

A Tibetan-language History of Israel by Jamyang Norbu

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In 1990 I was privileged to be part of a delegation of eight rabbis and scholars who traveled to Dharamsala, seat of the Tibetan government-in-exile, to meet with the Dalai Lama. His Holiness wanted to learn the "Jewish secret" for preserving a religion and a culture in exile.¹

We met not only with the Dalai Lama, but with all strata of Tibetan leadership as well. During a dialogue with "young, educated Tibetans" (as the official itinerary put it), Lhasang Tsering, President of the Tibetan Youth Congress, one of the leading political organizations in the exiled community, handed me a small Tibetan pamphlet.² It took me a few moments to decipher the Tibetan for "Israel," and once I did I was surprised to learn that I had been given "An Outline of the History of Israel," written by a fiery Tibetan patriot, Jamyang Norbu.

Norbu is well known in the refugee community as one of its leading militants. A graduate of St. Joseph's College in Darjeeling, he was a guerrilla fighter with the Tibetan Resistance Force in Mustang, a remote section of Nepal. After the Force was dismantled by the Nepali government, Norbu studied Sinology in France and joined the China desk of the Tibetan Office of Research and Analysis.

In 1970 Norbu became one of the founders of the Tibetan Youth Congress and, later, editor of its magazine, *Rangzen* (*rang-btsan*, "Independence"). Analogies between the Tibetan and Jewish experience appeared in its pages, such as referring to the *kohen gadol* (the high priest of the Temple of Jerusalem) as "the Dalai Lama of Israel" and likening the Roman conquest of Israel to the Chinese occupation of Tibet.³ More recently, Norbu warned against Tibetans who became too close to Deng Xiaopeng as akin to Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler, and cautioned his countrymen against the "banality of evil", by which he meant that while those in power may appear cordial and humane, they had to be judged by their deeds rather than by affect.⁴

Norbu has been very active in Tibetan cultural as well as political life. He edited *dZlos-gar*, a work on Tibetan music and the performing arts,⁵ and from 1979 to 1984 was director of the Tibetan Institute of the Performing Arts in Dharamsala. He is an accomplished poet in both Tibetan and English, and is the translator of *Horseman in the Snow*⁶ and the author of *Illusion and Reality*,⁷ a collection of essays which originally appeared in *Tibetan Review*.

A translation of Norbu's text follows.⁸

An Outline of the History of Israel, **by Jamyang Norbu**

Introduction

As a result of the Communist Chinese invasion of the rich land of Tibet, today we have been deprived of our own history, our constitution, and the free preservation of our unique culture and customs. The greedy, selfish motivation of the atheist Communist Chinese was their madness to gain more and more material wealth. Not only did they forcefully occupy Tibet, but they are actively engaged in the systematic destruction and pollution of the once virgin and pollution-free region. Today, we have a tremendous responsibility on our shoulders. It is now time for us to rise and work hard to achieve the aspirations of the millions of our brothers and sisters left behind in Tibet.

To achieve such a noble cause, we must take a lesson from someone who had experienced the same tragic fate. We need to derive inspiration from a people whose determination and hard work achieved their long-awaited goal.

The credit for writing this work goes to Mr. Jamyang Norbu who compiled this brief history of Israel, whose people had struggled for 2,000 years under many difficulties and hardships to get their land and freedom back.

This brief history of Israel is published by the Tibetan Information and International Relations Office on the second day of the first month of the Tibetan water-bull year (March 6, 1973) to mark the 2100th anniversary of the political independence of Tibet.

Chapter 1

A small, independent nation has reappeared on this planet after a gap of 2,000 years. This nation is not only very new, but she is very small, too. However, her military might is the equal of any super-power in the world. This is evident from the constant fear and anxiety being shown by its neighboring countries. Although she is surrounded by hostile nations on all sides, her military power has no match among these neighboring countries. For instance, in 1967 all the Muslim nations grouped together and attacked Israel, using aircraft, missiles and tanks given by the Soviet Union. They were united in their attempt to destroy this comparatively small nation completely, but to their great dismay, when the real battle came this small nation defeated her enemies, even though they were greater in number of soldiers and possessed more sophisticated weapons. She also captured significant enemy territory.

The history of Israel can be traced back 3,400 years. They enjoyed their independence for about 1,400 years before the Roman invasion. The early people of Israel were nomadic and were very religiously minded. After 1,400 years of their total freedom, the Romans, who were the most powerful nation of their day, invaded Israel and many other nations. Many nations did not dare to fight against such a powerful nation, and so they submitted themselves

without resistance. However, the Israelis⁹ were not easy men. They did not submit before their powerful enemies, but kept on fighting for their freedom and rights. However, despite all their determination and courage, they were defeated by their powerful enemy. The Romans completely destroyed their country and did not leave even a single stone from the buildings of Jerusalem. Those who survived the fight could not remain in their own country. They went to all the different countries of the world and took asylum. These displaced people, no matter where they went and settled, continued to cherish and preserve their religion and culture, and were thus able to maintain their distinct identity during their long exile.

Although they had lost their country and became displaced people in many different countries, they never allowed their distinct culture and religion to degenerate. They cherished and preserved their culture quite intact throughout their long exile. In addition to this, they worked hard to gain all sorts of knowledge from outside during their long period of exile. As a result, the people of Israel were considered as most intelligent and courageous, and were known all over the world.

For example, the Israelis were the first people who thought of and created the atom bomb. One of the Israeli refugees had even become Prime Minister of England. His name was Benjamin Disraeli and he made many contributions to that country. The Israelis were also well versed in poetry, medicine and music. In fact, the richest and biggest businessmen in France today are Israelis.

The Israeli refugees suffered tremendous difficulties and hardships because of the jealousy and hatred of the people of those countries where they lived, as the Israelis always turned out to be the most intelligent and successful in every field. Israelis were especially hated in England, France, Poland and Russia. Hundreds and thousands of Israelis were killed in those countries out of hatred. Although Israelis who lived in England and France made many valuable contributions to those countries, the people and the government of these countries always discriminated against them on the basis of religion and never treated them well.

The Israelis were highly educated, courageous and possessed all the qualities to challenge and face up to any circumstances. Nevertheless, they silently tolerated all the mistreatment they received from their host nations, as they knew that they lost their own country and were living temporarily in those countries. In the countries mentioned above, special laws were imposed upon the Israelis which restricted them from carrying out business ventures, and extra taxes were imposed upon them. In some of the countries, the children of the Israelis were denied admission to schools. Thus they experienced indescribable difficulties and tremendous hardship.

Despite these tragic circumstances, they cherished their race and made tremendous efforts to educate their children. New schools were opened at their own expense. Rich people helped the poor ones, and these poor people helped

those who were poorer than themselves. Each family member tried to contribute even their last dollar to the community. The community, in turn, helped to educate those children whose families could not meet their educational expenses. Religious people [rabbis], elderly men and women, and unemployed people were supported from community funds. They had not only physical unity, but also unity of souls. Their love for each other and their mutual bonds were so strong that no matter how hard those hostile governments and people tried to mistreat and abuse them, they could not harm them. Rather, these hostile conditions became a blessing in disguise for them, and their dedication and solidarity became tighter and stronger forever. Although no outside nation came forward to their support, they boldly stood on their own legs and faced all odd circumstances.

Chapter 2

In 1939 World War II started, a war in which millions lost their lives. This large scale, destructive war was started by Hitler of Nazi Germany. He was one of the most cruel and merciless dictators the world has ever produced. During those times, the Israelis living in Germany were economically very rich, intellectually at a very high level, and enjoyed a very high standard of living. The native Germans were jealous of their industriousness, economic conditions and intellectual qualities.

On top of this, Hitler fueled the fire by making inhuman propaganda statements, saying that the Jews¹⁰ had a very bad character and belonged to a low caste. Besides, he blamed the Jews for the German defeat in World War I. He said that the Jews had polluted their pure, white, superior race. So he advocated that the race of Jews should be totally eliminated in order to maintain the purity of the white race. Soon after he made this announcement, the secret police [SS] raided the Jews' residences, arrested hundreds of thousands of Jews, and tortured and killed them indiscriminately. Since at that time most of the European nations were under Hitler's rule, they followed suit and rounded up all the Jews and imprisoned them.

Jewish people living in Poland were looked down upon by the Polish, and to prevent their own people from becoming mixed up with the Israelis, separate residential areas were made for the Jews. When Poland surrendered to the Germans, the Jews living in Poland refused to surrender and so Hitler sent a huge army to destroy and suppress them. Although the Israelis did not have any weapons, they boldly grabbed the enemy's weapons and fought back. They opened factories where arms and ammunition were manufactured, and tin bombs and sten guns were made. When the German tanks came, even Israeli women and children ran with their weapons and destroyed both themselves and the tanks. The reason they sent women and children against the tanks was to keep their male fighting force in reserve to fight the main battle.

However, they suffered defeat because of the intense attack by Hitler's armed forces, both air and ground. Millions of Jewish people were arrested and put into prisons. Soon after, Hitler decided to kill all the Jews. But he did not want to shoot them one by one and thus waste both his time and ammunition. He had another plan to massacre the Jews. He built many cement chambers that could accommodate a thousand prisoners each, with a small window in each chamber. He then released poisonous gas into the chambers and destroyed as many as six million Jewish prisoners.

After World War II ended in 1945, hundreds of thousands of Jews became displaced. They had no place to go, no home. Besides, they were in a state of shock. They could not imagine the killing of six million Jews like insects, without the slightest regard for human dignity. Then a new idea dawned upon them. They realized that if they were to remain stateless, then they would experience more suffering and the same tragic fate again. Those who survived the brutalities remembered how they suffered humiliation and hardship for 2,000 years, only to die like insects ultimately. So they decided to go back to their own country and struggle to regain their ancient land.

Prior to the nineteenth century and long before World War I, Jews from all over the world began to return to their land. However, those going back to their country were still very few. Only those who loved their country and their people [i.e., the Zionists] went back, and they were in the minority. At that time, Israel was under the rule of Turkey and was called the Land of Palestine.

During World War I, when England and France were engaged in a war against Germany, England was in dire need of an element to be used for their mortar fire, which was discovered by Dr. Chaim Weitzman, an Israeli scientist living in England. As a result of his discovery, the firepower of England's arsenal was greatly enhanced, and the English were able to administer a severe defeat to Germany. The British Government was very pleased and decided to reward Dr. Weitzman. But Dr. Weitzman did not accept any award. Instead he said, "I do not need any reward, but I request you to help my people restore our country." The British Government agreed.

Both Germany and Turkey suffered a great loss in World War I, and they lost some of their land to England. At that time a number of Arabs were living in Palestine, and they were unhappy when many Jews began to return home. In spite of the hostile attitude of the Arab people, the Jewish people continued to return to their homeland. They started resettlement programs and engaged in an active cultivation program. As a result, great prosperity ensued. Jews tried to be cooperative and gave all kinds of help to the Palestinian people, but the Palestinians always showed their hostile attitude to the Jews. They never cooperated with them, claiming that the land belonged to them. The Jews also claimed the land as their own. In fact, the land rightfully belonged to the Jews. They lost it as a result of an invasion by outside forces. When the Jews claimed their rightful land, the Arabs were greatly enraged and razed the Jewish

settlements, burned the crops and killed Jewish women and children, thus causing a big problem.

In spite of Muslim atrocities against the Jews, the British Government did not help the Jewish people and ignored the matter completely. Law and order suffered, and the Arabs were allowed to act according to their own free will. The reason why the British government was so cautious was mainly because of their fear that their relationship with Arab nations might become strained, for those Arab nations possessed large quantities of oil, and twentieth century people are greatly dependent upon oil because of its use in modern technology. For that reason, the British government broke the promise they had made earlier, and instead of helping the Jewish people regain their independence, they rather strengthened their friendship with the Muslim nations.

The Jewish people had to suffer the atrocities committed by the Arabs for a long time. On top of this, the British government confiscated all the weapons of the Jewish people on the excuse that they were the guardians of the security in the land. But they never confiscated the weapons of the Arabs. The Arabs robbed Jewish villagers, killed others who tried to resist, and committed all kinds of atrocities. As a result, the Jews at last ran out of patience and decided to take revenge, blood for blood and brutality for brutality. Secretly, they purchased weapons abroad and began to manufacture their own weapons. They formed among themselves new organizations, namely Haganah, in order to prevent Arab brutalities. Later, when the Arabs came to attack them, they boldly fought and beat them back, successfully stopping Arab attacks against them.

After World War II, hundreds of thousands of Jewish people tried to emigrate to Palestine. Many of them were those who survived the release of poison gas by Hitler. Their condition was very miserable. The migration of many Jews into Palestine alarmed the Arabs, who thought that if such a great number of Jews came to Palestine, then they would take away all the Arab lands. So they appealed to Great Britain to make them stop their migration to Palestine.

Since the British had their own interest in the Arab nations, they sent ships to stop the Jews from immigrating into Palestine. However, those Jewish people who had already entered the land had given all necessary aid and support to help the new immigrants enter the country. Those Jews who were in the United States and other countries, and whose economic conditions were better, gave financial support, purchased weapons and smuggled them to Palestine. Clandestinely, the Jews purchased old ships from many countries, and tried to smuggle their coreligionists into Palestine without the knowledge of the British guards. However, since the British guards were very clever, they were able to capture many Jewish ships that were sent to Palestine during the night. However, many Jewish people were able to get into Palestine. Those who were captured by the British guards were sent to Cyprus, in the name of resettlement. In reality their conditions were no better than they had been in

German prisons. As a result of this slow and silent torture meted out by the British Government, the Jewish people completely hated the British Government.

In the course of time, there arose many military organizations in Palestine, and these organizations demanded that the British government withdraw all British influence and power from Palestine. The strongest of these organizations was the Stern Gang.¹¹ Although this organization had very few members and possessed very limited weapons, yet it was extraordinarily strong, well disciplined and maintained such tight security that it was successful in many ways. They bombed British factories, theater halls and army regiments. They killed British soldiers and police secretly, and thus they were able to wreak havoc for the British government. The British government made an all-out effort to destroy the Stern Gang. They were able to arrest some of the party members and engaged in torturous interrogations to get information about the Stern Gang. However, the arrested members never disclosed anything about their organization.

The Stern Gang assassinated two top British military generals in Palestine, and this caused the British government many problems. In fact, many nations at the time protested the British brutality against the Jews in Palestine. But this time the British Government had good reason to bring the assassinations before the United Nations, in order to justify their repressive measures against the Israelis.

Chapter 3

In November 1947, the United Nations decided to grant independence to Israel. But the United Nations was not going to return all of the land to Israel. They decided to give only a small, narrow portion of the land to the Jewish people. Besides that, Jerusalem, Israel's former capital, was to be given to an Arab country called Jordan. Despite such decisions, the Arab nations were still not satisfied. They protested that no portion of the land should be given to the Jews. The Arabs threatened the Israelis, saying that if they tried to declare their independence and hoist the independent flag, then they would destroy all the Jewish people. This threat made the Israelis so upset that the Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, instead of listening to what they said, reinforced their army and arranged to obtain more weapons. In May 1948, they hoisted the Israeli flag. This enraged the Arab countries so much that countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia gathered a huge army and tried to destroy the Israelis. At that time, the ratio of Israeli soldiers to Arab soldiers was 1:20. Yet the Israelis were united, motivated by their firm belief in the truth of their rights. The Israelis fought so bravely that within eight months, the Arabs were defeated and had to approach the United Nations.

Although the Arab nations appealed to the United Nations to stop the war and maintain peace, in reality they conspired among themselves. They decided

to remain silent until they were able to eliminate the whole Israeli race, one by one. The United Nations believed in the Arab peace proposal, and decided to give all the best land and militarily strategic seaports to the Arabs. This decision was greatly resented by the Israelis, who had sacrificed so much and had undergone so many hardships for the cause of their independence. So these patriotic Jews instigated among their own people, and tried repeatedly to start another war against the Arabs. As a result, the Arabs were greatly alarmed, and they approached the Soviet Union for military aid. They gave many tanks and other sophisticated weapons to Syria and Egypt.

Gradually, the military capability of the Arab countries greatly increased, and they increased their show of military strength. Eventually in 1967, Syria sent many soldiers secretly to infiltrate Israeli territory to ambush and kill many Israeli people. Egypt, on the other hand, tried to blockade all Israeli shipping moving in and out of the Suez Canal. Consequently, on June 5 war broke out between the Arabs and the Israelis. However, the Israelis were well prepared. They defeated and inflicted heavy losses upon the Arab armies within six days. This decisive battle earned a great reputation around the world for Israel's soldiers. Israeli soldiers captured many Arab soldiers and killed a great number of them. Since then, the Arabs have not been able to wage any fierce battle against Israel.

However, the Arab nations organized many terrorist forces who attacked Israeli civilian hospitals and schools, destroying them with bombs. However, Israel's military forces did not receive significant harm from these terrorist activities. These Arab terrorist organizations had a reputation for being well disciplined, like a thunderbolt. They were called "national liberation movements". Despite the Arab states having so many such organizations and possessing so many modern weapons, they could not win any of the wars. The reason was that, internally, these Arab nations were not friendly with each other, and were not well coordinated. For instance, the number of Israeli people they killed, directly or indirectly, in the wars was less than the number of people who were killed among themselves.

The terrorist acts of the Arabs were partly justifiable, but these terrorists exceeded all limits and hijacked international air planes, which discredited the name of these terrorist gangs.

The reason why Israelis prospered so rapidly is that they were highly motivated, and there was great unity among themselves. The people are highly educated, and they love their people very much. Israeli people are free from delusions and anger against one another, and they are always ready to sacrifice the self for the common cause.

- 1 My reflections on the historic dialogue were published as "The 'Jewish Secret' and the Dalai Lama," *Conservative Judaism* 43, 4 (1991):33-46. The trip drew considerable media attention, including Rodger Kamenetz's best-seller, *The Jew in the Lotus: A Poet's Rediscovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India* (San Francisco, Harper, 1994).
- 2 Jamyang Norbu ('Jam-dbyangs Nor-bu), *I-si-ral gyi rgyal-rabs snying-bsdus bsgrig-pa* (Dharamsala, Tibetan Information and International Relations Office, 1973).
- 3 Zev Milstein, "A Letter from Jerusalem," *Rangzen* 2, 4 (19767):14, 16.
- 4 Jamyang Norbu, "The Heart of the Matter," in Edward Lazar, ed., *Tibet: The Issue is Independence* (Berkeley, Parallax Press, 1994), p. 25.
- 5 Jamyang Norbu, ed., *Zlos-gar: Performing Traditions of Tibet* (Dharamsala, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1986).
- 6 Rab-brtan rDo-rje, *Mi tshai bya bzags dnos myon ma ons dran bskul*, translated by Jamyang Norbu as *Horseman in the Snow: The Story of Aten, and the Khampas' Fight for the Freedom of their Country* (Dharamsala, Central Tibetan Secretariat, 1979), republished as *Warriors of Tibet: The Story of Aten, and the Khampas' Fight for the Freedom of their Country* (London, Wisdom Publications, 1986).
- 7 Jamyang Norbu, *Illusion and Reality* (Dharamsala, Tibetan Youth Congress, 1989).
- 8 My former student at the University of South Florida, Mr. Damcho, was of considerable help to me in reading the text.
- 9 Generally in his text, Norbu uses I-si-ral-gyi-mi ("people of Israel") to mean Israelite, Jew, Israeli, etc.
- 10 Here Norbu uses the Tibetan neologism Dzi'u, roughly pronounced "Jew."
- 11 Si-kron in Tibetan. It is instructive that it was the most militant faction of armed Jewish opposition to the British which Norbu highlights, ignoring the more moderate Haganah.

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