

RING AROUND THE CHOLER

Sometimes it seems that the only thing the Israelis agree on is chicken.

Each Israeli consumes over 80 pounds of chicken each year, about twice as much as any other nationality. Along with that goes a national total of about a quarter of a billion cups of chicken soup - and almost 500 eggs per capita, another world record.

Food/psyche analysts might be tempted to draw a connection. The Israeli diet suggests a great national flow of cholesterol. The word "cholesterol" is formed from a Greek word meaning "bile" or "gall," because of a relationship between those bodily products and cholesterol. Gall, because of its sharp nature, quickly became associated with an impudent spirit (e.g.: "you certainly have a lot of gall"); consequently, superficial analysts might draw a relationship between the alleged Chutzpah of Jews and their high consumption of chicken products. But there is no hard evidence on that score.

More to the point, again because of the properties of bile or gall, the word "choler," was only used to describe one of the four human tempers; namely, irascibility or passionate argumentativeness. That may be more mythological than physiological, but then, so are the Jews. In that sense, the Israeli political scene is certainly choleric - and perhaps that is how the chickens have come home to roost.

Just take the matter of Zionist politics. There are more Zionist factions in Israel than there are ways to prepare an omelet; and they all argue passionately with each other.

In one grouping are the various forms of labor Zionism. These visions of the Jewish homeland are centrally spiked with diverse theories of socialism, as it applies to both domestic and international matters. Of this tradition were most early settlers, heavily infused with the socialist ideologies then current in Eastern Europe. This tradition, of course, dominated Israeli politics up until very recently, as exemplified by David Ben Gurion and Golda Meier.

Earl Raab
September 6, 1977
page 2

In another grouping are various forms of nationalist Zionism, whose visions of the Jewish homeland are more exclusively political and cultural than social or economic in nature. Herzl and Weizmann exemplified this kind of general Zionism - as did Jabotinsky and Begin of the Revisionists, who differed strongly from the Weizmann group on strategy, especially in the face of impending tragedy for European Jews.

In another grouping, of course, are the various forms of religious Zionism. And within each grouping are factions with strongly-held differences on economic, political and foreign affairs. Twenty one different "lists" vied for election to the first Knesset. The loose coalitions formed before and after elections are themselves in a constantly disputatious state.

Whether or not the Chicken Choler Theory is correct, the more significant question is how the political organism of Israel, showing so many choleric splits, can hold together. The answer, of course, lies in the firm consensual ring which surround that organism. The basic consensus is obvious: a common commitment to the survival of the Jewish state. But another common agreement has to do with political procedure: the tradition that because one's ideological opponents are mistaken does not mean that they are evil. That delicate tradition is the basis of all civilized, peaceful, democratic political behavior.

In San Francisco, that tradition has been strengthened within recent weeks. Two new Zionist groups are in the process of being formed locally: a local Revisionist group; and a local group of the Americans for Progressive Israel, in the socialist vein. The head of a larger general Zionist group in San Francisco came to one of their meetings to say that he disagreed with them, but welcomed them into the Zionist family.

The debate about Israeli policies will become sharper. Communication between San Francisco Jews and Israeli Jews may well increase. After all, as citizens we all communicate with Soviet officials. As friends, there is no reason why we shouldn't individually communicate our various viewpoints to the Israeli Embassy. They should know what we think.

Earl Raab
September 6, 1977
page 3

But while the debate will be sharp, it will not be fratricidal. And the sharper the debate, the more important will it be - especially in America - to let the rest of the world know that there is a strong consensual ring around our choler.