

Koch Says Fate Of Every Jew Is Tied To Israel

By Dr. Gerald S. Nagel
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CITY HALL, New York — He's partly known for his directness and his ability to slice through hyperbole and pretense with a sharp tongue, quick wit and fingertip recall of facts. But on the subject of Israel, which he asserts all Jews must support such as through United Jewish Appeal/Federation Campaigns, New York's Mayor Edward I. Koch can also be philosophical.

In a special interview here with the UJA Press Service, Mayor Koch was uncharacteristically low-key, as he penetrated deeply beyond recent events to find underlying message of importance

to Jews everywhere.

His answers to many questions disclosed a well thought out, perceptive understanding of Jewish life. He is convinced that Israel's survival is critical to the fate of Jews everywhere; that criticism of Israel is often a cover for attacks on Jews; and that American Jews must financially aid Jews overseas -- even if they disagree with Israeli policies and are confronted by charitable needs at home.

The Mayor's commitment seemed strikingly beyond his interest in the votes of Jews as he seeks his third four-year term in November. He is far ahead in the polls.

"The absorption by Israel of Ethiopia's black Jews is the very raison d'etre for the existence of



KOCH VISITS ABSORPTION CENTER. New York's Mayor Edward I. Koch greets Ethiopian Jewish immigrants at the Mevasseret Zion Absorption Center near Jerusalem. Later, the Mayor told the UJA Press Service that the visit "made clear why support of UJA and Federation is very important -- because they fund these projects." He said American Jews should provide aid through the UJA/Federation Campaign despite disagreements with Israeli policies and needs at home.

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Israel," said Koch, looking relaxed and sitting in a black easy chair in his office. "No other country wants any Ethiopians, Jews or non-Jews. The only country willing to accept them, gladly, is Israel."

Koch found some symbolism about Israel's reason for being, on his most recent trip to Israel last month, at the Mevasseret Zion Absorption Center near Jerusalem. There, he met three children playing together: an Ethiopian boy who had fled to Israel for his life; a Moroccan boy whose family came after fearing a pogrom in Morocco; and an English girl whose family made aliyah (relocated to Israel) to fulfill a religious dream.

"They came for different reasons," the Mayor said. "Yet as Jews they all had a place to go. Israel should be available for those who want to live there, and for those who must live there because of persecution in the countries of their birth. If Israel had existed in the '30s and '40s, millions of Jews would have been saved."

"And they are all in this absorption center," he noted. "For me that was a very exciting visit. And it made clear why support of UJA and Federation is very important -- because they fund these projects."

"Today there are over 100 million Arabs thirsting for their blood and their land," Koch said, and criticism of Israel is often a ruse for anti-Semitism. Shiite Muslims, who had hijacked a TWA 727 near Athens June 14, spirited away passengers with Jewish-sounding surnames and did not only seek those with Israeli passports, he noted. "Some of them aren't Jews, and one is a Lutheran pastor," Koch pointed out. "And they're not Israelis. The hatred is directed at Jews. The fate of Jews worldwide is tied up with the fate of Israel."

This doesn't mean he agrees with every Israeli policy. In fact, as the man chiefly credited with bringing New York City from the precipice of bankruptcy to fiscal stability, he thinks Israelis can sacrifice still more to rebuild their economy. However, he doesn't think Israelis can sacrifice still more to rebuild their economy. However, he doesn't think aid should be contingent on particular policies. "Israel makes mistakes like everyone else," he said. "Israel is not above criticism. But all of us have an obligation to keep Israel strong. So I give to UJA, notwithstanding my criticism."

And you can play your role from afar. "I happen to love Israel, but I will never go on aliyah," said Koch, who is 60. "I think today Zionism means love of Israel, not a commitment to live in Israel."



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