

# In Mourning For A Modern David

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WASHINGTON - The blue and white flag with the double triangle of the Star of David flies at half mast outside the Israeli Embassy here -- in mourning for a modern David.

There are at his request no further observances, or a state funeral. Twenty five years ago, when David Ben Gurion was obliged to make the final decision as to whether to name the new nation Israel (Instead of Zion, or Judea) his aversion to pomp was such that he had to be persuaded to wear a necktie as he proclaimed the Independence of Israel.

It was supposed to be a secret meeting there in the museum on Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv, on the fifth day of the Month of Iyar, or May 14, 1948.

But when the diminutive man with the flaring tufts of white hair arrived in a rented American automobile, there were cheering crowds.

Just ten miles North of Tel Aviv on the road to Haifa, the United Nations' partition of Palestine had left the Jewish settlement with a corridor only 12 miles wide and an ideal objective by which the armies of six Arab nations could cut the new nation in half.

Only twenty minutes

drive to the Southeast -- at the present site of Tel Aviv's Lod International Airport, the Arabs were in Lydda and Ramle. The heavy artillery and armor of Transjordan's crack Arab Legion, as well as the Spitfires and heavy bombers of the Egyptian Air Force were warming up, the latter for a bombing run on Tel Aviv that same night. The Israeli Air Force consisted of Piper Cubs.

Only the previous day had the National Council (which, as the British evacuated, had succeeded the Jewish Agency for Palestine) after heated debate, voted to proclaim independence -- in a narrow and disputed 6 to 4 vote.

Ben Gurion finished his rewriting of this proclamation only hours before the ceremony took place, under two Israeli flags and a large photograph of Viennese journalist Theodore Herzl, the founder of Zionism.

The leaders of nations with a population of 40 million Arabs had threatened that if the 600,000 Jews tried to proclaim themselves a nation, they would be promptly driven into the sea.

Despite such threats, Ben Gurion rapped the gavel and in a voice husky with emotion began reading the first Jewish Declaration of Independence since Judah



1886 - 1973

Maccabee defeated the Syrians two centuries before Christ.

"The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people..." read this usually fiery debater in an unusually quiet tone -- which everyone could hear due to the silence which accompanies history in the making.

He had no sooner completed his reading of this climax of two millennia of Jewish hope, than the crowd of 200 realized that somehow others had been gathered with them, upstairs, seated unnoticed in a room just off the museum's auditorium.

It was the Jewish Philharmonic Orchestra. And the audience wept as they heard the hauntingly beautiful strains of the Zionist anthem "Hatikva" ("The Hope").

Three years ago, as one

of the highest points of eight years as a professional journalist, I had the privilege of an exclusive interview with this combination of George Washington and Moses.

His secretary told me it was the longest interview that Israel's first Prime Minister had allowed in five years. Perhaps this was because we talked primarily about religion.

Original questions were promptly lost as he roared off on a dozen fascinating and historic tangents.

He reminisced with gratitude that it was a devout Christian, British Army officer Orde Wingate, who helped him and Chaim Weizmann set up plans for the modern state of Israel. Moreover this mystical genius at guerrilla warfare, who was to die after achieving

world fame in Burma, helped Ben Gurion set up the forerunner of Israel's army, known originally as the Haganah.

Ben Gurion also spoke admiringly of St. Paul, of whose writings he was an apt student. "I consider that St. Paul built Christianity, because he was the great assimilator," commented the Israel leader whom I recall one reform rabbi as having described as greater than Moses, having assimilated Jews in Israel from so many nations.

"I first read the New Testament in Greek and there is one letter -- to the Corinthians -- that ought to be part of Hebrew literature, too: but most Christian Bibles translate the critical word 'charity' instead of 'love,'" he said.

Regarding his religious beliefs, the 85 year-old patriarch, whose mind was unblemished by age, explained:

"I believe -- I am certain -- there is a God, although I agree with Spinoza that matter and spirit are the same thing -- which I suppose means pantheism. I don't know if there is an after life, I think there is. There is certainly order in the world, so who made it?"

From here the conversation turned to his wife Paula, who had just died. Paula Ben Gurion was, from all reports, magnificent -- an essential in his life whose death left him bereft.

One does not easily imagine tears in the eyes of either a prophet or a prime minister. But they were there in his eyes as he spoke of her. She was first mentioned as we discussed

the fact that some of the greatest things in the world are beyond proof -- such, I ventured, as his being unable to prove he loved his wife.

"Ah," he replied, his voice becoming husky, "but there was every kind of evidence!"

He remembered her weeping when he left, during World War I, to join the Jewish Legion in the British Army -- the training ground for many of Israel's generals in later years.

He recalled that when they were married, "I had to cancel a meeting of Zionists -- and we had to look for a hoopa -- and we had to pay a fee to New York's City Hall in order to get married!"

He also recalled with gratitude her leaving the comforts of the new world to come to the rigors of Palestine -- and much later in life, how she went back with him from the Prime Minister's quarters to a desert Kibbutz, where last week he was buried next to her.

"There may be creations a thousand times bigger and more sensible than human beings," he said to me as I rose to say goodbye, "but this is nothing in comparison to God."

While he acknowledged that there is no proof of life after death, there was little doubt that the possibility of reunion with such a woman as his wife Paula is of utmost importance in David Ben Gurion's concept of the greatness of God.

For as one of his fellow Jews wrote:



"We shall not all sleep -- we shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye..." That (St. Paul) and another (St. John) who wrote: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

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