



PERSPECTIVES

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The Ingathering of the Exiles Is Not Over

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Diaspora Minister Nachman Shai's claim that it is not his job to encourage aliya to Israel negates the very purpose of Zionism, as understood and emphasized by the leaders of the founding generation. First and foremost among those leaders was David Ben-Gurion, who saw the ingathering of the exiles as "the yearning, destiny, and mission of the State of Israel."

Diaspora Minister Nachman Shai is not the only public figure to have stopped seeing the ingathering of the exiles as a national goal. This is a negation of the essence and purpose of Zionism as understood and emphasized by the vast majority of the leaders of the founding generation. The most prominent of those leaders was David Ben-Gurion, who considered the redemption of Israel to be the state's reason for being. He explicitly cited the words of Chazal in Tractate Brachot and consciously and consistently used religious Jewish expressions to explain his position on this issue.

Ben-Gurion said, "Neither security nor the development of the country are the essence of the state. They are but essential conditions. The State of Israel is not like any other state ... The Jewish People has carried the yearning for redemption in its heart [for millennia]. The State is just the beginning of this redemption whereas the ingathering of the exiles is the yearning, destiny, and mission of the State of Israel. Without this destiny, it is devoid of its historical meaning and turns its back on the Jewish People today, in the generations that preceded us, and in the generations to come."

Returning to the Land of Israel is a national-religious obligation and also obliges the Jews who already live here. A state, like intimacy and love, is not a phenomenon that, once established, is on a static trajectory. It needs to be nurtured and regenerated daily. A state is in a constant process of

establishment—especially the Jewish State, where the ingathering of the exiles is its “yearning, destiny, and mission.” Being strong and prosperous is not an end in itself; the Jewish state must be strong and prosperous in order to accomplish its fundamental mission and destiny.

It is not for nothing that the term “עלייה (aliya)” —roughly meaning “ascent”—cannot be accurately translated, as it does not exist in any other language. As a concept, it is not equivalent to “immigration.” The Hebrew word “aliya” refers to one thing only: Jews coming to Israel. A Jew who moved from the USSR to the US is an immigrant, but a Jew who moved from the USSR to Israel is an “oleh” (“one who ascends”). A Jew who leaves Israel for another country is a “yored” (“one who descends”). Until a few decades ago, this was self-evident to every Israeli Jew. This is the context in which Jewish immigration and emigration are defined: there is one and only homeland, and a Jew living anywhere else is outside it.

Even during the aliya of Ezra and Nehemiah, in the early days of the Second Temple, most Jews chose to remain in the Babylonian exile. As the sages said, “Because of our sins we were exiled from our land and moved away from our land.” Jews pray three times a day: “May a great shofar sound our freedom and act as a miracle to gather our dispersed people.”

The writer A.B. Yehoshua has described the Jewish temptation toward exile as an ancient genetic defect. Zionism exists to correct this defect, and the determination to do so must be restated every day by every Jew.

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