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### Two Souls

“AS LONG as in the heart, within, a Jewish soul is yearning. . .” thus starts the official translation of Israel’s national anthem.

Actually, the Hebrew original says “the soul of a Jew”, but the translator probably got it right. It’s the Jewish Soul that was meant.

But is there a Jewish Soul? Is it different from the souls of other people? And if so, what is the difference?

FRANKLY, I don’t know what a soul is. But let’s assume that there is such a thing as a collective psychology, the general spirit of all the men and women who make up this collective—each of whom has a psychology of his/her own. What is it that differentiates it from that of other peoples?

Looking at the present day Israeli people, a stranger may well be perplexed. First of all, more than a fifth of Israelis are not Jewish at all, but belong to the Palestinian people, who presumably have a different “soul”. When people speak about Israelis, they generally really mean “Jewish Israelis”.

This, by the way, should have convinced Israelis long ago to change the national anthem and other symbols of statehood, to give the minority a sense of belonging. The Canadians did so. When they realized that the citizens of French descent were liable to secede and found a nation of their own, they changed their anthem and flag, so as to give the French minority a sense of belonging. As far as I can judge from afar, the operation was successful. But there is little chance of this happening here.

EVEN WHEN speaking about Israeli Jews only, our national psychology (or “soul”) is rather perplexing. It contains elements that are mutually exclusive, profound inbuilt contradictions.

On the one hand, most (Jewish) Israelis are immensely

proud of the power of the state they have “built out of nothing”. 150 years ago, there were hardly any Jews in the land of Palestine, and these were completely powerless. Today, Israel is the most powerful state in the region, a nuclear power excelling in many fields of human endeavor—military, technological, economic, cultural etc.

Yet listening to many Israeli outpourings, one might come to the conclusion that we may be wiped from the map at any moment. The world is full of people whose sole aim in life is to destroy us. Therefore we must be ready at any moment to defend our very existence.

How do these two contradictory attitudes go together? No problem. They do very well.

FIRST, THERE is the ancient belief that God chose us from all the peoples.

Why did God do that?

God knows. He does not have to explain.

The thing is a bit complicated. First the Jews invented God. There are also Egyptian and Mesopotamian claims, but Jews know better.

(It has been said that many Jews do not believe in God, but believe that God has chosen the Jews.)

Jews learn at a very tender age that they are God’s chosen people. Unconsciously, this knowledge remains anchored in their “soul” throughout their life, even though many of them become total atheists. True, many peoples on earth believe that they are better than other peoples. But they don’t have a Bible to prove it.

I am sure that many Jews are not even aware that they believe this, or why. The Jewish soul just knows it. We are special.

The language reflects this. There are Jews and there are the others. The Hebrew for all the others is “goyim”.

In ancient Hebrew, “Goyim” just means peoples in general, including the ancient Israelite people. But over the centuries a new definition has come into being: there are the Jews and there are all the others, the Gentiles, the Goyim.

According to legend, the Jews were a normal people living in their land, the Land of Israel, when the evil Romans conquered them and dispersed them throughout the world. In reality, the Jewish religion was a proselytizing religion and expanded quickly throughout the empire. The Jews in Palestine were already a minority among the adherents of Jehovah, when the Romans evicted many of them (but far from all) from the country.

Soon they had to compete with Christianity, an offshoot of Judaism, which also started to wildly gain adherents. Christianity was built around a great human story, the story of Jesus, and was therefore more apt to convert the masses of slaves and proletarians throughout the empire.

The New Testament also includes the story of the crucifixion—an unforgettable picture of “the Jews” demanding the execution of the gentle Jesus.

I doubt if a person who heard this story in their early childhood ever really loses the scene in their unconscious mind. The result is some kind of anti-Semitism, conscious or unconscious.

This was not the only reason for hating the Jews. The very fact that they were dispersed throughout the world was a huge advantage but also a huge curse.

A Jewish merchant in Hamburg could connect with a Jewish merchant in Thessaloniki, who was corresponding with a Jewish merchant in Cairo. Few Christians had such an opportunity. But the competition exposed Jews to innumerable pogroms. In one European country after another Jews were attacked, killed, raped, and finally expelled.

In the Jewish soul all this created two conflicting trends: the conviction that Jews were special and superior and the conviction that Jews were in eternal danger of being persecuted and exterminated.

IN THE meantime, another offshoot of Judaism—Islam—came into being and conquered a large part of the world. Lacking a Jesus story, it was not anti-Jewish. Muhammad had his quarrels with Jewish tribes in the Arabian desert, but for long stretches of time, Muslims and Jews worked closely together. Moses Maimonides, one of the greatest Jewish thinkers, was the personal physician of one of the greatest Muslim heroes, Salah ad-Din (Saladin).

Until Zionism arose.

Jews did not change. While other European nations changed their forms of social structure—tribes, multi-tribal kingdoms, empires, modern nations etc.—Jews stuck to their ethnic-religious diaspora. This made them different, leading to pogroms and finally to the Holocaust.

Zionism was an attempt to turn the Jews into a modern European nation. The early Zionists were cursed by orthodox Rabbis in the most savage terms, but refused to be drawn into a culture war. They created the fiction that in Judaism, religion and nation are the same.

Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, was a European colonialist through and through. He tried to win a European colonial power for his enterprise—first the German Kaiser, then the British imperialists. The Kaiser said to his aides “It’s a great idea, but you can’t do it with Jews”. The British realized the potential and issued the Balfour Declaration.

The Arab populations of Palestine and the “Middle East” realized too late that their very existence was in danger. When they started to resist, Zionism built up modern military forces. Very soon, they became by far the most efficient military machine in the region, and the only local nuclear power.

THAT IS where we are now. A domineering regional power and a global crybaby, ruling a colonized population deprived of all rights while being convinced that dark forces are out to exterminate us at any moment, considering ourselves a very special people and an eternal victim. All this quite sincerely. And all this together.

When somebody dares to suggest that anti-Semitism in the West is dying, and that anti-Islam is on the rise instead, the Jewish reaction is furious. We need anti-Semitism for our mental equilibrium. Nobody is going to steal it from us.

Almost 80 years ago, small groups of young Jews in Palestine had the idea of a separation between the communities: we Jews in Palestine were a new nation, all the others would remain just Jews. Rather like Americans and Australians, who were largely of British descent but not quite British anymore.

We all went “native”. On reaching the age of 18, we all exchanged our Jewish names for Hebrew Names. (That’s how Uri Avnery came into being.) We started to think of ourselves as a new nation, with a new “soul”, connected to

Judaism, sure, but mainly historically.

But when the full extent of the Holocaust became known, all these ideas died. The Jewish past was glorified. Now Israel calls itself the “Jewish State”. With all the attributes of being Jewish, including the double soul.

So Israelis will continue to sing at football matches  
“As long as a Jewish soul. . .”

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