

the United States, he knows he bears an allegiance to Israel, but that allegiance is qualified by a multitude of dissatisfactions. The support the country once received was an easy one: it was grounded in the spotlessly superior record of a certified victim as well as in notions of regional strategic importance. But for the critics, the first is soiled and the second under attack, so what ground is there for support? The appeal can only be to the mere fact of Jewish identity, something that might even resemble nationalism. Nationalism, though, with its declaration of self-interest, leaves a bad taste. Israel fighting in self-defense is fine, but Israel fighting for a mode of existence, a type of government, even for a country that is no more than merely Jewish and somehow less than sublime? There are few American intellectuals who would be tempted to argue such a position for the United States, let alone for a country to which loyalties must be secondary.

Of course some American Jewish criticism is quite sincere: some would have to be, for there is no lack of problems in Israel for a concerned outsider to address in a spirit of understanding. But it is lost amid the swirl of self-righteousness, anger, ideology, resentment of things lost, and relief at the prospect, finally, of ceasing to struggle. This pose takes pride in going against the grain, as if such criticism were a burden to be borne like the words of the Prophets. But it is less a burden borne than a burden lifted. The masks of strenuous advocacy can be removed, those of virtue and pained wisdom taking their place. True criticism is far more difficult, and far less "virtuous."

EDWARD ROTHSTEIN is music critic for the *New Republic* and a fellow of the *New York Institute for the Humanities*. His articles in *COMMENTARY* include "A Fateful Intellectual Friendship" (December 1987) and "Israel's Alienated Intellectuals" (February 1987).

**Jonathan D. Sarna:** The Israel of American Jews—the Israel that they imagined in their minds, dreamed about, and wrote about—was for well over a century a mythical Israel, an Israel that revealed more about American Jewish ideals than about Israeli realities. Contemporary criticisms of Israel, as I understand them, have far more to do with the shattering of these myths than with the "various traditions of opposition to Zionism" suggested in the symposium statement. A brief excursion back into history explains why.

In the early 19th century, American Jews depicted Israel as a "holy" land, a land where desperately poor and scrupulously faithful Jews engaged in prayer and study; a land, in short, where the material life, values, and practices of Jews

were precisely the reverse of American Jews' own. Later in the century, alongside this image, a new one arose: the image of the bold desert pioneer, the hard-working agricultural colonist, the brawny Jewish farmer—the answer, in other words, to those who claimed that Jews were merely parasites, racially incapable of "productive" labor. Finally, in the 20th century, Zionists like Louis D. Brandeis added a further twist to this image: Israel became for them an extension of the American dream, a Jewish refuge where freedom, liberty, and social justice would reign supreme, an "outpost of democracy" that American Jews could legitimately, proudly, and patriotically champion.

All of these images, whatever truth they may have contained, took on mythic proportions in America. They embodied American Jews' hopes and fantasies, responded to their psychological and emotional needs, and helped them to counter the malicious slurs of their enemies. Many American Jews, especially after the creation of the state in 1948, began to look upon Israel as an embryonic heaven on earth. It became for them what the Soviet "socialist paradise" had been for some of their parents: a kind of Jewish utopia, a place where their fondest hopes and dreams might be realized.

The wonder is not so much that these dreams were eventually punctured as that they lasted as long as they did. Why they lasted, even in the face of countervailing realities, cannot be explored here; the point is that they persisted until quite recently. Now events have jarred American Jews out of their dream world, puncturing the various myths that I have described. In response, some have exchanged their utopian myths for demonic ones, an immature but hardly unprecedented response to disappointment. But for the most part, American Jewish criticism of the state of Israel does not seem to me (in the editors' words) to be "open," "widespread," and "bitter." Steven M. Cohen's 1986 *Survey of American Jewish Attitudes Toward Israel and Israelis* finds, to the contrary, that "most" American Jews continue to "proclaim a deep sentimental attachment to the country and a concern for its survival." Still, I would concede that American Jews are now both more critical of Israel than before and more willing to legitimate criticism of it. It is against this background that I respond to *COMMENTARY*'s specific questions.

My own attitudes toward Israel have indeed changed in recent years, for the very reasons that I have described. Having spent a recent sabbatical in Israel, and several summers there before that, I think I now have a far more realistic picture of the country and its problems than I once did. Rather than projecting my own hopes and fantasies onto Israel, I now see it as it is: a young, developing, and internally divided state

beset by serious social, religious, political, and economic problems. Some of these problems are not being addressed at all; others, in my opinion, are being addressed poorly. I see Israel standing at a critical historical junction, and I am far from certain that it will follow what I consider to be the right path.

But whatever path Israel follows, I must emphasize that my attachments to it will remain unchanged, for they are basically familial ones. Israelis, indeed a whole range of Israelis, form part of my *mishpoche*, literally and figuratively. I may not always agree with them, but I do always love them.

AS I INDICATED, many of the hopes and dreams of Israel's supporters appear to me to have been unrealistic and utopian—no more realizable than the starry-eyed visions some Jewish immigrants brought with them when they sailed into Ellis Island. Such dreams, in the final analysis, tell us far more about those who do the dreaming than those who are dreamed-about. Disappointments could have been anticipated. Having said this, one should by no means overlook Israel's astonishing accomplishments. Somehow, despite all the many problems that we may now acknowledge, its cities boom and its deserts bloom. One need only visit Israel's neighbors, say Egypt or Lebanon, to realize how remarkable the Zionist achievement has been.

To my mind, the more important question is not whether Israel has fulfilled or disappointed *our* hopes, but whether it has fulfilled its own. The state of Israel, according to its 1948 Declaration of Independence, ". . . 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; [and] it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education, and culture." These goals, as anyone who has ever lived in Israel knows, have yet to be met. Some of Israel's leaders seem quite determined to make sure that they never will be.

IN TRYING to evaluate recent criticisms of Israel by American Jews, I have been greatly influenced by the words of Rabbi Jonathan in the talmudic tractate of Tamid (28a): "He who reproves his neighbor with pure intent ['in the name of heaven'] is worthy of a portion from God." Criticism, Rabbi Jonathan implies, must be carefully evaluated: much depends on the motives of the critic.

The unworthy critics today are easy to find: their shrill voices are neither moderated by love nor tinged with sadness. The worthy critics are more scarce. Alive to Israel as it really is, their words mingle praise and reproof. They speak softly, almost fearfully, and always in pain. In

this, Israel's fortieth year, I shall strain my ears to hear them better.

JONATHAN D. SARNA is associate professor of American Jewish history at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and is director of its Center for the Study of the American Jewish Experience. His most recent book is *The American Jewish Experience* (Holmes & Meier).

**Peter Shaw:** COMMENTARY's first question prompts a recognition that I have experienced a diminution of dread over Israel's survival, as well as a diminution of distress over developments that cause Israel adverse publicity. Israel's military strength and favorable developments in the Arab world seem to point the way to survival. The Arab states seek unity to heal the rifts brought about by the Iran-Iraq war, but their restoration of relations with Egypt appears to signal not the old resolve to destroy Israel, but a promising acceptance of the one state among them to have signed a peace treaty with Israel. The recent demonstrations and riots in Gaza and the West Bank have brought the Palestinian question to the fore as Israel's greatest problem. On the other hand, though it is said that the growing Israeli Arab population threatens the continuance of a Jewish state, the two populations have remained stable relative to one another and there is reason to believe that they will continue to do so.

Adverse publicity about Israel in America has been largely offset by a significant change in the terms of discussion. Thanks to an emphasis on the argument that Israel is America's one dependable ally in the Middle East, Israel is no longer the ward whose protection was urged on Americans as a moral responsibility. From this point of view, Israel's involvement in the *Iran-contra* arms deal showed it to be the one country America could turn to for guidance through the maze of Middle Eastern intrigue. And if Israel failed, it was because of a similar lack of affinity for the game. More than ever, therefore, American public opinion views Israel not only as an ally but as an outpost of its own civilization. In this light even the killings at Sabra and Shatila, misreported as they were so as to cast a portion of the guilt on Israel, may not have hurt it in the long run. For in the context of subsequent Arab terrorism in Lebanon, the worst accusations against Israel appeared as possible temporary exceptions on Israel's part to the norms of Western behavior, in contrast to a rule of terroristic behavior on the part of the Arabs. Thus the American press, by worrying over Israeli morality while accepting Arab brutalities as givens, left a more favorable