

## A Land of Two People: Martin Buber and Bi-Nationalism in Palestine

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Valley Beit Midrash, March 25, 2019

### **1. British Foreign Minister Arthur James Balfour (11/2/1917):**

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.<sup>1</sup>

### **2. General Syrian Congress, Memorandum to King-Crane Commission (7/2/1919):**

We oppose the pretensions of the Zionists to create a Jewish commonwealth in the southern part of Syria, known as Palestine, and oppose Zionist migration to any part of our country; for we do not acknowledge their title but consider them a grave peril to our people from the national, economical, and political points of view. Our Jewish compatriots shall enjoy our common rights and assume the common responsibilities.<sup>2</sup>

### **3. *Brit Shalom* (A Covenant of Peace / The Peace Association) Statutes (5/1926):**

The object of the Association is to arrive at an understanding between Jews and Arabs as to the form of their mutual social relations in Palestine on the basis of absolute political equality of two culturally autonomous peoples, and to determine the lines of their co-operation for the development of the country. Towards this end the Association will promote: a) The study of the problems arising out of the existence of the two peoples in Palestine, and out of the Mandate under the League of Nations; b) The spreading of verbal and written information among Jews and Arabs on the history and culture of both peoples, and the encouragement of friendly relations between them; c) The creation of a public opinion favorable to a mutual understanding; d) The creation of institutions calculated to advance these ends.<sup>3</sup>

### **4. *She'ifoteinu* [*Our Aspirations*], I., Preface (1927):**

Brith Shalom wishes to create here in *Eretz-Yisrael* a state inhabited jointly by the two peoples living in this country under complete equality of rights, as the two elements which jointly and equally determine the destiny of this country, without regard for the fact which of the two is, at any particular time, numerically superior. Brith Shalom aspires to create here in Palestine a solid and wholesome Jewish community, to contain as many Jews as possible, without regard for the fact whether the Jews attain a majority as against the other inhabitants of this land or not, since the question of a majority in this country should in no way be linked with any advantages or privileges.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, eds., *The Israel-Arab Reader* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Buber, *A Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 74.

<sup>4</sup> Aharon Kedar, "Brith Shalom," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 18 (Winter 1981), 68.

## 5. Judah L. Magnes, Diary Entry (12/17/1925):

[The] Reasonable arguments [of Bergmann and *Brit Shalom* are] based wholly on tactics...Jewish weakness, Arab strength, Jewish minority, Arab majority. The question goes much deeper. My friends, suppose the case were reversed, and you were the majority, would you then believe in the 'two nationalities' system? Perhaps. But one has the feeling that there are all too few whose tactics spring from a well-considered, deeply believed-in principle, which is right whoever be majority or minority.<sup>5</sup>

## 6. Samuel Hugo Bergmann, "On the Majority Question," *She'ifoteinu*, 12/1929:

We want Palestine to be our land in the sense that the political and moral outlook of Judaism leave their imprint on the life in this country, that we carry out here the doctrine which has been living in our hearts for two thousand years—whereas our opponents have a different outlook altogether. When they talk about Palestine as our land, the term 'our land' means *ours* and not *theirs*. This philosophy is borrowed from Europe in the era of its decline, and is founded on the conception of the state which is the property of one people only...In Palestine there is no room for 'the people of the state' or for any 'national sovereignty'... here, in this country, our historical fate has determined that we be those fighting for a change of values in the life of nations...to break up that majority spirit in the life of nations, to set up a new national and political morality in the world, which would secure a national minority the same rights enjoyed by the majority and eliminate totally the political value of numerical relations between people.

## 7. Yitzhak Epstein, "The Hidden Question," 1905:

We buy the lands, for the most part, from the owners of large estates; these owners, or their predecessors, acquired their land by deceit and exploitation and lease it to the *fellabin*...it is customary in Eretz Israel for the estate to pass from one owner to another while the tenants remain in their place. But when we buy such a property, we evict the former tillers from it...can we really rely on this way of acquiring land? Will it succeed, and does it suit our purpose? One hundred times no...Will they not in the end rise up to take back with their fists what was taken from them by the power of gold? When we come to buy lands in Eretz Israel, we must thoroughly check whose land it is, who works it, and what the rights of the latter are, and we must not complete the purchase until we are certain that no one will be worse off.<sup>6</sup>

## 8. Ernst Simon, "Letter to the Jewish Agency," 1930:

If the Jews renounce the plan of developing a majority they no longer need to oppose democratic institutions in the country. Such a peace conclusion would restore [the] confidence of progressive world opinion including the League of Nations...If such a perfect peace is not arrived at...the Palestinian contingent of the Jewish people will have to fall in for hire with the imperialistic and reactionary forces and must develop all the virtues and all the vices of a warlike nation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>6</sup> Yitzhak Epstein, "A Hidden Question (1907)," trans. Alan Dowty, in *Prophets Outcast: A Century of Dissident Jewish Writing about Zionism and Israel*, ed. Adam Shatz (New York: Nation Books, 2004), 36-52.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Susan Lee Hattis, *The Bi-National Idea in Palestine during Mandatory Times* (Haifa: Shikmona, 1970), 54.

### 9. David Werner Senator, “Letter of Resignation to Dr. Weizmann,” 1947:

If it is not assumed that the Great Powers are prepared to transfer the Arabs of Palestine from this country to other Arab countries, the [program of a Jewish commonwealth] can only mean partition. But here again, a workable partition seems to be possible only if at least a partial transfer [of the Palestinians from their homes to areas outside the Jewish state] is effected.<sup>8</sup>

### 10. Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, 1949:

Even in its first undifferentiated form a tendency towards federation was innate in the Kvuza, to merge the Kvuzoth in some higher social unit; and a very important tendency it was, since it showed that the Kvuza implicitly understood that it was the cell of a newly structured society...the fundamental assumption was that the local groups would combine on the same principle of solidarity and mutual help as reigned within the individual group.<sup>9</sup>

### 11. Arthur Ruppin, “Letter to Victor Jacobson,” 1931:

What we can obtain from the Arabs we do not need, and what we need we shall not be able to obtain. What the Arabs are willing to give us is at most minority rights for the Jews in an Arab state, according to the pattern of minority rights in Eastern Europe...Zionism which is willing to give its hand to such a compromise with the Arabs will not gain the support of the Jews of Eastern Europe and would soon become Zionism without Zionists.<sup>10</sup>

### 12. Hans Kohn, “Letter of Resignation to Dr. Feiwel,” 1929:

[W]e are seeking a victorious peace...a peace whereby the opponent does what we want...it will be possible for us to hold Palestine and continue to grow for a long time. This will be done first with British aid and then later with the help of our own bayonets...the means will have determined the goal. Jewish Palestine will no longer have anything of that Zion for which I once put myself on the line...What we support we cannot vouch for...either Zionism will be pacific or it will be without me. *Zionism is not Judaism*.<sup>11</sup>

### 13. Martin Buber, “And if Not Now, When?” (1932):

Judaism is the teaching that there is really only One Power which, while at times it may permit the sham powers of the world to accomplish something in opposition to it, never permits such accomplishment to stand...I am speaking of the *reality of history*. In historical reality we do not set ourselves a righteous goal, choose whatever way to it an auspicious hour offers, and, following that way, reach the set goal. If the goal to be reached is like the goal that was set, then the nature of the way must be like the goal. A wrong way, i.e., a way in contradiction to the goal, must lead to a wrong goal.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> David Werner Senator, “Letter of Resignation to Dr. Weizmann,” in Buber, Magnes, Simon, *Towards Union in Palestine*, 54.

<sup>9</sup> Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 146.

<sup>10</sup> Ruppin to Dr. Victor Jacobson, December 3, 1931, in Hattis, *The Bi-National Idea in Palestine*, 58.

<sup>11</sup> “Hans Kohn: Zionism is not Judaism,” in *Land of Two Peoples*, 96-100.

<sup>12</sup> Buber, “And if Not Now, When?” in *A Land of Two Peoples*, 105.

#### **14. Martin Buber, “The Bi-National Approach to Zionism,” 1947:**

This program [bi-nationalism] is only a temporary adaptation of our path to the concrete, historical situation—it is not necessarily the path itself. The road to be pursued is that of an agreement between the two nations—naturally also taking into account the productive participation of smaller national groups—an agreement which, in our opinion, would lead to Jewish-Arab cooperation in the revival of the Middle East, with the Jewish partner concentrated in a strong settlement in Palestine. This cooperation, though necessarily starting out from economic premises, will allow development in accordance with an all-embracing cultural perspective and on the basis of a feeling of at-oneness, tending to result in a new form of society.<sup>13</sup>

#### **15. Martin Buber, “Zionism and ‘Zionism,’” (1948):**

That demand [for sovereignty] was expressed and presented in two different forms, one beside the other. The first form crystallized around the ‘democratic’ concept of the majority: we must endeavor to create a Jewish majority in a state that will include the whole land of Israel. It was evident that the meaning of that program was war—real war—with our neighbors, and also with the whole Arab nation: for what nation will allow itself to be demoted from the position of majority to that of minority without a fight?

When that program was revealed to be illusory, a program of tearing off took its place. That is to say, tearing one part of the land away from the rest, and in the torn off portion—once again, a majority, and the thing’s name would be a Jewish State.<sup>14</sup>

#### **16. Martin Buber, “Socialism and Peace” (1956):**

I doubt if there is anything more important today than the choice between two types of socialism. One is a so-called socialism that is imposed from above...the other is a socialism from below, a socialism of spontaneity arising out of the real life of society...the coming stage of humanity that will emerge from this great crisis of man depends in great measure on just this decision. It depends on whether it will be possible to set up over against Moscow another, spontaneous type of socialism, and I venture even today to call it Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Buber, “The Bi-National Approach to Zionism,” in Martin Buber, Judah Magnes, and Ernst Simon, eds., *Towards Union in Palestine: Essays on Zionism and Jewish-Arab Cooperation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), 10. Originally published in 1947 by the Ihud Association, Jerusalem.

<sup>14</sup> Buber, “Zionism and ‘Zionism,’” in *Land of Two Peoples*, 223.

<sup>15</sup> Buber, “Socialism and Peace,” in *Land of Two Peoples*, 277.