

**Pardes from Jerusalem - Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'Atzmaut:
Recognizing, Honoring & Cultivating Israel's "Radical Otherness."**

A teaching from Rabbi Dr. Nathan Lopes Cardozo, in his article *Yom Ha'atzmaut – The Mystery of Israel, Thoughts to Ponder, TTP-339*, David Cardozo Academy, April 2013.

Throughout the centuries, historians, philosophers and anthropologists have struggled with the concept called "Israel" almost more than with any other topic. While attempting to place Israel within the confines of conventional history, they experienced constant academic and philosophical frustration. Any definitions they suggested eventually broke down due to serious inconsistencies. Was Israel a nation, a religion or an altogether mysterious entity which would forever remain inexplicable? By some, it was seen less as a nation and more as a religion; others believed the reverse to be true. And there were those who claimed that it fit neither of these categories.

In fact, it was clear to everyone that Israel did not conform to any specific framework or known scheme. It resisted all historical concepts and generalities. **Its uniqueness thwarted people's natural desire for a definition, since that generally implies arrangement in categories.** Anything that flies in the face of that categorization is alarming and terribly disturbing. This fact became even more obvious after Bar Kochba's rebellion (132 – 136 CE) was crushed by the Romans, who then forced the Jews out of their country. It was then that the Jew was hurled into the abyss of the nations of the world and has since been confronted with a new condition: ongoing insecurity. While humankind has always faced moments of uncertainty, it is the Jews who have been denied even the smallest share of the dubious security that others possess. Whether Jews were aware of it or not, they always lived on ground that could, at any moment, give way beneath their feet.

In 1948 Israel once again became a country. But many forgot that it was not *only* a country. All its other dimensions, such as nationhood, religion, mystery, insecurity and lack of definition continued to exist. Jews today do not find themselves exclusively in the State of Israel, and instead of one Israel, the world now has two. But the second, new Israel has until now been seen as responding to the demands of history, geography, politics and journalism. One knows where it is. At least one thinks one knows where it is. But it becomes clearer and clearer that this new and definable Israel is now seriously on the way to becoming as much a puzzle and mysterious entity as the old Israel always was. In fact, it already has.

Throughout its short history, the State of Israel has gone through the most mysterious events modern people have ever seen. After an exile of nearly two thousand years, during which the old Israel was able to survive against all historical odds, Jews returned to their homeland. There they found themselves surrounded by a massive Arab population that was and is incapable of making peace with the idea that this small mysterious nation lives among them. After having experienced a Holocaust in which six million of its members perished, the Jewish nation was not permitted to live a life of tranquility on its tiny piece of land. Once again, the Jew was denied the right to feel at home in his own country.

From the outset, Israel was forced to battle its enemies on all fronts. It was attacked and condemned for defending its population and fighting for its very existence. Over the years, it has had to endure the international community's policy of double standards. Today, as in the past, when it calls for peace, it is condemned for provoking war. When it tries, as no other nation does, to avoid hurting the citizens of the countries that declare war on it, it is accused of being more brutal than nations that committed and still commit atrocities against millions of people. Simultaneously and against all logic, this nation builds its country as no other has done, while fighting war after war. What took other nations hundreds of years it accomplished in only a few. While bombs, katyushas and missiles have attacked and continue to attack its cities, and calls for its total destruction are heard in many parts of the world, Israel continues to increase its population, generate unprecedented technology and create a stronger and more stable economy.

But the more it succeeds, the more its enemies become frustrated and annoyed, and the more dubious Israel's security becomes. The more some nations aspire to destroy it, the more the world is forced to deal with this tiny state and its survival capacity. By now, Israeli politics and diplomacy occupy more space in major newspapers and the media than any other political issue or general topic – as if Israel's questionable security and irritating population are at the center of world events.

Jews must ask themselves what this non-classification really signifies. Is it due merely to lack of vision and insight on the part of the nations? Is it that Jews *could* really fit into a system but the nations have not yet allowed them entry? Is it a negative phenomenon? A temporary one, until it will rectify itself in the future?

We have only one way to comprehend the positive meaning of this otherwise apparently negative anomaly: **the way of faith**. From any other viewpoint, the failure of Jews to fit into a category would be intolerable and a meaningless absurdity. What we need to understand is that our inability to conform to any framework is our living avowal of Israel's uniqueness. **Israel's very existence is the manifestation of divine intervention in history to which it must attest**. In Israel, history and revelation are one. Only there do they coincide. While other nations exist as nations, the people of Israel exist as a reminder of God's involvement in world history. Only through Israel is humanity touched by the divine.

*I remember how the materialist interpretation of history, when I attempted in my youth to verify it by applying it to the destinies of peoples, broke down in the case of the Jews, where destiny seemed absolutely inexplicable....Its survival is a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon demonstrating that the life of this people is governed by a special predetermination, transcending the processes of adaptation expounded by the materialistic interpretation of history. The survival of the Jews, their resistance to destruction, their endurance under absolutely peculiar conditions and the fateful role played by them in history; all these point to the particular and mysterious foundations of their destiny (Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006, pp. 86-87).*

Indeed, no other nation has overturned the destiny of humankind as much as this nation has. It endowed the world with the Bible and brought forth the greatest prophets and men of spirit. Its spiritual ideas and moral laws still hold sway among the world's citizens, influencing entire civilizations. This nation gave birth to a man who is seen by millions as their Messiah and who laid the foundations on which moderate Christianity, Islam and much of secular moral teachings were built. It has bestowed dignity and responsibility upon the human individual and has provided humankind with a messianic hope for the future. Unlike any other nation, the Jews have granted the gentile world “the Outside and the Inside,” their outlook and their inner life.

*We gentiles can hardly get up in the morning or cross the street without being Jewish. We dream Jewish dreams and hope Jewish hopes. Most of our best words, in fact—new, adventure, surprise; unique individual, person, vocation; time, history, future; freedom, progress, spirit; faith, hope, justice—are the gifts of the Jews (Thomas Cahill, *The Gift of the Jews*, New York: Talese/Anchor Books, 1998, p. 241).*

All of this proves that Jews have a destiny and a mission far different from any other nation. We are an eternal people with a timeless message, and **our history is one of radical otherness.**

The realization of this fact has become modern Israel's great challenge. Its repeated attempts to overcome its geographic and political insecurity by employing world politics will not work. Driven by its desire to overcome its vulnerability, Israel wavers between geography and nationhood, appealing to its history and religious culture while unable to find a place that it can call its existential habitat. **Its leaders must come to terms with the fact that any attempt to “normalize” the State of Israel will threaten its very existence. We must realize that there is no Israeli claim to the land; there is just a Jewish one.**

Only by the uninterrupted chain of generations can it be ascertained that this has always been the Jewish homeland—all through our exile—and that this land has been taken from us by force. If we reject this fact, our claim to the land stands on quicksand. **We either return to the Holy Land, or there is no land to return to.** Without continuity, there can be no return. **No nation can live with a borrowed national identity.**

Reading the *Nevi'im* (the books of our prophets), we see how they warned against such false notions of security. They predicted that Israel would perish if it insisted on existing only as a political structure. Yet, it *can* survive—and thrive. **This is the paradox of Israel's reality—as long as it insists on its vocation of uniqueness.**

Israel is summoned to remind the world of God's existence, not only concerning religion but also as a historical reality. **There is no security for Israel unless it is secure in its own destiny.** We must shoulder the burden of our own singularity, which means nothing less than fulfilling our role as God's witness. And we must draw strength from this phenomenon, especially in times such as ours when Israel's very existence is again at stake. **Once Israel recognizes its uniqueness, it will, paradoxically, enjoy security and undoubtedly be victorious.**

The Day Before – Yom HaZikaron

A story published in *Eretz Yisrael in the Parashah: Essays on the Centrality of the Land of Israel in the Torah*, Rabbi Moshe D. Lichtman, Kol Mevaser Publications, Jerusalem 2010, pp. 441-442.

In honor of Israel's Memorial Day, I present here a short, but very powerful, article that pinpoints, in my opinion, the problem with many Jews' attitude towards the modern State of Israel. It is taken from a pamphlet entitled "Zionism: A Challenge to Man's Faith," by Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis, Hineni Publications:

In the Holy City I met a woman...she related a tale to me...a tale which reflects the agony of Zionism in the 20th century...

This woman of Jerusalem had a son by the name of David...He was 20 years old. She also had a sister who lived in New York...She too had a son of the same age...His name was Chaim.

The American cousin came to Jerusalem for a year of study. Then suddenly, Milchemet Yom HaKippurim (the Yom Kippur War) broke out. Both boys were in the synagogue praying side by side. David, still wrapped in his tallit, without pausing for food or water, ran to answer the call of his people...He bid farewell to his cousin, to his mother, to his father, to his young bride...He had no choice but to go forth to defend his people...

The following day, the mother of Jerusalem received an emergency phone call from the United States. "Please, please," a near hysterical voice called across the great ocean..."Where is my Chaim? Please do not let him do anything rash...You must find him and get him out on the first plane to safety. We are sick with worry. I want him home."

The mother in New York was overcome by fear...and somehow in her agitation she forgot to ask about David...her sister's son...the son of Jerusalem, whose heart at that very moment was pierced by a shell in the Golan...

Two Sisters...Two Mothers...Two Sons...

The story haunts me. It leaves me no peace. For indeed, if the land of Israel has been given by God as an inheritance to all Jews, then how could this be that those in the United States go to sleep in security, knowing that their sons are well and sound, while their sisters living in Israel lie awake with gnawing fear gripping their hearts, asking the question, "Where is he now?" Whispering a silent prayer, "HaShem, Almighty God, watch over him."

This story highlights that no matter how much the American Jew has given and will continue to give on behalf of Israel, this will never equal the sacrifices of those who live in Israel and offer their very lives for the land...for all the Jewish people and not only those who live in Israel.

*I would suggest that the listener simply holds this story in his/her heart, whether living in Israel or in the Diaspora, without judgment, and with compassion --- not only appreciating what Yom HaZikaron means to all the Jewish people but to **feel** what in fact it is we are all remembering.*