

THE THIRD ERA OF JEWISH HISTORY: POWER AND POLITICS

A NEW ERA IN JEWISH HISTORY

We are at the threshold of the third great era of Jewish history. Each of the major eras has been inaugurated by major historical events. The Third Era is shaped by the impact of the Holocaust and the rebirth of the State of Israel, which have resulted in a four-fold transformation of the Jewish condition: (1) *politically*, through an essential change in the fundamental condition of the Jewish people from statelessness to power; (2) *theologically*, through a new Jewish self-understanding, i.e., a shattering of the covenant during the Holocaust and its renewal afterwards; (3) *communally*, through new leadership which is validated by its response to Israel and to the demands of power and Jewish renewal; (4) *structurally*, through new institutions which embody the values, and are especially adapted to serve the new needs of the community, e.g., political parties, federations, and Holocaust study centers.

The Biblical Era

The Exodus event and its implications were at the heart of the Jewish religion, nationhood, and self-understanding in the Biblical age. The never-ending challenge of this era was to maintain Jewish sovereignty and existence while trying to live by the covenantal values.

Externally, Israel's frail and vulnerable existence constantly was threatened by the mightier powers which sought to dominate the area around it, for the Promised Land's position as a geographic crossroads repeatedly made it the theatre of religious and political rivalries. Military, cultural and religious competition threatened to undermine the people's will to live as Jews, and their sense that the covenant was worth keeping.

The great internal challenge was to reconcile the needs of government and sovereignty with the covenantal demands to be a "holy people." Although they often clashed with realpolitik judgments, these demands could not be dispensed with. Without them, the preservation of the Jewish people and Jewishness was problematic and even, in the judgment of many, unnecessary. Thus, the needs of centralized political and priestly power clashed with those of relative tribal autonomy and the decentralized service of God. The realities of economy and diplomacy often led royal rulers to pursue policies that were excoriated by the prophets as betrayals of justice or faith values. While the prophets commanded: "Feed the hungry, release the slave, aid the homeless, the widow and the orphan," Israel's kings had to 'meet payrolls,' build fortifications and insure that powerful nobles were satisfied. The clash between these divergent interests was

never resolved—and never can be until a Messianic reality is established.

The Rabbinic Era

The destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. and the ensuing exile profoundly reshaped Jewry and Judaism, as Jews faced the challenge of powerlessness. Jewish survival was by no means assured; often it was eked out in a hostile world. Some historians have noted that since the Jews are as old as the Chinese people, there would be hundreds of millions of Jews today had we stayed on our own land. The huge demographic losses are due to exile, persecution and assimilation.

The internal challenge of powerlessness was to create a culture that preserved dignity and significance despite the nation's pariah existence. Jewish self-respect was maintained by messianic longing, which promised a better future, as well as by a day-to-day culture and religion that made life worth living. The resulting ethic tended to glorify martyrdom and political passivity, while insisting that the true mission of Israel as God's Chosen People or Suffering Servant would become manifest in the world to come or in the messianic days. Thus, Hannukah became the holiday of the miraculous oil discovery much more than the celebration of the military victories of the Maccabees. History becomes Ideals. Religious behavior determined outcome. Jerusalem fell because of the Jews' sins or because of *sinat chinam* (groundless hatred), not because of superior Roman armies. The Jewish tradition made powerlessness more bearable by giving consolation to suffering and encouragement to the weak. Remarkably, it also managed to preserve the memory of the old independence by incorporating (in Jewish liturgy) many allusions to Israel. While the tradition discouraged any activist attempt to regain rule, it made exile the focus of all that was wrong with the world, existentially and metaphysically. The dream of return remained vivid and strong, but for over 1800 years (with some significant exceptions) the Jews lacked the capability and political leverage to transform their condition. Under these circumstances, Jewish political theory and military strategy remained underdeveloped.

THE THIRD ERA

After almost two millenia, the Jewish people is again exercising sovereignty in its own land. In the Diaspora and Israel, the Jewish people have assumed responsibility for its own fate.

Medieval Jewry also took Jewish fate into its hands,

primarily through metaphysical effects of rituals and observances, repentance, and other forms of faithfulness to the covenant, and in the belief that such actions would bring the Messianic deliverer. Post-Holocaust Jewry has assumed responsibility for its own destiny in the arena of human history. Therefore, the great internal challenge of this era will be the exercise of power.

Third Era Judaism will be credible to the extent it can effectively exercise Jewish sovereignty while infusing it with Jewish values. Small wonder that many observant Jews in both the Diaspora and in Israel have great qualms about the all-too-human, all-too-compromising reality of an actual state. The rejection of the State by ultra-Orthodox Jews in part is an instinctive acknowledgment that *halakhah* (Jewish law) never before had to cope with the reality of Jewish power and an instinctive fear that for them, it may not be able to. For them, it would be better if the dream would remain a dream for a while longer. But almost all other Jews, both religious and secular, have come to understand that Jews must wield power in today's world.

POST-HOLOCAUST JEWS, THE CORRUPTION OF POWERLESSNESS, AND THE INESCAPABILITY OF POWER

For the Jewish people, the two-thousand year condition of powerlessness came to an end with the Holocaust. From that experience, Jews learned that power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely, but *absolute powerlessness corrupts even more*. European Jewry was nearly dealt a total death blow. The survivors—and in some sense, all Jews today—learned the bitter truth that unlimited terror frequently breaks the victims and robs them of dignity before destroying them. How many mothers, their love eroded by hunger, abandoned their children in the Warsaw Ghetto? Who can forget Elie Wiesel's portrait in *Night* of the son of Rabbi Eliahu, who abandoned his father during a freezing death march after three years of superhuman devotion? Or Meir beating his father, near death, for a scrap of bread?

Some have argued that the very concept of martyrdom was robbed of meaning when total force was available to kill every last Jew—even those who did not choose to be Jewish or to be martyrs. On the other hand, the rabbis of the Holocaust ruled that any Jew who was killed for the 'sin' of being a Jew died *al kiddush Ha-Shem* (for the sanctification of the Divine Name). By their very existence, all Jews represented in their living and dying everything that the Nazis felt had to be totally destroyed. Yet it is also clear that much self-sacrifice and many efforts at spiritual resistance were overwhelmed by the limitless slaughter. And when opportunities arose to save Jews by admitting

them to Palestine, by 'trading' them for trucks in Hungary or by bombing Auschwitz, little or nothing was done to save them—so powerless were Jews, so 'routine' their dying.

The Holocaust also reflects the potentially totalitarian nature of modern culture, which has created such extraordinary concentrations of power that the imbalance between victims and persecutors sometimes becomes total. In the 'bad' old days, Jews and other victims sometimes could be passive, bow their heads to the blows and survive. When hatred and individual anger were released and spent, the killings would stop. Jews might also flee from pogroms and crusades to another country or to another frontier.

The Talmud notes that The Holy One, blessed be He, did a kindness to Israel when He scattered the Jews among the nations, because when they are destroyed here, they survive there. In the twentieth century, the bureaucratic, impersonal nature of the killing system was inexhaustible. It could function until it ran out of victims. In modern culture, all borders are patrolled and all sovereign jurisdictions are closed to powerless victims.

Thus the Jewish people have learned that the right to a haven must be inalienable, and that this is possible only when Jews have sovereignty in their own state. Not coincidentally, one of the key forces working for Israel's establishment were Holocaust survivors who would only go to Israel, and who streamed there by legal and illegal methods before 1948, knowing they would be at home nowhere else. And one of the basic laws passed by the Israeli Knesset was the Law of Return, which guaranteed to every Jew the automatic right of entry and citizenship in the State of Israel.

Towards a Jewish Political Culture

While Jews are clustered in a high civic-participation group, and while the condition of marginality and potential danger undoubtedly has helped keep Jewish voting percentages high, the Jewish community is not experienced in the procedures and habits of political power. The challenge facing the community can be simply delineated. Jews must attain enough power, and exercise it well enough, to insure their security and survival in a world that has strong centers of anti-Semitism (e.g., Russia and many Arab countries). But given that power frequently corrupts, Jews must have sufficient cultural checks and internal controls to assure that Jewish power yields a just society for Jews and for others living with them.

If Jews fail to amass or exercise effectively sufficient military and economic power, and so are overwhelmed by their enemies, then Jewish existence is endangered. If Jews let power brutalize their culture or create an unjust

discriminatory system, then the basic values of that culture are betrayed, and the community's ability to maintain group loyalty may be seriously undermined.

What is a just and realistic exercise of power? To work in real power situations is to waive prophetic expectations. Prophets can rely on spiritual power and so make unequivocal demands for righteousness. Governments, especially those of beleaguered nations, have obligations to protect people. In Judaism, this involves calling on the *halakhic* resources of the tradition to judge specific situations and to reconcile conflicting claims. It means continually linking ultimate ends and proximate means, which cannot be done without involvement, partial failures and, at times, guilt.

The danger exists that American Jews, who lack the buck-stops-here considerations of sovereign governments, will play the righteous, prophetic role vis-a-vis Israel, i.e., hold it to an unreal moral standard, one it could live up to only by endangering its survival. Indeed, I would agree with Roy Eckardt that anyone who applies a special (even a higher) standard of morality to Israel is practicing anti-Semitism, especially in light of the ongoing threat to Israel's existence. This is not to deny Israel's merit in setting voluntarily a higher standard of exercising and restraining force, as it has done in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. But this is not always possible. In 1967-1977, the Arabs' control of Gaza refugee camps by terrorist tactics was broken by heavy-handed actions of the Israeli police and army. Yet afterwards, life was safer for the Arabs as well as for the Israelis. In this situation, then, the moral use of power consisted of using the least force necessary.

Continually inculcated with prophetic norms, Israel's kings and judges created the remarkable covenantal idea of power balanced by righteousness that made the Jewish religion survive and able to bring models of redemption to half the world. Power and prophecy—here is an ongoing dialectical juggling act that will continue to tax the character and maturity of the Jewish people in the decades ahead.

AMERICAN JEWRY: TOWARDS POLITICAL MATURITY

While Israel is the major expression of Jewish sovereignty in this era, American Jewry is also learning to exercise power in this country.

The Holocaust demonstrated that in modern culture, a people can no longer exist in the interstices of society. Either a group is integrated and vital to the economy and political structure (and therefore visible) or it is 'marginal' and becomes dispensable. At times its very existence

becomes dispensable, as the case with Polish Jewry in the 1930s.¹ And sometimes a group unwittingly promotes this perception of its societal role by assuming a very low profile. The last attempt of American Jews to be invisible, i.e., to insist that Jewish interest and general policy objectives are indistinguishable, occurred in the 1940's. This stance contributed to America's failure to respond to the Holocaust, an experience that haunts American Jewry, blocks it from escaping into universalist illusions, and drives it to 'atoning' political action.

Today, American Jewry's political culture is far less mature than Israel's. The fact that the American Jewish community has not exercised direct governing responsibility has slowed the process of its political development. Liberalism and universalist rhetoric have so shaped American Jews' views that they often are unable or unwilling to admit the presence of group interests and conflicts in American life. And many assimilated Jews do not care at all about Jewish political interests, while others wish to restrict Jewish values to the 'private' or 'ritual' areas of life. Thus, there are still a striking number of Jews who boast that they support Jewish philanthropy but reject political action. In general, the philanthropic and fraternal structures of American Jewry are far more developed than are those involving political action.

Yet Jews have learned that they must exercise power if they are to influence American policy in the Middle East and otherwise aid Israel. As manifested in Soviet Jewry demonstrations, Jews already have learned that there is group safety and dignity in the public promotion of their interests. There are still professionals in the community relations field who are very uncomfortable with the terminology of Jewish power or the open articulation of Jewish interests, particularly if these do not lend themselves to a universalist rhetoric. Their fear should not be dismissed. A tacit part of the majority culture's liberal deal with the Jews was its acceptance of Jewish individual rights at the price of its denial of Jewish group rights. ("To the Jews as individuals, everything; to the Jews as a nation, nothing," noted the pro-Emancipation *philosophe* Clermont-Tonnerre in 1789.)

Towards a More Genuinely Pluralist Democracy

Liberal ideology will have to accept much more assertive and thus authentic ethnic politics in the future. Admittedly, there is a real risk of a backlash, especially if other Americans look for scapegoats during a national crisis. And Jews cannot take lightly the revival of the dual-loyalty charge (made by some leaders during the Andrew Young affair and summoned up again during the Pollard espionage affair). Nevertheless, many Jews have concluded that the time has come to help make America a

more genuinely pluralist democracy. If there is to be a backlash which could jeopardize the standing of the Jewish community, let it occur while the option of going to Israel still exists.

Of late, the American Jewish community has become more politically assertive. To cite some examples: in 1974 when the Ford administration proclaimed its 'reassessment' of policy towards Israel, the community, especially via the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), aggressively opposed such an anti-Israel tilt. Spurred in part by Jewish political initiatives, seventy-six Senators sent a letter challenging the Administration, a move which significantly checked its drift away from support of Israel. Similarly, the community fought hard against the proposed arms sale to Saudi Arabia in 1978 and was undeterred by the flag-waving rhetoric of national interest. And in March 1980, the Jews in New York 'punished' President Carter for the U.S. vote for a U.N. resolution censuring Israel. In the Democratic primary that month, they overwhelmingly shifted their vote to Senator Edward Kennedy in order to make a statement on this one issue.

The desire to defend Israel has become the cutting edge of many Jews' growing political involvement. For Jews to become involved in lobbying and other forms of political activism is crucial because U.S. economic and military aid has a far greater impact on Israel than do the United Jewish Appeal and other forms of Jewish philanthropy. In the 1980's, the billions the U.S. government granted in aid to Israel far outweighed the total contribution of the U.J.A., federations and Israel Bonds, which generally totalled between a quarter and a third of the foreign aid. As the danger grows that this dwarfing of its achievements could lead to a decline in its support, the U.J.A. increasingly stressed that the level of Jewish giving is a major barometer of how deeply American Jews are committed to Israel, and that this affects the willingness of politicians to set a high level of governmental aid for Israel. Thus, philanthropy is justified in political terms, only a few decades after the American Jewish philanthropic leadership denied 'Jewish politics,' i.e., that there was a Jewish vote or Jewish political interests, and claimed that social concern is "our only business."

GREATER JEWISH POLITICAL EFFECTIVENESS

In the 1980's, American Jewry recognizes the significance of acting politically. And a newer generation of Jewish politicians elected in part by committed Jews, is more willing to be identified with Jewish issues. There is even a low-key 'Jewish caucus' in Congress. Gradually the extent of Jewish greater political involvement grows as the network of contacts, experiences and interest spreads.

Networks of Jewish Political Action

Equally important is the growth of an informal network of grass-roots lobbying, letter writing, political action committees, and public expression in synagogues as American Jews confront Israel's dependence on their political leverage. This network tends to be informal because the key Jewish organizations—federations, UJA and other national organizations—are tax-exempt and cannot afford to forfeit that status by engaging in political action. It may be necessary to relinquish the tax-exempt status of the community relations councils or to set up special political action committees to strengthen Jewish political action.²

Similarly, both individuals and small groups of Jews have become involved with campaign fund-raising for major political figures, in states where Jews are concentrated and in those where they are not. For the most part, these are individual initiatives, so that participants are relatively unaware of each other. It would be valuable to establish a network of such campaign contributors, for it is a fact of political life that financial support affects an officeholder's stands. For this reason, Jewish financial support of friendly candidates should be encouraged and perhaps be more publicized than it has been in the past. The benefits from so doing would more than offset the possible negative reaction of the electorate upon its learning of a candidate's Jewish connection. Jews who feel uncomfortable with this approach (a discomfort I take to reflect undeveloped political consciousness) might note that Exxon and Libya are among the well-established concerns attempting to exercise political influence through financial leverage. One is reminded of an old, bitter Jewish joke. A Jew in Eastern Europe was asked how he could square bribing the judge in a Russian judgment. He explained: "It's not a fix. The judge is biased against me because he is an anti-Semite. By giving him money, I neutralize this bias so he will give me an equitable ruling which is fair to both sides."

As Jewish political involvement has grown, more candidates have begun to turn to communally-involved Jews for financial and other support. They have begun to put on the community agenda the question of how to increase the Jewish response to such overtures and to relate this to other external and internal Jewish policy concerns. There is even a network of Jewish political action committees. However, this development evokes, in some views, all the old fears of backlash, even charges of a 'Jewish conspiracy.' The community increasingly feels the tension between wanting and needing to exercise more effective power, and fearing a strong backlash to its new political visibility.

'One-Issue' Politics

American Jews might learn from the practitioners of one-issue politics (groups that organize around one concern by which they determine whether or not to support a particular candidate), an approach which is now widely developed and recognized in America. A friend once noted: "Jews should be organized for Israel on the level of the National Rifle Association." Despite studies showing overwhelming public support for gun control, and despite the plethora of political assassinations during the past two decades, little legislation has been passed to limit gun sales because of legislators' fears that the NRA will 'punish' them for such action. This 'law of the determined minority' is a legitimate feature of democratic politics because, if something is a matter of life-and-death to a small group, that concern should be given greater attention that the group's numbers might justify. Happily, support for Israel, unlike gun abuse, is not bad for America; Jews need not frustrate the majority or the public weal to gain aid for Israel. Still, the determination and salience of the one-issue groups, including their reputation for not forgiving if they are 'crossed,' is a good model from which Jews should learn.

... and Coalition-Building

Of course, Jews are also concerned about domestic political issues, so the one-issue approach cannot be overemphasized. American Jews have had the most success in gaining support for Israel when they operate in the framework of a broad national consensus that is shared across the political spectrum. Coalition-building is as valuable as anything else that can be done now for acquiring political IOU's. It can be argued that the Jewish political self-assertion of the past decade has been too inward-focused. It is a time to reach out to other groups on a number of foreign and domestic issues (e.g., family policy, aid to parochial education, tax credits for college students, social justice) for Israel's sake and for internal Jewish needs as much as for liberal or idealistic reasons.

The importance of coalitions could be seen in the late Summer and Fall of 1979, when some black groups moved to support the PLO after the Andrew Young affair. Despite some 'wobbling,' such mainstream black organizations as the NAACP and Urban League did not do so because they still had Jewish supporters they did not want to lose, and because of the common political agenda with Jews which they hoped to achieve. Clearly, Jews must acquire long-term allies in every aspect of American life precisely because political trends in this country are so volatile.

To do so, Jews must overcome a great deal of naiveté

and a tradition of non-political idealism which reflects a heritage of powerlessness in significantly influencing political decision-making. We need more hard-headed analyses that anticipate the likely impact of proposed and new policies on Jewish interests. For example, Jews overwhelmingly supported campaign contribution reform. But the initial evidence of its impact is contradictory. Some experts argue that the Presidential candidate contribution limit has in fact weakened Jewish influence, for Jews made up a relatively large percentage of the big givers. This loss of political clout can be overcome only by a major expansion of the base of activist Jews giving \$1,000. On the other hand, it has been argued that without the limit, petro-dollars in unlimited numbers might have tilted the political balance to greater support of Arab positions.

The Electoral College Issue

One positive sign of Jewish political maturation should be noted. A decade or more ago, Jewish groups tended to support abolition of the Electoral College as a step toward a more democratic political system. Since then, cooler analysis has shown that its abolition would result in the loss of a major Jewish leverage point. Despite their small numbers, Jews are concentrated in high electoral vote states. Since a high percentage of Jews vote, they have political impact out of proportion to their numbers in key states, especially given the winner-take-all nature of the Electoral College. The old liberal rhetoric would make Jews uncomfortable with this distinction between democratic and Jewish interests. A post-Holocaust realism, on the other hand, would argue that (1) Jews must look out for themselves, and (2) true, pluralist democracy may require that power not be homogenized in such a way that small interest groups are politically obliterated. Fortunately, even the more historically doctrinaire liberal groups in organized Jewish life have recently demonstrated a more mature political ethic on this key issue. The basic characteristic of a viable Jewish culture will be for Jews to approach a policy question by asking, "Is it good for the Jews?" and by responding without apologies for asserting their self-interest—and without illusions about human nature and American society.

Resources: Access to Information and Analysis

At present, Jewish leadership lacks data and analyses which are developed in accordance with the community's interests. While the State of Israel has a defense analysis staff, intelligence organizations and myriad other government and private institutes, American Jewry has only rudimentary mechanisms of this type. Jewish leaders often commission policy studies from organizations with a wide range of other interests, and which thus have a

limited understanding and sensitivity to Jewish concerns. In addition, much Jewish policy analysis is reactive rather than anticipatory, aimed at 'putting out fires,' not preventing them. American Jewry needs one or more 'think tanks' to tap the community's extraordinary intellectual resources, including many Jewish policy analysts who currently lend their talents to a host of other interests and employers.

Such resources have not been developed in part because of American Jewry's tendency to defer to Israel's judgment especially on matters that touch on Israel's security and defense. Jews here have long felt that Israel has all the policy information and analysis capability it needs, and that it, far more than American Jewry, has to bear the consequences of its policies. Even if one accepts these restraints on criticism, American Jewish leadership's lack of independent policy information and analysis appears to be counter-productive. Thus, the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, which has emerged as the major forum for expressing Jewish concern to the White House, frequently has been ineffective in that role in large part because it is often perceived in Washington as an Israeli front organization whose members lack access to independent analysis and briefing. The people who serve on it essentially are picked for the internal needs of their organizations, and not for the effectiveness that they might manifest in the Presidents' Conference. Some also become overawed by the White House ambience.

Under the circumstances, good briefings and preparation are essential. Israel might derive more mileage out of the Conference if it were perceived as being more independent and as having better, more autonomous policy resources. (This argument has been made by some of the Conference's past chairmen who have allowed themselves to differ with Israeli policies.)

On a number of other issues, Jewish interests would benefit if American Jews came up with well-informed and independent policy formulations. For example, American Jewish efforts on behalf of Soviet Jewry during the early 1960's would have been more effective had the community not been restricted in its actions by Israel's policies. Israel's approach may have been constrained by the nature of the state of Israeli-Soviet relations. American Jewry need not have been so inhibited in its support for Jewish culture in the Soviet Union or the Jackson-Vanik Amendment.³ The same holds true for American Jewish attempts to aid the Falashas (Black Jews of Ethiopia).⁴

AMERICAN JEWISH POLITICAL BEHAVIOR: THREE WORKING PRINCIPLES

Permanent Interests, not Permanent Friends

One of the oldest principles of an effective political

culture is that nations (and peoples) have permanent interests, not permanent friends. This is a basic lesson which American Jews must take to heart. The reflex liberalism of American Jews is counter-productive, as is the strong, indeed almost automatic Jewish vote for the Democratic Party. (I write this as both a liberal and as one who usually votes Democratic.) In 1972, at the height of Jewish disenchantment with George McGovern, and of appreciation for President Nixon's strong support for Israel, the Jewish vote was still 65% Democratic, 35% Republican. Their 'guaranteed' Democratic vote is the Jews' Achilles' heel. I have chosen this example because for many Jews, Nixon was self-evidently 'beyond the pale.' Still, predictable political one-sidedness makes for bad politics.⁵

The two major political parties are more likely to respond to Jewish concerns if they have political incentives, i.e., a genuine possibility of winning or losing Jewish votes and support. This pertains particularly in a period when the philosophy of the Left seems to be moving towards anti-Israel positions (i.e., a romanticization of the Third World, a universalism that denies the rights of Jewish particularity, and idealistic as opposed to concrete political judgments). One shudders to think what would be the extent of Christian support for Israel today had Jews only worked with modernist, liberal Christian denominations, their past partners in inter-faith dialogue and reducing discrimination. The new power and sympathy for Israel shown by many Christian fundamentalists has served as a counterweight to declining support by the modernist, main-line denominations of the National Council of Churches.

This is not a call for a Jewish movement toward conservatism or fundamentalism. But Jews must avoid doctrinaire or fixed positions; they must have greater political volatility, and must be willing to reward friends, punish enemies and differentiate between them on the basis of current actions, not stereotypes.

Another expression of political maturation is that one sometimes goes with a politician or candidate who does not share the entire Jewish agenda, or who historically has a mixed or poor record. Forging temporary alliances on specific issues is a healthy and important part of democratic give-and-take.

Of course, there can be no one policy 'line' for all American Jews; the community is not monolithic and has many ideological as well as interest divisions. It is important that Jews be found across the spectrum of American political life, and that the argument for Israel and other Jewish issues be articulated to many different interest groups in American society. To create new channels of communication and networks of affiliation for

such people will be part of the maturation of American Jewish political culture.

Behavior: Losing Attitudes, Winning Attitudes

An essential difference between those who exercise power and those who think about it is manifested in terms of political behavior. Its day-to-day practice makes politics less earth-shaking and more pragmatic than theology or ideology. For non-political thinkers, this mundane give-and-take is often perceived as 'selling out,' a loss of idealism and lack of principle. Poll after poll of college students' attitudes has shown that one of the lowest ranking professions is politics. Students live in a world of ideas and for the most part, are separated from the moral complexities of the adult world. Give-and-take appears to them to be morally compromising. And as Erik Erikson has pointed out, the teens and early twenties are years when young people try out and are attracted to 'integrity' and 'pure' models which are undiluted by the *quid pro quos* of 'getting along.'

Politically, Jews in the Diaspora, including America, have been close to the university experience. For much of our history, the majority culture, and not the Jewish community, has made the basic decisions and taken responsibility for the consequences. In this sense, American Jews too have been more like adolescents than like adults who are fully responsible for their own fate.

To restate the point in classical Jewish categories: we have had the 'luxury' of being prophetic. Prophets look best in situations of powerlessness or non-responsibility. Demands for pure behavior 'ring true' when you do not have to make or enforce laws. By and large, however, the prophets failed miserably in their own time, so great was the gap between their demands and mundane reality.

The genius of the rabbis, on the other hand, was that they were truly politicians; they practiced the art of the possible. The greatness of *halakhah* is that it seeks to achieve messianic perfection by way of one flawed, compromising step at a time. The prophets dreamed of an end to slavery; the rabbis first accepted it, then gradually moderated its harshness until it was 'improved' out of existence. The prophetic goal is vegetarianism; the rabbis restricted and reduced the eating of meat. The prophetic goal is universal wealth; the rabbis improved treatment of the poor, and stewardship over wealth, through tithes, gleaning and laws relating to the *shmitta* and *yoveil* (respectively, the seventh and fiftieth years of the agricultural cycle). Paradoxically, prophecy flourished during the age of Jewish sovereignty, whereas the rabbis became the dominant force of Jewish life during the exile. However, the paradox is explainable if one considers that the prophets are half of a dialectic. They are the reactors to the

excessive compromises of the rulers. The rulers are the other half, the reactors to the excessive idealism of the visionaries, and the practitioners of what is possible in a world where not much is. In the Third Era, there is a need for a new synthesis whereby the possible is practical and the practical is shaped by the covenantal traditions and conscience of the Jewish people.

Jews must come to understand to what extent compromise and coalition-building are necessary to 'win' politically. The community must also learn to evaluate politicians less in terms of the question "Does candidate X (and his or her advisors) really like Jews?", and more in terms of that candidate's actual policies and behavior. Jimmy Carter in particular has suffered because many Jews are convinced that a fundamentalist or born-again Christian must be, at least, insensitive to Jews. (This kind of focus reflects the age of powerlessness. When there were no power restraints and Crusaders ran wild, the good will of the king or bishop was the only barrier to Jewish suffering and dying. Often such good will proved to be a frail reed as the ruler yielded to the power or interests of the other side.) The complement of this focus on personal attitudes is the excessive tendency of Jews to explain policies that go against Jewish interests as anti-Semitic.

The Jewish community must learn to avoid self-pity and excessive charges of anti-Semitism. The swing from total identification with the Black agenda in the Sixties to wide disillusion, and in some circles even unabashed racism, in the Eighties is unhealthy and reflects the absence of the habits of power. Today's enemies are tomorrow's friends; support need not be based on permanent commitments or the absence of potential conflicts.

Yet for Jews, as for any interest group, what really matters in politics is not attitudes but respect for a group's political leverage—and the fear of losing its votes. The Carter Administration repeatedly has supported Israel or refrained from employing sanctions when it was politically expedient to do so. This is not meant to deny the Administration's idealism or its commitment to Israel. But in a democracy, political considerations should and will enter into the making of foreign policy and the fight among factions for influence may be messy. (To paraphrase Churchill, this is the worst form of policy-making except for all the others.) Attitudes also play a role in policy shaping, but they are usually a secondary consideration to the contestants' power leverage. Furthermore, attitudes are shaped by political behavior itself. This is why Israel's actual policies have always had more impact on American attitudes than all the advertising and public relations work done by the Jewish community.

An important aspect of political maturity is knowing how to lose—and what losing does and does not mean.

Although there is no substitute for winning, politicians understand that losing from time to time is almost inevitable. They know when to compromise in order to win, and also how to lose when it is necessary or even strategically wise. Powerless people fear that once they lose, they will be 'lost' forever. Thus, in 1978, many American Jews were afraid to confront the Administration on the proposed sale of F-15's to Saudi Arabia. When the effort to block the sale failed, many spoke of a turning point. They feared that the days when Israel 'automatically won' in Congress were over and foresaw a rapid political decline in American Jewish clout on Capitol Hill. One of the strengths of the democratic political process is its tendency not to alienate losers, to look ahead to a time when one's opponents' help will be needed. Complacency toward the defeated is deadly to political survival. Barry Goldwater's supporters preferred being right to being elected—which is why they lost in 1964. But the ability to fight, lose, come back and make new alliances and new connections is essential to political success.

Politics is an ongoing, non-definitive process. In the case of the Saudi arms sale, the Jewish community won even when it lost. So outraged were Israel's supporters at the hard-fought, narrow loss that the Administration had to seek political compensation. It can be argued that, in the subsequent Camp David negotiations, the Administration did not tilt to the Arabs precisely because of its need to equalize favors after the F-15 sale. This relative lack of tilt was crucial in obtaining the Camp David agreements.

In the same spirit, the lesser evil is a basic principle of politics. In 1980, it is noteworthy how many Jews spoke of 'sitting out' the election out of dissatisfaction with the three major candidates. But policy-makers cannot walk away from reality or limited policy choices, even if they are bad ones. Those who intend to exercise power or shape it must meet the same test. Voting for a candidate about whom one is ambivalent leaves him or her in some debt to you. Sitting it out means having no influence. Since Jewish numbers are limited, voting, financial support and political activism remain the Jewish coins of the realm. If the candidate is not one's 'cup of tea,' then the party can be, or its platform, or the alliance that potentially will be of use tomorrow.

For all these reasons, of course, it is valuable that Jews not be found in any one political 'camp' and are distributed along the political spectrum. Although they share a common destiny, Jews must be open to a wide range of political viewpoints and options; they must also learn to appreciate that individuals with very different political ideologies can also be able to act for the sake of Jewish interest. The past shame of Jews who were conservative,

and the vicious attacks on *Commentary* magazine as it moved to 'neo-conservative' positions, are two good examples of bad political habits. After all, there is hardly an axiomatic confluence of 'Jewish' and 'liberal' interests. Rather, Jewish interests are no less permanent than business or societal interests. It is a well-known fact that although Republicans have been more sympathetic to business, corporate leaders tend to support both parties. They expect to be in business no matter who wins and they must make peace with political realities. Some years ago, it was revealed that Exxon Corporation, one of the great whipping boys of international Marxism, had been in contact with, and even helped fund, the Italian Communist party. Of course, the bulk of its help went to other parties but, given the rise of power of the Italian Communist party, Exxon was prepared for the day that the Communists might come to power, and had political chits in its pocket for that day. While the Jewish cause is not a business, and while covenantal values put some limits on strategies and political bedfellows, the range of Jewish political strategies must be widened.

Jews will undoubtedly learn to develop the political habits described above as they gain proficiency in the use of power. But given the narrow margins and political isolation faced by Israel the lesson must be learned quickly and conscientiously.

The Risks of Power, the Dialectics of Power

Given the strong pressures of other concerns, and given past stereotyping of, and other negative attitudes towards Jews, more assertive Jewish involvement in politics can lead to a real backlash. There is a real risk that the 'dual loyalty' charge will be revived. Already, Jews are barred from certain kinds of information and policy-making roles. Presumably, they are considered committed primarily to Israel or the Jewish people which is perceived as having a different agenda than America's. Such overt or covert charges are being made even more pervasively around the world in the Communist block as well as the Arab and Third World countries. If such a charge could be 'made to stick' in this country, the Jewish condition in America would deteriorate catastrophically. Understandably, many Jews oppose the political approach I have suggested because they fear such a backlash. In forthrightly and aggressively defending their interests, Jews are fighting the major battle for a new American democratic pluralism. Whether American democracy is capable of accepting assertive group-interest politics without repression will be the litmus test of a genuine pluralist democracy. (Obviously, Jews will need great internal fortitude and a sense of Jewish interdependence to stand up to the 'dual loyalty' charge.)

Jews should note that Israel is a strategic ally of America and that the Jewish interest and the American interest are intertwined. But the time has come to articulate a new norm of patriotism that goes beyond 'single loyalty.' Only a multi-stranded web of loyalties, policy perspectives and group interests will resolve the conflict between the ideal of nationalism and the dangers of national chauvinism. Our attachment to Israel, the Jewish people and the ethical demand of Jewish survival is a classic paradigm of the alternative perspective needed to guide and temper policy. If Jews hold firm to their group loyalties, as Blacks and other ethnics have done, the day will come when all loyalties will be treasured as sources of human solidarity which help keep American democracy responsive to the many 'tribes' which comprise it.

In sum, there should be less embarrassment and moral squeamishness about the acquisition and use of Jewish power. American Jews must be concerned about continuing to have insufficient access to power and policy formulation. We must not remain so 'idealistic' as to undercut support for Israel in our own community or in American society.

Yet power does corrupt. The more the power, the more the need to limit it. One of the great risks of power is the corruption of a people, the erosion of its principles for perfecting the world. If the greatness of the Jewish tradition is any guide, the covenantal Jewish commitment to holiness and redemption has ultimately set limits to the exercise of power. In the Third Era, this ability to exercise power while restraining its excesses will be the major test of whether Jews and Judaism can flourish in the post-modern world.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As the American Jewish community faces up to its inescapable involvement in politics, it needs to strengthen its capacity to obtain and wield power. Beyond developing the habits of effective political behavior, there are a number of structural changes that, taken together, can increase the community's political clout.

Upgrading AIPAC

AIPAC,⁶ the single most effective political instrument of the community, should continue to be upgraded. AIPAC has been particularly effective on Capitol Hill in working for understanding of, and support for, Israel's needs. In the past five years, AIPAC's annual budget has gone from \$618,000 to \$1.3 million. This budget is privately raised and involves non-tax-deductible dollars, so that raising money for AIPAC is not easy. Increased recognition of the importance of its work has made this budgetary expansion

possible. In recent years, the lay leadership of AIPAC has been broadened by people who have had senior leadership roles in local federations and UJA. They are the kind of people who have sufficient resources and contacts to sustain the growing budget. But the fact that many otherwise activist Jews remain wary of, or indifferent to, political action prevents AIPAC from having the budget and staff it deserves.

AIPAC's impact is heightened by extensive grass-roots activity for Israel, which persuades legislators it represents an army of people who care. Additional funding would give AIPAC resources to regularly 'touch base' with and coordinate such groups, and to help them do more thorough and effective lobbying on the local level. Additional funding would also help AIPAC commission more expert and scholarly studies, to articulate the conceptual framework for policy considerations that will make its lobbying and other practical activities more credible.

There have been differences of opinion between Morris Amitay, AIPAC's previous Executive Director, and the organization's officers as to whether AIPAC had become too visible under his leadership. Some officers feared this prominence would result in a backlash. However, some greater Jewish visibility is inevitable as part of an active Jewish political presence. Of course, part of political effectiveness is knowing when to be visible and when not to be. Thomas Dine, Amitay's successor, will have to struggle for a new balance between Jewish political assertiveness and behind-the-scenes lobbying.

Establishing PACs

Jewish Political Action Committees (PACs), should be formed. Considering the rise in political fundraising and involvement within the organized Jewish community, establishing PACs probably implies recognizing realities as much as creating new facts. PACs can broaden the range of existing political activities among Jews, articulate priorities and stimulate involvement by Jews who are currently not involved in political work.

I suggest the creation of a few experimental PACs, some organized by communities, some by professionals or business leaders. A possible variant would be to have Jewish Community Relations Councils organize the PACs. Involved in the JCRCs are representatives from a broad spectrum of Jewish organizations, who could help insure that the PACs reflect a Jewish communal consensus.

The obvious problem of JCRC political activity is that it could jeopardize their tax-exempt status. The Councils have the choice of spinning off the PACs, or they could sever their connections to the federations and other organizational networks which support them. However,

this probably would cause them financial difficulties. In response, JCRCs might become membership organizations, so that Jews could join, even elect their boards and vote on policy guidelines.⁷

However they are initiated, Jewish PACs will focus initially on candidates and on issues that pertain to Israel; the range of Jewish views on domestic affairs is probably too broad to encompass in one group at present. Even on Israel, internal Jewish opinion may lead to the formation of multiple PACs.

Finally, if the experiment proves successful, a network should be created among existing PACs and among individuals active in Jewish political fundraising drives. In making this proposal, I realize that the 'Elders of Zion' canard may be revived. However, it is very helpful for Jewish political activists to be aware of other candidates and issues, for such awareness often leads to new contacts and broader support for a given political cause. At the least, there should be an annual conference which could serve as a kind of clearing-house on the varieties of Jewish political activism.

The experiences of individual PACs can be studied to see which modes work best, how PACs interact with existing institutions, what resources can be mobilized through these forums, and what impact they can have. If the experimental PACs improve Jewish political effectiveness, the Jewish community might then proceed to organizing PACs throughout America.

Introducing a Political Dimension to Jewish Institutions

There should be an expansion of political education, communication and sharing through the existing councils, organizations, synagogues and federations. This would imply including a new political dimension in the role and self-perception of these institutions, which have more contact with the masses of Jews than any PAC will have. While direct political involvement is neither legal nor desirable in light of the other responsibilities these institutions have, they can play an important role in educating, disseminating information, putting people in touch with what activities exist on behalf of Jewish causes, and suggesting how they can help.

American society is involved in a new exploration and definition of the nature of church-state separation and the role of religion in American political life. This is going on largely outside of the Jewish community. The development of movements like the evangelical Moral Majority, and the reactions to it, are leading to a re-definition of what is legal and proper in political activity by religious groups.

The right of such groups to explore values, evaluate society and its policies is recognized and respected in American life. In his classic 19th century work, *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville saw the positive role religion plays in shaping political values and national choices as one of the great bulwarks of American democracy. Yet many Jews fear that this kind of involvement can break the wall of separation between church and state, endanger the position of Jews in America and compromise this country's tradition of religious pluralism. While there may be some basis for this fear, religious groups can, within certain limits, become more politically active, without this necessarily leading to a Christian 'faith test.' One of the main tasks Jews will have in the years ahead will be to help Americans separate the needed religious input into political behavior from the un-self-conscious triumphalism which characterizes some fundamentalist Christian political activity.

Discussing and Debating Jewish Political Issues in the Media

There is a need for active media dialogue and debate on political issues and candidates as they affect the Jewish community. As Jewish doctrinaire liberalism declines, such discussions are essential so that the best policies and people can be identified and a wide variety of political and policy options explored. The Anglo-Jewish press, and magazines such as *Moment* and *Commentary*, can serve as major vehicles of public education. 'Op Ed' pages which invite a wide range of views might be the most appropriate educational format. A mass-market publication would be particularly important in raising Jewish political consciousness, which all the more underscores how great a loss to the Jewish community was the recent demise of *Jewish Living* magazine.

In addition, American Jewish papers and magazines should run more political endorsements. To defend themselves against claims that this would be prejudicial, such publications should also carry editorial replies. The excitement of political debate will motivate people to join PACs and engage in other forms of direct political action.

Developing an American Jewish 'Think Tank'

American Jewry needs a permanent think tank to provide ongoing analyses of government policies and their possible impact on the Jewish community. At present, some Jewish organizations provide various policy analyses, but they generally are of a short-term nature, i.e., focused on immediate problems and limited by the nature of the organization's supporters and agenda. A well-funded, independent think tank, on the other hand, could

tap a wider range of academics and policy analysts for longer-term studies, including those which anticipate future trends.

During the 1960's, *The National Jewish Post and Opinion*, Dr. Robert Gordis and others urged the establishment of such a think tank. CLAL would like to organize this instrument for policy-making, but has lacked the resources to do more than individual papers or conferences. The activities of the Institute of Jewish Policy Planning and Research of the Synagogue Council of America have been limited by similar considerations. Most recently, Tel Aviv University has sought to create an Israel-Diaspora Center for Policy Studies, but thus far has not succeeded.

Yet the need for such a think tank remains compelling. No people as beset with enemies and challenges to its physical and spiritual survival as the Jews should formulate policy in a hand-to-mouth way. The absence of such an instrument is a telling commentary on the extent to which Jews are not used to exercising power. It also reflects how the community's focus on local priorities at times detracts from needed national resources. Indeed, there perhaps should be more than one think tank, given the wide range of Jewish interests and viewpoints, as well as the importance of credibly articulating Jewish needs along the entire American political spectrum.

Briefing Jewish Leadership Systematically

A more systematic political briefing process for American Jewish leadership should be developed. More extensive briefing sessions could be inserted into national conventions of Jewish organizations, as well as the G.A.⁸ They also could take place on a rotating basis in regional and city-wide settings. We are entering a period in which structural or longer-term trends can have as much impact on Jewish life as specific issues or problems. Thus the 'putting-out-fires' approach will be less effective than in the past. Groups and communities must consider the impact of national policies, as well as long-term political, societal and cultural trends which often affect them more than do the specific local issues with which they deal each day. While organizational needs and details usually overwhelm the professional and lay leaders of Jewish groups, they should still set aside a regular amount of time for long-term considerations which affect Jewish life.

This is admittedly an ambitious set of proposals. but clearly, questions of power and politics are central to Jewish survival in the Third Era, particularly in America. The community must learn to respond quickly, imaginatively and creatively to this new development. To extend Rabbi Tarfon's words in *Pirke Avot*: "The day is short, the work is great"... and Jewish fate is in our hands.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Celia Heller's *On the Edge of Destruction* (New York: Schocken, 1980) for an in-depth analysis of Polish Jewry's economic and political marginality in the 1920s and 1930s.
2. Non-political organizations do have some leeway, for the Internal Revenue Service allows a small amount of outright political activity to be done by non-profit, tax-exempt organizations. Some Christian fundamentalists are exploring this loophole as well, because they also see how powerful a factor government attitudes, policies and legislations are in affecting religious and cultural behavior, as well as actual policy formation. Although to do this is 'playing with fire,' it may be necessary to explore alternatives in this area because non-tax-exempt dollars are in short supply.
3. Adopted by Congress in 1974, the Amendment offered the USSR most-favored-nation trade status (i.e., lower tariffs) if the Soviet Union allowed a significantly greater number of Jews to emigrate than it had in the past.
4. On different approaches to this question and for recommendations toward an effective policy, see Diane Winston, "The Falashas: History and Analysis of Policy Toward a Beleaguered Community," *NJRC Perspectives*, April, 1980.
5. If you have nowhere else to go, you can be taken for granted by the party that has your group vote 'in its pocket.' In her brilliant book, *Accounting for Genocide* and elsewhere, Helen Fein has shown how American Jews' overwhelming commitment to President Roosevelt during the Holocaust paradoxically lessened the prospect of American intervention to stop the destruction. The unqualified nature of Jewish support for F.D.R. eliminated the Jews' option of withdrawing that support—the only leverage they had in moving him to rescue European Jews. Because the President 'had' the Jews, he was more concerned with losing the Saudi Arabians and the British. F.D.R.'s one outstanding rescue gesture, establishing the War Refugee Board early in 1944, was motivated by a memo from Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. Morgenthau's memo documented the Roosevelt Administration's failure to act. The threat of an open fight on this matter involved possible political costs in the Presidential election that coming November. Apparently, there is nothing like a little pressure to bring out the best in Presidents—and others.
6. AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, is the only registered lobbyist for Israel in Washington, and distributes the weekly, *Near East Report*. It also represents the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations at Congressional hearings. In 1979, the efforts of its nine-person staff helped lead to \$4.8 billion in Congressional appropriations for Israel.
7. If the JCRCs go this route, they become vehicles for political representation on a local kehilla (Jewish governing body). This opens up the whole question of a more articulated structure for internal Jewish affairs, which is an issue too complex to explore here.
8. The annual General Assembly organized by the Council of Jewish Federations is the largest meeting of Jewish professional and lay leaders each year.