



Social Judaism - what's that?

Isaiah 1:10-17

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah! "What need have I of all your sacrifices?" says the Lord. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations - I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood! Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.

Avot De'Rabbi Natan

Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai once was walking with his disciple Rabbi Joshua near Jerusalem after the destruction of the Temple. Rabbi Joshua looked at the Temple ruins and said: "Alas for us! The place which atoned for the sins of the people Israel through the ritual of animal sacrifice lies in ruins!" Then Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai spoke to him these words of comfort: "Be not grieved, my son. There is another way of gaining atonement even though the Temple is destroyed. We must now gain atonement through deeds of loving kindness (*gemilut chasidim*). For it is written, "Loving kindness I desire, not sacrifice" (*Hosea 6:6*).

Babylonian Talmud Kidushin 40b

Rabbi Tarfon and the Elders were once reclining in the upper storey of Nitza's house in Lod, when this question was raised before them: "Which is greater, study or action?"
Rabbi Tarfon answered: "Action is greater."
Rabbi Akiva answered: "Study is greater."
They all answered: "Study is greater, in that study leads to action."



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David Ben Gurion, *Rebirth and Destiny of Israel*, 1954

By these will the State be judged, by the moral character it imparts to its citizens, by the human values determining its inner and outward relations, and by its fidelity, in thought and act, to the supreme behest: "and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Here is crystallized the eternal law of Judaism, and all the written ethics in the world can say no more. The State will be worthy of its name only if its systems, social and economic, political and legal, are based upon these imperishable words.

Declaration of the State of Israel, 1948

The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.

After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom.

Impelled by this historic and traditional attachment, Jews strove in every successive generation to re-establish themselves in their ancient homeland. In recent decades they returned in their masses. Pioneers, defiant returnees, and defenders, they made deserts bloom, revived the Hebrew language, built villages and towns, and created a thriving community controlling its own economy and culture, loving peace but knowing how to defend itself, bringing the blessings of progress to all the country's inhabitants, and aspiring towards independent nationhood.

[...]

The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Elie Wiesel, *What Being Jewish Means to Me*, 2001

This is still my belief. In spite of all that happened? Because of all that happened? --To be Jewish today is to recognise that every person is created in the image of God and that our purpose in living is to be a reminder of God. A Jew must be sensitive to the pain of all human beings. A Jew cannot remain indifferent to human suffering, whether in other countries or in our own cities and towns. The mission of the Jewish people has never been to make the world more Jewish, but to make it more human.