

## CHRONOLOGY AND THE JEWS

The Jews are an ancient people. If you date them back to Abraham, that's over 3,800 years old. The Exodus was supposed to have taken place about 3,300 years ago. Then the land of Canaan, and Judges and Kings and Prophets and Temples, and finally the Diaspora in 70 CE. Fact or myth? God knows!

Which brings us to the next 2000 years. What did happen to the rest of the Jews after the Romans killed them and kicked them out of Judea? Did they go to the Arab peninsula, to North Africa, to southern Europe? And did some of them stay where they were? What happened after Constantine, after Mohammed? There was a period around the 8th and 9th centuries when the Jews and Muslims got along, but then everybody started persecuting the Jews again. Why the Crusades and the Inquisition? Was that why the Jews started moving east? Somewhere along the way, they created Yiddish, and around the 16-17 centuries, Polish Royalty invited them, so many moved further eastward. When we think about our forefathers, most of us imagine Eastern European Jews living in a hostile environment, but maintaining their identity as Jews, and maintaining the dream of "Meshiakh" and "Next year in Jerusalem."

What prompted the above brief chronology was my sense of wonder with regard to two aspects of recent Jewish history: Yiddish literature and the Jewish state. The Jews have been around a long time. They came up with the idea of monotheism; they wrote the Bible and the Talmud; and they even had a nation for a while. Nothing much happened in the way of literature or nationalism, but then in a remarkably short time, one group of Jews created a literature, and another group of Jews created a state.

I was impressed when I heard someone say that Yiddish literature is less than 200 years old, starting with Mendele Mocher Sforim, though there must have been a few writers before him. By the mid 19th century to the mid 20th century there were thousands of Yiddish novelists, essayists, short story writers and poets, as many as England, France Italy, Germany, Russia etc. produced over a period of 400 plus years.

I was also impressed when I thought about the creation of nation states and the emergence of all those countries in Europe, and the founding of the United States, and after Imperialism, the creation of countries in Latin America, Asia and finally, Africa. When I was a kid, I shared the dream with my mother that some day there would be a Jewish state. I had heard about Theodore Herzl, and Chaim Weizman, and Zionism, and that there were thousands of Jews settling on kibbutzim in "The Promised Land." I raised money for the Jewish National Fund. Then came the Holocaust, and then the promise was fulfilled, and Israel came into being in 1948. And from 1948 until today, a period of less than 70 years, Israel has created an advanced economy, a democratic society, and a powerful nation.