

Footnotes on Israel

They don't often sing Hatikvah in Israel. During my six weeks' tour of the infant democracy—there were official visits and meetings—I did not hear the anthem. Last time I heard it sung was two evenings before I embarked from Idlewild. That was at a bar mitzvah in Brooklyn.

What I mean is: The Israeli do not sing their patriotism. (Though they love music: a concert will have a three- or four-day run in Tel-Aviv.) Their ardent idealism is not expressed so much in the proud accomplishments of their five years as a nation. Where you really find it is in their eager approach to the bitter challenge that still confronts them.

COMMENT:

They've got a lot of nation yet to build in Israel.

They're using the army to do it—in a way that no army was ever used before. It's more than a security force; the barracks have become a melting pot for refugee immigrants from all parts of the world. Military service is compulsory and the polyglot of cultures and languages are diffused into the making of an Israeli. The army is probably the greatest catalyst in creating the spirit of "one nation" on which so much depends.

BRIDGING THE GAP between the ancient and the modern is the harsh task facing Israel today. Their keen interest in archaeology on the one hand, great admiration for American technological abilities on the other. We saw it everywhere.

THE RELATIONSHIP between Arab and Jew living in Israel as equal citizens of the state brings a pleasant shock to the visitor who reads only about border incidents and political name-calling in the United Nations. There is harmony and neighborliness inside Israel; the tensions are fostered by the leaders of the Arab states.

Similarly, there is excellent accord between Jews and Christians on protection of holy places in Jerusalem.

WE SPENT PESACH at a charming resort hotel, on the shores of the historic Sea of Galilee, where Prime Minister and Mrs. Ben Gurion were observing the holiday. Our wives and Mrs. Ben Gurion already had challenged each other with photographs of our children and her grandchildren. The Prime Minister had the first question.

"Are you making any progress fighting anti-Semitism in America? How do you know if you are succeeding?"

With this kind of opening, how could we hold back an ADL pitch? We discussed the trials and triumphs of the past 10 years and the general concern of the great mass of American organizations and individuals with the compelling question of minority problems. We talked a lot; it soon struck me that we were not interviewing the Prime Minister—he was doing it to us. His deep interest in America and his knowledge of our problems was surprising.

HE HAD HIS REASONS. He wondered out loud: "Do we realize how dim has grown the light that was Jewry throughout the world?" Only in Israel and America did he still find the light shining like a beacon of hope.

For Israel to succeed, said the head of its government, the American Jewish community must be secure. Jews in America, to continue as generous and vigorous leaders of world Jewry, must be free from fear. They must enjoy first-class citizenship. Lacking that strength and vitality in America, there can be no Israel in the Middle East. There will be no hope—all will be a vain dream.

"You understand my interest in your welfare," said the Prime Minister.

Benjamin R. Epstein

ADL NATIONAL DIRECTOR



Epstein, Forster and host (center).