

Is America Exile?

This article is the edited text of a symposium delivered at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, in April 1987. It touches on issues which go beyond the scope of the Jonathan and Ann Pollard affair, some of which will linger within the embrace of Israel-Diaspora relations. The moderator, Rabbi Yosef Goldman, is director of the B'nai Brith Hillel Foundation at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

Rabbi Yosef Goldman: We have all followed with great dismay the fallout and repercussions that resulted in the imprisonment and conviction of Jonathan and Ann Pollard. If anything positive could be said to have come out of this affair, it is the soul-searching and healthy debate that it sparked among Jews in Israel and America. We are indebted to Professor Shlomo Avineri for initiating this debate in his incisive if controversial "Letter to an American Friend", which appeared in the Jerusalem Post and Abraham Foxman's thought-provoking reply pub-

lished a few days later in the same newspaper.

The issues raised by Avineri and Foxman continue to occupy central stage on the Jewish public agenda, with numerous articles in the Hebrew, English, and international press, as well as on Israeli and U.S. television. I believe that critical to this debate is the question as to the deeper meaning behind the American Jewish response to the Pollard affair. Does it prove that American Jews do not really feel "at home" in America? And is it, therefore, a vindication of Zionism's classic notion that nowhere but in Israel can Jews feel truly safe? Or, is American-Jewish reaction merely an expression of concern born out of love for the State of Israel, for continued U.S. trust and friendship toward the Jewish state? Owing to the great importance of this issue and to public interest, B'nai Brith Hillel Foundation at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is privileged to present a debate between Shlomo Avineri, professor of political science at the Hebrew

University, and a former director general of the Foreign Ministry, and Abraham Foxman, associate national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith. The topic of their debate is, "Is America Exile?"

Professor Shlomo Avineri: On an intellectual level, one of the debates which occasionally comes up is between "the Zionist position," and the position which one hears in the United States. It goes as follows: the traditional Zionist approach views Israel as a center, and the Diaspora (or Galut, or exile) as a periphery. At various levels of sophistication and articulation, we occasionally hear an American view — I wouldn't say *the* American view — that says that the American Jewish experience is unique. Consequently the classic Zionist analysis does not apply. One cannot really talk about a center and a periphery. How can American Jewry be a periphery to Israel? Their view is that today there are two centers. And some like to use historical or theological parallels, one speaks about Jerusalem and Pompeii.¹ Another speaks about Eretz Israel and Babylon. I would like to start by accepting the premise that we can talk about two centers, that there is something in the U.S. experience, in the richness of Jewish life there, in the freedom — almost without parallel — in which the Jews live as Jews there, which can be compared to the Babylonian experience. But this only begs the question, because all Jewish sages who lived in Babylon never questioned the fact that Babylon was exile. They continued to pray, "Next year in Jerusalem." I would like to make it very clear that so long as Jews do pray, "Next year in Jerusalem," regard-

less of what they mean by that, they still think that they are in the Diaspora. This may not cover very secular Jews who never pray but if you say "Next year in Jerusalem," you know that you are in exile.

It is for this very reason that traditional Reform Judaism in its most extreme and radical way in the 19th century, excised that line from the prayer book. Most Jews who pray today do not excise that line.

Why do I basically feel that our discussion transcends the Pollard affair? There are moments in history where things that are considered dormant or have been conveniently pushed under the carpet, come out. And there are moments of truth. "The question is this. Why have American Jews and Israelis not spoken candidly to each other?" I think this debate is about speaking candidly. It is a debate within the family.

In the last thirty years we have had a tacit pact between the American Jewish leadership and the Israeli leadership, of not bringing up issues over which we know we disagree. There were political and financial reasons for that, there is an interlocking of interests. The American Jewish leadership has a political standing in the United States *only* because it is connected in some way or other to Israel; if it had just been the leadership of the American Jewish community, it would not have an entrée to the White House; it would not have the kind of visible position which no other religious, ethnic or cultural group in the United States has. And the Israeli political leadership has a built-in interest of having the forum of the American Jewish leadership open to it.

Until recently there was not much openness nor was there debate. Pollard brought out the fact that there is an issue. Now why, if I may try to understand, was there such anger within the American Jewish community about Pollard? Why so much public criticism?

American Jewish leadership has committed itself in the last years to a position which is not an easy one. It has said, "We support Israel, and we support the government of the day in Israel. It is not up to us to criticize the policies of the government of Israel. Because it is Israelis who are out there on the line, they have to make the decisions. They have to live with the consequences." And basically, I agree with that position. During the years of the Begin premiership, I had arguments with some of my best friends in America who are on the left, who were saying there some of the same things I was saying here about the Begin government, but I told them, "I don't think you should say that in America. It is one thing for me as a citizen of Israel to say it in Israel, but it's another thing for you, sitting in America."

The American Jewish community went through difficult periods, where publicly it had to defend Israeli policies with which it was not really in agreement. And here comes the great paradox. Israel can annex the Golan Heights and the American Jewish community may not be very happy, but it will support it. Israel can put settlements on the West Bank, and the American Jewish community — or some of them — may not be happy, yet they will not publicly dissociate themselves from Israel. When Israel bombed the nuclear reactor in Iraq (and this may or may not have been a good thing — I think it was a

good thing) many American Jews were not happy, but they did not dissociate themselves publicly from Israel.

Many American Jews were not happy with the Lebanon war, but they did not publicly dissociate themselves from Israel, with the exception of voices after the massacre in the Sabra and Shatilla camps — which was a very extreme case. The only time the official leadership of the American Jewish community in a variety of ways dissociated themselves from Israeli government policies, and made a point of *publicly* dissociating themselves, was in the Pollard affair. We can put settlements on the West Bank and annex it, we can go to war and the American Jewish community will hold its peace. On Pollard, it spoke out. Why, if you are not in an ambivalent position?

Because, the argument says, it put the American Jewish community in a difficult situation. Why are you put in a difficult situation unless you feel that you are in Galut. People are saying that this will bring out antisemitism. People are saying it places the American Jewish community under a cloud. Let me read you a letter I received from a Greek Jew. It is a copy of a letter he sent to the Jerusalem Post which was not published, like about 400 other letters which were not published on this issue.

"Reading Professor Avineri's remark reminded me of the American Vice-President Spiro Agnew, (a.k.a. Aganoskopolous) affair during President Nixon's administration in the early 1970's. Vice-President Agnew was forced to resign from office following his plea of *nolo contendere* to charges of bribery, or some such related allegations. Yet I do not recall that this created any panic in the Greek-

American community. Little, if any, publicity was given to the incident in any Greek-American publications; nor did the matter warrant any discussion by any of the Greek-American organizations."

There is a definition of Karl Marx that says that a police state is not a state where everybody is being followed by the police; but a state where everybody *thinks* that he is being followed by the police. Similarly my understanding of Zionism is that it is not a response to antisemitism. You don't need antisemites to be in Galut, because Galut is in your own soul. If you feel that something like the Pollard affair makes you uncomfortable, that it puts a question-mark on your allegiance, then you are in Galut. Rabbi Neil Sandberg, who happens to be the regional director of the American Jewish community on the West Coast, says, "I would like to see American Jews point with pride to the way Jews have contributed throughout history to the arts, the military, and all fields of life, and to make it clear to other people that we have helped build this thriving country. We have our allegiance with Israel, but we should indicate at the same time that our primary loyalty is to the U.S." I have no quarrel with somebody who believes that his primary loyalty is to the U.S. I believe in free choice. But why do American Jews have to say after Pollard that their primary loyalty is to the United States? Nobody has questioned the primary loyalties of American Jews, except they themselves. This is really what Galut means: by protesting too much, and making dozens of similar statements.

Galut does not mean persecution; nor does Galut mean that Jews are hated; neither does Galut mean that Jews are

discriminated against. Galut means that when the chips are down, one feels a little bit insecure and not at home; that one has to over-identify; that one has to show war medals — as some other letters suggested. How many Jews died for the United States? More Jews have died for the United States than for Israel. Why make that statement? Nobody is questioning your loyalty. But if you feel that you have to wave the American flag, that you have to wear your loyalty to the United States on your sleeve — this is Galut. No other religious or ethnic group in the United States reacted in such a way.

It is very interesting that one of the few American non-Jewish leaders who reacted mildly in public (but in private very strongly) was Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii who said at a meeting of the Jewish War Veterans Conference, "Why don't you Jews speak up? Why do you lower your heads after Pollard? Why do you feel a little bit uncomfortable?"

This does not mean that American Jewish life in the United States is insecure. This does not mean that a great wave of antisemitism is on the rampage. All of us who have seen the recent New York polls know, that most non-Jewish Americans do not know who Pollard is, and secondly, more thought he spied for the Soviet Union than for Israel. It is the *Jews* who think that the non-Jews think that Pollard reflects on the Jews. This is what Galut is.

Now why is this important? Precisely because we are a family. We should talk truth to one another. American and Diaspora Jews have on many occasions criticized a lot of issues in Israel which are not to their liking. How many times have we heard that our electoral system

is not the most ideal in the world, or that the way we treat minorities is not the best, or that the monopoly of Orthodox Jews over this country is a scandal? We have heard, and justly so, a lot of criticism from American Jews — about institutions, structures of Israeli government and society, etc. Precisely because we are a family, we are entitled to say to our American brothers and sisters what we feel about them. It seems to me that most Israelis do not wish to live in Galut — and this is the *raison d'être* of living in Israel — If America is not Galut, why are we not all there?

The only reason why three and a half million Israelis are in America is because for some reason or other we feel it is Galut. And I don't have to tell you that life in Galut is much easier than in Eretz Israel. Nobody said Galut "is acquired by suffering" — a saying in the Talmud. Only Eretz Israel was thus acquired. That's why the Jewish people always lived in Galut, because Galut was always the easy way of opting out. If one lives in Galut, one never has to worry about whether spies are sent or not. The gentiles do it for you. Living in Galut one never has to work out a tax system that will feed all your countrymen because you don't care for all your people; you just care for your own kin. If you live in Galut you don't have to defend your people. The gentiles will defend your people, if you have the good luck of living among good gentiles. The Jewish way of living in Galut has always been aimed at finding that kind of protection. In Poland it was the *Paritz*, the noblemen, who protected the Jew. There is a great nobleman that protects American Jews now, a great poet. This poet is called American Democracy. It is a very

deeply institutionalized protection. Still it is a protection. And therefore one fears that sometimes the protection may crack. And this is exactly what happened in the Pollard case.

Protection is always on condition. You are on probation. And many Jews felt after Pollard that somehow they have contravened the conditions of their probation. This means living in Galut. It does not mean — and I don't want to fool myself — that Galut will disappear. Maybe that Galut will remain, I wouldn't say forever, but for a long time.

In Jewish life, Israel is a value; Diaspora is a fact. There is a Jewish value in Jewish life in Eretz Israel. There is no Jewish value in Jewish life in the U.S: it could be lived anywhere else if the conditions were right. What can be done in the U.S. can be done in Canada, can be done perhaps one day if the world will change in the Soviet Union, if there will be freedom of worship, freedom of teaching Hebrew, freedom of prayer, freedom of aliya and then people do not come, then we will know we live in the free world. This is what Galut is. It is a fact; it is not a value. Therefore, nobody can do *yerida*² from the United States. You can only do *yerida* from Eretz Israel.

Abraham Foxman: There are certain remarks made by Professor Avineri that I would like to deal with, to lend some perspective to the comments that I've prepared.

Professor Avineri, you do not differentiate between the American Jewish community's response on such issues as the Golan Heights, settlements, the attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor, and the Pollard case. While there was no organized or unified American Jewish criticism on

such issues, there was criticism. It appeared in the New York Times and the Washington Post and the Jerusalem Post. So it's not a slate on which you say nothing, and then suddenly the explosion.

Pollard was different. In the view of the organized Jewish community, the other cases were differences between the United States and the government of Israel, or disagreements on Israel's policy; disagreements which went, if you will, to a policy disagreement in terms of geopolitics and self-interest. And so to this day you can have arguments and debates — and the State Department has positions, and your government has positions: do settlements bring or hinder peace? And you have legal documents on both sides. In the attack on Iraq — there were political and geopolitical differences between the two allies, the two friends. Was it necessary? Did it hurt America's relationship to the Middle East, to what extent is America going to suffer as an ally, and on all these issues.

Pollard is totally different. It is not a disagreement of policy where the State Department and the Israeli government differed. At least, from what I read, they are united in terms of the issues and the mistake and the gravity of it. But the difference in terms of the Jewish community and its unified voice, related to the fact that the Pollard affair went to the essence of the relationship that exists between the two countries. It's not a disagreement that the State Department or the Defense Department may have. It went to the essence of a relationship built during thirty-nine years, two governments, yours and ours. Having labored hard, without fear and cringing — they developed that special

relationship, based on what? Not on policy disagreement. There have been such and there will be. But they were based on the essence of mutual trust, mutual understanding, mutual credibility. The Pollard incident, the event and its aftermath went to undermine the credibility, the mutual trust, the mutual interest; which as far as we were concerned the American government would see totally differently from issues of disagreement over policy. We didn't cry out on "Iran-gate" — although that also touched on your credibility.

So there are two interests involved. But this went to the basic foundations, of what we jointly worked to establish in thirty-nine years. You want to invoke Greece? Well, Spiro Agnew didn't steal for Greece. But do you want to replicate the relationship between the United States and Greece? I don't want it. The United States has a clear, mutual interest relationship with Turkey and Greece, and it's cold and clear and proper. Now, Greek-Americans do exercise their voice once in a while and have a lobby, but is that the essence? And if you compare the other ethnic communities, the relationship between our two countries, and these communities' relationship with the U.S. you will find that our is that special relationship, which goes beyond mutual interest. So we don't respond as other communities have done on issues of this nature.

I don't think we put the question of American Jewish loyalty in question; I think Israel has. I think Israel, in its actions in the Pollard case, was the one that highlighted the question.

Rabbi Goldman indicated that maybe the only positive result of the Pollard affair is that the American Jewish com-

munity and the Israeli one hopefully will begin to relate to one another more honestly. Maybe we will do so more responsibly, and constructively define or redefine our relationship. The subject this evening, "Is America Galut?" is provocative — certainly it has been with us for many many years, and academically interesting. But I'm not sure that even if we resolve the question and come to some conclusion that it will accomplish very much. What consequences would that determination have, and how meaningful would it be to our relationship? It troubles me that there are so many Israelis who feel that the answer or their feeling or their predisposition is so central. Regardless of the answer we agree upon, will it change our relationship?

I accept that America is not the promised land for world Jewry — although tens of thousands of Israelis who flock to the United States may believe so. America certainly is Golah — Diaspora — but you interchange the terms of Golah and Galut — and somehow there is a difference. The term Galut seems to have a great deal of meaning, and even passion, to Israelis, and in truth it is of very little consequence to American Jewry. For many Israelis it is a pejorative term. Do Israelis need to reject Galut to legitimize, maintain or justify their experience? And if they do, to what extent does it shape the relationship between our two communities? American Jews who do not consider themselves as living on probation, also do not see themselves as living in an emancipated environment. But certainly they do not perceive themselves as living in Galut in the classical sense of the word. And even if they did, the question still remains: How does it

shape the relationship between our two communities?

Galut or not Galut is totally irrelevant to the majority of American Jews and their relationship with Israel. What shaped the American-Jewish response to Pollard and other issues relating to the crisis, is our perception of ourselves. And we as American Jews are not squeamish about our Jewish identity. Nor do I hear in very many circles the concept advanced that we are the New Pompedita.

Our abhorrence of Pollard was because we believe it hurt Israel — and our ability to help Israel.

The Pollard affair and its aftermath has left scars on our relationship, which we should be able to face up to with time and understanding. Did those rogues or others who planned the Pollard affair, consider for one moment the fate of American Jewry. Or was it because we are Galut Jews that even that question was not significant? Did the Israelis concerned worry as to the impact on American Jewry or the imagery of Jonathan Pollard in front of the gates of the Israel Embassy, whose gates were slammed while three Israelis were flown to safety? I believe we are uncomfortable with each other today because for years we were not honest with one another. It was and it continues to be today a relationship based on sloganeering. "*Am Ehad*. We are one; we are equals."

But you never really meant it, except in the abstract. But maybe, while you didn't mean it, you actually began to believe it. Worse still, many of us in Galut believed it, accepted it, and acted upon these slogans. And so when Pollard happened, many of us realized that we may not really be *one* — or at least if we

are one, we may not be equal. And when we expressed ourselves as American citizens, you became arrogant, and resorted to calling us names: we were accused of having a "Galut mentality", of living in a soured promised land.

While we as a people are one — certainly in the philosophical and in the religious sense — we are not really equal, not because we are Galut and you are emancipated, but because our responsibilities and liabilities are not equal to yours. It's not a question of whether we have a right to challenge, criticize or speak out. We have a right, as long as we each live in a democracy. But the reason we have or have not spoken out before is not a barometer of the antisemitic hobgoblins that supposedly hover in our paranoia. It is a question, not of right, but of responsibility. Your decision-making carries with it liabilities and consequences; ours does not. No, on second thought, ours also does, but not to the same degree of life and death. Yours is a prime responsibility; ours is a secondary one. And if we are shareholders, there are class A and class B shareholders. You vote. You are the total determiners of your fate. We do not vote, but share in your fate. Neither you nor we should pretend to be what we are not. And this whole debate of Galut, the value and the fact, the responsibility and the relationship is totally out of context with the realities that I see in our relationship.

If we begin to appreciate and respect each other honestly and realistically, it will really matter little whether American Jewry lives in Galut or in the "promised land." Then our relationship will be defined not by philosophy or ideology, but by those who live the relationship of

mutual respect, and that will be the strength of our future relationship.

Avineri: I am in no way excusing the people who are responsible for Pollard. The Israelis involved did not only fail to consider the consequence for American Jewry — they did not consider the consequences for Israel either, not because they are Galut Jews, but because they were irresponsible.

I still believe that we are *one*, but we are very different. When I say we are one, as a very secular Jew, I feel a deep feeling of identity — not identification — with an Orthodox Jew. I know what he thinks of me. Still, we are one. He looks down on me, and he is entitled to his views; and because of politeness I am not going to say what I think about him and how I look down on him and in which century I would like to place him. This is my view which does not detract as far as I am concerned from my caring and feeling and identification with him, despite the fact that we disagree. And I think that we can have something similar with the relationship between Israel and Diaspora Jewry.

Yes, I think there is Galut. And I think that Galut is pejorative. Just as a religious person thinks that I am a secular freethinker — he uses the term pejoratively. And I may use some terms relating to Orthodox Jews in a pejorative way. There is nothing bad in it, so long as we are able to live together. And if you think there is something wrong in living in Eretz Israel, say it. The relationship is not a parallel relationship. The relationship is a relationship of basic imbalance. You don't look down on Israel — you may criticize things in Israel, but you don't look down on Israel, because there

are things in Israel that are crucial to your identity as a Jew. There is a lot in American Jewry that I love, but none of it is critical to my identity as a Jew, and this, therefore, is the difference between a value and a fact.

NOTES

1. An academy of great talmudic learning in ancient Babylon. There was some rivalry between the Jerusalem school, whose teachings and insights became codified in the Jerusalem Talmud, and that of the Babylonian school which found expression in the Babylonian Talmud.
2. To emigrate: literally "to go down" from Israel.

Yerida: The Pull and the Push

The phenomenon known as yerida (emigration from Israel) is both complicated and complex. Some people regard it as heralding the destruction of the Third Commonwealth, while others consider it as a marginal social manifestation not worth special attention. Some regarded and still regard the yordim as "a fall-out of weaklings", "industrial refuse" that accompanies every growing community; still others regard the aspect as a painful loss to the society of Israel of fine young people. Some consider yerida to be an anti-thesis to the implementation of the Zionist idea; others see it as an inseparable and necessary component in the materialization of a concept whose realization

necessitates a large-scale movement of population. At any rate, this phenomenon stirs deep emotion intertwined with highly significant psychological aspects.

From the point of view of demography, the yerida is simple emigration. Large scale emigration can be analysed and explained as being based on an interlacing of forces, one — pushing from the country of emigration, the other — pulling towards the countries of immigration. Sometimes, in extreme cases, it is possible to identify pre-eminent forces that push towards emigration such as in the case of wars or calamities of nature. When these things occur, the supreme consideration is that of survival. On the other hand there have been cases in history where the pulling forces towards immigration were the stronger element e.g., emigration caused by deep religious feelings, like the crusades. These cases aside, the major cause for migration is a conglomeration of pushing and pulling elements. To my mind, yerida seems to

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