

A New Year Message For 5746 From The President Of Israel, Mr. Chaim Herzog

The centrality of Israel and Jerusalem was emphasized during these summer months by the numerous international scientific, professional and communal gatherings of utmost distinction which have converged on our country. The World Congress of Jewish Studies has brought many hundreds of scholars from many lands to the Mount Scopus campus of Hebrew University. Thousands of young Jewish athletes came to participate in the Maccabiah Games. The 850th Anniversary of the Birth of Maimonides was celebrated in an international gathering which discussed Maimonides as a Jurist. The 50th Anniversary of the passing of the revered Chief Rabbi Avraham Hacoheh Kook has been the occasion for an international gathering devoted to his teachings and philosophy.

These vivid manifestations of the role of Israel in Jewish life have been a foretaste of the peaceful and inspiring future we hope to build. They may well serve as a corrective for the concern induced by so many negative factors in these troubled days and notably in Israel, beset by a difficult economic struggle, political uncertainties, the sporadic occurrences of terrorist attack and the dilemmas posed by counter-violence.

In the past year Israel has been ruled by a

Strengthening Democracy In Israel Called Most Important Task Of American Jews

NEW YORK — The most important task for the American Jewish community is "to help strengthen the undergirding of democracy in Israel," declared Leonard Fein at the United Nations seminar on Zionism sponsored by the International Council of B'nai B'rith (ICBB).

Fein, a professor at Dartmouth College and Columbia University and editor of Moment Magazine, said the bolstering is important "not because democracy is in immediate jeopardy, but to prevent it from falling into disrepute."

In response to a question whether Israel can remain a Jewish state and a democracy from one of the 140 persons attending the seminar, including some two dozen foreign ambassadors, Fein said only Rabbi Meir Kahane, a member of the Israeli Knesset, "puts the question that way." Fein added that Kahane's vision of Judaism "is manifestly hostile to democracy...He has already chosen a Jewish state over democracy."

The American Jewish scholar said that many Jews "are trying to see that Israel will never have to make this choice."

Stating that "the gravest sin of which Zionism can be accused is the sin of innocence," Fein said the question is not whether Zionism can be distorted, "but whether it contains within itself a redemptive vision of human possibility."

"The notion that this ancient people, so long excluded from the family of nations, should, as a matter of right, be accorded the chance to test its wisdom -- and, indeed, express its folly -- in a corner of its ancient homeland seems to me a perfectly respectable, indeed redemptive, notion."

"The fact that Zionism went still further, in its principal versions, and suggested that it was not enough merely to come home, it was necessary also to make home a special place, a model place, a place from which all might learn, is hardly a disturbing fact; it is, I believe, a fact to be praised, even if it remains a fact postponed."

Philip Lax, chairman of ICBB, told the meeting that Zionism originated "not as a racist ideology but as a reaction to the most virulent form of racism."

The claim to the land of Israel, he said, was not made because of its religious sanctity but because "it was the only national home Jews have ever known."

Government of National Unity combining the two main political elements in the country. There has been a tendency to focus on certain negative aspects in the functioning of the Government and to ignore the very positive results of the activity of such a Government. The very existence of the Government has tended to blunt the sharpness of the political debate in Israel and to create a greater measure of political tolerance than we have known in the past. Moreover, the Government has succeeded in completing the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from Lebanon, while taking measures necessary to guarantee the security of the towns and villages in the Galilee.

The past year has seen an alarming tendency on the fringes of our society to indulge in racist incitement which defies our tradition and our history. World Jewry will, we trust, rally behind the vast majority of our society in its struggle to maintain the democratic values on which the State of Israel is based. Without absolute deference to the rule of law and the rule of the courts, anarchy will prevail, mortally threatening our open democratic society, our spirit and our

future.

Israel is being tried in the balance, and so, too, Jewish communities everywhere. Their problems are basic - the problems of identity and assimilation; demographic survival; the transmission of Jewish education and tradition to younger generations. These are problems that cut close to the bone: on their solution depends nothing less than survival.

5746 is a year to be met with determination and intelligence and with gratitude for what has been achieved in the forty years since the new post-Nazi chapter of world and Jewish history opened. During those years Jewish sovereignty and independence have been reestablished in Israel; communities everywhere have been reactivated; we have made consummate efforts to understand and to organize ourselves, and to make of Israel and aliya central issues in our existence. In the light of the overpowering contrast between the devastation of forty years ago and the energies of today, we place our trust in the Rock of Israel and face 5746 with faith and hope.



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