

Israel and the Diaspora

A topic that has been discussed in Israel for a long time, but has become increasingly so in recent months, concerns the relations between the Jewish state and Diaspora Jews.

Let us consider: When the state was founded, there were only 650,000 Jews living in Israel, Today, there are 6.93 million. Worldwide, there are estimated to be 15.2 million Jews; that is, 45% of the world's Jewish population currently lives in Israel itself—in 1948, it was only 6%. Most Jews living outside Israel are found (in descending order) in the USA (6 million), France (446,000), Canada, Great Britain, Argentina, Russia, and Germany (118,000).

27,000 live in Muslim countries, especially in Turkey (14,500).

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had promised His beloved Jewish people: "Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land, and I will make them one nation..." (Ezek. 37:21-22). We are allowed to experience the time in which God has clearly begun to fulfill this promise, which has led to "Aliyah": Since the founding of the state in 1948, more than 3,250,000 Jews have returned to the Promised Land, partly with the help of "fishermen" (e.g. organizations such as "Ebenezer" and the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem), partly because of growing anti-Semitism, because of "hunters", in accordance with the promise: "Behold, I will send many fishermen, says the LORD, and they shall catch them. And after that I will send many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and from every hill and from the clefts of the rock" (Jer 16:16).

From its very beginning, the Jewish state felt an obligation to serve the Jews of the entire world. Even during the Dispersion, they remained one people ("Am Yisrael"), one family ("Beit Yisrael"). This is underscored, for example, by the "Law of Return," which grants every Jew the right to immigrate to Israel and obtain citizenship there.

But relations between Jews in Israel and those in the Diaspora are becoming increasingly difficult. There are several reasons for this:

A 2020 survey revealed the alarming result that 25% of American Jews described themselves as "Jews without religion," meaning that although they identify as ethnically or culturally Jewish, have a Jewish parent, or were raised Jewish, they are atheists or have no religion (Jerusalem Post, September 3, 2021). Many have thus lost certainty about their identity as Jews. With increasing secularization, interest in Jewish life, culture, and tradition is declining.

Second, while American Jewish youth once proudly followed the rise of the Jewish state, many now sympathize with the "Palestinian" minority and reject Israeli measures against the massive hostile attacks—abetted by the often completely distorting media. An August 2021 study found that 9% of American Jewish voters agreed with the claim that Israel has no right to exist. Among those under 40, the number was as high as 20%! A third of young voters believe Israel is committing genocide, and over a third consider Israel an apartheid state. (Jerusalem Post, August 27, 2021)

Third, alienation has been intensified by Netanyahu building an intense relationship with Republican Donald Trump and the majority of American Jews who identify as Democrats.

Fourth, there are tensions in the spiritual realm between the Israeli Orthodox Chief Rabbinate on the one hand and the Americans, who are predominantly Reform Jews. When the Sephardic Chief Rabbi said of the Reform Jews that they distort the Torah, "everything about them is fraud" (July 10, 2020), this will deter American Jews from making aliyah. And approximately 400,000 Israelis, primarily from the former USSR, have Jewish roots but are not Jewish under Jewish law. They are therefore unable to marry in Israel. This further strains relations with the Diaspora.

An Israeli commentary summarized: Diaspora Jews should not seek to influence politics in Israel, and Jews in Israel should not act as arbiters in matters of Judaism and faith. But we must remember our shared values and bring together wisdom and commitment.

For decades, Israel has been strongly supported by Jews from America. Now, partly due to the pandemic, a paradigm shift may be emerging, with the Diaspora receiving financial support rather than supporting Israel. "But this raises philosophical questions about the nature of Zionism: To what extent does Israel want to help Jewish communities abroad survive? Shouldn't they come here?" (Jerusalem Post 15.5.21)

The NGO "Jewish Agency", founded in 1929, has played a significant role in strengthening relations between Israel and the Diaspora by repatriating Jews to the Promised Land, sending young Israelis as "ambassadors" to many countries, organizing educational programs, exploratory trips and summer camps in Israel, language courses, and social programs such as job placement and integration support, among others.

Christians should pray

- for wisdom for the Israeli government
- for the fruitful work of the Jewish Agency and the organizations working for Aliyah
- that many more Jews will return to the God of their fathers and gain the right biblical perspective on their identity and God's plans
- that the Holy One of Israel himself heals the existing cracks.
-