

# IT'S GOOD TO BE AN ISRAELI JEW

## Independence Day Reflections

It is not easy to be objective about being an Israeli and a Jew, and still less so on Independence Day. But then — why should one? There is no need to go into the philosophical-psychological problem of the meaning and existence of objectivity. Let us say that there is such a thing; so what?

There are many occasions in the life of man when love and hate, joy and grief — all the emotions that interfere with objectivity — are a sign of mental health.

There is nothing more healthy and natural than a man loving all that is his, without necessarily overlooking its possible defects. There may, however, be such a thing as blind love. That is why the true test of any love is neither at high noon or at midnight, neither when the midday sun is distorting one's sight nor when everything is shrouded in darkness; but the hour of early morning when everything appears hard and bright. Then one can see clearly and register every wrinkle and blemish — and go on loving, nevertheless.

This is very much the kind of light in which the Jewish people is appearing at present. Clouds and winds, inside and outside prevent the sun from shining too brightly and blinding our eyes. We are too ancient a nation not to realise our inherent defects, some of which have been responsible for many of the disasters that have befallen us. Again we are too young as an independent nation in its own country, too eager in our recent encounter with our land and sovereignty not to be still somewhat romantically inclined, and there is nothing wrong with this kind of romanticism as long as one keeps one's head screwed on right, one's heart filled with love but one's mind still firmly in control.

*And in this spirit of curbed romanticism one may rightfully proclaim! It is good to be an Israeli Jew.*

**IT IS GOOD TO BE AN ISRAELI** The: most objective person, however, hostile, cannot but concede that there is hardly another country in the world so imbued with a spirit of youth and creation, so steeped in the search for knowledge and learning, so intent on reviving a country which has lain waste for many hundreds of years. He cannot but concede that no other nation has within the brief period of twenty years managed to do so much. No one else has succeeded in reviving a so-called dead language that is evolving daily to become a tool not only for everyday human commerce but of science and poetry as well. No other nation that has for centuries been considered cowardly and deprived of any physical or military prowess has managed to put such an army into the field.

**IT IS GOOD TO BE AN ISRAELI**, for there has never elsewhere or before been such a variety of creative challenges within a few years to turn a nation of traders and middleman into a nation of farmers and

industrialists; to make the people of Auschwitz over into the nation of the Six Day War; to bring in exiles from over seventy countries and weld them into a single whole; to increase the country's population threefold within twenty years without major economic and social upheavals but on the contrary build up a modern economy at the same time; to raise the newcomers from backward cultures to the standards of a modern society. All this has been achieved not under ideal conditions but in the face of the constant opposition of indigenous elements and hostile neighbours and under the disapproving eye of major foreign powers.

**IT IS GOOD TO BE AN ISRAELI** — to live on the Western edge of the Asian continent, in the same way as Japan is located on the Eastern end. It is good to be a modern country in that vast backward continent, the sole Western democracy among its feudal or totalitarian-Communist regimes.

**IT IS GOOD TO BE AN ISRAELI** because of all these achievements and despite a clear awareness of all the faults and blemishes that beset us — the evils of petty party politics and party domination, the waste of public funds through bureaucratic delays and inefficiency. It is good to know that despite all this, despite evil designs and inner defects, such wonderful accomplishments could nevertheless be attained.

**IT IS GOOD TO BE AN ISRAELI**, to be able to face this unprecedented historic challenge of working for the redemption of the Jewish people, of realising two-thousand year old prophecies, of implementing the dreams of the Jewish people — *THE DREAMS THEY DREAMT IN THE DAYS OF THE INQUISITION AND IN THE NIGHTS OF THE GHETTOES.*

**AND IT IS ALSO GOOD TO BE A JEW.** It has not always been so. It was not so good to be a persecuted, hated Jew, depending on the good graces of the Gentile.

**IT IS GOOD TO BE A JEW**, to be aware of the heritage of this ancient people, which is largely hated out of envy because of its tremendous contributions to human culture, its resistance to every form of persecution and attempts at annihilation. Others are rightly jealous not only of its own great cultural wealth, but of its capacity even at times of apparent assimilation, to contribute beyond its numerical size and bring forth such men as Jesus and Marx.

*It is good to be a Jew and know that there has been no Jewish illiteracy for as many as three thousand years, even at times when among the civilised nations only the minority were versed in the art of reading and writing. It is good to belong to the most non-conformist nation in the world, despite the high price it has paid for its revolutionary attitude, and to know that the present act of*

return to Zion is merely another non-conformist act among many — another departure from the narrow path that meaner minds prefer to tread.

**IT WAS NOT SO GOOD** to be a Jew in the Europe of the forties. Nor is it so good to be a Soviet Jew at present.

But it is good to be a Jew who knows that his nation has managed to survive Hitler and his holocaust, and to see that now, too, there are Jews fighting for their right to be loyal Jews even under the tyrannical Soviet fist. It is good to feel the spirit of Jewish solidarity and witness the surprising fusion of the young and the old, ancient tradition and modern nationhood.

*THAT IS WHY IT IS BEST OF ALL TO BE AN ISRAELI JEW.*

**TO KNOW** that the scientific genius who is working at the Weizmann Institute is the descendant of an ancient prophet in Jerusalem or perhaps of a Jewish winegrower in Hebron, that the talented officer who is serving in the army is the distant offspring of one of the judges of the Sanhedrin or perhaps of a Jewish cobbler who lived in Jericho in Hasmonean times, and that the forefather of the musician who is playing in the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra was one of the Levites making music in the Temple.

**TO KNOW** that one of the descendants of a Jew in mediaeval Cordoba or Vilna is now serving as a pilot in the Israel Airforce or is working on a kibbutz in the Valley of Jezreel.

**AND TO KNOW** that there is one biological and spiritual current from the days of Abraham down to the new settlers in Hebron, a constant stream into and from which many tributaries have flown — many religions and cultures, the psalms and the Song of Solomon, the dirges of the Ninth of Ab and the tracts of Spinoza, The Baal Shemtov and Rabbi Nahman of Breslau, and that as all streams end in the sea all the outpourings and yearnings of this nation end in Jerusalem the temporal and the spiritual.

**GREAT AND BEAUTIFUL** precisely because it is hard, because it is costly. Can there be a great and beautiful prize that is easily won?

*It is when you choose to be such a Jew and Israeli, to take an active part in this glorious achievement, not because you are pushed into it, not when you are driven out and persecuted, but of your own free will, that you can truly count your blessings and say:*

*WHAT I AM DOING IS GOOD. GOOD, AND GREAT, AND JUST.*

**THIS IS WHAT INDEPENDENCE DAY SHOULD MEAN TO US: AN AWARENESS OF MISSION AND OF CHALLENGE.**

**DR YISRAEL ELDAO**