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## Elements of a Philosophy for Diaspora Judaism

### An Introduction to Rabbi Aaron Samuel Tamaret's "The Exile of the Presence and the Presence of the Exile"

by **Everett Gendler**

Why be Jewish? Why join temples? Why bother to introduce our children to Jewish ideas and practices? Answers to these questions vary from person to person and from age to age, but the questions persist. Perhaps there are periods of remission but not of resolution. The questions seem as perpetual as the Jewish people itself.



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In recent decades, many Jews have answered these questions by referring to the Holocaust or the State of Israel as primary reasons for remaining involved in Jewish life and for exploring Judaism. With the passage of time, the Holocaust grows more remote. To preserve

the memories of it seems still a worthy goal, but the immediacy and urgency of it have diminished with time. And as Israel has transformed from an immediately endangered society to a regional military superpower, the shift in its identity has opened the way for many Jews to question specifics of its policies and its claims upon us. Territorial policies, the steady growth of settlements from the post-Oslo period into the present, military actions in Lebanon and Gaza, the blockade of Gaza, and the flotilla episode have caused many Jews to feel increasingly remote from Israel as a moral or spiritual center for their lives.

Once again the question of Jewish purpose, of Jewish mission, asserts itself afresh. Rather surprisingly, a chapter from an essay written in 1920 seems directly relevant to the question that we address today. Its title? "The Exile of the [Divine] Presence and the [Divine] Presence of the Exile." My translation of this text -- the fourth chapter from *The Community of Israel and the Wars of the Nations* by Rabbi Aaron Samuel Tamaret/Tamares -- appears on page 56 of this issue of *Tikkun*; I am offering this short essay as

an introduction to it.

Many readers will recognize the term "Divine Presence," an English rendering of the Hebrew word *Shechinah*. Referring to God's presence within the sanctuary of the community of Israel (Exodus 25:8), the term is central to contemporary discussions of the renewal of religious experience and to seeking the felt presence of God during prayer and ceremony. As the central expression within Jewish mystical thought and practice for the feminine presence of God, it is a frequent point of reference in feminist theology as well. The centrality of the term in Tamaret's affirmation of God's felt presence within Diaspora Judaism contributes to the sense that, despite the ninety years since its composition, his essay sounds surprisingly up to date.

### **An Unassailably Jewish Critique of the Nation-State and Jewish Nationalism**

Rabbi Tamaret/Tamara passionately affirms Diaspora Judaism as the true, necessary purpose of Jewish existence, even as he expresses a severe critique of nationalism. Not prone to Jewish exceptionalism (as in "a 'Jewish' nation-state will be different"), he offers a searching criticism that extends both to the independent Jewish kingdoms of biblical times and to the Temple itself, as well as to modern political Zionism.

Many Jews are uncomfortable with criticisms of Zionism and of Israel as a state. Even thoughtful, sympathetic Jewish critics of policies of the State of Israel are often dismissed as ignorant about Jewish matters, inauthentic, or self-hating. Such charges can hardly be directed against Rabbi Aaron Samuel Tamaret/Tamara, 1869-1931, known as the prodigy (*ilui*) from Maltsh. In addition to being an author and philosopher, Tamaret served as rabbi to the village of Mileichich (Grodno district) from 1893 until his death. He is aptly characterized in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* as "an Orthodox rabbi who fought against the fossilized halachah in a completely original style and who attacked nationalism and political Zionism as anti-Jewish phenomena." Reassured by these Jewish credentials, perhaps we can, with less discomfort than would otherwise be the case, give reasoned hearing to Tamaret's searching, searing critique of Jewish nationalism.

His essay begins with some reflections on the ever-changing fortunes of nations engaged in realpolitik domination and subordination. He then turns to the example of the traditional Jew rising at midnight to chant prayers of mourning (*Tikkun Chatzot*) for the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jewish people from its land. Often cited by detractors of Judaism as evidence for God's remoteness now from the Jewish people, the exile is presented in a totally different light by Tamaret, who argues skillfully and vigorously that the exile in fact represents the continuity (through purification and intensification) of the intimate relation of the community of Israel to the Divine. For this, a prime example is Sabbath observance, providing clear evidence of the gifts of spirit, and the consequent joy, that this day bestows upon Jews.

Tamaret explains in detail why this exile is necessary: it serves in the fulfillment of God's desire to be made known to the entire world as truly the one who would redeem all peoples from "the tight trap of materialistic nationalism," thereby freeing all persons to experience intimately the presence of the Divine -- a profound liberation theology. In Tamaret's view, the example of living "not by might, not by violence, but by Divine Spirit," the basic mandate of the community of Israel, was seriously compromised by the

power political intrigues that characterized the policies of all the kings of Judah and Israel. Even the construction of the Temple represented ambiguities that threatened the purity of the intimate personal relationship of the individual to the Divine. The nationalistic desire "to be just like all the nations"; the tendency to value routine, external sacrificial acts above the intentional inwardness of Torah study; the growing tendency to regard sacred scripture as primarily a governmental constitution -- these were among the corruptions that could be cured by exile. The combination of exile and the origin of the "house of study" enabled the community of Israel to serve once again as fresh witness to the possibility for other peoples to live fulfilled communal and personal lives without the increasingly lethal costs of traditional nationalism. As Tamaret notes, "When Torah and Exile are joined, great wonders are born in the soul of their bearer."

### **The Relevance of the Jewish and Tibetan Diasporas to Humankind**

At this time of renewed soul-searching among Jews -- with faith in Israeli nationalism severely shaken following Israel's attacks on Lebanon and Gaza -- attempts to base Jewish identity upon identification with the political entity called the State of Israel are increasingly called into question. As ethnic identity becomes steadily weaker, the need for a renewed sense of purpose becomes all the more urgent.

It seems evident that the ethical sense remains strong among younger Jews today. Their disproportionate involvement in movements for peace, justice, and social change is one testimony; their seeking after the transcendent, manifested in their interest in Eastern spirituality, is another; their sympathy and activity on behalf of the Tibetan community, both under occupation and in exile, still another. Many younger Jews have been particularly inspired by the dedication of the Dalai Lama -- and with him Kalon Tripa Samdhong Rinpoche, the first elected prime minister of the Tibetan Government in Exile -- to a self-determining Tibet as a nonviolent Zone of Peace, whether as a genuinely autonomous region of China or as a fully independent state. Echoes and associations with the Jewish example of exile are rich, resonant, and strikingly reminiscent of Yochanan ben Zakai (circa 30-90 CE) establishing the Academy at Yavneh; resemblances to Rabbi Tamaret's principled yet practical sense of nonviolent mission may also be discerned.

Tamaret might well be understood as articulating a vision of nonterritorial communal survival and post-nation-state existence. At a time when numerous conventional national boundaries are being challenged by both ethnic strife and transnational globalization, and large numbers of humans are becoming refugees in alien lands, Tamaret's declaration of the relevance of the Jewish Diaspora to humankind as a whole deserves fresh consideration. This sense of broader purpose and wider mission may well enlist the idealistic energies of many Jewish youth today.

Though Tamaret wrote the following piece almost a century ago, it is surprisingly contemporary and compellingly relevant to all Jews concerned with the meaning of our lives and the broad human significance of being Jewish.

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# The Exile of the Presence and the Presence of the Exile

by Aaron Samuel Tamaret, translated by Everett Gendler



*"The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem," by David Roberts, 1850.*

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The events of history move rapidly in this world: nations decline and nations arise. Every nation in its heyday holds the world firmly in the palm of its hand: it plucks the wool without tiring, devours the flesh ravenously, and at the same time tries to breathe in its soul and spirit, believing absolutely in the just merits of this procedure. Widely engaging in these two estimable practices -- exploiting and plundering all men, and "teaching" and "guiding" all men -- every ascendant nation for a certain time manages to boast and behave foolishly until finally it descends from the pinnacle and its place is taken by another nation, also half despoiler and half "guide."

## Persistence of the Jewish People

Through all this long history of the succession of nations, one nation in the world trailed in the wake, Israel by name. Time after time it was cast about and driven from one country to another. Its rucksack, always ready at hand, was filled largely with books -- books for the study of the Torah. Within the bundle of books were found also a small Siddur and a small wax candle. As soon as the wanderer had located a night's lodging, just so soon would he arise at midnight, find some corner in the inn, seat himself on a low stool, light the dim candle, open his tidy Siddur, and recite *Tikkun Chatzot* (Midnight Prayers of Lamentation). In his reciting he would, half hungry and half shattered, cry and bemoan his physical sufferings. But mainly he would pour out his heart because of his spiritual travail, because of "the Exile of the Presence." He would gasp bitterly and recite:

Then was I his only beloved

And the Glory of the Most High was I called;

And the Glory of the Most High was I called;

Now to the depths have I descended,  
 And my Most Beloved to the heights has ascended.

## Calumnies about the Exile

The "seventy nations" and the mockers see this tragedy and are content to explain it lightly and cynically: "For you, accursed Jew, it is fitting indeed to bemoan and bewail 'the Exile of Presence,' for you are plagued, smitten by the Lord and afflicted, having neither Presence nor God." Thus do they deprecate and dismiss the life of the Jew in exile, scornfully spitting on "the Galut" by presenting it as the cause of "the lack of spirituality" and denying to the Jew in exile all possibility of the finer life.

## The Spiritual Reality of Exile

Yet anyone with even a bit of a brain in his head surely understands the matter in quite the opposite way: the sorrow of our people over the Exile of the Presence is an indication, not of its remoteness from God, but precisely of its nearness to him. The solitary beloved, sitting and shedding tears of great longing for her lover who for the time being is separated from her, surely does not prove by this that her lover has rejected her or forsaken her forever. And how much less does it provide even one shred of evidence that she, the beloved, has rejected her lover. Just the reverse.

"Those who love me do I love, And those who seek me earnestly will find me" (Proverbs 8:17).

Seated on the ground at midnight, the tears that "his only beloved" sheds night after night for "her Most Beloved who to the heights has ascended," are a clear indication of the intense nearness and the burning love that exists between the beloved and her lover.

But he who lacks the sensitivity to recognize the nature of the tears shed by the grandfather over The Exile of the Presence at the time of Tikkun Chatzot each weekday night -- let such a one kindly take the trouble to observe the tears of this very same grandfather at the time of *Kabbalat Shabbat* (Prayers for Welcoming the Sabbath). Let him but take the trouble to enter the synagogue on the Sabbath Eve and see the tears of joy and ecstasy that the grandfather sheds as he welcomes the arrival of "Sabbath the Queen," the arrival of the Divine Presence. Then his error will become apparent to him, his error in so misapprehending the tears shed by the elderly Jew each weeknight over the Exile of the Presence. For surely now he must be convinced that this mourner is not anyway forsaken by the Presence, but quite the contrary, the Presence is very near unto him, so near that he actually receives and welcomes it each and every Sabbath. Let him note, please, that her lover who wandered so far off, even ascending to the heights, returns to her dwelling time after time to rejoice with her in the delights of love.

This joy and ecstasy -- which even in exile seizes the Jewish people each Sabbath and Holy Day Eve by means of the glorious and exalted prayers and hymns through which it expresses its soul -- is the true mark of the sublime exilic creativity of the Jewish people. For although the Jew in exile was not especially creative in the material realm, for reasons independent of him, he was, despite this, most creative in the spiritual realm. And his true joy in this creative task the exilic Jew expresses in his hymns and prayers concerning the tranquility he finds through his most pleasing mate, the Sabbath.

With these words we have laid the foundation for the assumption, readily assented to by all the initiated among our people who have penetrated to the inner spirit of people and its sacred literature: that not only did the Exile not remove from our people its exalted task and mission, to bear witness to the Providence that in the first instance established it as a people, but on the contrary, it has in fact assisted it in this task, easing its work in assuming this mission.

This discussion has been in general terms. We shall now proceed to portray the exilic creation in greater detail.

### **The Mission of the Jewish People**

Two thousand years ago, at the time of the renowned revelations at Mount Sinai, the hour had arrived for the Creator of the universe to give to the world his Torah, i.e., to give to the world below the divine emanations of faith in and cleavage to God (*Emuna* and *D'vekut*).

The Jewish people responded to his call by hastening to express its willingness immediately in these words: "We will obey and we will hearken." Therefore the Torah was conveyed to the Jewish people, creating a firm bond and covenant between the people and the Holy One, blessed be he. For the people the covenant had as its goal their becoming "a kingdom of priests and a holy people," i.e., their becoming a people each of whose individual members would have within his heart purity and nearness to God to such a degree that it would be, as a whole, a kingdom all of whose members were priestly and holy -- every member serving nobly in the divine sanctuary and comporting himself with the holiness befitting such ministering. The people had just escaped from the burdens of Egypt and had seen, with its own eyes, the absolute collapse into nothingness of material might and "national," "sovereign" pride; and it was itself situated in the midst of a dry, barren desert with neither "national territory" nor an established army. These factors made the hearts of many people ready to welcome the covenant. Their total removal from the tight trap of materialistic nationalism well prepared them to respond, "We will obey and we will hearken," to proclaim ecstatically their complete readiness to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy people."

### **Corruptions from Sovereignty Over the Land**

But after this, when Israel came to the land of Canaan, seized it, spread itself like a leafy tree in its native soil, and established for itself a sovereign political life "like all the nations," there began hovering over its head the danger that Moses our teacher had warned against: "lest when thou hast eaten and art satisfied, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein ... then thy heart be lifted up and thou forget the Lord thy God, who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

The Holy Spirit began to be driven away and separated from them by the gross spirit of "political nationalism" that took their hearts. And as the Holy Spirit fled from the people, the imprint of the Torah also faded, the trace of the divine ordinances they had received at Mount Sinai. Rather than the Torah eventuating in an immanent godhead dwelling in the midst of the children of Israel, a divinity whose abode was the heart, the heart of every individual Jew -- rather than this, the children of Israel began viewing the Divinity as exclusively external, with its abode in the midst of political protocol and propriety.

From that point on, the children of Israel became "political," and the Torah became merely a kind of constitution, similar to those constitutions from "cultured nations" that we today know all too well: on paper, drafted and signed, but in practice, the complete opposite.

The Jewish people fulfilled its intention to be "like all the nations" and performed its part: it saddled itself with kings. And the kings performed their part: they involved the nation in cruel wars though absolutely nothing required them ("optional wars" in rabbinic terminology), and thus the people were killed and killers, slaughtered and slaughterers, "felling with axes of iron," "measuring among the wounded one to be rescued and two to let die." All of it, the whole business, was exactly as carried on in the surrounding nations.

The Father in Heaven, the Holy One, blessed be he, sat mourning the straying of his sons in the paths of the nations, but, as is his wont, he granted them freedom to follow their own hearts to the very end. But with the passing of time, the kings had their fill of the delicacies of "the nations," of the dainties of war, and then there came to their minds the memory of the God of Israel. One king especially was mindful of the Holy One, blessed be he, one who in his childhood was a shepherd in the desert, after that a refugee hiding in the forests, and who carried within him two souls: one "kingly" and mighty, fit to "lift up his sword against eight hundred, whom he slew at one time," and one saintly, which cleaved to the Presence and "did sound the harp at midnight, busying himself with the Torah." This king did remember the Holy One, blessed be he, and decided to build a house in his honor.

At that point, when the "king" began concerning himself with a "house" for the Lord, the Holy One, blessed be he, was no longer able, as it were, to contain the wrath long pent up in his heart due to the vain mockeries committed by his people through kingship, and he immediately rejected the idea: "Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars; thou shalt not build a house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight" (1 Chron. 22:8). The reason for the rejection, according to scripture, is this: it is not for kings, wagers of war, to build houses for the God of Israel, for his ways and attributes are the complete opposite of kings' sovereign ways and wars.

### **The Building of the Temple**

The work of building the Temple was taken out of the hands of the king who had engaged in the work of kings, i.e., the active waging of war, and was transferred to his son, the "peaceful king." But a king, even if he be peaceful, is still a king. And if, by virtue of the numerous victories already won by him or his forefathers in subduing all the neighboring nations, he be slack in waging new wars that would demonstrate further the prowess of his sword (a process indeed very tiring and troublesome) -- even so, that characteristic desire of royalty, to expand over all the surroundings, in no wise abandons him. But he can express it, now that the nations are subjugated, in more gentle ways: by extending a "humble" hand to his submissive neighbors and by going about with them "like a brother." He pays them a visit on their feasts and festivals and invites them to his own feasting and celebrating.

This dwelling, and everything connected with it, was arranged just the opposite of how it should have been were it to realize its purpose, that of being a dwelling place for the Presence in this earthly sphere. This ideal of the Presence, resting upon and influencing the earth despite its being high and uplifting, great and wide, embracing the entire universe -- despite and precisely because of this, the realization of

the ideal requires a contraction and a joining to a people chosen for this end. For, since this ideal Presence is high above the heavens and wide beyond the earth, the hearts of men are too small to encompass it. Thus it requires for itself one people that will concentrate on it, cherish it, and absorb it within themselves; then, from the splendor of that people, light will emanate to all peoples. But in the Temple that Solomon built, just the opposite happened. The ideal itself became so confined and debilitated that it, itself, required fattening by thousands of cattle and sheep; and despite this and because of this, the arms of the ideal family stretched and extended until it, too, embraced all the nations and went forth to join in the dance with them...

### **Exile as Primarily Purification, Not Punishment**

Thus fared the Torah of Moses all the while that Israel sat upon its land, its king upon its neck, and the Temple atop both: famous throughout the world, its true followers now as if one of many nations. In that measure to which the Torah extended over the superficies of the earth, to that degree did it become more superficial within the camp of Israel. In that measure to which some of its customs with external glitter -- those suitable for political officials -- made their way in the world, to that degree did the Inner Spirit flee from the Jewish nation itself; and the materialistic craving for the tastes and temptations of the nations grew apace.

The prophets, men of great souls and inspired intellects, the teaching of the Lord in their mouths, their hearts filled with the Intimate Presence from Mount Sinai -- great was their sorrow over the foolishness of their people, and they stood warning the children of Israel that they were drawing ever nearer the precipice beyond which lay nothingness.

Not for this had the Holy One, blessed be he, selected the children of Israel when he brought them forth out of Egypt and gave them the Torah at Mount Sinai, and certain it was that he would not tolerate forever their backsliding and turning aside from the mission assigned to them. Certain it was that he would soon lay hold of severe means to drive his people toward the goal he desired, shattering and destroying in wrath and fury all the crude contrivances and paraphernalia of alien "nationalism," from which were issuing influences damaging to and destructive of the Torah. That is, the Holy One, blessed be he, would raze the palaces of kings, pull down the Temple, and exile Israel from its land.

Then, in those first days after the catastrophe, the children of Israel would suffer terribly; but from that darkness would shine forth a great light for them: from their bodily woes would be raised and established their spiritual world. Then would the Torah return to its proper lodging: in a parched desert was it given, and to the desert of exile it would return. And there, in its traditional home, it would once more blossom forth in the hearts of the people. The nearness of God and the intimacy of the Presence would return to them as in the days of old, as in the days of their departure from Egypt. In these words of warning the prophets expressed most pronouncedly the purpose of the destruction of the Temple and the exile, of which events they did forewarn Israel continually. It is clear from this that exile was not exclusively or even primarily a punishment for the past, but rather, and essentially, a constructive measure for the future: the return of the Presence to "her place" -- the hearts of all who are in a state of loneliness and solitariness.

The prediction of the prophets came to pass.



## Reclaiming the Mission

The cessation of their pride in national sovereignty on the one hand, combined with strong feelings of loathing and rejection for the neighboring nations of those times, stirred within the children of Israel powerful longings for the God of their ancestors. At these times of longing there was born a strong urge to return to their source. The returnees from exile built the Second Temple by a scheme completely different from that used by Solomon in building the First Temple. Solomon stood inviting the nations from everywhere to come and take part in the building of the Temple, while the returnees from exile made every effort to keep the nations far removed from all aspects of the project.

Even the idea of setting a portion of the subjugated Jews building a Temple "to whatever God promenades there in Jerusalem" originated entirely with the King of Persia himself ("the Lord awakened the spirit of Cyrus"); for it had not occurred to a single Jewish leader to appeal to the "gracious king" that the house of God might be rebuilt with the help of an alien king. The kind offer of the king -- the head "arranger" in the matter of rebuilding the Temple -- to provide them with soldiers and horsemen for their protection on the way to Jerusalem was refused by the exilic leaders with apparent humility but hidden sarcasm: "The hand of our God is over all those who seek good from him; but his wrath and fury is upon all those who forsake him." And to the other foreign volunteers who offered their services in the project, they replied simply and without further explanation: "It is not for you but for us to build a house for our God."

The contrast was felt most of all in the matter of the study of the Torah. For Solomon, the sacrificial worship was the principal activity of the house erected to God, and within it he offered such quantities of cattle and sheep -- thousands upon thousands -- that "the altar was too small to contain them all." For the exilic leaders, the sacrifices were merely incidental (a fact that will emerge clearly obvious to anyone who takes the trouble to inspect the spirit of the scriptures with a perspicacious eye). It was practically a case of having to comply with the expectations of the Persian king, the inspirer and supervisor of the whole matter, who instigated the practice and also contributed toward it from his treasury. For the leaders of the people, the main purpose in erecting the Temple was that they might thereby create a center for the study of Torah and the observance of the commandments. For when the Jewish people concentrated within itself, craving to live in intimacy with the Presence through the study of the Torah, the original intent of the Torah earned itself permanent residence in the midst of Israel, and Torah study became a decree never to be transgressed, neither during that period of the Second Temple, nor in the time immediately after, nor for all time to come.

This is the ideal that was widely realized in the days of the Second Temple through the study of the "Oral Torah," the Oral Torah being both the partition that separates Israel from the other nations and that which strengthens its covenant with the Holy One, blessed be he. The Oral Torah, diligently studied and practiced, is the means whereby the Presence is brought to rest upon the heart of the individual Jew; and the giving to the Jew of this most precious gift for meditation -- this wonderful, wise, and inspired collection of laws and legends in the Talmud -- is also the expression of both the intimacy and affection of the Presence for him.

## Cleansing from National Sovereignty

This principle -- the preservation of Jewish integrity (*yihud*) -- was placed in the very foundation of the Second Temple, and because of it the vocation of the Oral Torah held the chief place in the spiritual life of the people; so much so, in fact, that the whole business of the Sanctuary and its sacrifices was reduced to second rank before it. "Greater is the study of Torah than the daily sacrifices" (Erubin 63a). And how indescribably less still was the value placed on the alien pleasure of "national sovereignty" as compared with the satisfaction of Torah.

Consequently, at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, the scholars were disinclined to wage a stubborn, all-out war, either for their political status or for the Temple -- knowing full well that these possessions, which could be taken from them by the power of others, could not stand without such bloodshed, whereas no power on earth could succeed in taking from them their everlasting inheritance, the Torah. And when Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai was given the opportunity to salvage something by his influence, he asked for no national concessions, but only for "Jabneh and its scholars" -- a refuge for the Torah. He asked nothing from the besiegers, for the granting of such a request would have been an act of grace on their part, and so would have created the expectation of perpetual gratitude. Instead he requested from them something that, whether or not they were willing to grant it, would in the final end remain in our hands.

Take note. The Second Temple was destroyed. The Higher Providence had found, apparently, that the good influence that dwelling in the land had on the spirit of the Jewish people -- its being sanctified by the commandments connected with the land, as well as its taking upon itself the promissory seal of the "Covenant of the Parts" (Gen. 15:13-16), in these ways strengthening the bond between the Jewish people and its Heavenly Protector -- such influence had already done its maximum to ensure that, even though far from the land, the good effects of the land should not thenceforth cease among the people. The sacred memories of the land, and the turning toward it at the hour of prayer, would suffice to preserve its influence upon their hearts. And their further actual dwelling upon the land as a "kingdom" would bring, from that point on, greater spiritual loss than gain. For even those few remnants of the gross outer shell, those mere fragments of the material paraphernalia of "nationalism" -- i.e., even the dimmed example of the realpolitik-oriented life that still held sway at the time of the Second Temple -- served to prevent the true inner substance of the people from being revealed, the exemplification of intimacy with the Divine that was its mission from the time of Mount Sinai. Therefore did Providence cast down even the vestiges of the paraphernalia of that "nationalism" and sweep them from the path.

Then did the Jewish people sprout wings truly free, rising to the uttermost heights, building for itself in the great, spacious heavens a buttress on the skiffs of the wind, far from the reach of the earth-dragon -- that dragon which stands ever ready to make spectacles of the nations and monarchies: spurring this one against that one, stirring that one against this one, establishing "countries" and overturning them, enlarging "nations" and swallowing them.

At the hour when Titus the wicked packed all the vessels of the Temple for transfer to Rome by "ships of the sea" -- then did our people take the inner substance of those vessels, the Holy Spirit, and carry it to its ships plying the air of the heavens and establish there "the Heavenly Jerusalem."

Wherever Israel was exiled, wherever the people were sent, even though thousands of parasangs from Jerusalem, two images accompanied them: the image of Jerusalem, the holy city, which the people would engrave on the tablets of their hearts, sealing therewith the memory of "the love of her espousals" with the Holy One, blessed be he, in earlier times, in the days of her youth (Jeremiah 2:2); and the image of "the Academy of Jabneh," which provided a living copy for every place of settlement as they established, everywhere they went, a house of study in which they could continue their life with the Holy One, blessed be he. In these tiny academies the life of the couple, the Holy One, blessed be he, and the Jewish people, was established in most wonderful fashion.

### **"When Torah and Exile Are Joined, Great Wonders Are Born in the Soul"**

Thus were "exile" and the "house of study" two wonderful catalytic agents for the Jewish people, for by means of them it progressed in the task that the Lord had assigned it at Mount Sinai. And these two catalytic agents were interdependent. Academy without exile would not have survived, for its light would have been extinguished by the thick shadows of sovereignty and state; and exile without academy also could not have existed, for its subject, the people in exile, would not have survived. That is to say, a people without a Torah -- and many such peoples suffered exile -- yields to the indomitable power of its conqueror and becomes assimilated within the invincible ruling nation. With this the exile ceases, and with it also the correction and purification of exile. The result of such an exile is merely that the exiled people is removed from its own Molech idolatry and transferred to the Molech idolatry of another. When Torah and exile are joined, great wonders are born in the soul of their bearer.

Justly, therefore, does the midrash say, in reckoning the ethical balance of all that happened to us as a result of our losing our land: "Said the Holy One, blessed be he, 'When it was destroyed'" -- i.e., when the kingdom was destroyed and the root bearing gall and wormwood plucked out -- "'you raised me for me righteous men; and when it was established, you raised me wicked men'" (Song of Songs Rabbah).

### **The Secret of Survival**

And thus it was that between two fires -- the flaming light of Torah within our houses of study and the flaming eyes of the wolves outside -- for two thousand years there was ceaselessly cast a singular and unique culture, one without parallel anywhere in the world: a culture soft as wax in material interests and hard as iron in matters of the soul. And this culture grew and developed, and presented before the whole world a people wondrous and legendary in its very surviving and wondrous and legendary also in the quality of its soul and its way of thinking: a nation with ears attending and senses awake to every good idea; a nation that, if humanity sometime be ordered to make an ethical journey to bring redemption to the world, shall without doubt march at the head.

The purification of the soul of our people in exile, and its being made receptive to every inspired idea -- through which came about the possibility of understanding the previously proclaimed prophecy of our prophets, "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore," not as prose resounding in the air but as compelling and perceptible logic -- this purification was itself the exilic creation of our people, and this was the very secret of our survival in exile.

The sublime hymn, "Awake, awake, for your Light has come," sung ecstatically on the Eve of the

Sabbath in synagogues wherever Israel is dispersed, is the spirit-in-song of our people's exilic creation; and as night approaches to elevate the seventh day to its station as the Sabbath, the crowning glory of all Jewish creations, the hymn proclaims of its creator, the Jew, that he has not stopped making his divine creations from the material of the commandments and the Torah of his God, nor will he stop such creating.

May the erring in spirit now realize that the lament of our people over "the Exile of the Presence" is no proof whatever of our people's having been, in exile, emptied of the Holy Spirit; but, on the contrary, it is an indication of its being abundantly filled by the flow of the Holy Spirit. Thus even while our people laments the Exile of the Presence, and fervently longs for its extension over all the world, it at the same time rejoices and takes great pride (for in this it may well take pride) in its Exilic Presence.

*Rabin Sz. A. Tamres, a rabbi in Milejczyce, published an expanded version of this essay in Hebrew as chapter four of the Knesset Yisrael u-Milchamot Hagoyim, Zydzki I walka narodow (The Community of Israel and the Wars of the Nations) in Warsaw in 1920. Thanks to Rabbi Everett Gendler for producing this compressed English translation for Tikkun.*

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