

AMERICAN JEWS, ISRAEL'S IMAGE, ON DIALOGUE AGENDA

By RICHARD COHEN
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REHOVOTH, Israel -- How to insure the survival of the American Jewish community and strengthen Israel's image abroad dominated the American-Israel Dialogue at its closing session.

Some 30 American Jewish and Israeli scholars and community leaders ended four days of discussion at the annual symposium sponsored by the American Jewish Congress in the Weizmann Institute here.

Professor David Landes, historian of Harvard University, warned that some of the brightest and most idealistic of American Jewish youth were either indifferent or hostile to Judaism and Israel.

"It is ironic if not tragic," he said, "that so many young Jews appear totally unaware that the noble ideals of social justice, human brotherhood and peace to which they are so committed stem from the same Jewish tradition they hold in disdain." He added:

"The challenge before American Jewry -- if it is not to lose a large and valuable segment of today's younger Jewish generation -- is to teach its children that the universal causes in which they are so involved represent an authentic expression of true Judaism."

Paul Berger of Washington, D.C., lawyer and chairman of the American Jewish Congress Commission on Law and Social Action, observed that many American Jews were asking, "Survival for what?"

"American Jews -- not only today's college generation -- are deeply concerned with the quality of life and equality of rights for all

citizens," he said. "Jewishness is regarded, in part at least, as a way of resolving these problems by many of us."

Referring to proposals by some Israeli Dialogue participants that American Jews "turn inward" and concentrate on their Jewishness per se, Mr. Berger declared:

"If we must ignore the vital issues of our day in order to survive as Jews, what is the purpose of Jewish survival?"

Mr. Berger was joined by Rabbi Israel Dresner of Wayne, N.J. and Rabbi Myron Fenster of Roslyn, N.Y., who argued that Jews could not withdraw from American society by abandoning their efforts for the common good.

Carl Gershman of New York, chairman of the Youth Committee for Peace and Democracy in the Middle East, added:

"The strengthening of group identity cannot be achieved in isolation from the rest of the community, whether it be attempted by Jews or blacks in America or by Oriental Jews in Israel."

Professor Irving Louis Horowitz, sociologist of Rutgers University, proposed three "low-risk changes in Israel's priorities" as a way of improving understanding of Israel's policies and positions among young American Jews and New Leftists. He stated:

"First, Israel must publicize far more effectively than it has until now the depth and range of its commitment to Third World nations in Africa and Asia, as exemplified by its extensive scientific and technical aid programs.

"Second, Israel must settle the incendiary issue of freedom of conscience by ending the Orthodox monopoly of the country's religious life. Unless this is done, the flow of immigrants from both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. will dry up because too many of them will fail to meet the Orthodox definition of who is a Jew.

"Third, Israel must step up its efforts to close the economic and social gap between its Western and Oriental citizens."

On the issue of integration of Jews from Arab lands into Israel, Professor Shlomo Shohan, criminologist of Tel Aviv University, urged that the problem be approached "not on the basis of ethnic identification but on the basis of human need."

He said he was not so pessimistic on the issue as another Israeli Dialogue participant -- "peace pilot" Abie Nathan -- who warned that Israel's social problems were approaching a level of seriousness as urgent as the country's security problem.

"Israel's integration problem," Professor Shohan said, "must be dealt with both in ethnic and economic terms. Money for housing, for job training and for education is needed, but money alone will not solve the problem of cultural integration.

"Time is even more important -- time for more Oriental young men and women to attend university, time for more to complete their Army training with its educational and assimilation program, time for the rising percentage of marriages between Ashkenazi and Oriental Jews to go even higher. We have learned in Israel, to our pain, that overnight cultural integration schemes don't work, and that artificial efforts to promote integration are doomed to failure."



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