

# THE AMERICAN JEW: AN AMERICAN AND A JEW

By DAVID BALCH

**C**AN the American Jew be loyal to both Israel and America?

Simply and without a doubt, the answer is yes. There is no contradiction between being a good Jew and a good American. But the issues raised by this question are complex. They require an understanding of American democracy as well as our own role as Jews in America. A thorough examination of the issues involved is necessary for two reasons.

Most importantly, we Jews must appreciate our relationship to America in order to preserve our identity as Jews. Secondly, anti-Semites, who tell lies about Jews, charging us with disloyalty to the United States, must be answered. Lies must always be answered. We cannot afford to be inactive, for Jew-haters will only take heart by our silence.

Let us begin with a historical view of the Jew and his place in society. After the destruction of the Temple by the Romans, the Jewish nation was driven from its land, scattered among the other nations of the earth. We became a nation in exile. As a people, we were commanded not to forget Israel. The prophecy of our Scriptures foretold our return to Zion. This is why Jews face toward Jerusalem when praying. Jews have never forgotten their historic and prophetic bond to Israel. Each year, no matter where we find ourselves, the Passover prayer is, "Next year in Jerusalem."

As Jews, we understand the suffering of other Jews. This is why we must support, by whatever means, the struggle of Syrian and Soviet Jewry to have the option of return to Israel or to immigrate to free lands of their choice.

With the establishment of the State of Israel following the Holocaust, the land promised to our Fathers, possessed by our ancestors, and pioneered by our modern Zionists, once again became the physical center of Jewish life. We who are fortunate enough to live in a democracy like the United States cannot forget our brethren, wherever they are.

How then do we answer our enemies, who charge the Jew with owing allegiance to a foreign power (Israel) and disloyalty to the United States? Two hundred years ago George Washington, the father of the United States of America, in a letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, answered this slander for us. He wrote: "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, while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid." What Washington was saying, drawing on our prophet Micah, is that people are different; and in America, a society drawing its citizens from different racial, ethnic, and religious stock, these differences must be respected. Everyone has a right to be himself. If a Jew stops being a Jew, he becomes a man alone, a man without identity.

It is the creed of democratic America that individuality be protected and encouraged. Only a dictatorship asks its people to give up the freedom to be themselves. It isn't just the Jew who longs to keep his identity. Look at any other ethnic minority in America. Italian-Americans identify with Italy. Black-Americans call themselves Afro-Americans, Afro referring to the continent of Africa with which they choose to identify. Puerto Ricans, also Americans, maintain strong ties to Puerto Rico. Many Cuban-Americans claim dual nationality as Americans and Cubans. No one rightfully can accuse these minorities of disloyalty to America, just as it is unfair to condemn the Jew for his love of Israel and fellow Jews.

It was not until the time of the American and French Revolutions that Jews were granted the right of citizenship. Before then, we were strictly outsiders in other peoples' countries. It is not by accident that the Jew had to wait for the coming of the democratic revolutions for citizenship in Western society. A democracy recognizes that one may be loyal to more than one thing at a time. You have family loyalty, for instance. It is only in a dictatorship that the individual is expected to inform on his relatives and abandon his people. In a democracy it is understood that loyalty is not absolute. An individual may also be loyal to his family, his religion, and his people. No thought or conscience control can be exercised in a free and open society such as ours. The United States Constitution, a remarkable document, was inspired in large part by our Biblical Law. In the United States a man may hold dual citizenship — may be both a citizen of the U.S. and of another democracy. Our Government sees no conflict in this.

It is an undeniable fact of history that whenever a country has treated its Jewish population as equals, Jews have responded with loyalty and good deeds. American Jewry has contributed to the American way of life in every possible way through the arts, sciences, professions, and public services. America has borrowed from our ancient culture to strengthen its moral framework. America, like Israel, is a country of law, and no man is above the law.

Israel, like the United States, tries to do the right thing. This does not mean she always succeeds. Neither does the great power of America always succeed. There is no doubt that Israel would always be on the side of the United States in any foreseeable world conflict. But it is also conceivable that the United States' world interests might not always be the same as the interests of Israel at any given time. In the final analysis, America would always use all of its great power to protect the existence of the tiny democracy in the Middle East. Still, governments, like people, may sometimes use bad judgement in spite of good intentions. One good reason

(ANYONE WHO HAS VISITED DISNEYLAND'S "CHILDREN'S WORLD," WITH THE SYNCHRONIZATION OF "IT'S A SMALL WORLD," DRUMMED OVER AND OVER AGAIN, CANNOT BE OTHERWISE BUT IMPRESSED THAT THE CHILDREN OF ALL COUNTRIES ARE ONE AND THE SAME. HERE, FROM A MAGAZINE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, "WORLD OVER," IS A SIMPLE, STRAIGHTFORWARD EXPLANATION OF DEDICATED AMERICAN PATRIOTISM. WE HAD TO FIND A SPOT FOR THIS PIECE IN THIS ALL-IMPORTANT, SPACE-HUNGRY EDITION. J.T.)

why Jews must involve themselves in the American political process is to insure that the United States always takes the friendliest possible attitude toward Israel. It is only through the participation of citizens in a free society that democracy can survive.

The democratic principles of the United States Constitution, in a large sense, are derived from the Torah. The United States could not take a hostile stand against the Jewish people without the moral structure of this country collapsing. It would have to renounce its entire democratic tradition first. It is, therefore, precisely in the Jewish

interest to maintain a strong and democratic America.

There is no contradiction between being a loyal American and a loyal Jew. In fact, the American Jewish community has the unique opportunity and obligation to aid all other Jews throughout the world through its participation in the American political process — for instance, by supporting senators and representatives to the House who are friendly to the interests of the Jewish community. In America, the Jew, a loyal citizen, is free to help his fellow Jews.

Remember, we are Jews and we are proud.

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