

DARE TO DREAM

HADASSAH 75TH ANNIVERSARY INSTALLATION CEREMONY

"When Adonai brings about the return to Zion," it says in the Psalms,

We will be like dreamers.

Our mouth will be filled with laughter

And our tongue with joyous song.

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 came as a sweet fulfillment to the dreamers of Zion--among whom were the members of Hadassah, spiritual descendants of a study group fittingly called the Daughters of Zion.

"Cause me to dream," quotes the Talmud, "and make me to live." Indeed, Erich Fromm has observed that dreaming is a psychic necessity, a requirement of life, without which people become ill.

Such a perspective seems especially appropriate with respect to Hadassah, for our dreams have not been idle visions, but rather reflections of the uniquely practical idealism of our founder, Henrietta Szold. Her father bequeathed to her his dream, of a universally enlightened Jewry; she spent some of her "early lives," as she would say, as a teacher, scholar, writer, and editor, seeking through such projects as the Jewish Publication Society to enlarge and enhance Jewish knowledge and Jewish spiritual development.

With the founding of Hadassah 75 years ago, Szold joined the command of study with the centrality of service--in particular, with the mission of healing in Eretz Yisrael.

"Dream big," Szold told us, but she knew to start small--"All beginnings are hard," a Midrash tells us--and to proceed step by simple step: "Slow growth," she wrote, was "the surest guarantee of success."

So Hadassah's first medical presence in the Holy Land, in 1913, consisted of two American-trained nurses; today, the Hadassah-Hebrew University Medical Center embraces a teaching hospital; medical, dental, pharmacy, and nursing schools; and schools of occupational therapy and public health. As a matter of principle, these and other Hadassah facilities treat Jews and Arabs alike--for this was another of Szold's dreams, and thus another of Hadassah's deeds: "the healing of my people and the healing of the nations."

Zionism, to Henrietta Szold, was "this ideal of self-emancipation: to meet a people's need through a people's own efforts." And so, Hadassah's practical idealism has meant that our Youth Aliyah and Israel Education programs--from agricultural and vocational training for disadvantaged teenagers and new immigrants to our Comprehensive High School and Hadassah Community College; from Mobile Culture Caravans to our Vocational Guidance Institute--are designed to empower those Israelis whom they serve: with skills, with education, with self-respect.

Only in such a way can the words of our dreams be the seeds of our freedom.

Or, for that matter, the seeds of a reclaimed land. We Zionists dreamed of a productive Holy Land, nourishing a vibrant people; through the Jewish National Fund, we in Hadassah have built roads and drained swamps; cleaned polluted water and planted verdant forests.

But the Talmud tells us that though part of a dream may be fulfilled, the whole of it is never fulfilled. Our High Holy Days liturgy speaks of reaching "l'eila u'l'eila"--higher and higher. As Jews, we can never be completely satisfied, never entirely content; and as members and officers of Hadassah, we seek always to inspire and express new levels of commitment, new depths of devotion to our people, new heights of loving service.

Indeed, as Americans we are reminded in this bicentennial year of our Constitution that our Founding Fathers sought to form a more perfect Union. Their work, like ours, was that of perfecting--of improving what was already good, but not good enough. Like them, we Zionists, in Henrietta Szold's words, "have (our) eyes on a living present, and a future promise." We know what our sages teach: that we are not expected to complete the work, but we are not free to evade it.

We need our officers, then to guard our dreams; to cherish them as touches of prophecy; and to translate them, always, into deeds of service and Jewish achievement.

We need, first, our secretaries to give us all a sense of belonging and a sense of history--a sense that, as individuals and as a Hadassah chapter (region), we matter.

The ability "to lose one's identity in details," wrote Henrietta Szold, was precious. We need our treasurer to do the impossible: to mind the big picture and to keep track of every dollar. To help us, with limited resources, make our dreams come true.

"To acquire money requires valor," wrote the German-Jewish novelist Berthold Auerbach; "to keep money requires prudence, and to spend money well is an art." But if our treasurer is to be prudent and our national Hadassah organization wise, then our Fund-raising Vice-President must be a true woman of valor.

In days to come, said the prophet Joel, the gift of prophetic dreaming will be bestowed on all men and women, on young and old alike. Our Membership Vice-President has the special task not only of recruiting and absorbing new members, but of enlisting all our talents, all our skills--and all our dreams.

May it be Your will, asks the prayer book, that all my dreams regarding myself and regarding all of Israel be good ones. But how do we know God's will? Our Program Vice-President must draw us closer to our Jewish heritage and traditions, to enable us to be better Jews--and better dreamers.

In the early days of Youth Aliyah, each child would report to Henrietta Szold what he or she had learned, and then what he or she wanted to do. She understood that our dreams grow from our learning; she knew the value of clear thinking, of open discussion, of vigorous dissent. We ask our Education Vice-President to "keep us honest" by seeing that we keep learning--about Israel and Zionism, about issues important to us as Americans and Jews, about Hebrew language and culture.

Robert Kennedy once offered as his definition of leadership, "to inspire people to exercise their best qualities." We need our President to be such a leader--to inspire each of us to dream, and embolden us to dare. For dreams give us the courage to be ourselves--and to create ourselves. "In our dreams," wrote Erich Fromm, "we can become poets."

The Talmud says that a person should await the fulfillment of a good dream for as much as 22 years. We at Hadassah have seen some of our noblest dreams fulfilled, but we know that the realization of our greatest Jewish dream--a just world, and a just Israel, at peace--may take even longer than 22 years--or than our 75 years as Hadassah. So we ask our President and her Executive Board to teach us patience--and the faith to know, in the words of the Israeli poet Jacob Fichman, that "Dreams do not die--If they bloomed once, in the soul."

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