

LEADERSHIP UNDER PRESSURE

Menachem Begin, The Peace Treaty and a New Israel.1913-1992.

Park Avenue Synagogue

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Avi Shilon, "Menachem Begin's Attitude toward the Jewish Religion", The Middle East Journal, 70, 2, 2016, 249-274.

Begin fiercely opposed the **Reparations Agreement** that Israel reached with West Germany in 1952, for reasons clearly related to his view on the Jewish religion and Jewish identity. In this he took a position on Jewish history that was quite different from that of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, the moving force behind the agreement...He understood the Holocaust as the ultimate manifestation of the innate hostility the nations of the world bore toward God's chosen people, as described in Jewish texts. Begin thus objected entering into direct negotiations with West Germany over reparations, because the very fact of speaking to Germans was tantamount to an act of exoneration that could ultimately obliterate the traditional view of the Jewish past.

2) Begin viewed **Zionism** as the realization of a national spirit that had always been evident in traditional writings and among Diaspora Jews. He saw no need to transform the traditional Jew into a New Jew. Instead, he portrayed Jewish martyrdom throughout the ages as an embodiment of an age-old Jewish struggle for national liberation. Begin's Zionism, therefore, did not draw a direct line between the biblical age and the modern era, dismissing the long years of Diaspora as an aberration. In his view, the Biblical past, the days of the Second Temple, and the Exile were all simply different manifestations of the same drive for Jewish survival and unity that stood at the foundation of Zionism. As he saw it, Zionism was not an innovation in Jewish history; it was one more link in the chain of generations. Since he viewed Zionism as continuous with Jewish history, he believed it was essential to incorporate religious symbols into it as they were formulated in exile. Only in this way could the modern state be justified and legitimate.

3) The conquest of the **Territories** was a defining moment in Begin's political career. He had always demanded a Jewish state occupying the entire Land of Israel. Like Jabotinsky, he saw this as a political imperative, and maintained that the borders of the Palestine Mandate

as originally defined by the League of Nations - including all of what is now Jordan - had been promised to the Jewish people and were necessary for the settlement of the world's Jews and for the state's economic viability and defense. But, more essentially, Begin's commitment to the Land of Israel had its roots in the religious right of the people to their land, anchored in the covenant God made with his people as described in the Torah.

Patricia Golan, "Helping Strangers", The Jerusalem Report, Dec 14, 2015.

It's been 40 years since Prime Minister Menachem Begin welcomed with open arms the relatively small group of "**boat people**" fleeing Vietnam. It would be incomprehensible, Begin argued, if the state that was founded on the ashes of the Holocaust was not prepared to take in refugees fleeing political persecution and oppression. But since then, Israel has granted legal status to only a handful of non-Jewish refugees. Begin's attitude seems sweetly quaint today.

Mordechai Kremnitzer and Amir Fuchs, Menachem Begin on Democracy and Constitutional Values, distributed with "Israel Hayom" newspaper on eve of Yom Kippur 2011.

1) Menachem Begin had a liberal-democratic worldview. For him, democracy was both deep and rich. It was deep because he believed people were born with intrinsic rights, rather than given rights by the state. In his view, individuals come before the state, rather than the other way round.

2) Begin well understood the pitfalls of majority rule which can be tyrannical, repressive, and discriminating toward minorities. This led him to formulate the principle of the rule of the people, which is constrained by the power of self-limitation.

3) "*The nation should recognize and the law of the country should stipulate that the law and the judiciary must be completely autonomous. This obligatory independence is mutual, both on the part of the government toward the judge and on the part of the judge toward the government*" (M.Begin, 1952).

4) "Some say that it is impossible for us to provide full equal rights to Arab citizens of the state because they do not fulfill full equal obligations. But this is a strange claim. True, we decide not to obligate Arab residents, as distinguished from the Druze, to perform military service. But we

decided this of our own free will and I believe that the moral reason for it is valid. Should war break out, we would not want one Arab citizen to face the hard human test that our own people had experienced for generations... We believe that in the Jewish state, there must be equal rights for all its citizens, irrespective of religion, nation or origin".
(Knesset address explaining the reasons for proposing repeal of the emergency Regulations, February 20, 1962).

Bibliography.

*Menachem Begin, The Revolt, 1951- his activities in the Jewish underground.

*Menachem Begin, White Nights: The Story of a Prisoner in Russia, 1957-an experience that he would never forget.

*Daniel Gordis, Menachem Begin: The Battle for Israel's Soul, 2014- an erudite broad presentation of Begin's life.

*Ofar Grosbard, Menachem Begin: The Absent Leader, 2007- an overview of his life. *Avi Shilon, Menachem Begin. A Life, 2012- an exceptionally good analysis.

YouTube.

*Israeli Prime minister Begin's remarks at the Camp Daily Agreement, 17 September 1978, 11 minutes- *an historic moment with Begin at his best in the presence of Presidents Carter and Sadat.*

*Remembering Menachem Begin, Shalom TV, 29 minutes- shows him in a positive light.