

Empire Or A Homeland?

(70 Years Since The Balfour Declaration)

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The cup is half empty and half full. The achievement of statehood is without parallel but the "empty" cup is actually full of Jewish blood. Haman was unsuccessful in his plans of destruction whereas the latter-day Haman was able to carry out his satanic ideas. The modern-day pronouncement of Cyrus was fulfilled too little and too late.

Today, the faults continue. There are millions of Jews who live without the acknowledgement that they are in exile, in galut. We do not need any pronouncements nor declarations. The land is in our possession; it is no legend. But if we will not want it, it may become a legend. The Jewish "Empire" worldwide continues to exist but what of the homeland and the state?

There are some here in Israel who are expecting a new Cyrus in the form of the international conference that will take from us our country. There are others who want us to become a new Cyrus for another people and give them of our country as I heard an Israeli politician say that he desires to be the Balfour of a national home for the ... Palestinians. In the United States, the trend is growing that justifies the American galut alongside the State of Israel. Or the other way around: an Israeli state alongside a great worldwide Jewish "Empire" whose capital is New York.

One could despair of all this if it were not for the Ida Nudels and Vladimir Slepaks and their comrades coming on aliyah from the darkness of the Russian exile. They are lighting up for us the dark despair and igniting a renewal of faith and trust as Ida Nudel said: "I have returned home."

I was seven years old and like others of my age I remember the excitement

with which we received the news of the Balfour Declaration. Like others who received a Zionist education from their fathers, we immediately sought a comparison with Cyrus of Persia. Some got carried away and saw in Herbert Samuel the figure of Nehemiah and as Ezra the Scribe - Ahad HaAm.

Not an admirer of the British mandatory regime, I want to concentrate not on what the British did but what we did or did not do in the wake of the Balfour Declaration. The time is long gone when it was true to say that "the sun never sets on the British Empire" and we can be proud that we eventually overcame her treason against us. However, it is still true today - but of this, as Zionists, we have nothing to be proud - that the sun never sets on the Jewish "Empire."

The comparison with the days of the Babylonian exile can only prove the heavy obligation of our "Balfour era" in this century. The pronouncement of Cyrus did not bring about an exodus of Babylonian Jewry in accordance with the writings of the prophets except for Yechezkiel who well knew that exile from firsthand experience. He spoke of a forced redemption (see for example 20:33,34). The Second Temple period was one of coexistence between Babylon and Judea. We must bitterly admit that the masses preferred to remain in exile.

I do not ignore the criminal responsibility of Britain in the annihilation of European Jewry. Likewise, I must point out the guilt that falls on the heads of the Zionist leadership. For principled, practical or opportunistic reasons, mass aliyah was shunned. So too was an activist struggle against Britain's renegeing on the mandate.

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