Hence, both the Zionist «left» and right advocate immigration and settlement, ignoring the rights of the Palestinian people.

By interlocking the Jews' liberation with their repatriation to their lost holy land, Zionism made immigration into a perpetual enterprise. It also led Israel to refuse to define its geographical borders. Israel does not abide by a geographic gauge, but by the spiritual energy of the Jews in the diaspora, since coming to the «Promised Land» is considered the divine right of every Jew everywhere. Concurrently, there is the idea that the «Promised Land» will not assume its true dimension until it embraces all the Jews of the world. Ben Gurion made this point emphatically when he described Israel as part of the Middle East only in a geographical sense. This accentuates the Zionist strategy which is constantly being adapted in proportion to the number of Jews that can be incorporated in the «land of their ancestors.» The geographic factor has no value, because it changes as political and demographic realities change. Ben Gurion's statement is in line with the classical Zionist doctrine which gave birth to the slogan of «reclaiming the homeland» which is awaiting its «lost people.» This slogan spawned two basic laws in Israel: The first is the Law of Return which aims at bringing to Israel all the Jews of the diaspora; the second is the Law of Government Education for making «the Jewish culture flourish in the motherland.» The relationship between these two laws is clear: Jews must be inculcated with an education which satisfies the needs of the Zionist movement. Israel does not address only those Jews in Israel, but