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When asked to consider the State of Israel's future over a historical span of several decades, I can't help recalling being asked more than once in the 1970s—both before and after the Yom Kippur war, both in Israel and abroad—whether I felt that this country would still exist

in the year 2025, for example, or would already have become but an episode of history. At the time I would answer, with ardent yet duly respectful opposition, that I was not at all certain that either the Soviet Union or the United States would still exist so far in the future, but I was perfectly willing to bet on the existence of the State of Israel (although I assumed, of course, that if and when the bill came due, I would most probably lie among the dead).

Now, lo and behold: Despite an appearance of tremendous, monolithic might, the Soviet Union collapsed in 1990, when Israel was but forty-two, and only six years later than when Russian historian Andrei Amalrik, in his *Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?*, predicted that the “evil empire” would disappear.

This, of course, did not happen to the United States. Right now, with almost every country on earth undergoing severe shocks to its economy, currency and society, it looks as if America’s monopolistic imperialism is getting ever more firmly entrenched. Nonetheless, sociologists, political scientists and intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans continually point to deepening inner contradictions in America’s multifaceted society, proofs of its identity crisis, loss of solidarity, erosion of civic consciousness and sweeping, almost ubiquitous corruption—all of which may make us expect that the “American Century,” the last of the second millennium, will also be America’s last as a unified nation-state, as leader of the world.

But to go back to the matter at hand, namely, evaluating the future of the State of Israel. In the first years of statehood, such questions were naturally and quite frequently voiced, in a tone of doubt and incredulity. At some of the most difficult points of the 1948 war, they were accompanied by full-blown terror and despair or, at the very least, by fierce, heartfelt anxiety regarding the future. And before Israel came into being, in the years when it seemed only a dream, or at best an abstract ideal—something many of its dreamers were embarrassed to admit, even among themselves, much less in public—the atmosphere was rank with pointed questions about its

chances of being established at all, and even whether it was really necessary or just.

In every generation, concern with understanding the dimensions or even basic character of the future to which one tribe, nation or polity or another can look forward is quite familiar to students of the occult, including some blessed with imagination and sharp intellect—as well as to some others who tend to hallucinations and nightmares. This preoccupation is often ideologically or even theologically based. This is especially characteristic of the biblical prophets' predictions of wrath and destruction, offset, to some degree, by prophecies of consolation from the same Book of Books. It also applies to the basic assumption of classical Christian historiography, which tried hard to present the “New” Israel as the antithesis-culmination of the “Old,” and the “New” Testament as both paralleling and rivaling the “Old” one.

Uncertainty is, to be sure, at the core of all existence, all the more so of human existence. If we dare approach the absurd, at the end of the day it would seem that in the annals of the twentieth century, surprises were what was *least* surprising, and the unanticipated, more than anything else, should have been anticipated. Perhaps those with a broader perspective might well arrive at a similar conclusion about *every* chapter in the annals of man. In a history replete with persecutions of the Jews as a people dispersed and oppressed—possibly even proud of its sorry state—this lesson may take on deterministic, or perhaps apocalyptic, significance. Almost as a matter of principle, disaster and annihilation have become an immanent part of collective consciousness, bound together like Mahlon and Chilion, the two Ephratite brothers in the book of Ruth—the anticipation of failure and bereavement.

Thus it should not be surprising that from the very beginning, heavy doubts and horrific fears accompanied modern settlement in the Land of Israel. More often than not, they even came to be expressed publicly, candidly and with moral authority by mentors, visionaries and standard-bearers of Zionism. Ahad Ha'am and Haim Nahman Bialik, J.H. Brenner and Uri Zvi Greenberg gave them lucid, even heartrending expression, each in his own way, each true to his own self. Even when these fears were accompanied

by fantastic, messianic hopes, the profundity of their angst remained intact. And even in the air of sovereign, stately Israel, to which people stream from near and far, and which has come to be admired by people near and far (more by the far than the near, to be honest), they still float about, permeating the atmosphere. Now as well as before. In other words, they do not merely result from a difficult or problematic situation. They are nurtured by the same affluent, self-satisfied strata of the Jewish soul, starting out as a faint, fatalistic pessimism and ending in masochistic self-flagellation.

So, I could base my unswerving (and unusual) confidence in the future and longevity of Israel (whether it continues to be called by that name, charged with traditional, theophoric connotations, or adopts one more appropriate for a nation-state) on an intelligent, comparative analysis of statistical data relating to its military, political, scientific, technological and economic potentialities, against the backdrop of its geopolitical, human and cultural environment. My confidence, however, derives from an appreciation of the *essence* of that future—that is to say, the *essential character* of the state in the future; in other words, in the fundamental, unavoidable and ever-anticipated changes in its values.

Hebrew would not have returned to life as a full-fledged language had it not undergone a certain desacralization, transforming it from the “holy tongue” to an everyday, secular idiom (perhaps even most secular of all). So, too, the State of Israel may be certain of its future to the degree that it undergoes a profound dejudaization, redeeming it from its “judeocratic” rags, and from modes of thought and action typical of a “Jewish state” (or “state of the Jews”). In the world of nations, a state such as this will find its place—no longer as a communal or congregational state, but rather as a territorial, secular, democratic nation-state, self-sufficient, viable and fully capable of self-rule.

And then, the sky’s the limit...

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