''Jews who deny their birthright''
by Jeffrey M Cohen

Does 'Jewish' mean
Being frozen in time,
To ancient tunes,
Performing a mime?
Is our covenant only
With antiquity,
In the Bible's estate,
Our equity?

Didn't Esther challenge
The inherited norm,
With a demand that
All Jews perform
The remembrance of
Her heroic deeds,
In the Purim Megillah
That every Jew reads,
In festive mood,
By night and day,
In synagogue,
As we pray?

What temerity
The Maccabees had,
Making their victory
A launching-pad
For a festival
Of dedication,
Marking the victory
Of their nation
Over Antiochus
And his Syrian forces,
Riding their elephants
And war-horses!

And the fact that they found
Just one jar of oil
That the enemy
Didn't manage to spoil
By touching with
Idolatrous hand —
Oil of a truly miraculous brand,
That they never dreamt
Would burn for eight days
Since, in volume,
Barely enough to raise
A flame to burn
For a single day —
A new festival born,
And destined to stay!

In medieval times
It was lament and fasting,
With the Jew constrained
To broadcasting,
By dress and demeanour,
His sorry plight,
And under a bushel
Hiding his light,
As if to say,
''I'm easy game,
Just pin on me
The badge of shame!
Beat me,
I won't retaliate.
I'll absorb your blows
And your hate!''

Ironically,
In Europe's East,
A new-found pride
Was released:
That of being
God's elect—
The core belief
Of the Hasidic sect,
Seeing God's image
In every man,
With a pledge to help him
As best they can,
Replacing sadness
With celebration,
Drinking a *lechayim*
To the elevation
Of the righteous souls
Of our nation.

They taught us to leave
Sorrows behind,
To rejoice in the now,
Not to be defined
By troubles past –
Not even by death –
For life moves on
And a babe's first breath
Is a toast to a world
Of peace and hope,
Of brotherhood's
Unlimited scope.

But, about one thing
I'm mystified:
The unforgivable
Lack of pride
On the part of a section
Of our nation,
That views our State
As an aberration,
Rather than as our rightful desert
After two thousand years
Of pain and hurt,
Martyrdom and dislocation –
Being dubbed the pariah
Of every nation.

Well, Israel's star
Will ever shine bright,
With Jews embracing
Their birthright.
Wearing the mantle
Of a leading nation
In scientific and wider
Sophistication.

Its technology
Is globally found
In discoveries
That break new ground,
Launching a capsule
Into space,
Inventing cures
For the human race.

The first to arrive
At any disaster,
Its medical supplies
Flown in faster

Than other countries
Closer to hand —
Life's sanctity,
They understand.
A quarter of Nobel prizes
We've won over the years.
In every category
We've been pioneers –
Physics, Chemistry,
Medicine and Peace,
Literature, Economics –
We never cease!

Though beset by foes,
Israel is named
Among the top nations,
For happiness, famed.

So, you who deny
Your own birthright,
In defence of your State,
Refusing to fight –
And you who stand side by side
With those who shed our blood,
To repeat the fearful Holocaust
If only they could –
Don't live under the illusion
That, for Jews like you,
There'd be an exclusion
As a mark of your value.
For, let me assure you
That, right on cue,
You'd be among the very first
That they would pursue!

_____

©Jeffrey M Cohen
2025