



Jacob Herzog

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'Dr Jacob Herzog', *Jewish Chronicle*, 14 April 1972, 28, 43



JACOB HERZOG was endowed by the Creator with gifts seldom found in combination: he had a cool, subtle and powerful brain, a pure and warm heart, nobility of character and a simple and untroubled moral vision that sustained and preserved him in the inner conflicts that must, sooner or later, afflict all sensitive persons caught in the problems of public life.

No doubt he owed this ultimate tranquillity in large measure to the deep and unswerving religious faith, in which he was brought up by his loving and saintly parents, a faith that never abandoned him, but, if anything, grew deeper and stronger with the years. All that he did and thought and felt was rooted in it, and his life of fervent and selfless service based on total devotion to his people and to the state of Israel was an act of profoundly religious self-dedication.

In this service he literally wore himself out. His life and his death seem to me to possess the heroic quality of a man who gives all that he is and has to the cause that absorbs him entirely. This cause was Judaism in all its aspects – religious and secular, historical and contemporary, personal and political. Above all it was embodied in

the state of Israel, which for him (as for many of us) was the spirit of Judaism in its most real historical incarnation. For it he laid down his own life.

In appearance he was gentle and unassuming; but within that frail body there lived a firm and powerful spirit which, armed with a sharp critical brain, fine perceptions, inexhaustible patience, a great and perpetually growing store of beautifully ordered, accurate knowledge, made him intellectually formidable. As a political analyst and observer he had few equals and, I should guess, no superior. But he was more than this. Because he understood and loved everything connected with the culture, the history and, above all, the religious experience of his own nation, he understood the quality of other nations and customs, and the inner life of individuals who belonged to other faiths. They, in their turn, felt this and responded to him as they did to few public servants or political officials of Israel.

His freedom from vanity, his genuine modesty and sweetness of nature, his unpolemical and deeply constructive character, which impelled him always to seek for points of agreement, for ground on which something positive could be built to forward whatever plan he was seeking to realise, disarmed the suspicious and competitive. Politicians and journalists, civil servants and ecclesiastics, academics and industrialists found him neither aggressive, defensive nor anxious to impress them with his knowledge, his intelligence, or to score points. They found he was willing to understand them and their purposes and to discuss controversial or emotionally sensitive issues in a lucid and rational fashion of which he was master. This predisposed them towards him and caused them to trust him – rightly.

If he was an effective public speaker, it was principally because he had something to say and marshalled facts and arguments with calm intelligence and precision: this often left a more lasting impression than the words of many speakers of greater eloquence. Yet behind his plain words there was always a reserve of disciplined passion. He was not a detached *rapporteur*, fascinated by his own [43] powers of exposition; for the life and security and well-being of his country and of Jews everywhere meant more to him than his own. This came through, and no matter how quietly he talked in his agreeable, slightly Irish brogue, the words had moral, as well as intellectual, weight. His obvious integrity and uprightness achieved

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as much as, or more than, his restraint and intellectual grasp; people, both Jews and gentiles, whether they knew it or not, were moved by this and believed him.

In private life he was a marvellous friend – tender-hearted, tactful, sensitive, loyal, utterly dependable and, when he felt at ease, light-hearted and highly entertaining. He had great charm, and understood the nature of personal relations. His ideal vision of what the Jews had been, and could be, was – when he abandoned his natural reticence sufficiently to reveal it – deeply moving. He truly loved the Jewish nation and was a patriot without being a nationalist: this alone is surely one of the rarest of human virtues. He loved his people as such and was tolerant of their foibles. He had devoted friends among Jews of all persuasions – or lack of them – pious and deviant, Zionist and non-Zionist: provided they were content to be Jews at all and did not seek to evade or bury that which made them Jews, he found good in all of them.

Others have testified to the quality of his service as Ambassador and as adviser to four Prime Ministers. I can say only that he was one of the best and wisest, most attractive and morally most impressive human beings I have ever known, and I shall mourn his passing for the rest of my life.

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