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IN MEMORIAM

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THE INTELLECTUAL WORLD OF DANIEL ELAZAR

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The Continuity of Jewish Thought / Humanity's Choice / From Ancient Thought to Modern Themes / The Ideal Jewish City / The Jewish Political Tradition / Jewish Community Studies / Squaring Circles, Completing Agendas, Building Bridges / Neo-Phariseans, Neo-Sadduceans, Neo-Essenes / The Ability to Overcome Catastrophes / The Sephardi Tradition / Fighting Myths and Stereotypes / Federalism / Between Israel and America / Personal and Public Choices

Daniel Elazar was both a profoundly committed Jew and a Renaissance person. Physically and intellectually he roamed the Jewish and non-Jewish world. In his attempts at synthesis and continuity he felt at home in both. His analytical mind moved through the millennia and disciplines in search of truth. He felt in line with a specific trait of Sephardim about whom he wrote that they have sought "to balance their lives both as Jews and as parts of a larger human society."[1]

His very committed worldview drew from a coherent vision of the crucial role of tradition in society, the true nature of human interactions, and a good understanding of the elements permitting the development of civil society. This enabled him to deal with many diverse issues as various strands of his thoughts cross-fertilized each other.

In dedicating a book to his father, he wrote what may also be taken as a description of his own outlook. He wrote that his father's great-

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ness lay "in the way in which he saw all Jews as *bnai brit* and all humans of good will as at least potential *baalei brit* and how he strove to bring each group together to fulfill its fullest potential in the finest Jewish and American traditions of covenant."[2] This, indeed, reflects Daniel Elazar's own background and perspective on life which fed from Jewish, Sephardi, democratic, and American traditions.

The Continuity of Jewish Thought

Elazar focused much attention on the continuity of Jewish thought through the millennia and its relevance to a wide variety of contemporary issues. In the 1960s he began to study the Jewish political tradition from biblical times till the present, laying the foundations for the new academic discipline of Jewish political studies, while overcoming major resistance from both secular and religious circles.

He saw the Torah as the "basic and foremost constitutional document of Jewish history. Its subsequent modifications and/or amplifications must, therefore, be considered to have been necessitated by overwhelming pressures for constitutional change."[3] These changes, as expressed in Mishnah, Gemara, and the major *halakhic* codes, maintain the Torah's traditions, though redirecting and supplementing them.

Brit, the covenant as it figures in the Torah, was for him a key Jewish political concept. Elazar defined the political purpose of the Bible as "to teach humans the right way to live in this world. Since its teachings require humans to live together to fulfill God's commandments, its teachings focus on living in a polity, a commonwealth designed to enable fallible humans to find and follow the right way. It does so on two levels: (1) it provides a basis for the achievement of a messianic age, and (2) it discusses the more practical problems of living in society until then."[4]

Elazar analyzed the distribution of power between the partners in the successive covenants between God and Noah, Abraham and the Israelites at Sinai. He stressed their political aspects in his writing: "By the Bible's own terms, any teaching about the good life must include teachings about the good commonwealth."[5]

Humanity's Choice

In Elazar's view, humanity was free to decide whether to adhere to these covenants. From the biblical worldview, all humans are expected to be bound by the Noahide covenant. Elazar linked basic human rights to the acceptance of obligations, a motif which frequently returns in his writing. In his view, outlaws who do not accept the Noahide covenant cannot be punished for breaking it except for the most blatant acts of inhuman behavior.

From there on, Elazar claims, "all human beings can also accept the covenant of Abraham, that is to say, join one of the monotheistic faiths and accept its obligations and gain certain rights thereby. They may also accept the Sinai Covenant and become Jews, thereby taking on even greater obligations and winning the right to be numbered among God's singular people (*am segula*), that is to say, to have the full *brit* and not merely benefit from Abraham's *brit* and *brakhah*. These are all matters of individual human choice."[6]

Elazar sees in maintaining the Divine commandments an element which fosters the Jews' civic virtue.[7] Another component of the latter is their historical memory which finds its expression *inter alia* in the first "national" historical site of the Jewish people and, perhaps, in the history of the world: the stone cairn erected as a commemoration of the crossing into the Land of Canaan by the Israelites in the time of Joshua. "This reflects the sense of history that has been part and parcel of the Jewish approach to life since the very origins of the Jewish people."[8]

From Ancient Thought to Modern Themes

Covenants, human rights and obligations, as well as national and historical sites are only a few of the modern themes Elazar recognizes in the Bible and classical Jewish sources, and integrates in his development of a Jewish perspective on politics. This approach, which is so characteristic of much of his work, traces political motifs through Jewish history, confronts them with contemporary attitudes in general society, and develops ways to teach them.[9]

He seeks a way to bridge the gap between traditional Jewish and modern expectations of rights

and obligations. He looks, for instance, at anti-democrats abusing the freedom in democracy and considers it a reasonable Jewish position that those who do not share the basic agreements underlying democracy should be denied the right to use it.

Elazar is well aware that current moral opinion runs contrary to this practical judgment. He thus stresses the need to find moral grounds for such an approach, being aware that if society bases itself exclusively on what is practically justifiable, the situation in Nazi times looms in the background.[10]

The Ideal Jewish City

Another analysis of historical Jewish positions against a contemporary background concerns the form of government of the Jewish people in biblical times. Elazar defines this as "republican in an aristocratic as much as a democratic way."[11]

Yet another theme — not surprising in view of his deep interest in local government — is how classical Judaism views the city. In a lecture he said that the Bible "does not celebrate urban civilization in the manner of the Greeks and Romans. At the same time it is not anti-city *per se*. As in all things, however, it is realistic about cities and does not romanticize them."[12]

Elsewhere he wrote: "The Levites received 48 cities around the country, each with pasture lands to 2,000 cubits each (Numbers 35). The inclusion of pasturage lands in the grant is indicative of the basically sub-urban character of the 'cities' of Israel."[13]

His defense of small cities against the metropolis fitted well with this worldview. It gave Elazar great satisfaction that he and his colleagues at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs served as advisers to the most important Israeli urban revitalization aspect: Project Renewal. Under his leadership, JCPA pioneered diaspora representation in Project Renewal, and in 1986 organized an international conference in Jerusalem on urban revitalization with over 500 participants from 30 countries.[14]

The Jewish Political Tradition

The Jewish political dialogue commenced over 3200 years ago as the Israelites developed common and distinctive responses to political situations. Ever since, Jews have enhanced that tradition, many elements of which continue to be relevant in contemporary Jewish life. Elazar led a growing group of scholars from around the world who have been investigating that tradition and developing the field of Jewish political studies as a part of Jewish studies.

As the father of Jewish political studies, Elazar was responsible for the publication of the basic literature in the field including: *Kinship and Consent: The Jewish Political Tradition and Its Contemporary Uses*, published also in Hebrew as *Am V'Edah*; *The Jewish Polity: Jewish Political Organization from Biblical Times to the Present* (with Stuart A. Cohen), published in Hebrew as *Adat Bnai Yisrael*; a four-volume exploration of the Covenant Tradition in Politics, representing a lifetime of historical research; *Authority, Power and Leadership in the Jewish Polity: Cases and Issues*; and *The Jewish Political Tradition: High School Students Course Book and Teachers Guide* (Hebrew).

In addition, Elazar founded the Workshop in the Covenant Idea and the Jewish Political Tradition, sponsored by JCPA in cooperation with the Bar-Ilan University Department of Political Studies, which produced nearly 40 publications. In 1981 he initiated a workshop for academics on the Study and Teaching of Jewish Political Studies, held every summer for nearly twenty years. In 1989 he founded and edited the *Jewish Political Studies Review*, the first and only scholarly journal dedicated to the study of Jewish political institutions and behavior, Jewish political thought, and Jewish public affairs.

Jewish Community Studies

Jewish community studies represented an area of major interest. Starting in 1968, he set out over the decades to study every Jewish community in the world, documenting their organization and dynamics in order to map out their future.[15] One of his last *Jerusalem Letters* analyzed the Jewish community of Miami.[16]

In 1970 he founded the Center for Jewish Community Studies in Philadelphia for this purpose. Then in 1976, together with a group of Israeli scholars, he established the Jerusalem Institute for Federal Studies to conduct research on questions of federalism, Israel-Arab peace, the administered territories, power-sharing in multi-ethnic polities, and intergovernmental relations in Israel, and to

explore federal responses to current political problems. The institute's first commissioned project came from the Ministry of Defense, headed at the time by Shimon Peres, to explore federal or shared rule options for the future of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza. In 1978 he established the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA) as an umbrella organization encompassing both the Center for Jewish Community Studies and the Jerusalem Institute for Federal Studies, to undertake policy research and education and serve both Israel and the Jewish people. JCPA attracted both leading and promising scholars of diverse geographical, disciplinary, and political backgrounds to participate in the Center's work.

He not only had to devote his attention to the academic side of JCPA's activities, but he personally raised most of the funds for its operation and its beautiful building, named in honor of the Milken family. The many donations he received were, to a large extent, an expression of the personal confidence that he enjoyed and admiration for his intellectual abilities.

Squaring Circles, Completing Agendas, Building Bridges

The subheadings from his many *Jerusalem Letters* expressed frequently recurring motifs in his approach, such as "squaring circles," "completing a century-long agenda," and "rebuilding the bridge around new tasks." He also used constructive terminology in the titles of his books and articles: *Reinventing World Jewry: How to Design the World Jewish Polity,*[17] *Israel: Building a New Society,*[18] "Strengthening the Ties between the American Jewish Community and the States,"[19] "Israel at Fifty: Some Issues in Building a Proper Democratic Polity,"[20] "Orthodox and Non-Orthodox Judaism: How to Square the Circle,"[21] and "A New Agenda for the Jewish People."[22]

He deeply regretted the increasingly higher walls of separation between the various Jewish movements in the United States, and felt that chances had been missed there in the past. On the "who is a Jew?" issue he wrote that the problem was to develop "operational ways to maintain Jewish religious unity in the face of the confrontation of two binary opposite perspectives. At the root of the problem is the fact that both the Israeli Orthodox establishment and the American Conservative and Reform movements are right from their respective perspectives."[23] Though religiously observant himself, he wrote: "An objective observer would probably also have to agree that both are right, at least in some ways."[24]

Reading the Bible and looking around him made him realize that people with very different views have to live together in communal frameworks. Civil society can only exist if it tries at least partly to unite people in their diversity. Defining which bridges have to be built and how to lay the intellectual and practical cornerstones for them was a life-long interest.

Neo-Phariseans, Neo-Sadduceans, Neo-Essenes

Ten years ago, he had analyzed how the attitude toward Judaism of the non-religious public in Israel had been changing since 1967. "For a small but very visible group, it has meant a return to traditional forms and Orthodoxy. For others, it has led to an effort to establish a movement for secular humanist Jews in an almost pathetic attempt to develop an a-theistic Judaism. For many more it has meant a searching for ways to express growing interest, openness and positive sentiments."[25]

He was realistic enough, however, to consider it normal for Jews to divide into camps and, once again, saw in this phenomenon continuity through the millennia. Elazar recognized in these modern-day camps their predecessors in the days of the Second Temple. He considered contemporary *halakhic* Jews to be neo-Phariseans. The neo-Sadducean Jews define their Jewish identity mainly in the existence of Israel. Elazar said that this started out with socialist Zionism, which turned out to be an ideological dead-end.

He doubted that, in the void thus created, foreign imports into Israel like Reform and Conservative ideas would speak to non-religious Israelis as they did not authentically grow within the Israeli community. In the kibbutzim he recognized the neo-Essenes who tried to create a contemporary holy community in a secularized context.[26]

The Ability to Overcome Catastrophes

Elazar stressed that organized Judaism has an extraordinary capability to reorganize despite ever-renewing challenges, some of the greatest of which it had to confront in the closing century. He was convinced, based on his historical perspective, that

world Jewry has an inherent ability to overcome major catastrophes and situations of distress, as proven by its post-Holocaust history.

He expressed this clearly in his analysis of the revival of European Jewry.[27] He considered that the Jews outside Israel and North America have to take their rightful place on the Jewish world scene. He felt it to be his obligation to be out in the forefront, identifying what the new challenges are, what they mean for the Jewish agenda, and how one should organize to confront them.[28]

In this spirit, he undertook with associates a comprehensive study of the world Jewish polity as it has developed over the past 150 years, setting out what the specific roles of each of the various Jewish world organizations could be.[29]

The Sephardi Tradition

The Elazars can trace their history back to Salamanca in Aragon before the Spanish exile, and thereafter to Saloniki and other parts of the Ottoman Empire, as well as to Jerusalem. Daniel Elazar served as the first president of the American Sephardi Federation upon its creation in 1972 and all his life sought to stimulate the recognition of Sephardi culture within the broader framework of Jewish culture.

Elazar was looking for unique Sephardi contributions to Jewish society through the ages and for their contemporary traits in various fields.[30] The specificity of Sephardi Zionism he found expressed in its early seeking of "political solutions to the Jewish condition, at the same time never divorcing such solutions from a deep religious commitment."[31] This synthesis of religious and political impulses is integral to their Jewishness[32] and was also true for Elazar himself. He underlined, however, that Sephardim and Ashkenazim have stood together to support Israel wherever they resided.

When he categorizes the various *halakhic* positions, he adds a sixth category — Sephardi *halakhic* — to that of the commonly mentioned ultra-Orthodox, centrist Orthodox, Conservative-Masorti, Reform, and Reconstructionist. Elazar justifies this separate category by saying: "Despite the tremendous pressure it is under from the first and second groups...one can still see a tendency among Sephardic *posekim* to look upon all of *halakhah*, religious and civil, as a piece, to consider contemporary conditions while searching for the proper decision according to the text, to take a broader view of contemporary issues, and to seek to bring less *halakhically*-committed Jews closer to Judaism in their decision-making insofar as possible."[33]

In his book *The Other Jews: The Sephardim Today*, he attempted to see whether Ashkenazim and Sephardim differ more than superficially within the context of their Jewishness and whether this would be of lasting significance to Jewish civilization.[34] The book was published in 1989, before the major Russian *aliyah*, at the time when the Sephardim were a majority in Israel.

Fighting Myths and Stereotypes

Daniel Elazar fought against the myths and stereotypes propagated by members of Israel's establishment, which divided the country into civilized Western Ashkenazim and culturally-backward and undemocratic Eastern Sephardim.[35] This led to efforts to "civilize" the latter, a euphemism for trying to assimilate them to the values of Labor party members who had come from Russia.

Under this pretext, the Sephardi immigrants were robbed of a precious heritage. Elazar defined it as "an assault on an entire segment of Jewish culture."[36] He added: "it is hard to overemphasize the discrimination, perhaps unwitting but no less real, against Sephardic culture in Israeli society."[37] Throughout the pages of *The Other Jews* it becomes clear that, as a Sephardi intellectual, he occasionally felt alien in some Ashkenazi environments where those who want to be part of the higher echelons of Israeli society are expected "to accept what are in essence Ashkenazi norms."[38]

In conversations he would not mention this unless his partners in conversation were specifically interested in the subject. A friend of his told one of the authors how disappointed he was that, rather than the moderate Sephardi outlook influencing the Ashkenazi one in Israel, the reverse was increasingly the case.

In his comment on the overwhelming success of Shas in the May 1999 elections, after the conviction of Aryeh Deri, he saw a reflection of "the deep feeling of victimization on the part of many Jews from the Muslim lands and their children who took the verdict as an anti-Sephardic act rather than a matter of administering justice fairly without fear or favor. The intensity of feelings of victimization

on the part of at least 15 percent of the electorate fifty years after the founding of the state and nearly that long since most of them or their parents came to Israel, does not bode well for the future."[39]

Federalism

Federalism, one of the fields which made him internationally known in the academic community, seemed on the surface to be separate from his other interests. In his writings, however, he frequently pointed out that *foedus*, the Latin word from which the term "federalism" derives, means "covenant," which in turn had its origin in the Hebrew word "*brit*."[40] He observed that many philosophers, theologians and political theorists in the Western world had noticed that the roots of the federal idea were to be found in the Bible.[41]

Elazar devised federal solutions to bridge the seemingly unbridgeable or, in his own words, "to provide for the energetic pursuit of common ends while maintaining the respective integrities of all parties."[42] He studied how the institutional mechanisms and frameworks of federalism can be used for conflict resolution. On various occasions he was consulted for projects concerning federal political solutions for South Africa, Italy, Cyprus, and Spain, and federal arrangements in Yugoslavia and the European Community.[43]

In 1998, JCPA organized a conference on "Federalism and Peace-Making" on the occasion of the annual meeting of the International Association of Centers for Federal Studies, an organization he helped found in 1977. The U.S. Embassy in Cyprus brought delegations of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots to the conference where Elazar tried to find common ground and narrow down the issues. It was clear that both sides saw in him a person who, in the future, could make a contribution to reducing the conflict.

Elazar insisted for decades that federal arrangements could serve the cause of Middle East peace and that political leaders in Israel and its neighbors would ultimately realize this.[44] He wrote frequently on this and organized several conferences on the subject.[45] In *Two Peoples...One Land*, he developed eleven possible federal options for a resolution of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinian Arabs.[46]

He gave much attention to many aspects of the Palestinian question and studied and promoted roads to peace. After the Oslo Agreements, however, he warned against exaggerated optimism. He saw that, in the short term, they had done much for Israel, and saw a possible scenario which might turn out to be a blessing for the country. He also recognized that, in the same short term, they had probably reduced the breach between Israel and the diaspora, which he considered to have been partly caused by the media.

In the U.S., Daniel Elazar was Professor of Political Science and founder and director of the Center for the Study of Federalism at Temple University in Philadelphia, as well as the founder and editor-in-chief of *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*. In addition, he was appointed by President Ronald Reagan to two terms as a member of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations. In Israel he was Senator N.M. Paterson Emeritus Professor of Intergovernmental Relations at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan, where he also directed the Institute for Local Government.

Between Israel and America

Elazar always attempted to look simultaneously at the multiple aspects of an issue. This enabled him to act as a visionary pragmatist. This was strengthened by his seeking to combine academic research with public affairs involvement and aiming to have policy studies influence decision-making.

Elazar's choice to come to Israel from America had been made very consciously. He did not burn bridges, however. He maintained his professorship at Temple University, traveled frequently to the United States, and focused not only on U.S.-Israel relations but also on describing the structure of the American Jewish community[47] and making suggestions to improve it.[48]

He also continued his studies of American constitutional affairs.[49] Also here the interdependence of his interests emerged. He pointed out that there was considerable evidence that the founding generation of the United States was aware that the American Constitution represented a reconstruction of federalism in its ancient, biblical form.[50]

Personal and Public Choices

Daniel Elazar approached his personal problems as he did his research issues, in a pragmatic way. Stricken by polio in his youth, he abhorred

turning his handicap into a category of thinking. He saw it as a hindrance to be overcome as much as possible, rather than dwelling at length on the uncommon perspectives on life that it might provide.

He did not bother his visitors with the frustration he must have encountered as so many places in Israel were difficult or impossible for him to access. Those talking with him soon forgot his physical condition and concentrated on what he had to say. Few realized how much planning by him and his family members was required to enable him to live his life the way he did. His wife, Harriet, and his children, Naomi, Yonatan and Gideon, made it possible for him to achieve so much.

Elazar's personal attitude toward the use of time also reflected a modern version of the classical concept of *bitul zman*, the avoidance of wasting time. For Elazar, it meant that each day had to bring with it original thoughts, which he explicitly confirmed when one of these authors once put the question to him. His mood during the months of final illness was often influenced by how much he had accomplished during a particular day.

His choice to come to Israel was the logical outcome of his personal convictions and his worldview. He had already lived for almost two decades in Israel when he made it clear that he did not regret his choice: "On the most immediate level, Israel is still a place where Jews can find a secure home, where every Jew lives by right and not by sufferance, and where Jews can develop as a people and not simply as individuals."[51]

His last choice expressed the same coherence: he was buried in Jerusalem on December 2, 1999, according to his wish, following the Sephardi tradition.

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Notes

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