

Book Review

DUAL ALLEGIANCE: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY BEN DUNKELMAN

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Résumé

Peut-on être fidèle à deux idéaux? Voici la question que Ben Dunkelman se pose dans son livre *Dual Allegiance*.

Dunkelman qui est le fils d'un riche homme d'affaires juif de Toronto, a commencé ses études au Upper Canada College de cette ville, mais c'est surtout le sport qui semble l'intéresser d'abord. L'atmosphère de sa maison qui est un des centres zionistes de Toronto semble pousser le jeune Dunkelman à développer un grand intérêt pour ses origines et à l'âge de 18 ans il devient *shomer* de Tel Asher en Palestine.

Est-il possible d'être juif et Canadien en même temps? Bien sûr, répond Dunkelman. Pendant la Guerre d'Indépendance il a le moyen de se distinguer particulièrement et tout semble faire croire qu'il a désormais choisi de rester en Palestine où de grandes honneurs l'attendent. Pourtant les obligations envers sa famille le poussent à quitter ce pays et à rentrer au Canada.

La vie et les actions de Ben Dunkelman nous montrent qu'on peut, en effet, être fidèle à deux idéaux car l'un ne semble pas remplacer l'autre mais plutôt le compléter.

The twelve year old son of a close friend was asked a few years ago where he would be if Israel and Canada were at war with each other. "Where would I be?" responded this eerie throwback to the dark ghettos of an earlier age, "in prison, of course!"

A colleague recently faced a similar question when asked during a public lecture how he could reconcile his deep loyalty to Canada and to Israel. He replied with an imaginative metaphor drawn from the social sciences: Man is a creature who plays overlapping roles - parent, child, sibling, mate, in-law, breadwinner, friend, lover. . . . Life is the continuous process of reconciling these roles. The Jewish scholar went on to say that

membership in communities, whether local, regional, ethnic, religious, social or national, involved similar overlaps which had to be accommodated. However, any community that demanded absolute loyalty to the exclusion of all others was tyrannical.

The dilemma of competing loyalties is neither new nor is it unique. *Dual Allegiance*, the title of Ben Dunkelman's autobiography, is yet another - perhaps more concrete - attempt to resolve the question.

Dunkelman, the son of a wealthy Jewish businessman from Toronto and a mother who apparently dominated her family as she did her social circle, at first glance seems an unlikely figure to raise such complex issues. In an age when the immigrant children of the 1920's faced the twin hardships of poverty and acculturation, Dunkelman spent his time moving between lavish homes to equally exclusive schools such as Upper Canada College. Sports dominated his early life, and education was a minor consideration.

Ben Dunkelman was raised in a warm Jewish home which was a centre of Zionist activity in Toronto. Yet suddenly at age eighteen, he found himself a *shomer* .guard. . watching over the young settlement of Tel Asher in Palestine and exchanging blows with a local Arab villager. The inevitable question is what was he doing there: ". . . I should have been at school preparing for university or for the family business instead of fighting for my life in the dust of a Jewish settlement in the heart of Palestine. . ." (p. 1).

But the incongruity of the hockey player at Tel Asher is not that startling. As an adult he was able to articulate the lessons learned during childhood from figures such as Weizman and Shmaryahu Levin: "I was simultaneously, a Canadian and a Jew, and neither as a child nor as an adult did I find any conflict between the two." (p. 14).

Apparently Ben Dunkelman has had the unusual ability of intuitively attracting complex situations and then either resolving them with characteristic bluntness or simply brushing aside their implications. Throughout his life he has played contradictory roles which might have overwhelmed another man. At one and the same time he is the rich boy from Upper Canada College who is a *shomer* at Tel Asher, a decorated officer of the Queen's Own Rifles during World War II who refused command of the 1st Battalion because he is a civilian at heart, and, then, a major military figure in Israel's War of Independence who eventually returns to the quiet life of business in Toronto. Dunkelman plays each role with equal vigour.

It is during the year that Dunkelman spends fighting in the 1948 War of Independence that the polarities of his life become most clearly apparent. Much of *Dual Allegiance* is devoted to this period, which Dunkelman obviously feels is the highlight of his life.

Dunkelman, a major in the Canadian Army and with an impressive wartime record, was enlisted by Lady Lorna Wingate, the widow of Orde Wingate, to help the efforts of the Haganah in North America. As Chairman of the Haganah in Canada, Dunkelman recruited Jewish veterans to serve as volunteers in Palestine. He himself returned to Palestine in March 1948 to participate in the fighting that had already begun in anticipation of the end of the British Mandate in May. The units in which he served or which he led saw some of the fiercest battles of the war and his comrades-at-arms, such as Haim Laskov, Yitzhak Rabin, Arele Yariv, were among its most important commanders.

At first Dunkelman served with the Harel Brigade on the Jerusalem front, participating in Operation Nachshon to relieve Jerusalem. While stationed there he undertook tasks such as the organisation of formal logistics and planning that were so foreign to the informal Jewish army, which had evolved out of the camaraderie of small kibbutz-based units. Eventually Dunkelman planned the break-out from encircled Jerusalem and travelled in the first jeep to reach the coast, circumventing the main road blocked by the Arab Legion at Latrun. This later became the "Burma Road" that enabled New Jerusalem to remain in Jewish hands.

Dunkelman, who had established a close relationship with David Ben Gurion, then was offered the position of Co-Chief of Staff of the newly formed 7th Brigade. However, because of his experience with mortars, he instead requested and received unusually wide powers to supervise the production and distribution of mortars and the training of their crews.

From July 1948 until April 1949 Dunkelman was the Commander of the 7th Brigade that was credited with the conquest of the Galilee. With great efficiency, and with a brusqueness that often encountered the opposition of subordinates as well as senior officers, he quickly reorganised the Brigade into an effective fighting force. The results were gratifying to the Commander who spoke only broken Hebrew. Within days of his taking command the Brigade occupied Shafa Amr, a key town in the Galilee, with minimum loss. This was done with the assistance of Druze villagers who had been enlisted by Dunkelman against the advice of *Shai*, the Haganah's intelligence service. Forty-eight hours later, on July 16, Nazareth, the centre of the Lower Galilee, was occupied after a highly un-

orthodox campaign, without major casualties, any damage to the city or harm to its inhabitants.

The Brigade's last major battle was Operation Hiram which cleared the Central Galilee of enemy troops and brought Israel's forces to the Lebanese border. Within thirty-six hours, the unusual tactics that characterised Dunkelman's campaigns resulted in the destruction of Kaukji's army of irregulars, the capture of large quantities of arms and ammunition and the occupation of most of Israel's northern region. This was done with the loss of only three men!

As the war drew to a close, Ben Gurion offered Dunkelman the position of Commander of Israel's Armoured Corps. But again he returned to civilian life and attempted to establish himself in Israel. However, faced with pressures from his family, fading business prospects in Israel and the pull of ties in Toronto, Dunkelman eventually returned to Canada, where he remained.

To return to the dilemma posed at the outset: was Ben Dunkelman any more successful in coping with his dual allegiance than the twelve year old or the social scientist? Dunkelman himself asks a similar question and concludes that ". . . my life has been incomplete . . . I am not a citizen of that other country I have cherished and defended." (p. 325). And yet "This shuttling to and fro, physically and in spirit, has given my life an additional dimension. My dual allegiance has given me the pleasure of two lives." (p. 326).

I doubt whether there is a definitive answer to the question of dual allegiance and whether such loyalties must necessarily compete with each other. Still, I must give Ben Dunkelman full marks for having tried his best. He also wrote a fascinating story.