

Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs

1.

During the First World War, it became clear to me that a process was going on which before then I had only surmised. This was the growing difficulty of genuine dialogue, and most especially of genuine dialogue between people of different kinds and convictions. Direct, frank dialogue is becoming ever more difficult and more rare; the abysses between human beings threaten ever more pitilessly to become unbridgeable. I began to understand at that time . . . that this is the central question for the fate of humanity. Since then I have continually pointed out that the future of our humanity depends upon a rebirth of dialogue.

2.

At this hour, in which the nationally conscious representatives of the Jewish people have gathered together again after eight years of separation, we once again declare before the nations of both the West and the East that a strong nucleus of the Jewish people is determined to return to its ancient homeland, there to renew its life, an independent life founded on labor which shall grow and endure as an organic element of a new humanity. No earthly power can shatter this determination, whose strength is found in the lives and deaths of generations of our pioneers. Any act of violence committed against us because of it sets the seal of blood upon the scroll of our national will.

Our national desire to renew the life of the people of Israel in their ancient homeland, however, is not aimed against any other people. As they enter the sphere of world history once more, and become once more the standard bearer of their own fate, the Jewish people, who have constituted a persecuted minority in all the countries of the world for two thousand years, reject with abhorrence the methods of nationalistic domination, under which they themselves have long suffered. We do not aspire to return to the Land of Israel with which we have inseparable historical and spiritual ties in order to suppress another people or to dominate them. In this land, whose population is both sparse and scattered, there is room both for us and for its present inhabitants, especially if we adopt intensive and systematic methods of cultivation.

Our return to the Land of Israel, which will come about through increasing immigration and constant growth, will not be achieved at the expense of other people's rights. By establishing a just alliance with the Arab peoples, we wish to turn our common dwelling-place into a community that will flourish economically and culturally, and whose progress would bring each of these peoples unhampered independent development.

Our settlement [in the Land of Israel], which is exclusively devoted to the rescue of our people and their renewal, is not aimed at the capitalistic exploitation of the region, nor does it serve any imperialistic aims whatsoever. Its significance is the productive work of free individuals upon a commonly owned soil. This, the socialist nature of our national ideal, is a powerful warrant for our confidence that between us and the working Arab nation a deep and enduring solidarity of true common interests will develop and which in the end must overcome all the conflicts to which the present mad hour has given birth. Out of

the sense of these links there will arise in the hearts of the members of the two nations feelings of mutual respect and goodwill, which will operate in the life of both the community and its individual members. Only then will both peoples meet in a new and glorious historical encounter.

Speech to the Twelfth Zionist Congress, 1921

3.

Those who favor only power will argue against me that my demand for a responsible attitude toward our Arab neighbors is a "purely moral" one. Yet it is actually a political demand, in the full meaning of this term ... It is unthinkable that those who hold dear the values cherished by the people of Israel will start their road by acting unjustly. He who does this commits not only a moral, but a political sin ... Every immoral policy is a bad policy.

1929

4.

We have not settled Palestine together with the Arabs but alongside them. Settlement alongside, when two nations inhabit the same country, which fails to become settlement together with, must necessarily become a state against. This is bound to happen here - and there will be no return to a mere alongside. But despite all the obstacles in our path, the way is still open for reaching a settlement together with. And I do not know how much time is left to us. What I do know is that if we do not attain [such a relationship with the Arabs of Palestine], we will never realize the aims of Zionism. We are being put to the test for the third time in this country.

5.

I belong to a group who, from the time Britain conquered Palestine, have not ceased to strive for the concluding of genuine peace between Jew and Arab. By a genuine peace we inferred .. .that both peoples should together develop the Land without the one imposing its will on the other... Two vital claims are opposed to each other, two claims of a different nature and a different origin, which cannot be pitted one against the other and between which no objective decision can be made as to which is just or unjust. We considered ... it our duty to understand and to honor the claim which is opposed to ours and to endeavor to reconcile both claims. We cannot renounce the Jewish claim; something even higher than the life of our people is bound up with the Land, namely the work which is their divine mission... Seeing that such love and such faith are surely present also on the other side, a union in the common service of the Land must be within the range of the possible. Where there is faith and love, a solution may be found even to what appears to be a tragic contradiction.

Letter to Gandhi