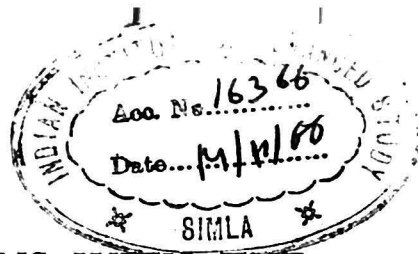


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ISRAEL'S RELATIONS WITH THE EMERGING STATES IN ASIA

By ELIAHU ELATH

(Address given to the Royal Central Asian Society on May 16, 1962)

WHEN I was discussing with the officers of our Society the question of this talk on Israel's co-operation with some of the emergent States of Asia, I was obliged to point out that about four-fifths of Israel's work in this field has been with African States, and only about one-fifth with countries in Asia. But with our immediate neighbours there is, unfortunately, still little present prospect of co-operation, so that geography can hardly be a dominant factor in the distribution of such help as we are able to give. Common interests, common problems, approximate similarity of soils and climate, play the most important part in determining where we, as members of the United Nations, can most usefully make our modest contribution to the progress of those peoples now emerging, as we did in 1948, into full independence.

So while I shall do my best to confine my remarks this afternoon to our relations with, and our work in and for, the emergent States of Asia, I must ask your indulgence for any more than occasional references to African countries. In these, the challenge of the past few years has been more urgent, so that some of our work there is more advanced than in Asian lands. In these, developments tend to be more gradual—less dramatic—than in Africa. But they offer, I think, better prospects of durable achievement. Indeed, with some of the older Middle Eastern non-Arab States—and especially Turkey—we have for years been working in various fields, social, cultural and economic, towards the greater stability and prosperity of our own part of the world.

I must admit that I feel that the sort of co-operation we have established with them, and with others of the newly created States of Asia and Africa, ranks among Israel's greatest achievements in the few short years of her national independence. It gives us a special satisfaction because for so many generations our people have been obliged to be mainly recipients of help and charity from others. Now, for the first time, we have the chance of contributing, so far as our limited means and opportunities permit, to the well-being of other peoples. The desire to do something of this kind made its appearance very early in the history of Zionism. More than sixty years ago, the modern Zionism, Theodor Herzl, in his prophetic following words into the mouth of one



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problem of oppressed peoples which has not and only a Jew can grasp how serious it is. black peoples. . . . I myself, having wit-

nessed the Return of the Jews, would like to help the Return of the Blacks as well. That is why I am working for the development of Africa."

Dr. Herzl made his hero speak like this because he himself never considered Jewish statehood as an end in itself, but rather as a means—primarily of solving the problem of Jewish homelessness, but also of serving the cause of humanity in other lands, and for other peoples. He felt, even then, that the restoration of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland, where they might live in peace and security, would enable—and indeed oblige—them to share their knowledge and experience with others who might seek it.

Two questions here suggest themselves. Why did some of these young States, most of them much larger and in many ways richer than Israel, feel impelled to approach *us*? And why, and to what extent, did we feel not only the desire but the capacity to undertake so difficult a task, while we still had so many urgent problems of our own?

In the last decade or so, many peoples of Asia and Africa have found themselves newly emancipated—their leaders suddenly charged with responsibilities both formidable and inspiring. Political independence presented them with a host of new problems affecting practically every facet of their life, at junctures when they had but little experience of the democratic forms of government in which most of them were putting their faith. Among their leaders, not a few realized that free institutions would soon fall into discredit and eclipse unless they could meet the challenge of social and economic welfare. They realized, too, that the international constellation was such that time might not always work in their favour: their problems could not await the kind of solution which takes generations to evolve. For the prevention of anarchy and chaos at home, and the stabilizing of external relations, they had to seek some techniques for accelerating their peoples' development.

When they turned to Israel for advice and co-operation, their leaders themselves explained to us that they did so because they saw in Israel a country which, in its own struggle to build a united nation within the framework of a newly created democratic State, had found at least partial answers to some of their own burning problems. They hoped, too, for understanding and sympathy from a State almost as young as themselves, emerging from a long history of dependence to establish a society dedicated to the rights and interests of the common man, and to providing, so far as possible, equality of opportunity to all.

They saw, too, that we had been as little able as they to wait on normal, gradual development. Our very survival had often depended on our ability to tackle problems by unorthodox means, to improvise to meet the unexpected, to take great risks to meet greater dangers. It was in the "pressure-cooker" of Israel that they hoped to find inspiration and example in solving problems of their own which, to a detached observer, might seem insoluble.

Then, Israel is such a small country—neither very wealthy nor ambitious for aggrandisement or domination. They saw in her no possible

threat to their newly acquired independence. Relations with Israel could be based on genuine co-operation, with no strings attached, and with no political or other safeguards required.

Last, but not least, some of these peoples saw Israel not only as a geographical link between Europe, Asia, and Africa, but also as a laboratory of ideas and experiments, where ancient and modern, spiritual and material, tradition and progress, all joined in an effort to achieve unity and harmony within the compass of a free, modern society. A few even saw the significance of the fact that the Jewish people, returning to the cradle of their civilization in the East, had brought with them the experience gained in generations of living in Western countries, and made of Israel a testing-ground where West and East could meet in peace, and benefit from each other's values and qualities and experience.

Now as to what impelled *us* to meet this challenge, especially when we ourselves are still very far from achieving our own goals, and when so many of our own problems remain unresolved.

There was more to it than ethical principles—Jewish or universal. We did not exaggerate our capacity to help some of the new States in Asia and Africa. But we did feel, all the same, that some of the knowledge and experience we had gained during our brief statehood might be useful to others. We might be able to prevent others from repeating our mistakes.

Then, Israel, within a very small area, includes a remarkable variety of soil and climate: hill and plain, sand and swamp and rock; the temperate weather of the hills of Galilee, the Mediterranean weather of the coastal plain, the sub-tropical heat of the Jordan Valley. We had the natural conditions for a great variety of agricultural and other experiments.

Moreover, in the process of building Israel, we had had to cope with the reception and integration of hundreds of thousands of immigrants from East and West, many of them from Asian or African countries. We had thus had to learn the difficult, but essential lesson of brotherly co-existence, upon which our future as a united people must depend. And although our immigrants were bound together by their common Jewish heritage, and their longing for a secure and normal national life, their backgrounds, cultures and traditions differed widely. Mutual respect, tolerance, parity of esteem, were essential from the start, and we knew it. Prejudice or discrimination could have destroyed Israel more surely than any external enemy. Nor was the process of welding together our different groups a smooth or easy one, but it has, I think, given most of our people a very sensitive appreciation of the feelings of various groups of a nation which may differ in colour, or creed, or in social or educational backgrounds or traditions. This may have facilitated our approach to a better understanding of the feelings and difficulties of those young coloured peoples who must now meet their former "senior partners" in new relationships of freedom and co-operation. Israelis working as experts in Asian or African countries would have done their work less effectively had they regarded it merely as a formal, technical assignment.

This applies also to our contacts with young Asian and African students who come to Israel for training. In all our contacts with them, in Israel or abroad, we cannot ignore the existence in them of deeply in-

grained prejudices and suspicions of any "white" instructors; their confidence has to be won before any real progress is possible. So we try to begin by making it clear that material achievements alone, however impressive, do not make a State—still less a nation. A solidly based State presupposes moral values: social justice, respect for the rights and liberties of the individual. And in a genuinely democratic society the man who works with his hands must fill an important and honoured place."

Education is almost the most urgent of the outstanding problems in the new States of Asia and Africa. Until educational standards reach a reasonable level, all activities in these States will inevitably be concentrated in the hands of a small percentage of their citizens, and this may lead to their moral and political disintegration. The gap which at present separates the small literate section of the people from the illiterate masses is clearly fraught with dangerous possibilities; it can only be narrowed if every effort is made to fight illiteracy, both through new schools and through adult education. This problem, or rather the problems of the gap that yawns between the educational systems adequate a century ago and those needed today, is not peculiar to any one State, nor, of course, is it the exclusive concern of new States. In Israel, we have been obliged to give it a great deal of attention, and have conducted quite a good deal of research. What has taken centuries in the older lands of the West must somehow be speeded up in the newly emerging countries, and it is by no means certain that the same techniques will prove effective in less developed areas. We found it necessary to alter them when we came to deal with many of our own Oriental immigrants.

But educational problems in new States will not be solved by outside advisers alone, however well equipped and well disposed. It is the teachers in the new States themselves who must be trained in the methods and techniques in use in modern countries, and who must learn how these may best be applied with their own people, whose tribal or religious traditions may often hinder the spread of education if it is carried out too hastily, too radically, or without proper preparation.

In this, as in other fields, we always stress to students from the new States the importance of not assuming that everything studied by them in Israel can automatically be applied in their own conditions; their success will depend on their ability to translate what they have learnt with us into the realities of their own environment.

No less vital for the future well-being of the new States is the question of health. In advanced Western societies the average expectancy of life is about seventy years. For the underdeveloped Asian or African countries it is between twenty-nine and thirty-nine years. The main problems in this sphere are the endemic diseases, which diminish physical and mental capacity, and take a heavy toll of life, and secondly, the infant mortality rate, which is among the highest in the world. The question is how to introduce better methods of hygiene and medical treatment, and to this the new States have to find an early answer if they are to reach a higher standard of living, and a more advanced social and cultural life.

But better health and hygiene, resulting in greater life expectancy, involves the need to produce adequate food supplies for a rapidly increasing

population. Improvements in health and education without economic advance will create as many problems as it solves, and may lead to tragic conflicts. The terrible inequality still existing between advanced and backward communities, despite their equal possession of sovereign rights, appears from a few very simple figures :

In Western Europe the national *per capita* income ranges from about £120 to about £180 a year. In the United States it is as high as £800 a year. But in Asian and African countries it ranges between £13 and £17 a year. And between 1950 and 1957 incomes in the developed countries rose by an average of £7 *per capita*; in underdeveloped countries, in the same period, by only about six shillings.

The question of economic advancement cannot, therefore, be separated for a moment from the rest of the problems preoccupying the new States. And here one of the first prerequisites is the effective utilization of their natural resources. Often they have no complete or reliable surveys of this kind—such studies as have been made may have been made by foreign authorities or organizations for their own specific needs and purposes, rather than for the indigenous populations. But before a State can draw up agricultural or industrial programmes, it must know what minerals are available, how much water, what kinds of soil, what flora and fauna, are to be found within its borders.

In the early stages of Israel's development, similar though less critical problems arose. We have evolved a few techniques which, though not elaborate or costly, have sufficed to provide us with the necessary minimum of information to enable work to be begun, with a prospect of completing our data as the work progresses. It is a process of trial and error, but with us many of these developments have been on a smaller scale than in most modern States, and we have acquired some experience which can be of use to some of the new States. When, for instance, the leaders of some of these countries travelled around the United States, they felt rather overwhelmed. Huge projects like the T.V.A. seemed larger than life-size to them. But our irrigation schemes in Southern Israel were more comprehensible to them, and seemed to show something quite within their reach : " If Israel can do it, we can ! "

This seems to be the place to mention that Israel has shown by her own example, and tries to pass on the idea to the young States in Asia and Africa, that successful economic and social planning does not require a communist form of government—as in Soviet Russia or China—operating at the expense of the freedom of the individual and of human rights. On the contrary, it can better be achieved where public interest and individual rights are combined in common effort within a genuinely democratic State.

But no economic planning of any kind will be possible in any of the new States unless capital and trained personnel can be made available for the implementation of the various development schemes. This is one of the greatest difficulties in the realm of co-operation between the new States and other countries—and this for psychological as well as political reasons. It is true that some of these States have learned to enjoy the fruits of " positive neutrality "—getting assistance from whatever source they can tap at the moment—but the inequality of the parties militates against genuine

co-operation, and gives rise to fear and suspicion on the part of the recipient. I feel that only an international approach can open the way to a constructive solution of this problem. The Special Fund of the United Nations, and other agencies of the World Organization, are, of course, already playing an important part in this field.

Another limitation which hinders co-operation with the new States of Asia and Africa is their intense racial and national consciousness. They have a passionate desire to have their own teachers, doctors, and engineers with the least possible delay, and to control the capital necessary for their development schemes. Some of their leaders, as I saw for myself on recent visits to Asian and African countries, may prefer to remain without foreign experts altogether rather than forget their suspicions, especially of their former Western governors. It is here that tiny Israel has the advantage over larger and richer countries: her readiness to help can be accepted without suspicion.

It is with this in mind that the Medical School of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem has opened a five-year medical course for Asian and African students, and has added special courses dealing with specific problems of hygiene and medicine as they affect Asian and African conditions. Similarly, the Haifa Technion—the Israel Institute of Technology—has arranged a four-year course in agricultural engineering. Quite apart from the intrinsic value of these professions, every additional Asian or African physician or engineer will enhance the self-confidence of his people. The Hebrew University is also preparing to establish a School of Asian and African Studies, so that our own students may gain better understanding of Asian and African peoples and languages. The scope of the University's School of Oriental Studies is already being extended to include the history, religions and cultures of Asian peoples.

Other Israel institutions of higher learning are also considering how modern science can best help to solve the more urgent problems of the new States. This was the main theme of the discussions at the International Conference on the Role of Science in the Advancement of New States which took place last year at the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot. It was attended by Israel and foreign scientists, including a number from Asia and Africa. Most of the delegates stressed their desire that priority should be given to problems threatening their very existence: better health, more education, increased food production.

Israel is now in regular relations with twenty-four African and ten Asian States. The number of trainees coming to Israel has risen from a few score in 1959 to more than a thousand in 1961, and a further rise is already apparent. More than 600 of them have come under the auspices of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The Israel Federation of Labour—Histadrut—has also made a significant contribution in this field. In 1960 it established the Afro-Asian Institute for Labour Studies, which has just concluded its third course in Co-operation and Trade Unionism.

In the four years of our co-operation with these Asian and African States, more than 3,000 of their students have attended different educational institutions and courses in Israel, and some 900 Israeli experts and advisers have been sent abroad, mostly to these same States.

The students who come to us study a wide variety of subjects: health and hygiene, youth and adult education, work among women, vocational and industrial training, public administration, transport, civil aviation, shipping, housing and building, tourism and hotel management. Recently we felt that our long experience in agricultural co-operation might justify a proposal that the Special Fund of the United Nations should set up a permanent centre in Israel for the training of agricultural instructors and technicians from the new States of Asia and Africa. And just as I was leaving on this visit to London, the I.L.O. jointly with the Afro-Asian Institute of the Histadrut was starting a two-month course on co-operation, attended by students from some Asian and African countries, among them students from Turkey, Iran and Cyprus.

Burma was one of the first Asian countries with which we established friendly relations, and we have welcomed many Burmese students in Israel, and sent a number of experts to Burma. Forty families of Burmese ex-soldiers are now living in various agricultural settlements in Israel up and down the country, learning the theory and practice of co-operative farming. Fifty members of the Bhoodan movement in India have also spent several months in Israel studying different forms of co-operative agricultural settlement with a view to using the knowledge acquired on their return to India. Most of them have gained some experience of living and working in collective or co-operative settlements.

A number of women from Asian countries—India, Ceylon, Burma, the Philippines, Thailand, and Nepal—as well as some Africans, have been attending a six-week seminar in Haifa on the Role of Women in a Developing Society, and a successful course for youth leaders and sports instructors has just been completed.

Only a few weeks ago, a group of forty men and women from Japan spent six weeks in Israel studying problems of adult education, and some social and economic aspects of the co-operative movement.

Courses planned for the near future include a seminar on rural planning and building, another on irrigation in sub-tropical regions (in co-operation with the F.A.O.), and further courses in agricultural co-operation, poultry-rearing, citrus culture, the metal industry, and other subjects in which students from Asian and African countries have expressed interest.

We have also taken some opportunities of establishing closer relations with some of the new Asian and African States in matters of economics and development. Political independence has made these States the masters of their own economic activities, and they are learning quickly to modernize their trading methods. But they seek partners who will not be interested in political advantages, or in exorbitant profits. We have felt that the spheres in which we could be most helpful in these directions were those of agriculture, public works, and such industries as shipping lines and trading corporations. But in all such ventures our Asian or African partners have majority rights from the outset, and are encouraged to take over the management for themselves when they feel able to do so. There is no question of establishing any Israel "vested interests."

As I said at the beginning, this work is one in which Israelis find real satisfaction—a sense that they are making their small contribution to the peace and stability of the world, and helping to meet the challenge set by these emergent States to every free country. We feel that challenge to be an urgent one, for the destiny of these States is bound to affect our own. We live in an age of acute social consciousness, when, more than ever in the past, social security and economic prosperity are the deciding factors in the political stability of any society, and hence in the preservation of peace throughout the world. But the new countries look askance at anything that hints at charity—at alms offered by the rich to the poor. They need to feel that whatever help is offered comes to them as from one member of the human family to another, as an obligation accepted between equals. Israel counts herself fortunate in having, to this extent, gained their confidence.

REPORT OF DISCUSSION

A member opened the discussion which followed by asking how the Moslem world was reacting to the co-operation being offered by Israel to the emergent States of Asia and Africa. The lecturer replied that its attitude was not a united one: the Arabs were not too happy about anything Israel was doing in the field of international relations and were doing their utmost to be obstructive. On the other hand, Israel had found moral support for what she was doing in Asia and Africa on the part of Turkey and Iran—Moslem countries which were interested in the preservation of peace and stability in the world and which looked with favour upon the contributions Israel was making to the social, cultural and economic development of the new States in Asia and Africa.

In reply to a question about the part played by the English language in the work that had been described, the lecturer said that this was used as a language of instruction at the Afro-Asian Institute of Israel and in the various courses and seminars arranged by different official and public bodies in Israel for students from Asian and African countries where the prevailing language was English. Many of the students, he added, acquired some working knowledge of Hebrew, which helped them in their studies and in their contacts with Israelis who did not speak English.

The first questioner then asked if Moslems learning new techniques from Israel also learned to co-operate with the country. The lecturer replied that in a number of the emergent Asian and African States with which Israel had friendly relations, Moslems formed a considerable percentage of the population. This in no way prevented Israel from co-operating with them in many fields to everyone's mutual advantage. Israel had Moslem students in her educational institutions, including the University. No difference was ever felt in the attitude of these students towards Israel as compared with that of students of other denominations coming from the same countries. While being faithful followers of their religion, Moslem students from Asian and African countries did not necessarily identify Islam with opposition to Israel, and did not support the Arab attitude in this respect.

A member asked for further information on Burmese interest in co-

operative or collective settlements; in reply the lecturer said that Burma was one of the first countries in Asia with which Israel had established close relations of mutual friendship and co-operation. Many Burmese had visited Israel in recent years in order to study some of her methods in agriculture and other aspects of life. A considerable number of Burmese had spent some time at Israel's co-operative and collective settlements and on their return to Burma had endeavoured to introduce into that country some of the forms of social and economic life they had seen in Israel. At Burma's request a number of Israeli instructors had gone there to help in this and other fields. There were also Burmese studying in Israel's educational institutions, and the recent changes in the Government in Burma had had no effect on the friendly relations prevailing between the two countries.

To an enquiry about the financing of the training of African and Asian students in Israel the lecturer answered that there was no unified system for it. Some students were sent to Israel at the expense of their Governments, or of public institutions interested in their members being trained in that country. The Israel Government itself granted scholarships to quite a number of students coming to study there. And the Afro-Asian Institute, as an instance, received annually sixty scholarships from the American Trade Unions (A.F.L.-C.I.O.). The International Labour Office had recently arranged in Israel a seminar on Co-operation for Asian and African students which was subsidized by that office.

To a final question by a member as to whether Israel had been able to help in the ex-Belgian Congo the lecturer replied that Israel had been receiving a number of students from ex-Belgian Congo, and that these had not created any problems for her.

