

Vayetze

December 10, 2016

אִם-יְהִיָּה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי, וְשָׁמְרָנִי בַדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ, וְנָתַן-לִי לֶחֶם לֶאֱכֹל, וּבָגָד לְלַבֵּשׁ
וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּשָׁלוֹם, אֶל-בֵּית אָבִי; וְהָיָה יְהוָה לִי, לֵאלֹהִים

Genesis 28:20-21 *If G-d will be with me, and maintain me along the way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and clothes to wear so that I come back whole to my father's house, then shall Adonai be my G-d*



It seems quite brazen for the biblical figure of Jacob to bargain with G-d immediately following G-d's reassurance that he will be protected and soon brought back to the land. Yet, Jacob itemizes the ways he should receive Divine favors in order to pledge his allegiance to G-d. Jacob thinks of practical necessities beyond spiritual connections. He asks G-d for protection on his journey, food to sustain him and clothing to wear. Then, under these conditions, if and when he returns to his father's land, he will set aside a tithe for G-d. Jacob's insistence on practical necessities sends the message that tangible, life sustaining items must precede a transcendent covenant.

The establishment of the State of Israel could not have occurred without some very practical planning. The nucleus for Israel's bureaucratic organization evolved out of the early 20th century Zionist Congress and the creation of the Jewish National Fund and the Anglo-Palestine Bank, each of which assisted in early settlement of Palestine. After World War I, the Zionist Commission (then the Palestine Zionist Executive 1921-1929) followed by the Jewish Agency coordinated Jewish settlement with the British. Jewish Agency personnel had regular contact with British counterparts in drafting legislation and reacting to political events in Palestine. When the British imposed restrictions against Jewish immigration in the 1940s, the Jewish Agency, through its fledgling self-defense force, the Haganah, abetted illegal immigration. The British Navy responded by intercepting unauthorized ships off the coast of Palestine and forcing illegal immigrants into [detention camps in Cyprus](#). In certain cases, like the *Exodus* in 1947, they forced the human cargo ships to return to points of departure. The Jewish underground in Palestine sabotaged British installations in protest. Faced with increased violence against their rule in Palestine and pressure from the Truman administration, in April 1947 the British government turned to the newly created United Nations to choose one of two options: either remove British presence entirely or confirm a renewed Mandate for Britain without any political restrictions.

After months of investigation, the [United Nations Special Committee on Palestine \(UNSCOP\)](#) presented two proposals: a minority of the committee suggested a single federal state for both peoples, and the majority opinion suggested the partition of Palestine into two states with an economic union between the two and an international zone for Jerusalem. In November 1947, the UN General Assembly passed the resolution of the committee's majority suggestion for the [partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states](#). It was clear that the Zionist dream was about to be realized. Yet, as Britain withdrew, leaving the hard-pressed Jews in Palestine at the mercy of the surrounding Arab nations, it was clear to some

Americans that Israel could not succeed without much needed supplies, funds, and the tools to defend its communities and the people living there from ongoing incursions and attacks by men in neighboring Arab villages. Sheer will and determination could not protect the Jewish institutions and population.

Many people helped Israel seek and preserve its establishment. Among them was Al Schwimmer, an aviation engineer and pilot from Connecticut. At the end of World War II, Schwimmer was understandably [horrified by reports of what had occurred to the Jewish populace in Europe](#). He insisted, despite great personal risk, in the first days after the establishment of the State of Israel that he would do what he could to save the remnant of European Jews who had successfully made it to the shores of Israel, along with the lives of those already living there. In the early months of 1948, he responded to a request from [Teddy Kollek](#), the Haganah's chief of weapons acquisition in the U.S., to help the Jewish community secure necessary equipment and supplies for its defense.

During Israel's War of Independence in 1948-1949, through a variety of creative maneuvers and some illegal contacts, Schwimmer arranged, purchased, [repaired, and delivered fighter planes, arms, and ammunition that were surplus in the USA, Czechoslovakia, and South America in the aftermath of WWII](#). Even after the UN levied a strict embargo on supplying arms to those fighting in the Arab-Israeli war, Schwimmer successfully procured munitions for the newly established Israeli Air Force; he helped to identify possible engineers and pilots, many recruited from his circle of colleagues and friends from his years in the army. In the months after Israel's successes, Schwimmer helped to build the country's first military aircraft installation, and eventually Israel Aircraft Industries. It was, and continues to be, a government-owned enterprise responsible for the defense of Israel and the export of weapons.

Schwimmer died in Israel in 2011 at age 95. He is not universally known as one of the devoted early Zionists ready to risk life and limb to secure the Jewish State. And, he didn't seem to mind the lack of recognition, despite his close association with the early leaders of Israel, including David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Moshe Dayan, and Shimon Peres. Schwimmer could be held up as an exemplar of commitment and ingenuity for Israel's establishment. There were many others like Schwimmer who made important contributions to the state's establishment.

Like the patriarch Jacob and modern-day hero Al Schwimmer, people who support the success of a Jewish state must continually consider the practical and realistic means that will enable Israel to continue to grow and flourish today and in the future.

Discussion Questions:

With more than six decades since the establishment of Israel, what remains for "practical needs?" Any discussions of people, leadership, means, organization, perseverance, sacrifice, innovation, adaptability, lobbying for the cause, and commitment are clearly appropriate.

Additional Resources:

David B. Green, [This Day in Jewish History Al Schwimmer, Who Smuggled Jets Into Israel to Create Its First Air Force, Is Born \(And Dies\)](#), [Ha'aretz](#), June 10, 2015.

1948 Colonial Office, and Foreign Office. "[Palestine: Termination of the Mandate](#)."

[Above and Beyond](#) - 1h 30 minute Documentary, Playmount Productions, USA, January 2015.