

# Arab-Jewish Cooperation

PRESENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN  
THE TWO PEOPLES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION.

by Abraham Revusky

WHENEVER SOMEBODY suggests a certain action for the improvement of Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine, he is usually confronted with the question what political concessions he is ready to offer to them. We must have, it is said, a definite program for a permanent solution of the Jewish-Arab problem. Otherwise all our efforts to create better relations with the Arabs would be wasted.

This opinion is strongly represented in Zionist ranks. There are many, I would say too many, Zionists who believe that without a radical solution of the Jewish-Arab problem, the actual relations between the two peoples are doomed to remain as hostile as before. They believe, that a formal understanding on political problems must precede any effort to improve the practical relations between the two peoples.

According to this purely political conception, the first step in any effort to create more friendly relations between the two peoples of Palestine, must be an Arab-Jewish conference, where all outstanding controversies shall be thoroughly discussed, and a definite solution reached and formally signed. As long as such a successful conference is not in the realm of practical possibility, the Jewish-Arab relations must be left to their natural course.

From the Zionist point of view the logical conclusion from this conception is that all efforts for the solution of the Jewish-Arab problem must wait until the Jews of Palestine reach a stronger position in comparison to the Arabs than they hold today.

At present the Palestine population consists of 33% Jews and 63% Arabs; of the latter about 92% are Moslems.\* When the Jews will attain numerical equality with the Moslems—and this will be reached when they will form 45-46% of Palestine's population—the Arab leaders, impressed by Jewish progress and no longer able to prevent their further expansion, will be ready to listen to our proposals for the future. Before this is attained, no acceptable solution of the Jewish-Arab problem is possible. We must therefore proceed further with our upbuilding work in spite of the unavoidable Arab resistance.

There is a certain measure of truth in the as-

\* Nearly four per cent of Palestine's population are neither Jews nor Arabs. They represent smaller national groups; Europeans (mainly, British and Germans), Greeks, Armenians, etc. Among the Arab population of Palestine about eight percent are Christians—mainly Roman Catholic and Greek-Orthodox.

sertion that without a definite political agreement between Jews and Arabs improved relations reached by economic cooperation would be in constant danger of disruption. On the other hand, it is still more true that no political understanding is feasible in the poisoned atmosphere of mutual distrust hitherto prevailing in Palestine. Leaders of national movements are usually more extreme in their demands than the masses behind them. Only when the practical relations among individuals and groups of both nationalities will become more normal and friendly, will the political leaders of the Arabs be induced to dilute their nationalistic demands and adopt a program offering greater prospects for a definite understanding with the Jews. Unless certain bridges are built between the Jewish and Arab masses of Palestine, the grip of the extremists on the Arab movement will not be relaxed.

Years ago I expressed the opinion that "without a close cooperation between Jews and Arabs outside of Palestine no lasting peace will be ever achieved in the small country between Dan and Beersheba." This conviction is now shared by most representatives of the Zionist movement. It seems, however, that some of them are now over-emphasizing this point of view and drawing from it hasty and too optimistic conclusions. The establishment of friendly relations with the Arab states outside of Palestine becomes in their eyes a panacea that will solve the Jewish-Arab problem in Palestine even without specific efforts on the spot. I find, for instance, this opinion reflected in the article of E. Golomb in the February issue of the "Jewish Frontier":

"The efforts of the Jewish Agency in increasing and strengthening political activity among the Arab countries are therefore not only the most successful but also the ones that will lead to the desired end more effectively than all others."

But the actual success attained by the political activities of the Jewish Agency among the Arab countries in the East is not yet visible to the naked eye. A year ago, at the so-called "round-table" conference in London, these Arab countries staunchly supported the Mufti and his extremist followers. Due to the united Arab front demonstrated at that conference, our crafty opponents in the colonial office succeeded in foisting upon us the infamous White Paper. Where is the assurance that at another opportunity of that kind

the attitude of the Arab States will greatly differ from that adopted by them a year ago in London?

This is not, however, the decisive point in the divergence of opinion between E. Golomb and myself. Much more important is the question whether any influential Arab statesman outside of Palestine will dare to advocate the recognition of Jewish aspirations in Palestine without a tangible improvement in the local relations, which must not necessarily imply a full political solution of the problem as a whole. Unless there will be in Palestine itself strong Arab groups urging peace and cooperation with the Jews, all our efforts to insure the political friendship of Egypt, Syria or Iraq will be wasted. We might create a favorable "stimmung" by sending musicians to Cairo, or irrigation projects to Baghdad, but the practical results of these efforts, and I am the last to discourage them, will finally depend on the extent of practical cooperation that could be established on the plains of Sharon and the hills of Judea. Should the Jewish labor movement of Palestine succeed in establishing a mutually beneficial contact with an ever increasing number of Arab workers, and should similar friendly relations be reached between Arab and Jewish farmers, merchants, etc., the whole political atmosphere of the country would undergo a definite change. Should Arab intellectuals, physicians, lawyers and, most important, teachers, now under the spell of fascist ideologies, become influenced by Jewish humanitarian teachers, and democratic principles in general, a future reversion to terroristic violence would meet more resistance among the Arab inhabitants of the country. A moral disarmament, preceding a formal settlement in the future, would begin.

A policy of discouraging or even minimizing such local understandings because of the allegedly bright prospects of a general agreement with the Arab countries outside of Palestine would be very harmful to Jews and Zionism. By neglecting the great opportunity offered us by the present, more peaceful mood of the Arab masses in Palestine, we are taking the risk of again being confronted with outbreaks similar to those of 1929 and 1936.

The key to our relations with the Arabs, in Palestine as well as in the neighboring countries of the East, lies in the establishment of more normal relations in the daily Jewish-Arab life of the country.

In one important aspect all observers of the present situation fully agree. There was never in our generation a better opportunity to establish friendly relations among Jews and Arabs in all walks of life. The Arabs of Palestine, as Golomb rightly put it, are tired of the national strife. They suffered tremendous losses in lives and economic positions from the prolonged anti-Jewish terror forced upon them by a vociferous and armed ex-

tremist minority. They are ruined by the heartless extortions of their own "liberators" and by the disruption of the profitable economic contacts formerly existing with the Jewish population of the country. Most of them are in a repentant mood and would be eager to grasp a friendly Jewish hand extended to them.

What should be done to utilize this exceptional opportunity?

No "dramatic" solutions are required at the present moment. No formal agreement on Jewish and Arab rights, no elaborate constitutional provisions regulating the political relations of both peoples for all times to come, no deal about immigration, not even a definite obligation concerning the future Near Eastern federation. We shall certainly discuss all those problems in our own ranks, but shall not attempt to force their premature solution at present. All that is necessary right now is to establish as many contacts as possible with the Arab population of Palestine, and make them as close and friendly as circumstances will allow. Let us find a more practical, more elastic method of organizing Arab workers and including them in the benefits given to its members by the Jewish "Histadruth". Let us help the Arab peasants in their marketing and other agricultural problems. Let us assure a lasting cooperation between Jewish and Arab planters. Let the Hebrew University organize extension courses in their own language for ambitious Arab students and teachers. Let us create a joint publishing company issuing all kind of useful books and magazines—not just propaganda pamphlets—for the young Arab generation. Let us organize Arab excursions, from Palestine as well as neighboring countries, to visit our cooperative settlements, colonies, factories, schools, and learn something about us and our achievements. Let us establish more cooperation in the field of sports and more social contacts with our Arab neighbors. And, last but not least, let us at the same time re-educate the Jewish masses and especially the recently arrived immigrants by eliminating prejudices and acquainting them with elementary facts on Arab life and customs.

This is only a partial list of practical tasks confronting us in the field of Jewish-Arab relations. They don't require subtle legalistic brains indulging in highly complicated diplomatic formulas. All that is necessary is systematic activity, perseverance, good-will, and some financial means to cover the most necessary expenses.

Here we arrive at another question concerning which I must disagree with the opinion expressed by E. Golomb in the last issue of the JEWISH FRONTIER.

Who should undertake the realization of the above program? How should we start it?

To achieve a lasting improvement in our relations with the Arabs we must tackle the problem in a broad democratic way. It must become the task of the whole Jewish community of Palestine. It must be reflected in the approach of the average Jew to the average Arab, whenever he meets him in the course of his daily life. The fundamental basis of a Jewish-Arab friendship in Palestine is a greatest possible number of individual friendships between Moshe's and Mustafa's. At the same time all kinds of Jewish organizations should strive to some kind of contact in the economic, cultural and social field with the respective groups among the Arab population. Only such a broad democratic approach will create a more friendly atmosphere in the national relations of Palestine and pave the way to political understanding both inside and outside of the promised land.

In full contradiction to this democratic method, Mr. Golomb—who will certainly not object, at least theoretically, to any of the points of the above program—believes that all efforts to improve our relations with the Arabs must emanate exclusively from the Executive of the Jewish Agency. He is afraid, that if this task is entrusted to voluntary organizations it might lead them to abandon Zionism in their concentration on the Arab problem. He refers to the horrible example of "Brith Shalom" some of whose members were ready to consider ten years ago, in the black days of the Shaw commission, a limitation of Palestine's Jewish population to 400,000. He envisages the possibility that the "League," which he considers as the successor of "Brith Shalom," might finally arrive at a similar point of view.

However, I feel that Mr. Golomb is not quite fair to "Brith Shalom". He offers no proof that that organization—with whose methods I sharply disagree—ever approved the proposal of an upper limit of 400,000 for the Jewish population of Palestine. It seems that one of its younger ideologists (Ernst Simon) conceived that desperate idea as a way to assure a minimum of progress at a very dark moment in the history of Zionism when all seemed to be lost. We may condemn him for lack of faith. But I do not believe that "Brith Shalom", an organization which included among its members many sincere and wholehearted Zionists, should be blamed as a whole for that product of a brooding mind.

Still more important is the fact that the present "League for Jewish-Arab Relations" holds a point of view diametrically opposed to that once adopted by "Brith Shalom". The "League" which includes many prominent Zionists of all shades—some leading members of the Histadruth are among them—does not expect to solve the Arab problem by diplomatic subtleties or concession on

principles. It is based on the conviction, already explained in the beginning of this article, that actual improvement in local relations must precede any effort to solve the Jewish-Arab problem by diplomatic conferences. Any proposal to accept a voluntary curtailment of Jewish immigration, or to put an upper limit to the total Jewish population of Palestine, would be simply dismissed by it as exceeding its task and competence. Its founders expressly recognize the supremacy of the Jewish Agency in all matters concerning the political solution of the Jewish-Arab problem.

Under these circumstances, I feel justified in supporting the democratic approach to the Jewish-Arab problem advocated by the "League". At the same time I have doubts concerning the chances of achieving good results in this field through the centralized methods suggested by E. Golomb. Whenever a democratic nation envisages the necessity of better relations with other peoples, public opinion expresses itself in all kinds of independent good-will organizations, which begin to clear the atmosphere even before the official government leaders are ready to tackle the problem in their own slow and clumsy diplomatic way.

It likewise stands to reason that any activity among the Arabs which will bear the official stamp of the Jewish Agency, will give rise to more suspicions and mistrust than if it were done by a voluntary organization. A representative of the Agency would also be in a more difficult position when confronted with premature questions about the future. He could not say that they are outside of his competence.

Furthermore, can we expect from a department of the Agency the same missionary zeal and enthusiasm that might be displayed by a voluntary organization strongly convinced of its historic task?

I therefore believe that we should welcome and support every well-meaning initiative in this field. Here in America we should support any organization of this kind as long as it is headed by responsible Zionists, deserving our general confidence.

Naturally, this does not exclude a more intensive activity on the part of the Jewish Agency. The recent appointment of a commission to study the present aspects of the Arab-Jewish problem should certainly be welcomed by all of us. The Agency shall stimulate and, to a certain degree, supervise all activities aimed at the improvement of our relations with the Arabs. At the same time it should not monopolize functions which might better succeed as voluntary efforts.

In any case, let us not waste precious time. The history of Zionism is full of lost opportunities. Shall we loose another one?