

Will Israel Save Our People?
Personal Reflections Over the
Life of the State

34 Independence Day

May 1, 1982

Omaha, Neb.

Will Israel Save our People?

For thousands of years the ^{question} ~~was~~ ^{has been} answered affirmatively and with confidence. The dream of a State of Israel in one way or another dominated the thoughts of prophets, sages, poets, philosophers, social scientists and dreamers in Jewish communities all over the world.

The fact is that it was Political Zionism that brought the State of Israel into being.

(Now ~~34 years later~~ ^{the 34th} we live to the celebration ~~of another~~ Independence Day for the State.

34 yrs = nothing in Jewish History.

And ~~then~~ the State and its citizens--all of them, Jewish and non-Jewish, Jew, Arab, Christian, religionists and secularists are beleaguered.

(The war of Independence ~~is~~ in 1948 and 1949 has never really ceased. (The state of war is not just a technicality; it is a reality.

(From the beginning there has not been one day of real Peace in the land of Peace.

(Thirty four years--- a generation or more. Fewer and fewer are those in the Land who saw the birth of their country. (And all the rest, as here, have no pre-Israel memory! Great events crash down on the hearts and souls of those who live through them.

What American ^{is there who} ~~man~~ does not know where he was and what he was doing when Pearl Harbor was attacked. (Of the day when the first atom bomb was dropped? Or when the assassin's bullet blew the life out of John Kennedy? (We were all younger then, or not born perhaps; but those of us who were mature must remember the day the United Nations voted the establishment of the State of Israel.

(And so I reflect on the life of the State. And some questions and hopes arise.

(That day in May of 1948 when the radio (remember ^{when every} the radio?) brought the news, I for one could not believe my ears.

(The cataclysmic suddenness of the birth of Israel appeared to me then and now as a shock to the Jewish People and ^{even} to the Zionist organizations. (No one was really prepared.

(Not a single shred of national equipment was in place: no coinage, no postage stamps, no uniforms, no name for the State, no real funds, no defences, no mobility, precious little food, (and the sure knowledge which was correct that the Arab ~~would~~ world would attack the moment the British ~~it~~ withdrew.

(Less than one year later my wife and I were in Israel.

(We were not and are not ardent Zionists in the sense that we believe that the State of

Israel alone is the salvation of the Jewish People. (It is obvious that had there been a Jewish State during the period of the Nazi domination of Europe, untold numbers of our brothers and sisters ~~and~~ could have been saved. (They could also have been saved if OUR country had made of the statue of liberty an open door rather than a tourist symbol.

(Will Israel save our people? I don't know any more because I am not nearly so confident about the status of Jews among the peoples of the world as once I was.

(What has Israel done? What can it do? Well, still the State of Israel runs true to any historical model ^{in Near East} even to ancient times.

(The war with enemies ~~exists~~ outside the State goes on. (But so ~~is~~ does the war within? ^{Not only in the Jew} (Jew against Jew. (Extremist on one side against extremeist on the other. But all Jews! Tragic but also in a ~~sense~~ assuring.

(For those of us, those very very few Americans who were in Israel in 1949 or 1950 the ~~new~~ TV motion picture film broadcast only a few days ago called "Golda" brought back tearful memories. (Memories of the hard life. (And I must say the views in the film of the early Kibbutz ^{conditions} ~~life~~ were harsh and true enough, with people living in sparse concrete rooms. (But we along with many others lived in tents: no plumbing,

no electricity, insects all over the place, now and then a lizard or scorion crawling over your body in the night.

(But ^{then} there was a strange dedication, a passionate stubbornness to make the State the salvation of the people.

(Yes, there were the dusty roads you saw in the film, the creaky old buses lumbering along ~~the~~ between the villages and towns, the shortage of food, milk only for babies and the elderly ^{+ sick} and in some of the moshavim (cooperative towns) the few hours a day when the electricity was ^{rationed +} turned on for light and power.

(Then it was a matter of claiming the land, removing the hula ~~lake~~ lake and its malaria in the north and turning the water through a narrow pipe to the ~~south~~ south. Back breaking heroism.

(And now a different kind of heroism. Heartbreaking surrender of the land ^{won w} with homes and gardens and military protection and schools, and oil resources and roads — all in the hope for peace.

(Today there is none of the Israel of the 40's left. (Americans like ourselves go to the posh American type hotels and ride around in German made air conditioned Mercedes buses. Out of a miserable land, men and women and children have built a country.

(One day a few years ago when we were in Israel with a group mostly from our congregation we walked past a corner which my wife recognized and I did not. (It was the first place in which we stayed in Tel Aviv when we landed in the country after the horrendous flight from Rome. (A ratty tumbled down miserable building we would not give a second glance today. Then it was sumptuous *by comparison*.

(Well, we all know the Land has been built. And yet we quarrel. (The Orthodox establishment still holds a strangled grip on the religious life of the people. (The debate still goes on as to what the borders of the land should be.

(And worst of all: sacrifices must still be made. (Not money, not land, but life.

(I do not believe that Israel can endure another slaughter of its youth. (If it is to be, who will beget the future generations, who ~~will~~ will be schooled, who will be the trained thinkers, healers, researchers,, teachers, poets, sages? *social builders*.

(It is said that Israel is the center of Jewish life. (It is not. (We have a strange partnership. (The greatest most productive Jewish community is here and not there.

(We contribute to each other. We are one ~~xx~~ people not two.

Will Israel save our people? Yes. If we also save our people. (If we will learn as the great Leo Baeck once said that Jewish life has always had two centers and not one

(We will support our fellow Jews wherever they live, here and in Israel. That is our destiny.

(But for heaven's sakes, let's stop the pretense of talking about Israel citizens as "we", let us cease the pretense of regarding ourselves as such passionate Israelis from the safe comfort of Omaha, and New York and Cleveland and Los Angeles. (An infrequent visit to Israel or even ~~x~~ a winter season there does not qualify an American Jew to feel ~~xx~~ heroic about Israel. (Not until we share the risk, give the life, declare the unequivocal ~~loyalty~~ loyalty to the State ~~xxxx~~ can we totally identify with Israeli life and hopes and dream

(It was Abba Eban who said that the only convincing proof he had of life after death was the existence of the Zionist organization!

(It's a sharp and barbed quip; but there is truth in it.

(The truth is we are all Jews. And, as in a family, there is room for difference among us, but no room for ^{discrimination or acts of violence} destructive acts against each other or abandonment of each other.

(A generation has past. Israel still lives. It is still the only place on earth that I know of where, as happened to me, a policeman who had just threatened ^{he scolded me} to arrest ~~me~~ ~~x~~ in parting from me said: "Shabbat Shalom". Trivial? I think not. In those two words she bridged the cultural, religious, social, nationalistic gulf between us. We were Jews. Let us support and let us pray for the peace of