

Chaim Weizmann Centenary

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Chaim Weizmann was the greatest Jew of the twentieth century. Sir Isaiah Berlin describes him as "the first totally free Jew of the modern world, and the State of Israel was constructed...in his image. No man has ever had a comparable monument built to him in his own lifetime."

He was born on November 27, 1874 in the town of Motel in Russia and died as President of the State of Israel on November 9, 1952 in his home on the campus of The Weizmann Institute of Science, named for him, and its first President.

Chaim Weizmann always characterized himself as a scientist "who has devoted much of his life to the practical problems of the Jewish people."

He spoke always of the Jewish people. He never said Israel or Israelis. To him, world Jewry and the Jewish State were an integral entity. He himself represented a Jewish nationalism that was always global. He would have disliked everything that is tolerant of expediency.

Weizmann himself summarized his philosophy in his inaugural address before the Knesset when he was elected first President of the State of Israel. He said:

"First, let us strive to strengthen our constructive resources of science and research which are the basis of human achievement. Yet, for all the decisive importance of science, it is not by science alone that we shall win through. Let us build a new bridge between science and the spirit of man. "Where there is no vision the people perish." We have seen what scientific progress leads to when it is not inspired by moral vision -- the atomic bomb threatening to destroy the entire planet. All my life I have labored to make science and research the basis of our national endeavor. But I have always known full well that there are values higher than science. The only values that offer healing for the ills of humanity are the supreme values of justice and righteousness, peace and love." No more prescient words could have been spoken.

When I saw him shortly before he died, he talked about science, about freedom of inquiry, about the sacredness of work for its own sake, and not for the sake of some trivial award. In his last moments, characteristically, his dual concern remained national morality and the universal scope of science.

In announcing Dr. Weizmann's death, Prime Minister David Ben Gurion paid him this tribute: "Dr. Weizmann wore two crowns -- the crown of statesmanship and the crown of learning. He was at once the acknowledged leader of our people and one of the foremost men of science of his generation. He was the first citizen of Israel. He symbolized our nation's renaissance."

The New York Times called him "One of the titans of this century... During his lifetime of 77 years, he combined the three careers

of scientist, statesman and teacher, any one of which would have been sufficient for world renown...

"That he had intellect of the highest order, there can be no doubt. The high quality of his scientific achievement establishes him as an outstanding figure of our time in chemistry and related fields. But intellect alone does not explain Chaim Weizmann, for in him there were also tenacity, courage, kindness, vision and loyalty -- all attributes he displayed to the full on innumerable occasions....

"By any criterion one chooses, Chaim Weizmann was one of the great and formative figures of today's world. His death is a loss for all humanity."

There has been a tendency -- sometimes unconscious, sometimes deliberate and contrived -- to confine Weizmann's political creativity to the Balfour Declaration and the succeeding two decades, while implying that he was a mere spectator of the foundation of Israel.

In the autumn of his life, he was the decisive figure in some of Israel's most formative

moments: the creation of the Jewish Brigade; the Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly on Partition (29 November 1947); the inclusion of the Negev in Israel's borders; and the recognition of Israel by President Harry S. Truman, which became the foundation of the present partnership between America and Israel.

Chaim Weizmann cast the spell of his personality far and wide across the world.

Nobody can understand Israel's present or probe its future without looking deeply into its roots in the past. At this cruel moment in their journey, as they mark the 100 anniversary of Chaim Weizmann's birth, Israelis would do well to look back toward the content, spirit and style of Weizmann's statesmanship. Any spark of it today, however small, would do much to illuminate the future path.

Gov. Mike O'Callaghan and Jimmy Durante were named 1974 "Man of the Year" designees by Nate Mack B'nai B'rith Lodge. They will be hosted at a dinner Sunday, November 3rd, at the Tropicana.

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