

Is It Good For The Jews?

When, in the traditional household of my youth, politics came up, the conversation, no matter how it began, always seemed to recur to the same old question: Is it good or bad for the Jews? Foreign affairs, the economy, electoral races—everything boiled down to that one inescapable criterion. To me, that seemed an awfully narrow way to view the world. In reaction, I became involved with civil rights, the struggles of labor, pacifism, ecology—all the broadest, most universalistic causes.

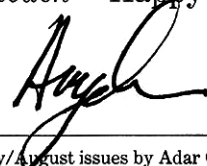
In retrospect, I can see that we were both right; my parents and I had equally valid points. I recognize now that concern for the common weal, for the greater good of the nation or the world, by no means precludes a healthy interest in the welfare of one's own people. No group—certainly not the Jews—can depend on being looked after by somebody else. It's plain irresponsible.

That's much of the motivation behind this issue's special feature on the presidential candidates. As we note in the introduction to that piece, there is no such thing as a Jewish vote; there are only Jewish voters, and they are diverse individuals with diverse opinions on the whole range of questions that concern an American. But many Jewish voters do take a legitimate special interest in the life and health of the State of Israel, in the fate of Jews in the Soviet Union and in Arab lands, and so on. We think that JEWISH LIVING can best fulfill its special function by providing point-by-point comparisons of the various candidates' positions on these and other issues of special Jewish interest.

Yitz Greenberg makes a related point—among many very provocative others—in his “Purim Plot.” If Mordecai and Esther hadn't taken an interest in the special concerns of the Jewish community, there would soon have been no Jewish community in Persia. But when Mordecai became prime minister, he sought the good of the kingdom as well as that of his people. His solicitude has of late been ill repaid, though, and once again Persia's—now Iran's—Jews are in danger. This month's “My Brother's Keeper” tells how you can help.

Our travel piece, “The King and You,” seems pretty remote from such serious concerns; Thailand is an island of serenity in strife-torn Indochina. But just over the Cambodian border, havoc and starvation reign—and this isn't something Jews can ignore. As it happens, a team of Israeli doctors has been on the scene, doing its best to relieve suffering in a part of the world where Israel has nothing to gain. It may or may not be good for the Jews—but it's the Jewish thing to do.

Well, enough moralizing. The overall tone of this issue, I think, is bright, even dazzling—from Edward Jay Epstein's colorful coverage of the Jewish diamond connection to our carnival of Purimiana. Purim, by the way, has always been my favorite holiday; it's the one day of the year when lampooning is a solemn duty. And then there are the hamantashen—well represented in this issue, along with many other Purim and year-round delicacies. So *chag sameach*—Happy Purim! Thou Shalt Enjoy It!



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