On the National State

Part 3: Character

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The preceding sections of this essay explored two aspects of the ideal of Jewish guardianship, which is the purpose of the Jewish state—the first, according to which Israel offers diplomatic and military assistance to Jews everywhere in times of need; and the second, which sees in Israel a natural shelter under which a unique Jewish way of understanding and living may be brought into being. In the last part of this essay, I will examine a final aspect of Jewish guardianship: The aim of raising up Jewish men and women of a character sufficient to these ends. As the early Zionists were sharply aware, the idea of a Jewish state cannot be divorced from the question of individual character, both because character is a precondition for maintaining political and cultural independence over time, and because this quality of personality is more readily cultivated under conditions of national sovereignty. In the discussion that follows, I will argue that these claims are, if anything, even more relevant today than when they were first made a century ago.

Character is not a subject much discussed these days, and this is no surprise. The more one is preoccupied with equality as an ultimate political end—and such a preoccupation is no less visible in the Jewish state in our time than in any other Western society—the more difficult it becomes to admit of the existence of qualities such as honor, virtue, or character, which are usually recognized from the fact that some individuals possess them in a greater degree than others. In other words, these are qualities that are distributed unequally in any given population, so that in praising or otherwise seeking to encourage them, one becomes vulnerable to the accusation of harboring illicit republican or even aristocratic sympathies. And if it is in a Jewish context that one insists on raising such issues, the discussion is all the more difficult. For by now, any discussion of Jewish character is immediately said to recall all the old talk of the "new Jew" who was supposed to spring into being in Israel, and especially the calls of Brenner and others to reject the inheritance of our fathers who lived in the diaspora. At times the mere mention of the need to develop a more resilient character is enough to provoke accusations of "negation of the diaspora," or even of anti-Semitism.

Such hesitations may be justifiable, but they have also had an increasingly baneful effect on our public discourse. Because of them the Jews have become a people expert at juggling abstractions such as "justice" and "rights" and "independence," while avoiding any treatment of the concrete qualities that may be required for such political ends to be possible in practice. All these high ideals are presumed to be obtainable out of thin air, or else because we sincerely want them and frequently express ourselves to this effect. The possibility that our society may not be comprised of the kind of individuals who are capable of securing these things, and that some change in ourselves may be required if we are to attain and keep them, is seldom mentioned.

To my mind this reticence is ill-considered. We live in difficult times. And while there are things that are not in our hands, it may also be that if we are dissatisfied with conditions in the Jewish state we have built, it

is because the materials with which we have been building are not what they might be. If so, a fundamental improvement will not be possible until we ask if we are the kind of men we need to be, given the tasks ahead of us. In this I do not propose that we necessarily adopt the severity of Rousseau writing of the French, Dostoyevsky of the Russians, Nietzsche of the Germans. But we must be able to point to our failings, not only with regard to this or that person, but also with regard to our people more generally. We Jews excel in pillorying every individual who takes the reins of power among us. But we are impatient when it comes to making an accounting of our collective faults. These are habits of mind that are not only imprudent but also dangerous when one lives under a democratic form of government, in which the qualities of the public, as much as those of any elected leader, may well determine the course of events. For these reasons it seems desirable that we revisit a question that was of such great concern to the founders of our state.

II

The point of departure for this inquiry has to be a discussion of what is meant by character, as contemporary usage has stripped this term of much that was once essential to its meaning. Character, as I will use this term, refers to a steadiness of spirit in the face of adversity, where the meaning of "steadiness" is the absence of tremors or fluctuations of the spirit.[1] This is an oversimplification, of course. No one is exempted from experiencing fear; it is impossible to live without it. It is the first twinges of fear that warn us of the presence of danger, and it is the subsequent onrush of emotion that permits us to rally our resources in the effort to improve our condition. But there is a great difference between a man who experiences fear as a whisper of foreboding, which he subsequently

transforms into a more penetrating understanding and a more resolute course of action; and one in whom fear is a river that habitually overflows its banks, destroying everything before it, including much that was not originally in danger. These are two very different experiences of fear, and in innumerable ways a life lived with the one is very different from a life lived in the shadow of the other. In particular, the quality of the fears we experience has a profound effect on everyone around us: It is fair to say that a person whose fears are under tight rein is one who can be relied upon to uphold his responsibilities and commitments even under conditions of severe duress, and thus can be a true partner in all life's enterprises; whereas an individual whose personality is periodically washed away by fears is one who, whatever he may seem to be here and now, will become something entirely different in the moment of duress.

Discussed in such abstract terms, the subject of character may seem an unfamiliar one. But when we examine the concrete particulars of life, whether in our daily affairs or in distant history, we find that the question of character is present everywhere, animating virtually every drama that succeeds in arresting our attention. It is, to mention one obvious example, the very heart of the story of the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. In the books of Moses, the enslaved Hebrews are depicted as having been robbed entirely of the spiritedness that had characterized their forebears in Canaan. Moses, upon returning to Egypt from the desert, finds a feckless people, which exultantly embraces the dream of liberation he presents, only to turn against him at the first sign of Pharaoh's anger. "May the Eternal look upon you and judge," they cry against Moses, "because you have made us abhorrent in Pharaoh's eyes, and in his servants' eyes, putting a sword in their hands to slay us."[2] Moses proceeds to fill Egypt with blood, and the Jews in their thousands eagerly seize the chance to flee the country. Yet when Pharaoh determines to pursue them, they are again beset by fear, losing all capacity to take responsibility for the path they have freely chosen. Again they turn on Moses, crying: "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the

desert? What have you done to us, carrying us out of Egypt? Is this not what we told you in Egypt, saying, Leave us alone, that we may serve Egypt?"[3]

Nor do the Jews improve in this regard after leaving Egypt. In the wilderness, this same inability to stand before adversity appears time and again. Unable to face hunger, the Hebrews constantly demand to be returned to the comforts of enslavement in Egypt, and accuse Moses of seeking to starve them to death;[4] when they see that Moses has been delayed in returning from Horeb, they panic and seek to allay their fears with an idol of gold.[5] And when at length they reach the gates of the promised land and hear the report of the spies sent to survey it, they are again overwhelmed with fear, and decide to replace Moses and return to Egypt:

> They spread an evil report of the land… [saying:] All the people we saw there were men of great stature…. We were in our own sight as grass-hoppers, and so we were in their sight. And all the congregation lifted up their voice and cried…. Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt? And they said to one another, We will choose a leader and return to Egypt.[6]

This recurring depiction of the Jews as a people unable to stand firm before adversity reflects an understanding that a generation growing up in slavery would be bowed not only in body but in spirit; and that neither political independence nor an independence of mind could be attained before the coming of a man such as Moses, who, having been raised among the princes of Egypt, would have the strength of personality to lead the enslaved in revolt. On this view, the quality of one's character cannot be separated from the experiences under which it has been tempered and tested. A spirit forged under conditions of chronic weakness is not permitted to be equal to the challenges that face it; its principal recourse has been submission, and the skill of mastering duress through confrontation and independence of posture remains unlearned. Under

conditions of genuine duress, such a spirit is always found to be either limp or bloated, tending to collapse like a paper cup or else to billow forth with foolish arrogance. In either case, it becomes the seat of uncontrolled and uncontrollable fears such as are visited upon the Hebrew slaves with every new hardship. And throughout, they are implicitly compared to Moses, whose personality is marred by neither fear nor arrogance, and can meet unimagined hardship with steadiness of the heart and of the hand. Indeed, Moses' temper fails him only once in his years as leader of Israel, by the waters of Meriba; and it is because of this one tremor of his spirit, so we are told, that he does not merit to enter the promised land.[7] It is this steadiness of the heart and hand, which our tradition associated with Moses, that we call character.

Let us consider some of the implications of this distinction between the character of the Hebrew slaves and that of Moses, the prince of the Hebrews. Moses felt fear, of course. One need only remember that at the burning bush, he responds to God's behest that he confront the Egyptians by asking, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?"[8] In his fear of the Egyptian king-god, he is not so different from other men. What sets him apart from the Hebrew slaves is not the absence of fear in his soul, but the ability of his spirit to maintain its consistency in the face of this fear. Thus when we examine the behavior of the Hebrews, we see clearly how their beliefs and loyalties are changed by the onset of fear, which renders them more servile and solicitous of the power that is the source of this fear ("You have made us abhorrent in Pharaoh's eyes, and in his servants' eyes"); more prone to abandoning principles and interests previously of great importance to them in order to avoid punishment or other unpleasantness ("Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"); and more inclined to justify their behavior with absurd arguments they themselves would likely have rejected days or even minutes earlier ("All the people we saw there were men of great stature"). But in Moses, we see something very different: A man who, when confronted by a superior power, feels no need—or at least successfully resists the need—to accommodate himself

to it by adopting its will as his own; or to respond by flailing futilely at it as a result of a foolish inflation of his abilities in his own eyes. His bearing and composure remain much as they were, as do the principles that move him. Although the world has changed and the road grown harsh, he is still the same person he was.

In the Hebrew vernacular, such an individual is said to have *tzura*, that is, "shape" or "form," and in fact it helps to think of a man of character as one whose spirit retains its shape, is not "bent out of shape," by adversity or duress, defeat or victory. And as an approximation, this definition of character will serve us well: Character is that quality which permits an individual to maintain his prior bearing and commitments under conditions of duress.

To this point, I have described character without specific reference to its moral implications. But one does not have to look farther than the most familiar kinds of human association to see why character is rightly understood as an elementary moral virtue. Consider the extended work of joint construction that constitutes the life of a family, for example, or a business enterprise. These are associations in which individuals work together over a period of many years, even a lifetime, to achieve a common purpose. A man and woman marry, and thereby establish an association for the common purpose of raising children; a businessman establishes a corporation with a few colleagues for the common purpose of manufacturing a new product; and so on. These long associations are immensely advantageous, but they are established at the cost of an implicit vulnerability. We can always be harmed most easily by those who are familiar to us, by a husband or wife, or by a business partner. They know what would hurt us most, of course; and they are close enough to take advantage of this knowledge. But more than this—they are the foundation, walls, and roof of our lives. We rely on them, every day, for their sympathy, assistance, judgment, protection, and allegiance, and with the passage of time this reliance only grows: Children are born, responsibilities are divided, investments are made, and debts incurred. The superstructure

built upon our association grows, and with it our vulnerability to any change in the individuals upon whom we have come to rely.

If we examine these long associations carefully—and others like them, such as educational institutions, religious associations, competitive athletic teams, military units, and so forth—we find that in every case, they are established on the basis of an unspoken premise: That it is possible to rely on those who share a common effort with us, even under conditions of hardship. In other words, every common cause presupposes character.

Every association involves a different set of undertakings, of course. What is implicitly promised to one's parents is not the same as what is implicitly promised to one's business associates; and neither of these is identical to what is promised to one's countrymen. But in each case, we can identify the demands of character by placing ourselves in the position of one who learns, under difficult circumstances, that he can no longer depend on an individual he had supposed to be made of a more solid material. Think of the woman whose husband is so distressed over the loss of a job that he can no longer function as a father to his children; or of a soldier whose commander, so brilliant in training, evidences signs of terror in the midst of battle. Both see the bulwark of their lives grow unsteady, as the individuals upon whom they have relied become disfigured before their eyes. Neither the husband nor the officer can reasonably be considered *bad* men, since they have presumably ceased to be in control of their actions. But there is no difficulty in concluding that they are *worthless* men, individuals of poor character who are deformed by adversity, and so cannot be relied upon when they are needed most. And this, too, is a moral category—as is evident from the fate of the Hebrew slaves, whose lack of character consigned them to forty years of wandering in the wilderness, mere spectators in a life truly lived only by others.

III

Every human association, if it is to persist and attain its purposes in the face of adversity, depends on individuals capable of maintaining their commitments under duress. In this sense, the association is like any other instrument. Like a hammer or a chain, it becomes worthless the moment any part of it begins to deform under the strain of events. Thus the family can no longer serve its purpose of sheltering and educating children once disputes between the parents break into the open; a business enterprise cannot survive if the partner entrusted with the books alters them out of consideration for his own financial needs; a military formation collapses once the soldiers begin to suspect that each of them cares only for his own survival. For this reason every human association, if it does not perish, eventually begins to become conscious of the need for character, and to develop methods of inculcating it in its members.

But of all forms of human association, it is the nation and the state that have the greatest need for individuals of character.[9] Nowhere else is there a demand for individuals of character in such great numbers; nowhere else is there so consistently the need for these individuals to be able to endure every kind of physical and psychological violence without significant distortion in their original commitments. In its diplomacy, in its military and police actions, and in the operations of its organs of law and taxation, the state achieves its purposes under duress; and on each of these fronts and others, it can succeed only to the degree that it operates through persons who can maintain their bearing and commitments under the most trying circumstances. An official assigned to enforce the laws, or an officer in command of soldiers, or a statesman enduring the displeasure of foreign contacts built over long years—all stand under excruciating pressure to relent in their pursuit of state policy, acceding instead to a course

that is, for them personally, more comfortable or more profitable. Unless they are of strong character, the official will soon begin to shape the laws so as best to suit his political or financial interests; the officer will seek to preserve his own life and that of his men at the expense of the nation's ability to wage war; and the statesman will quietly give away his country's independence in exchange for the applause of foreign dignitaries. In each case, to hold firm is to maintain the integrity of the state, while every failure of character brings the state that much closer to dissolution.[10]

This, then, is the challenge that the national state lays down before a people that wishes for independence: Produce ten thousand men of superb character for your cause, not once but in every generation. This alone can secure your independence. This alone can sustain it.

Now this is a formidable challenge even for the greatest of nations. It is not obvious that diplomacy or war, or any of the hardships commonly associated with statecraft, poses a greater difficulty than does this fundamental educational challenge. Indeed, this may well be the central political problem of the state: How can character be made to appear with such frequency in a citizenry, one generation after the next?

No institution creates so extraordinary a demand for character as does the independent state, and it is precisely for this reason that the key to developing the character of a people is to be found in the effort to establish and maintain such a state. The affairs of the state are inextricably bound up with matters of life and death; they are suffused with the threat of defeat and destruction, which is sometimes nearer, sometimes more remote, but always tangible. And constant contact with this threat has its effect on political and military men, educators and religious figures, who, witnessing the unmistakable needs of the state with their own eyes, slowly but surely begin to invest their efforts in establishing methods and traditions of instilling character in the young.

Basic military training is a familiar example of the methods whereby the most rudimentary form of character—the ability to maintain

one's course in the face of the pains and protestations of the body—is inculcated systematically and on a vast scale in response to the most evident need of the nation, that of self-defense. The raw recruits, even those who have prior athletic experience, are invariably afraid of the pain that their bodies are capable of inflicting upon them, and mistakenly believe that the spirit must sooner or later break in the face of such pain. Basic training goes about systematically eliminating this fear by taking the recruits through a protracted sequence of ever more grueling demonstrations of their own ability to perform in the face of pain. Certainly, their physical abilities are improved en route, so that that which was painful a month earlier is simply no longer painful. The essence of basic military training, however, is not the training of the body but the training of the spirit, which becomes ever stronger in the face of hardship, as it is demonstrated again and again that the onset of pain bears almost no relation to one's ability to continue striving towards a given goal. In this way, the 2-kilometer forced march that gave one such a fright on the first day of training presently gives way to a 120-kilometer march, and the spirit is tempered so that it no longer quails before the prospect of physical ordeal.[11]

This type of military training is an example of the way in which the needs of political independence are translated into a concrete educational effort—an effort whose ultimate purpose is to teach character. But physical endurance is not, in itself, character. The Hebrew slaves of Egypt were certainly capable of enduring physical hardship; what defeated them in the desert were the numberless fears that haunt a spirit that knows no form of self-possession other than physical endurance. Nor is the capacity to withstand the stresses of combat—which is, after all, a significant step beyond mere physical endurance—identical with character. From our own experience of public life, we know that the most battle-hardened military man, when dropped into the political arena and faced with a sandstorm of criticism at the hands of journalists or foreign officials, often finds himself

once again experiencing the kinds of fears that gripped him in his first days in the army. One need only think of the prominent former general, who recently told the Israeli press that "I'm not going to get into a confrontation with the Americans. I'm not enough of a hero for that."[12] Yet this example is hardly unusual. No small number of former officers, knowing little of character beyond the battlefield, simply adopt the fear of superior power as the guide and counsel of their political lives.

These considerations point to a significant misunderstanding on the part of many of the early Zionists, who believed that manual labor or military training would give rise to a strong character in a more or less automatic fashion. Military discipline can, to be sure, be an important step. But it cannot serve this purpose unless it takes place within the context of a broader philosophical framework—one that interprets the results of such training only as a metaphor, and as a template for use in transferring the lesson of self-possession to other areas of endeavor. Such a framework could be found for a time in the kibbutzim, which at their height were veritable assembly lines for the production of character, and whose educational efforts were probably the most systematic attempt by modern Jewry to develop a comprehensive system of education to-wards character. But whatever the specific nature of the approach, it is evident that it must be able to make sense of the onerous responsibilities involved in maintaining an independent state, and translate these into a course of education whose end-goal is not military discipline or bravery in combat, but a more resilient form of character capable of taking root well beyond the confines of military service, in the public life of the state generally.

Just as the demands of maintaining the state force a people to develop means of improving the physical endurance of its sons, so too do these demands press relentlessly in the direction of ever more ambitious tradi-tions and institutions whose purpose is the inculcation of character and yet more character. *Ten thousand men of character in each generation*. This is the essential challenge posed by political independence. And in difficult

times, when those entrusted with the state demonstrate their unsteadiness and even their worthlessness in the face of adversity, this challenge becomes a great din in the ears of men—a din that every free people, so long as it has not lost its last hope and acquiesced in its own bondage, gradually comes to recognize and take to heart.

IV

Many of the early Zionists believed the conditions of uncertainty and fear under which the Jews had lived in the dispersion had not been without deleterious effects on their character, both as individuals and as a collective; and most saw the challenge posed by the establishment of a Jewish state as the surest way to remedy this condition. Give the Jews responsibility for maintaining a sovereign state, they argued, and we will soon see that the descendants of the Maccabees can handle themselves at least as well as any other people, and perhaps better.

Despite what has often been said, the critical assessment of the Jewish character implicit in this point of view was no invention of the anti-Semites and was not adopted from them. On the contrary, the suspicion that the exile had worked undesirable changes in the personality of the Jews is deeply entrenched within Jewish tradition, beginning with the merciless depiction of the behavior of the generation of the Hebrew slaves in the books of Moses. Traditional rabbinic interpretation expanded on this theme, painting shocking midrashic portraits of the generation that had grown up in the Egyptian exile. In Midrash Rabba, for example, the rabbis report that the elders who set out with Moses to confront Pharaoh were so overtaken by fear that each in turn took an opportunity to steal away, leaving him to face the Egyptian king alone.[13] In later centuries, with the dispersion of the Jews in Christian Europe and the lands of

Islam, the rabbinic tradition associated this new exile with a return to the bondage of Egypt—not least with regard to what it viewed as the reversion of the Jewish personality to slavishness. The great medieval commentator Abravanel, for example, writes of the Jews that:

> During the period when the Second Temple still stood, they were men of valor, and of strong heart as any among the brave… yet behold, after they have returned to exile, they are of quivering heart and pining eyes and an aggrieved disposition, which is to say, a heart that quivers with fear and dread always…. Even if they have gained wealth and respect and status among the nations of the land, and have attained greatness and positions of authority in the cities for many years, behold, the trembling and the fear will not depart from them.[14]

Rabbi Ya'akov Hagiz, the famous anti-Sabbatean leader of Jerusalem, writes similarly that by comparing the military victories of the Jews described in the Bible to the Jewish condition in his own generation, one comes to recognize the depths of "our misfortune and humiliation and weakness, for the sound of a stirring leaf drives us to despair."[15] Hagiz, of course, paraphrases Scripture, which paints the most damning possible portrait of Jewish character in exile:

> And upon those of you who are left alive, I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies. And the sound of a stirring leaf will chase them, and they will flee as if fleeing before the sword, and they will fall when none pursues them.[16]

Most of the early Zionists considered this tradition all too accurate in its description of what had befallen the Jews after so many centuries of humiliation and persecution. Indeed, when one examines the writings of Lilienblum and Pinsker, Herzl and Nordau, Brenner and A.D. Gordon, one quickly realizes that the issue of Jewish character haunted them perhaps above all others. Thus we find Max Nordau standing before the

Zionist Congress and comparing the degraded character of the Jews in exile to that of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt.[17] Jabotinsky's 1904 eulogy for Herzl likewise emphasizes the difference between Herzl's character and that of the slaves, and his *Samson* is one long protest against the deterioration of Jewish character in the dispersion.[18] In the works of such writers, we find proposals to build up the character of the Jews through the hardship of physical labor, through the responsibility of proprietorship, through physical training and military discipline, and through early marriage and parenthood. But ultimately, Jewish character was seen as being dependent on the establishment of a Jewish state, which was to serve a dual purpose in this regard: On the one hand, it would free Jews from the struggle for acceptance in the arena of European society, which was itself seen as a significant obstacle to the emergence of a strong Jewish character; on the other, the demands of statecraft would be a force for the development of a strong personality, in effect making the state into a vast school for nurturing Jewish character.

The first of these arguments was of particular significance because of the force with which it spoke to Jews in the liberal societies of the West, especially Germany and Austria. In Herzl's *The Ghetto* and in his depiction of Viennese Jewish society in *Altneuland*, as in Max Nordau's play *Dr. Kohn*, Jewish life in the open society is depicted as inherently tragic, not because of any physical threat but because its promise of social advancement is dependent on a renunciation of one's Jewishness in a manner irreconcilable with the commitments of character. Such societies lay down what may seem to be reasonable rules regarding the pursuit of status, wealth, and power, but these rules conceal a hidden dilemma. For one can succeed in the game only by adapting himself to the tastes of gentile society, and this can be done only at the cost of disloyalty to one's family and people. One might decide to change his name or outward appearance, another to adjust his opinions or his religion, yet another to avoid too close an association with other Jews—but it is all of a piece. Every such concession contains within it a capitulation in the same place

where one's forefathers stood firm at great cost, and therefore an element of betrayal. The selfsame act that for a gentile might be utterly innocent—the changing of a strange-sounding name, for example—is for the Jew a significant failure of character. Nor is it likely to be the last, as a Jew who finds himself willing to forgo his honor in this way when it seems socially advantageous may well find many additional ways in which to benefit from such lapses.[19]

The literature of Zionism is replete with treatments of precisely this sequence of considerations. Max Nordau, who had himself married a gentile and changed his own name (from Sudfeld) before being won over to the cause of the Jewish state, came to see the steadfast refusal to accept baptism or a change of name as a leading indication of character in a Jew. Thus the tragic hero of his *Dr. Kohn* is a young mathematician who has long since lost all affinity for Jewish customs and ideas, but who is nevertheless willing to give up his life—in the end he does so—rather than betray his people by changing his name to make himself more acceptable to German society. When a baptized Jew asks Kohn sarcastically whether he considers it an honor to wear such a name, he responds in anger:

> Since you utter the words, Councillor Moser, I answer: You are quite right, [it is] an honor. A Kohn has every reason to be proud. Legend and history echo in his name…. To give up this spur to higher aspiration would be a crime against myself, and, at the same time, a sort of self-mutilation, cutting off the roots of my being, which extend far back into the centuries.[20]

It is striking that despite his alienation from the beliefs of his more traditional parents, Kohn nevertheless sees it as a point of honor to be known by a Jewish name; whereas the abandonment of this ancient token of Israelite priesthood at the instigation of German Christians is not only a dishonor but "self-mutilation"—the introduction of a permanent deformity into one's character. As Kohn explains, this deformity starts from

the decision to allow fear to dictate the degree of one's loyalty to family and people, but its effects run much deeper. It ultimately breeds an endless bondage to this fear, which, having triumphed once, continues to dictate the course of one's life forever. In revolting against such a prospect, Kohn describes life as a baptized Jew as the antithesis of the character he seeks for himself:

> I will not be compelled in my home to tremble at allusions, to feel my heart throb and my face flush, if, at my own table, out of thoughtlessness or weariness, I suffer a [characteristically Jewish] tone, a movement of the hand or shoulders to escape me. I will not have people considerately avoid mentioning my father or mother. I will not be forced, when I go into society with my wife, to listen anxiously in corners, and to imagine that people are laughing over my origin whenever a group whispers together. I will not consent to show, by my servility, my gratitude that a Christian family has received me as a relative.[21]

The Zionists sought relief from this dilemma in the creation of a Jewish society on a national scale, which, by virtue of its size and independence, would permit a Jew to pursue personal success in every field without having to break faith with his past. The Jewish state was to be the one arena in which the quest for advancement—whether in politics or business, scholarship or art—would be in full concordance with the demands of personal loyalty and character, since in such a society every success gained by the individual would by the same token bring honor upon one's parents and one's people. As Herzl wrote: "We, too, want to work for the improvement of conditions in the world. But we want to do it as Jews, not as persons of undefined identity…. We shall thereby regain our lost inner wholeness, and along with it a little character—our own character. Not a Marrano-like, borrowed, untruthful character, but our own. Only then shall we vie with all other righteous people in justice, charity, and high-mindedness; only then shall we be active on all fields of

honor and try to advance in the arts and sciences."[22] Indeed, once liberated from the shackles imposed upon it by European society, Herzl believed that the Jewish spirit could become nothing short of magnificent:

> The idea [of the Jewish state] must spread to the remotest miserable hamlets where our people live. They will awaken from their torpor, for all our lives will have a new substance.... A wonderful breed of Jews will spring up from the earth. The Maccabees will rise again.[23]

This use of the image of the Maccabees was hardly restricted to Herzl. There was virtually no Zionist leader who did not, as one of them put it, "remember Mattathias the Priest, that national hero who turned his back in scorn and loathing on the Syrian officer, with his promises of life and wealth and glory, and sacrificed himself and his family for the honor of his people and his religion."[24] In fact, Mattathias and the Maccabees were understood by Zionists as archetypes of the strong Jewish character they wished to resurrect—to the point that the holiday of Hanuka, celebrating the victory of the Maccabees, was adopted throughout Europe as an unofficial holiday of the Zionist movement.

Much of this adulation of the Maccabees was of course related to the hope that a restored Jewish character would return to the Jews their ability to defend themselves, which had been lost during centuries of dispersion. But there were other interpretations of what a restoration of Jewish character would mean. That of Ahad Ha'am is, I think, of particular significance today, and therefore worth considering more carefully. Among the great hebraist's most famous essays is "Slavery in Freedom" (1891), in which he argues that the most pernicious form of servitude afflicting the Jews in the diaspora is what he calls their "intellectual slavery"—the tendency, especially of Western Jews, to reshape the ideas of Judaism so as to make them more acceptable to gentile society. For Ahad Ha'am, the Maccabees are indeed a symbol of maintaining one's commitments under conditions of adversity, but it is principally intellectual commitments that concern him. After all, he writes, what moved Mattathias

was the desire "that the Jews might be able to remain separate from the nations in their inner life, and develop in their own way as a distinct and individual people."[25] The restoration of Jewish character, then, was to have its most significant impact on the ability of Jews to maintain their bearing in the face of duress in the realm of culture and ideas.

But what would a steadiness of the spirit look like in the realm of ideas? As suggested earlier, conditions of chronic weakness seldom permit the tempering of the spirit; instead, such conditions tend to give rise to a character that dissolves before a display of strength, or else to one that responds to superior power by swelling with a counterfeit sense of self-righteousness and self-importance. If we consider this matter, we can see that these twin aspects of a poor character have their rough equivalent in two familiar Jewish responses to the gentile civilization that surrounds us: *First*, that response which holds that there is little of real significance to be learned from the nations, and so finds endless reasons to avoid contact with non-Jews, their ideas, and their ways; and *second*, that which supposes the nations to be the source of virtually all good, and so finds endless reasons for avoiding any too-obvious identification with Jewish ideas and ways. Both of these approaches were endemic to Jewish life in Europe during the century prior to the establishment of Israel, and each did much to strengthen the hand of the other: The fear of resembling the Jews of the ghetto provided Jews seeking to integrate into general society with a potent motive for drawing away from all things Jewish; and the pronounced departure of Jews in general society from Jewish norms fueled the fear of inundation that characterized exclusionary Jewish society. By the middle of the nineteenth century these effects had become so extreme that rabbis in Germany were wearing white collars and observing the Sunday sabbath, while rabbis in Russia fought to prevent children from learning arithmetic.

Dissimilar as they may seem, these responses to gentile civilization result from the same cause: Weakness of character and its attendant fears. How else to explain a rabbi rising in the morning and donning the outfit

of a Catholic priest, if not by a secret hope that shelter and safety will come from hiding one's too-Jewish self from view? How else to explain a rabbi rising in the morning and resolving to prevent Jewish children from learning multiplication, if not by a secret hope that shelter and safety will come from hiding the gentile world from view? The former, like the chameleon, seeks safety by pretending he does not exist; the latter, like the ostrich, by pretending the gentiles do not exist. On a certain level, however, the two programs are one. For each seeks to put an end to the unbalanced relationship between the Jew and his far stronger Western environment by denying the significance of one of the two parties. Having thus disposed of whichever one he prefers by an act of mind, he feels free to go about his business as though all outstanding difficulties have been settled.

Now between these extremes there must exist a different path, which grows not out of weakness and fear, but out of strength. By this I do not mean anything resembling a *compromise*, whereby one's cultural disposition is determined by casting an eye in the direction of each of the opposing extremes and determining what is right by seeking the geometric center between them; for there is nothing so indicative of weakness of character as the belief that the proper posture can be determined by such compromise, and that compromise, in and of itself, is therefore a formula for discovering truth. Rather, I have in mind something else entirely: An individual for whom Jewish ideas and customs are the natural currency of his thoughts, so that when he comes to examine the ideas of another people, or when his children do so, he feels not even the most passing need to cast down his eyes or the slightest tremor of fear, whether conscious or unconscious; and is therefore moved by reflex neither to reject what he sees nor to embrace it, but judges it as a man of substance and resilience. Having found such an equipoise rooted in a confidence in his own value and in that of the civilization out of which he has grown, such a Jew would be able to admire that which is worthy in other peoples, and still to return to his own people without having endangered his essential

cultural disposition or loyalties. He would set his intellectual course in accordance with the need to give ever greater depth to his own Jewish perspective, now diving into the deep water of the ideas and traditions of our people, now venturing forth again into the wide gentile world, but always out of a belief that he acts as he does so as to attain the highest reaches. Such an individual will always have before his eyes that enrichment of his ideas that will bring the greatest benefit to his people and to himself, with the clear understanding that in matters of civilization, the betterment of one's own invariably redounds to the betterment of all mankind.

There is every reason to believe that such an intellectual posture can be achieved, not only on the level of individuals but far more broadly. Indeed, it is only in this way that the oft-discussed revival of Jewish civilization can come about. Yet if one examines this ideal carefully, it becomes evident that it is, from first to last, dependent on character—and in particular on the ability of a strong character to permit us to clearly distinguish ourselves from the gentiles without fearing them. To stand upright in the face of the gale wind that is the civilization of the gentile West, to be able to look deep within it and engage directly the sources of its strength, and yet, in the face of such stress, to maintain a sharply distinguished and independent Jewish conception of the highest things— this requires the capacity to bring to bear a formidable counter-pressure whose source is, and can be, in nothing other than force of character.

The restoration of Jewish civilization, which was and is a central purpose of the Jewish state, is thus contingent on our ability to raise up men and women of character. And the same is no less true of Israel's traditional purpose as guardian of the physical well-being of the Jews. This, too, is a responsibility that can be shouldered only by a state willing and able to exert itself in the most trying circumstances, wielding diplomatic, security, and economic tools alike to achieve its aims. Character, then, proves to be not only one of the purposes for which the Jewish state was established, but a prerequisite for attaining any of them.[26]

V

Has the Jewish state brought with it the development of the Jewish character, as so many had hoped? I do not believe there can be a simple answer to this question—in part because the Jewish experience of sovereignty has been so brief, and success in such an endeavor is not something that one can reasonably expect to measure over a handful of years. Nonetheless, the significance of this question requires that an attempt be made to render at least a tentative answer. I will therefore touch on several factors that must be considered if we are to assess our progress in this matter.

As discussed above, the expectations of the early Zionists with regard to the state and character were twofold: *First*, the state was supposed to free Jews from the onerous burden of having to adapt themselves to gentile norms as the ticket of entry into society; *second*, the challenge of independence and self-government was to create a relentless demand for individuals of character who would be sufficient to the task of maintaining the state. In other words, the removal of the barriers to Jewish entry into society was a largely *formal* change in our environment, which would open the door for the next, *substantive* step: The establishment of traditions and institutions capable of inculcating character in successive generations of young Jews.

With regard to the first, formal condition, I think that the results have been unequivocal. Life in the Jewish state has in fact put an end to the fear of social sanction resulting from one's being a Jew. This is not to say that an Israeli Jew seeking professional recognition or business contacts abroad does not occasionally come across some kind of hostility or unpleasantness related to his origins. But this is a marginal aspect of the life

of Israeli Jews, who do not, after all, live overseas but in our own Jewish state and society. Here, the once pressing need to obscure one's Jewishness in order to gain acceptance has disappeared without a trace. The restoration of the Jews' "inner wholeness" of which Herzl spoke—that is, the dream of attaining a perfect unity between our ambitions as individuals, and our loyalty to our forefathers and to our people—has been achieved. And with this, a fundamental obstacle that had frustrated the development of Jewish character in the liberal societies of Western Europe really has been eliminated from our lives.

Regarding the second, substantive aim, the picture is more complex. As suggested earlier, the challenge of establishing Jewish independence did inspire the creation of certain frameworks focused on training for character, of which the kibbutzim were the outstanding example. But the agricultural communism of the kibbutz was hardly an ideal of sufficient generality to be capable of propagating itself beyond the very particular set of conditions that brought it into being. These conditions disappeared shortly after the founding of the state, and with this the collective farms began their rapid decline as a significant educational force in Israel, taking with them the Labor Zionist youth movements and all the other satellite institutions that had sprung up around them. Though some of these institutions still exist in form, they ceased to fulfill their aristocratic function as models of character development long ago. The years have passed, and despite various promising developments, no obvious successor to the kibbutz has emerged. Nor is it difficult to understand why. Private schooling was never an idea with much traction in a country with a powerful public commitment to socialism; and Israel's universities, all of them vast institutions dealing in mass education, are hardly equipped to cope with something so personalized and labor-intensive as the effort to improve the character of their students. Only in the small, elite units of the army, under cover of military secrecy, has Israeli society systematically sought to develop the kind of character necessary for shouldering the responsibilities

of statehood. But for the reasons already mentioned, these units have seldom, or at least not for many years, graduated soldiers whose sturdiness in battle has been readily translatable into parallel qualities in other areas of public life—political, diplomatic, economic, or intellectual.[27]

This almost exclusive reliance on the military to educate our young men and women in matters of character has had far-reaching consequences for the quality of Israel's public life. On the one hand, the tradition of discipline in the army's elite units, together with the general conscription and training of most of the Jewish population, has succeeded in making of the Jews a people capable of showing exceptional force of character in warfare. This has been no less evident over the past two years than in previous wars, and in some respects it may be said that the present test surpasses anything Israel's public and its political leadership have faced since the War of Independence. Not for a generation has the Jewish state had to sustain a war whose duration was measured in years; not since independence has it had to contend with warfare directed against its civilian population, with war in the streets of its cities and capital. Nor is it possible to ignore the tide of anti-Semitism that has washed over Europe and other parts of the world as a result, throwing up hatreds against our state and our people that many had believed were long extinct. Yet despite all this, Israel has held its ground in a struggle our enemies were certain would break us.

On the other hand, it is worth taking notice of the fact that this display of character, of which Israelis are justifiably proud, did not become possible until *after* our enemies had begun systematically bombing all of our major cities. In other words, what we are seeing is a truly impressive display of Israeli battlefield character in a war that has engulfed the country's entire civilian population. But it is not clear that this capacity of Israelis to show force of character in warfare was ever really in doubt. What is in doubt is something else, which is whether one can point to the growth of a similarly impressive character in other areas—

political, economic, intellectual—for which the military does not explicitly train us, and in which one does not benefit from the moral clarity of being shelled.

And in these areas, our performance is in many respects troubling. Consider, for example, the pronounced tendency of Israel's political leaders—without regard to party affiliation—to refrain from speaking clearly concerning the necessity of enduring long-term hardship in order to attain worthwhile ends. This avoidance has been painfully in evidence in recent years, as our state has moved into a period of war, isolation, and economic contraction. It is an elementary principle of politics that states periodically find themselves in difficult circumstances, and that at these times they must purposefully undertake a policy involving protracted hardship, so as to invest all available resources in a direction that will lead to eventual improvement. Under conditions of external menace, this means setting out on a course of diplomatic confrontation and war that may require long years of sacrifice and suffering in order to lay the foundations for a better postwar order. Under conditions of economic menace, it means a course of confrontation and political struggle against those interests—whether oligarchic or "social"—that stand against a policy of open enterprise and growth; and here, too, there is often no alternative to long years of hardship if solid foundations are to be laid.

In other words, neither peace nor prosperity can be returned to the state without a willingness to chart a course that entails protracted hardship. In a democracy, moreover, a policy of hardship cannot be maintained indefinitely unless the leaders win the support of the public for it—that is, unless they explain why such a policy has been purposefully chosen, and persuade the public that it must accept this burden and even embrace it if better circumstances are to emerge a few years hence.

Yet this is precisely what Israeli governments have proven unable to do. More than a few Israeli political figures are enamored of Churchill's character, and in private they talk emphatically of the need for a political

leader who will speak the truth, saying that there is now nothing to be offered but blood, toil, tears, and sweat, and that matters will be worse before they are better. But in public, no significant Israeli leader dares to speak in this fashion on any subject. Their pronouncements are not calibrated to rally the public behind a policy of sustained austerity in order to cope with what is expected to be prolonged hardship. They are aimed to put the best face on things, as if all hardship were senseless and the only message worth delivering is that matters will soon improve. The best among them, of course, do not play this game. Instead they remain silent.

One may interpret this reluctance on the part of our political leaders in one of two ways: Either much of Israel's political leadership is without the strength of character necessary to risk electoral defeat in order to tell the public the truth; or else this leadership does have such strength, but is prevented from making use of it because the public lacks the character to bear such news and would reject a leader who comes forth with such a message. But whichever explanation one chooses, its implications with respect to the political personality of the Jewish state are not flattering. A democratic regime in which elected leaders refrain from persuading their public of the need for painful policies is one that is limited to choosing between that which is least painful and that which can be obscured by dishonesty. To put this in terms relevant to our discussion, such a state is one that is crippled by an inability to maintain a difficult course in the face of duress. It is crippled by lack of character.

Similarly, there is much to give us pause in the way Israel's intellectual and cultural life has developed over the last few decades. I suggested above that a man of character is not one who is given to flights of uneducated bombast when contending with ideas originating outside our people; still less should he need to be taking his cues as to what constitute suitable ideas from his colleagues in Germany or the United States. A good sign, therefore, of a strong national character would be the restoration of an independent Jewish cultural mainstream, which would avoid the extremes

of assimilation into the gentile West, on the one hand, and of exclusion of all foreign influence, on the other. This would mean the end of the regime of warring cultural extremes that so marred Jewish life in nineteenth-century Europe, and would pave the way for the rise of a Jewish civilization capable of once again speaking to the nations as an equal.

Yet what we see is precisely the opposite. After the founding of the state, writers and scholars such as S.Y. Agnon, Benzion Dinur, and Natan Altermann did indeed point the way to an independent cultural center that would move with confidence among Western models in the arts and letters, while at the same time developing a uniquely Jewish perspective capable of speaking to the great majority of Jews. Today, however, this trend has all but vanished; and everywhere one is confronted with a resurgence of the same warring extremes, the same old fears and hatreds, that so bedeviled Jewish life in Germany and Russia. Perhaps no one today would don a white collar or refuse the teaching of arithmetic, but the reality is closer to this than we care to admit. Our universities are to a great extent preoccupied with the imitation of the latest academic trends from abroad, while our yeshivot are for the most part closed off from any meaningful contact with ideas and traditions not their own; and the gap between them is, if anything, substantially wider than it was thirty years ago. Thus if the capacity to maintain a posture of Jewish cultural integrity without fear of gentile civilization is indeed an indicator of character, we must say that here too Israel's record is deeply troubling.

Although Israeli Jews rarely speak of character explicitly, it is hard to say that the problem to which I am referring is unknown in the public discourse of the Jewish state. The question of character, and especially of the Zionist leadership's failure to establish this quality among its children, was already in clear view in literary portraits of this younger generation such as Aharon Meged's *Living on the Dead* (1965) and Ya'akov Shabtai's *Past Continuous* (1977).[28] Today, however, this failure has become an open scandal. The public's veneration of political leaders such as Ariel

Sharon and Shimon Peres—men advanced in years, who are in effect the last survivors of the generation of the founders—has been widely interpreted as a repudiation of the younger cadre of politicos, and recent journalism has become ever more insistent on drawing attention to this point.[29] Like children who have grown up in affluence and yet know nothing of the hardship and self-discipline that brought their parents to it, Israelis of today have grown up in a Jewish state whose maintenance depends on qualities of personality they witnessed as children, but did not necessarily understand or appreciate at the time. In fact, much of Israeli public life in the past thirty years, since the Yom Kippur War of 1973, is the story of the gradual awakening of a generation of Israelis to the truth that their parents possessed something they are lacking—something our state could really use right now.

The hardships of recent years have brought many Jews to a greater appreciation of the role character plays in maintaining the independence of a people. We have paid much for this lesson, but then men are only educated at great expense. The question now is whether we can make good use of what has been learned. To do so means to take up in earnest the question the generation of Israel's founders never found the time to address properly: What is to be done so that our children will have sufficient strength of character to carry forward the commitments undertaken with the establishment of our state?

Everything else we wish for depends on the answer we give this question.

VI

The order of sovereign states is a moral necessity, the only tolerable alternative to a world of anarchy and empire. Having failed to establish such an order to their satisfaction, many in Europe and even some in America are nonetheless reaching out jealous hands today to the poison fruit of empire.[30] Educated men should know better. History is littered with the bones of nations that, beginning to feel their excellence and their strength, and becoming aware of some special calling, have turned these thoughts to the extension of their might and their law throughout the world. The outcome is almost always the same. A people bent on empire is one that ceases to concentrate on the maturation of the unique qualities that alone give its existence purpose. Instead it spreads itself ever more thinly across the globe, losing itself in unimagined plots and entanglements, squandering its strength and diluting its unique qualities, until the original fire gives out and it collapses into ignominy. Before we in the West acquiesce in so easy a return to imperial ways of thinking, we should make a more conscientious effort than has thus far been attempted to grasp what we would be losing in giving up our own independent states, each of which was the labor of generations, each of which is the bearer of unique purposes that a world of empire and anarchy will never be able to fulfill.

This is no less true of Israel than of any other state. The purpose of our own state was and is to be the Jewish state, the guardian of the Jewish people. I have tried to elaborate the meaning of this purpose, by considering anew three aspects of Jewish guardianship—the physical guardianship of the security and well-being of the Jews; the upbuilding and restoration of the unique Jewish vantage point on civilization; and the nurturing

and development of the Jewish character. Each one of these is a worthy aim, and they were treated as such by the founders of the Zionist movement. But it is also useful to understand them as being dependent on one another in a sequence: The capacity for an independent Jewish foreign and security policy is ultimately dependent on the capacity of the Jews to articulate their own views concerning the essential questions facing mankind; and both of these are dependent on the development of Jewish character.

I have tried to show how fundamental Jewish character is to the other purposes of the state, but I have said less about another aspect of this threefold relationship that deserves to be touched upon. For the early Zionists, there was no question but that the Jewish religion, and the Jewish ideas and way of life that developed from it, had been the basis for Jewish survival in the lands of the dispersion. Yet this once-clear relationship between Jewish ideas and "survival" became almost unknown in the period after the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel; the extraordinary emphasis during this period on the role of the Jewish state in ensuring Jewish continuity tended to obscure the role that had been played previously by Jewish ideas, and in fact the State of Israel itself came to be seen by many as the central Jewish idea, or even the only one. Moreover, we must admit that this has been an especially difficult period for the propagation of the intellectual heritage that was handed down as part of the Jewish tradition. The destruction of metaphysics by Hume and Kant, together with the dismissal of the contribution of the Jews to the West by Hegel, left a profound doubt as to whether any aspect of Judaism would ever again be relevant to humanity; and the question of God's abandonment of his people during the Holocaust settled the issue for many, so that Hitler was responsible for the erasure not only of much of the Jewish people, but also of its capacity to find strength in its own heritage. Only the necessity of protecting Jews from the likes of the Nazis seemed to be a clear imperative, and this imperative consequently served as the catalyst

that brought the actual Jewish state into being. For many, the tottering edifice of Judaism was rebuilt on the sturdy foundation of Zionism.

But time has had its effects in this area, and to my mind they have been largely salutary. As was inevitable, a generation growing up without memory of the Holocaust no longer understands the imperative of a Jewish state as being self-evident, and has naturally discovered what in any case had always been true—that taken in isolation, the idea of the Jewish state is an insufficient basis on which to construct a compelling worldview. As memory of the Holocaust has faded, so too has Zionism, and with it the Judaism that many had sought to build upon it. In the meantime, however, the intellectual climate in which we live has gradually grown less forbidding. The stream of "pure" enlightenment has run its course, and everywhere on the intellectual horizon there are movements of resistance—communitarianism, conservatism, republicanism, post-modernism. Each of these has, in its own way, opened the forbidden doors that lead back to the Jewish tradition. It has now become possible to think of doing away with the unstable structure of a Judaism based almost exclusively on Zionism, and to reconsider the possibility of a Zionism whose basis is in our Judaism. In other words, just as the intellectual vantage point of our fathers sustained us in the dispersion, so too does it hold the key to preserving the Jewish people in its state, and therefore the Jewish state itself.

When these considerations are taken together, it seems to me that they offer a clear view of the purpose of our state. Through our state we have the opportunity to build up individuals of independent character; and through them we may yet see our civilization rise again, and with it our capacity to protect our people in times of hardship. Of course, the mere existence of a state can no more guarantee the character of the Jews than it can guarantee that their welfare will be safeguarded, or their civilization restored. The hope of establishing a Jewish character worthy of the name is, like these other hopes, no more than a potentiality and a

promise. But what a promise! That the remnant of Jacob should once more have the opportunity to raise up commanders of armies and industries, poets, men of learning, and statesmen—perhaps among the best that ever were, perhaps to the enrichment of all nations, and in the name of their forefathers and the God of Israel. In this way, too, will we be able to contribute to humanity by serving as a bulwark against the encroachment of empire and anarchy, whose enmity to the aspirations of mankind was first understood by our own people, many centuries ago.

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Notes

1. In discussing personality, I make reference to its three distinct parts: Intellect, spirit, and appetites. Each of these aspects of our nature can be described in isolation from the others, and requires its own vocabulary to capture the range of characteristics and qualities that are special to it. Thus one may say that an individual possesses a quick mind or a creative or abstract one, these being descriptions of qualities of the intellect or reason; regarding appetites, too, one can say of an individual that he is voracious, subdued, perverse. The third part of our nature, the spirit, is that which detects danger and other forms of disorder in the environment around us, and rallies the forces needed to neutralize threats and reimpose order by means of passions such as anger and fear. The spirit, too, can be described in terms of qualities that vary from one person to the next. Thus a man may be aggressive or forceful or passive, magnanimous or petty, effusive or temperate, prone to debilitating fears and depressions or not so. And it is here, as well, that we find the quality of character, which is principally a quality of the spirited part of our personality.

There are those, of course, who believe life would be better without the experience of anger or fear. But there is little to admire in such a hope. The

phases of our spirit can be seen as a continuum from despondency at one end, to exhilaration at the other, in which fear and anger are the middle phases. On this continuum, exhilaration is that emotion which represents to us circumstances of complete control over ourselves and our environment, while despair represents to us capitulation and complete loss of control. The phases and hues in the middle range, on the other hand, are those that permit us to move between these two extremes. The first twinges of anger warn us that stability and control stand to be lost, while the subsequent force of this passion affords us the chance to improve our condition through confrontation and struggle; fear functions in the same manner but in the opposite direction, warning that stability and control have already been lost, and mustering the resources necessary for retreat and retrenchment. In other words, it is the intermediate phases of the spirit that permit us to construct a predictable environment around us, by distinguishing that which is safely under our control from that which is threatened, and both of these from that which is beyond us. To live life without the emotions of the middle range would be to live in a kind of insane delusion, in which everything is either at one's absolute command or else beyond any hope of influence.

2. Exodus 5:21. For the Jews' earlier reception of Moses and Aharon, see Exodus 4:29-31.

3. Exodus 14:11-12.

4. Exodus 15:2-3, 17:3; Numbers 11:4-6, 19:2-5, 20:4-6. Dathan and Abiram go so far as to say that it was Egypt, and not Israel, that was "a land flowing with milk and honey." Numbers 16:12-13.

5. Exodus 32:1ff.

6. When Caleb and Joshua attempt to persuade them that the land can be conquered, the congregation decides to stone them. Numbers 13:31-14:10.

7. Numbers 19:7-13.

8. Exodus 3:11. In fact all of Moses' questions at the burning bush are arguments born of fear. He fears that both Pharaoh and the Hebrew elders will not believe him, that he will not know what to say, that they will ridicule and reject him. See also Exodus 3:13, 4:1, 10, 13.

9. The relationship between the state and personal qualities such as character is discussed in Plato, *Republic* 374e-376e, 428d-434e; Aristotle, *Politics* 1276b16-1277b16, 1337a11. Aristotle, in particular, emphasizes the need for character in smaller associations as well. See also Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 1:18, 3:1, 3:27ff., in *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, trans. Allan Gilbert (Durham: Duke University, 1965), v. i, pp. 241, 420-421, 492ff.; Machiavelli,

The Art of War, in *Chief Works*, v. ii, pp. 566-567, 582, 723-724. In addition, there has been a substantial revival of interest in this topic in recent years. See, for example, Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1969), p. 118; J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton, 1975), pp. 74-75, 551; John Dunn, *Rethinking Modern Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1985), pp. 34-54; William A. Galston, *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1991), pp. 213-237; James Q. Wilson, *On Character* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1995), pp. 113-122; Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford, 1997), pp. 241ff; Michael J. Meyer, "When Not to Claim Your Rights: The Abuse and the Virtuous Use of Rights," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 5:2 (1997), pp. 149-162.

10. The conclusion that must be drawn is that while the political state must excel in its economic capacity and in the quantity of its armaments, it ultimately exists by virtue of the strength of character found among its officials and officers. Under a democratic form of government, in which a very broad public participates in determining the actions of the state, one must go further and say that the state relies for its existence on the character of its citizenry as a whole. Thus the weakness of British policy in 1938, including England's ignominious betrayal of its commitments to the Czechs and the Jews, was not merely a reflection of poor character on Chamberlain's part. It was to a significant degree a reflection of the weakness of an entire generation of Englishmen who proved insufficient to the challenge posed by Hitler. At the same time, it may also be said that Britain's independence as a state was saved two years later by this same people's recognition that it had to reform its posture and commitments or accede to enslavement. By this time Germany's armies were already approaching victory in France, but it must be remembered that England still had an alternative to the "blood, toil, tears, and sweat" that were all Churchill had to offer. England could have chosen a settlement with Germany, as proposed by Hitler himself and supported by the faction of Lord Halifax—a settlement whose price would have been the establishment of Hitler's rule in Europe. For an account of this live option of reaching a negotiated peace with Hitler, see John Lukacs, *The Duel: The Eighty-Day Struggle Between Churchill and Hitler* (New Haven: Yale, 2001); for some of Churchill's war speeches, see Brian MacArthur, ed., *The Penguin Book of Twentieth-Century Speeches* (New York: Penguin, 1992), pp. 185-189.

11. Particular attention should be paid to this choice of the 2-kilometer forced march during the first days of training. Not every such choice can have the desired effect. This first test must be harsh enough so that the recruits have

genuine cause for fear, but not so harsh that the exercise will defeat them outright. The premise of such training is that fear is a deceiver, and that one must not live by its dictates. But if the recruits are defeated time after time, they will only be reinforced in trusting their fears and giving themselves up to them; that is, they will emerge broken in spirit. There is thus a fine line between an education that builds up the spirit, so that it grows stronger with each new trial, and one that breaks it. The latter, we may say, is the kind of education the Hebrew slaves received at the hands of their taskmasters, in which every clash of wills meant inevitable defeat; fear was therefore learned to be a faithful guide in choosing one's actions. The former is, we may surmise, the kind of education that Moses received in the house of Pharaoh.

12. *Ma'ariv*, Friday supplement, April 12, 2002.

13. Exodus Rabba 5:14. Compare the commentary of Ibn Ezra on Exodus 14:13: "How could a vast camp of six hundred thousand men have been afraid of its [Egyptian] pursuers, and why would they not fight for their lives and for their children's lives? The answer is that the Egyptians were masters over Israel, and the generation of the departure from Egypt had learned from childhood to suffer the yoke of Egypt, and their spirit was broken; and how would they now fight against their masters?"

14. R. Isaac Abravanel, commentary on Deuteronomy 28:65, in *Commentary on the Torah* (Jerusalem: Bnei Arbael, 1964), p. 270. [Hebrew]

15. R. Ya'akov Hagiz, *Halachot Ketanot*, part ii, 139:5.

16. Leviticus 26:36.

17. Max Nordau, Address at the Second Zionist Congress, delivered on August 28, 1898, in Nordau, *To His People: A Summons and a Challenge* (New York: Scopus, 1941), p. 90. [Hebrew] For similarly suggestive passages, see M.L. Lilienblum, "On the Rebirth of Israel on the Soil of the Land of Our Forefathers," originally published in 1881, reprinted in Shalom Kramer, ed., *M.L. Lilienblum: A Collection of His Articles* (Tel Aviv: Joseph Sreberk, n.d.), p. 74 [Hebrew]; Leo Pinsker, "Auto-Emancipation: An Appeal to His People by a Russian Jew," in Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), pp. 186-190; Yosef Haim Brenner, "Micah Joseph Berdichevski: A Few Words on His Literary Personality," originally published in 1913, reprinted in *Writings*, vol. iii (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1985), vol. iii, pp. 837-838 [Hebrew]; A.D. Gordon, *The Nation and Labor* (Jerusalem: Zionist Library, 1952), p. 188. [Hebrew] Herzl himself repeatedly used the image of the Exodus from Egypt to describe his plan for liberating the Jews from the exile; and the sin of the golden calf as a symbol of lack of Jewish character. See, for example, Theodor

Herzl, *The Jewish State*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Herzl Press, 1970), pp. 90, 94.

18. See Ze'ev Jabotinsky's eulogy for "Doctor Herzl" (Odessa: Kadima, 1905) [Russian], translated into Hebrew only in part in Ze'ev Jabotinsky, *Early Zionist Writings* (Jerusalem: Eri Jabotinsky, 1949), p. 98; Ze'ev Jabotinsky, *Samson* (New York: Judaea, 1986).

19. "Talked to Dr. F. of Berlin," Herzl once noted in his diary. "He is for baptism. He wants to make the sacrifice for his son. I explained to him that there are other low-down ways in which one can make it easier for one's son to get ahead." Theodor Herzl, *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, ed. Raphael Patai, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Herzl Press, 1960), entry for August 10, 1895, vol. i, p. 228. The opening pages of Herzl's diary include a declaration of his own record on the subject: "I can say to myself with the honesty inherent in this diary—which would be completely worthless if I played the hypocrite with myself—that I never seriously thought of becoming baptized or changing my name. This latter point is even attested to by an incident. When as a green young writer I took a manuscript to the Vienna *Deutsche Wochenschrift*, Dr. Friedjung advised me to adopt a pen name less Jewish than my own. I flatly refused, saying that I wanted to continue to bear the name of my father, and I offered to withdraw the manuscript. Friedjung accepted it anyway." Herzl, *The Complete Diaries*, undated introduction, vol. i, pp. 4-5.

20. Max Nordau's *Dr. Kohn* was published in English translation as *A Question of Honor: A Tragedy of the Present Day*, trans. Mary J. Safford (Boston: John W. Luce, 1907). This passage appears on pp. 82-83.

21. Nordau, *A Question of Honor*, pp. 81-82.

22. Theodor Herzl, "Judaism," in *Zionist Writings: Essays and Addresses*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Herzl Press, 1973), vol. i, pp. 57-58.

23. Herzl, *The Jewish State*, p. 110.

24. Ahad Ha'am, "The New Savior," in Leon Simon, ed., *Selected Essays by Ahad Ha'am* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962), p. 250.

25. Ahad Ha'am, "Slavery in Freedom," in Ahad Ha'am, *Selected Essays*, pp. 171-194. This quotation is from Ahad Ha'am, "The New Savior," in Ahad Ha'am, *Selected Essays*, p. 250.

26. In this context, it is reasonable to ask whether we can really see the development of character as an end in itself—that is, as a purpose of the state comparable in importance to the physical guardianship of the Jews, or to the restoration of Jewish civilization. Certainly, there have been voices in the

Zionist tradition that have made of character precisely such an end. This is, for example, the teaching of Jabotinsky's *Samson*. I know more than a few readers who have asked what a Jew is supposed to learn from a Samson who regularly commits acts of thievery and adultery, who has never so much as heard the name of Moses, and who fiercely loves the Philistines to his dying day, because among them "every soldier is like a staff in the hands of his officer, every officer in the hands of his captain, and the whole army in the hands of the Saran." Jabotinsky, *Samson*, p. 59. What makes the book such difficult reading is precisely the fact that its purpose is to present the case for character *as an end in itself*. Jabotinsky's Samson can teach his people nothing concerning the significance or desirability of being a Jew because, given the choice, he himself would have chosen the life of a Philistine. Nevertheless, he does have something to teach his downtrodden brothers: He teaches them to stand their ground, to aspire to unity, to remain loyal to one another in adversity. In short, he teaches them character.

When viewed against the backdrop of the dissolution, disloyalty, and corruption that characterizes the Israelite settlement in Canaan in the time of the Judges, it may be argued that even the distilled quality of character in which Jabotinsky traffics, unmixed with any other virtue, does indeed possess a certain beauty. Nevertheless, it seems to me that this argument is insufficient to establish character as an end in itself. That is, if one asks whether this beauty, such as it is, is sufficient reason to establish the Jewish state and maintain it, with all the hardship this entails, I find myself unable to answer in the affirmative. Life and truth—these are things for which a man may have to sacrifice his life, or that of his son. But to sacrifice human life for the sake of beauty? Jews cannot wage war to be more beautiful men; we cannot teach men to lay down their lives and those of their children for beauty. It is Samson's seeming willingness to sacrifice life for the sake of beauty that makes this book so repulsive to us. In the end, character is to be valued not as an end, but only as a means to other, higher ends.

27. One step that has been taken in recent years has been the establishment of a number of small, one-year pre-military academies, whose purpose is to provide young men and women with a framework capable of channeling their energies towards national service and placing this service within a larger intellectual scheme. But these are only a modest supplement to a public-school education whose focus, where it addresses questions of citizenship, is on teaching the student to insist on his rights, while saying nothing about the qualities of character he and his countrymen will need if the state that guarantees these rights is to be maintained.

28. Aharon Meged, *Living on the Dead* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1965) [Hebrew], English edition trans. Misha Louvish (New York: McCall, 1971); Ya'akov

Shabtai, *Past Continuous* (Tel Aviv: Siman Kri'a, 1977) [Hebrew], English edition trans. Dalya Bilu (New York: Shocken, 1989).

29. See Ari Shavit, "The Failure of the Grandchildren," *Ha'aretz*, Weekend supplement, April 25, 2001, pp. 10-14.

30. Max Boot, "The Case for American Empire," *The Weekly Standard*, October 15, 2001, pp. 27-30.