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**I**n its first fifty years, the State of Israel has come to maturity and taken a form that could not have been predicted in its difficult early years. In this short period, the course of Jewish history has changed dramatically, irreversibly, after nineteen hundred years of life based both upon a myth of returning to the land of the Patriarchs, and upon the daily reality of the diaspora—meager, fragile, at times unbearably tragic.

During its first half-century, the State of Israel absorbed 2.7 million immigrants—demographically, economically and politically—beginning with the massive influx at the time the state was founded, to the recent waves from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union. Ethnic gaps remaining among Israel's Jewish population are no greater than the disparities found in more well-established countries; they are even smaller than in countries with a uniform cultural foundation, and certainly than in countries with a diverse, multicultural society. The State of Israel's economy, too, has undergone a revolutionary transformation, from a citrus-farming, diamond-cutting economy to one which invents and exports high-tech industrial goods

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and services. Its average income level has reached that of the group of twenty-five most developed nations in the world, and the internal differentials in its citizens' standards of living appear unexceptional in comparison with these countries. Israel's democratic form of government has been worked and refined through recurrent changes of government, which have spanned the entire political spectrum.

Israel's test in its next fifty years will be whether it can offer something exciting and appealing, both internally and externally: Helping the Jewish world to develop the content of its collective identity and its representative institutions, and bringing these institutions to maturation; fostering ties of mutual respect with the nations of the world; and, with stubborn patience, establishing such ties with all the peoples of the Middle East. In practical terms, the State of Israel, and with it the entire Jewish people, will have to meet the following five existential challenges:

1. *Immigration and rescue.* Although the remaining endangered communities are a tiny minority among the world's Jewish population, as long as they exist Israel is obligated to rescue them. This is no longer the central task that it was during the first fifty years, but still it will require constant readiness in view of the instability that characterizes today's global system, where a seemingly minor and sudden change can make the difference between areas and times of calm and prosperity, on the one hand, and situations of economic and political destabilization, with their inherent potential for danger to the Jewish public, on the other.

2. *Jewish continuity.* In the transition into the next century, with the world's geopolitical, economic and cultural pulse beating stronger and faster, and reality having become replete with contradictions, Israel will play out its future upon the lively yet faded field of identities. If current demographic trends continue, Israel will become the center of gravity and primary residence for the world's thirteen million Jews. One reason for this is the physical and cultural erosion among diaspora Jewry. The greatest challenge, however, will be Israel's ability to show itself, once and for

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all, to be the Jewish people's symbolic center, a source of inspiration and emulation, and a powerful generator of ideas and experiences for the entire Jewish world.

In the future, even more than today, the "Jew" will primarily be one who has chosen to be such. We must take care, however, that this term does not become devoid of content. Israeli society will have to develop qualities befitting an attractive, relevant Jewish society; lacking this, Israel is liable to be stripped of the foundations for its existential legitimacy. It will be compelled to offer significant Jewish cultural messages. To attain this goal, the Jewish state will have to be youthful, diligent, innovative, competitive and open to a broad range of ideas and people.

3. *Unity and solidarity.* The Jewish people was never monolithic. United in times of disaster, in periods of freedom they often engaged in unfettered internal discourse, going as far as extreme vulgarity and violence. (In point of fact, no sufficiently deep remorse and repentance followed upon the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, neither among his political rivals and those responsible for the act, nor even among those who shared his vision.) Ideological differences and tensions are a fundamental part of Jewish and Israeli reality. The contemporary Jewish world is characterized by different, competing patterns of identification, which at times seem to admit no compromise or bridging: The traditional identity, which relies upon an unchanging system of religious values and a popular compliance with the teachings and sanctions of charismatic leaders; the ethnic-national identity, grounded in frequent, close social and cultural contacts with a community of affiliation; identity based on a kind of Jewish cultural residue and expressed in an enfeebled, at times ambivalent sense of personal affiliation; or even a completely submerged identity, one which has vanished into the profusion of religious-national-cultural expressions but may suddenly burst forth one bright morning, given the proper stimulus.

In light of the interminable debates over the definition and basic contents of Jewish and Israeli identity, over the challenge posed by

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increasing assimilation, over the Law of Return and the Conversion Law, the prospect of a divided national leadership is deeply worrisome, particularly when their preoccupation with the needs of special-interest groups and antagonistic style of engagement prove more important to them than an overarching view of the general good and topics of shared concern. To succeed, Israel must maintain strong, clear criteria for defining its Jewish character and guarding the boundaries of its culture and values. And yet, it must also be patient and tolerant toward the great diversity of contemporary Israeli reality, which includes a full recognition of the rights of non-Jewish citizens. Acknowledging this inner diversity does not mean supporting the division and disintegration of the Jewish collective; it will, however, require a supreme effort to formulate messages that are unifying and, of primary importance, have broad appeal.

4. *Relating to the outside world.* Although we no longer live in a world dominated by aggressive, often violent anti-Semitism, a long road must be traveled before the Jewish experience is understood by the world at large, and the Jewish state's right to exist is universally accepted. A number of highly significant steps in recent years, including those by the Catholic Church, indicate that progress is being made, and further advances in this direction must be encouraged.

Facing the array of arguments opposing this, fed in no small measure by economic and political interests centered upon the Middle East, extensive educational efforts are needed to improve the image the world holds of the Jews and their state.

5. *Jewish sovereignty.* The peace process began with a spark of hope and has continued hesitantly, accompanied by many difficulties. But despite all this, the process is still alive and progressing. Since the beginnings of diplomatic normalization—which, as expected, is proceeding at a snail's pace along the paths of convoluted logic that so befit the Middle East and so confound the forecasts of the best experts—the desire for peace has only strengthened among most Israelis. Israelis are well aware that a continuing intifada, with all its unpleasanties, would exact an intolerable price from

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Israeli society, not so much in the military-strategic sphere, but in the negative educational impact upon entire generations of young people. In the long run, the cumulative burden on the entire society would likely be extremely heavy.

The true goal for Israel in its second fifty years will not be a triumphalism which seeks to satisfy at any price the urges of a messianic minority, but a survivalism which reflects the unquestioned existential interests of the majority. This requires that it remain faithful to the fundamental values of Jewish culture. The real test of Jewish sovereignty lies in Israel's ability to integrate its stubborn defense of essential political and security interests with the preservation of a high level of Jewish morality in all avenues of government.

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