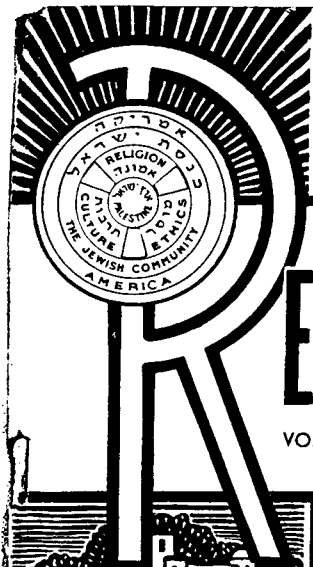


The Reconstructionist
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... ביום ההוא אקים את סכת דוד הנפלת ...
 ושבת י את שבות עמי ישראל ... ונטעתים
 על אדמתם ולא ינתשו עוד מעל אדמתם
 אשר נתתי להם אמר ה' אלהיך :

*On that day will I raise up the tabernacle
 of David that has fallen . . . and I will
 bring back the captives of my people
 Israel . . . and I will plant them upon their
 land, and they shall no more be plucked
 up out of their land which I have given
 them, says the Lord your God.*

Amos 9: 11, 14-15



Dedicated to the advancement of Judaism as a religious civilization, to the upbuilding of
 Israel's ancient homeland, and to the furtherance of universal freedom, justice and peace.



FROM THE EDITOR

1998/5758 marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of *Medinat Yisrael*, an event whose meaning for Jewish life continues to unfold. The Jewish people worldwide find themselves engaged in a classically Jewish form of anxious celebration. We share gratitude and celebration for the miracle of the third Jewish commonwealth and simultaneously engage in debate about the internal state of the State as well as the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora. At this season of the *Yovel Hamishim* (50th Anniversary) few Israelis seem “at ease in Zion” and few Jews in the Diaspora seem at ease about Zion.

Reconstructionist Judaism, identifying Judaism as the civilization of the Jewish people, included from the outset an ardent affirmation of the centrality of Eretz Yisrael, and later, the State of Israel. The urgency of establishing a homeland in which Jewish civilization could be primary rather than secondary, as in most western Diaspora settings, was irresistible for those committed to Mordecai Kaplan’s vision of a reconstituted worldwide Jewish people.

A review of the editorials and articles in this journal from 1935-1948 reveals a constant attention to the opportunities inherent in a Zionism that embraced both the cultural centrality affirmed by Aḥad Ha’Am and the political autonomy espoused by Theodor Herzl. Revisiting many of these thoughtful observations from our own pages, as I had an opportunity to do in preparation for this issue, serves as a reminder of the blend of passion, ideology, commitment, and excitement that Zionism generated during the march up to the founding of Israel.

As we edge up to the millenia, and prognostications and prophecies about the “fulfillment of biblical prophecy” permeate the public arena, the 50th anniversary of Israel reminds us of the enormous paradigm shift encompassed by modern Zionism. For Zionism, whether cultural or political, was a massive repudiation of the supernatural messianism which traditional Judaism endorsed. Rather than awaiting the divine decree to gather in the exiles, Zionism urged the Jewish people to take the responsibility for their own fate.

Yet even within this naturalistic understanding of Jewish history, the establishment of Israel partakes of what can legitimately be called “the miraculous.” Surely there is much to debate, much to criticize, and much about which to worry. But our legitimate concerns about Israel should not diminish the awe with which we ponder its meaning and place in Jewish life.

To these generations has been given the gift of shaping a state about which earlier generations could only dream and hope. If Israel be imperfect, let us rejoice in the opportunity to have a state which can be improved; if Israel be not quite “the beginning of the dawn of our redemption,” let it at least be for us a testimony to the reality of the Power that makes for redemption. And if, at 50,

we have not resolved the issues of what Israel is and where it is headed, let us be grateful for the existence of a homeland and polity in which the Jewish people can seek to fulfill the challenge of being the best we can be.

This issue offers perspectives on Israel at 50 drawn from the Israeli and American experiences. We hope our readers will be enlightened and engaged by the viewpoints presented in these pages.

About Future Issues

The Fall 1998 issue will focus on “New Midrash and New Ritual,” with articles devoted to the exciting expansion of creativity taking place in Jewish life today. The Spring 1999 issue will be devoted to “Caring and Healing.”

We take this opportunity to make two corrections pertinent to our Spring/Fall 1997 issue on “The Arts in Jewish Life.” Dan Schifrin’s article, “Conflicts and Challenges of Jewish Culture,” was based on and expanded from an earlier piece he published in *Sh'ma*; our apologies for neglecting to include that reference. The book review of Frederic Brenner’s *Jews/America/A Representation* carried the biography but not the by-line of our reviewer, Dr. Egon Mayer; again, our apologies.

We join with our readers in an expression of gratitude for the opportunity to celebrate the *Yovel H'Amishim* of *Medinat Yisrael*. Blessed are you, ETERNAL ONE our God, the sovereign of all worlds, who gave us life, and kept us strong, and brought us to this time.

— Richard Hirsh

Israel and Identity Building: Educating American Jews About Israel

BY ELAN EZRACHI

Pro-Israelism: A Fundamental American Jewish Value

For many years the relations of American Jews toward Israel were shaped by two opposing attitudes. Israel has been the main source of pride and joy in the organized Jewish community. Israel generated intense emotions at every level of public Jewish life. From early childhood education, through the day school and supplementary school system, in camping and at the JCC's, at synagogues, federations, and national defense organizations, Israel was a prominent motif. This strong sentiment of pro-Israelism expressed itself in ceremonies, decorations, public statements, slogans, parades, special events, and any other form of symbolic expression. The high level of

pro-Israelism did not stand in contrast with "American" values, since Israel and the United States were in a close strategic alignment. So, being an Israel supporter was just the *right thing* in the eyes of many American Jews.

This position was part of the ethos that was emerging in the post Second World War era which Jonathan Woocher labeled as the Jewish "Civil Religion" in America.¹ Identification with Israel was part of the survival ideology, which energized the Jewish community, and became the central force of organizations and community processes.

High Emotion vs. Low Engagement

But American Jews stopped short of going beyond the strong pro-Israel position. Unlike their heightened feel-

Elan Ezrachi is the director of the Charles Bronfman Mifgashim Centre in Jerusalem. His doctoral dissertation is a study on the dynamics of interaction between American Jews and Israelis.

ings toward anything that had to do with the Jewish State, there was little done to translate this energy into an active engagement with Israel. This lack of engagement with the *reality* of the new Zionist experiment reflects the second attitude of American Jews toward Israel.

As Israel is celebrating its 50th anniversary and assessing the various forces that contributed to the shaping of its cultural, economic, and social reality, the American Jewish community receives a few meager footnotes. The small role Americans have played in the emerging Israeli civilization seems to be in total contradiction to the amount of love and affection that so many Americans felt over the years toward Israel.

One might question the impact of American Jewish philanthropy, which is clearly substantial, but allows little involvement of donors with their benefactors. This unique American position of *high* emotion and *low* engagement should be viewed as part of the development of the American Zionist idea. American Zionism, which is the ideological foundation of the pro-Israel position, was unique from the start. As Jonathan Sarna writes:

The Israel of American Jews — the Zion that they imagined in their minds, dreamed about, and wrote about — was for centuries a mythical Zion, a Zion that revealed more about American Jewish ideals than about the realities of Eretz Israel.²

American Zionism was an *American* cultural movement. Zionists looked for a *general American* rationale for creating the Jewish State against heavy odds. Alon Gal talks about the “mission ideology” which was developed to respond to this quest, that was universalistic in nature. The humanistic, universal, and moral emphasis served to bring the American Zionists’ vision of Israel into “significant accord with the ethos of the American people.”³ Thus Israel, which embodied a pioneering spirit and was seen as the sole democratic country in the Middle East, served as a good cause to identify with from an American stand point.

Add to this the geographical distance between Palestine/Israel and the U.S., the low numbers of Americans emigrating or traveling to Israel over time, the decline of Hebrew and European Jewish culture in America—and the trend is clear. American Jews, at best, care for Israel but lack the tools to develop an active relationship with Israel as a civilization.

Formative Memories

For many American Jews, the love of Israel is associated with certain memories that give the flow of emotions a clear focus. Most of these memories have to do with Israel’s quest for survival, its heroic ability to sustain itself and the dramatic instances that enabled people who are observing from a distance to share in the exciting achievements. Unlike their parents and grandparents, young American Jews do not possess such memories. Most Jews today do not remember the raising of the Israeli flag

in 1948, nor can they recall the sense of fear and relief during the Six Day War. Even the memories of the Entebbe Operation in 1976 or the rescue of Ethiopian Jews in 1991 are fading.

In recent years, Israel awareness seems to be shaped more by the negative images that Israel receives in the media and the growing sense of alienation that is a result of the treatment of the non-Orthodox streams in Israel. It is easier to garnish sympathy through events in which the “Davids” win over the “Goliaths,” rather than what Israel provides today.

Scholars have debated in the early 1990s the extent to which there has been a decline in the support of Israel among American Jews. Steven M. Cohen argues that the distancing theory is not so clear cut. The surveys conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s showed relative stability in the pro-Israel positions, contrary to the overall climate of the effect of the Intifada and the “who is a Jew” crisis. Still, there is evidence “to an impending decline in American Jewish attachment to Israel at some point in the future,” which is a result of an analysis of the trends among the younger generation.⁴

Jewish Peoplehood As a Key Concept

American Zionism was an ideology that paradoxically encouraged American Jews to focus inward. In this respect, Israel served as metaphor for the American Jewish experience. Identifying with Israel had more to do

with the building of the American Jewish community rather than with actually participating in the building of Israel. The UJA formula of the united campaign, in which money is raised in the name of Israel but more than half of it stays in the U.S. for local needs, exemplifies this position. In other words, continuation of this classic approach is bound further to distance American Jews from Israel rather than bring them closer.

This is exactly where radical change is required. American Jewish education should develop a new strategy of Jewish identity education. Jewish identity begins and ends with a very basic predicament. A Jew, first and foremost, is someone who is part of the *Jewish people*. The Jewish people is divided along two basic demarcation lines. One division is based on religious differences (from ultra-Orthodox to the secular options). The other division among Jews is based on geography. Jews are scattered around the world, and together they form a unique international network, the Jewish People.

Jewish education in America should address these divisions. On one hand, every group should continue to perpetuate its own religious (or secular) ideology in the context of its own constituency. This means doing its best to deepen the spiritual dimension and the quality of its own educational system. But at the same time, Jewish education has to raise awareness beyond one’s own world to the global Jewish scene.

Implications of Jewish Peoplehood

American Jews, in particular, need to be liberated from the isolation that the American Jewish ethos was so effective in creating. So, even before Israel comes into the Jewish educational arena, the younger generation should be exposed in a serious way to the global aspects of Jewish existence; namely, Jews live all over the world, but are one people.

The message is rather simple: Being Jewish is not only caring for one's immediate community. It is about membership in an international network of people who share a common heritage, have similar existential and ideological challenges, and believe in some kind of a joint meaningful future. Today, with the relative stabilization in Jewish demography and the opening of all political and cultural boundaries, this seems to be a realistic objective.

A focus on Jewish peoplehood requires several elements in the educational process. This is a multi-discipline issue which involves theology, Jewish history, ethnic and cultural studies, political science, and sociology. Young American Jews should be able to articulate what connects them to and sets them apart from other Jewish communities around the world.

Israel: A Different Kind of Jewish Community

Israel needs to be treated somewhat differently in the broad spectrum of

Jewish peoplehood education. While the universal message of Jewish peoplehood is vital to all Jews, Israel requires an additional lesson. Israel is a polity and as such it carries several unique features that can never be found in Diaspora communities. They are, by definition, ethnic minorities in a majority non-Jewish environment, while Israel is a sovereign state.

Viewing Israel as a polity requires two educational efforts. First, within the realm of political theory, it is important that students will be aware of the meaning of the term polity. It involves understanding key concepts such as sovereignty, military power, status within the international community, and control of key cultural domains such as language, calendar, and national symbols.

In addition to the universal aspects of political existence, there are unique elements that relate to Israel as a *Jewish* polity which require particular attention. American Jews should be familiar with the characteristics of the Israeli political system and the historical processes that shaped its formation. Israel has developed a certain type of political reality, democratic in its basis, but not completely formed and still struggling with key issues that relate to Judaism and to Jews around the world. American Jews should have a good understanding of the complex relations between the secular state and the various organized religious groups operating within it. The struggle for religious pluralism, for example, has to be understood through the prism of the broader scene, namely, the status of religion in a Jewish state. American

Jews will be much more effective in pursuing a more open and tolerant Israeli Judaism if they would demonstrate competence in understanding the way the system works.

From Engagement to Involvement

The main argument of this article is that from the start, American Jews are deeply attached to Israel on an emotional level, yet they detach themselves on the cognitive and behavioral sides of human expression. This focus on emotional attachment coupled with the generational factor that assumes that such emotions are bound to fade, requires a new strategy that will bring Israel to a new kind of awareness among young American Jews. In addition to a high emotional attachment, Israel has to be part of their identities in other realms.

Looking at this challenge from a theoretical point of view, we stand on shaky ground. People's identities are normally shaped by the culture and environment in which they are raised. In other words, a person's identity is the sum total of individual characteristics together with the alignment circles that this person has, such as neighborhood, ethnic community, region, country, and profession. It is almost impossible to develop an affinity to a group or place that is not part of the person's private scenery.

This is where a comprehensive educational initiative can help. Education can stretch the boundaries of a person's identity beyond the natural forces of socialization (or, say, good

education can go contrary to sociology). The main goal of this educational campaign is to include Israel in a person's self-identity. Thus, growing up as an American Jew (an identity challenge as it is) means that an affinity with Israel is part of the package. And unlike the old-time focus on the emotional identification, this new approach is more pragmatic and wishes to develop an American Jew who has competence to engage and be involved with Israel and Israelis.⁵

Israel As a (Second) Home

As we approach the twenty-first century, we are entering a new period regarding the place of Israel in the lives of American Jews. The State of Israel has been in existence for a half century. It is a modern country which, while beset with problems and challenges, has established itself as a vibrant and dynamic contemporary Jewish society. Israel has changed; the North American Jewish community has changed; and the world that we live in has changed.

Israel education has to adapt itself to these new realities. First, Israel education should not be restricted to discrete educational domains. Israel education is a life-long process that applies to every type of educational experience and communal framework.

Second, the aim of Israel education is to bring American Jews to an active engagement with Israeli culture, people, and day-to-day life. The Jewish community has to develop a comprehensive plan that will relate to all ages and express itself in every aspect of communal life. *The Israel Experience*, a

term that has been associated with youth programs in Israel, should be expanded to other populations: families, adults, special interest groups, study and volunteer programs, internships, and even groups involved in political lobbying.

Engaging Israel and Israelis

Third, American Jews must become literate in every aspect of Israeli culture. This is no small challenge, since it is conditioned on a sense of strong motivation that includes a willingness to learn Hebrew, to keep in close touch on current events and to travel frequently to Israel. Once the elites of the American Jewish community demonstrate such an attitude the message to the broad community will be clear. Today, the common image of an American Jewish leader is someone who comes to Israel for a few days, stays in an elegant Jerusalem hotel, and speaks only English. Israelis interpret this posture of American Jews as remaining perennial outsiders.

Finally, Israel is not a static entity. It is a community. American Jews have an opportunity to personalize their relations to Israel through engagement with Israel's most viable commodity: Israelis. Today, there are many venues upon which to base the Israel connection through interaction with Israelis. Known as *mifgashim* (encounters), Americans and Israelis (and Jews from other countries as well) can reach out to each other through peer connection, which is becoming increasingly more widespread.⁶

A word must be said here about

Israelis. For them, meeting Diaspora Jews is equally important. Israelis suffer from the same isolation syndrome that was analyzed earlier concerning American Jews. Meeting American Jews and establishing relationships is a crucial factor in shaping the future of Israel as an open pluralistic Jewish society. Interaction with Israelis is most likely the most effective way for American Jews to influence Israel to move in the direction that is compatible with the American Jewish experience.

Post-modern life suggests that people are citizens of a global community. They learn about other cultures, acquire languages, travel frequently and even live for extended periods of time in other countries. This seems to be an accepted mode in many circles. Being an American (or French, Italian, or Israeli) stands in no contradiction to being immersed in other cultures. The time has come to apply this orientation to the Jewish community. Being Jewish is about membership in a particular Jewish community, while at the same time participating in the global Jewish Village.

1. Jonathan S. Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

2. Jonathan D. Sarna, "A Projection of America As It Ought To Be: Zions in the Mind's Eye of American Jews," in Alon Gal, *Envisioning Israel: The Changing Ideals and Images of North American Jews* (Hebrew University, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1996), 41.

3. Alon Gal, "Overview: Envisioning Israel—The American Jewish Tradition," in Alon Gal, *Envisioning Israel...*, 21.

4. Steven M. Cohen, "Did American Jews

Really Grow More Distant from Israel, 1983-1993—A Reconsideration,” in Alon Gal, *Envisioning Israel...*, 368; Also Steven M. Cohen, “Israel in the Jewish Identity of American Jews: A Study in Dualities and Contrasts,” in *Jewish Identity in America*, ed. David M. Gordis and Yoav Ben-Horin (Los Angeles: University of Judaism, 1991).

5. Several organizations joined forces recently and initiated the “*Israel In Our Lives*” project. IOL is a comprehensive approach to Israel education at all levels of the North American Jewish community. It includes a series of 15 guides written by key educators and scholars.

“*Israel in Our Lives*” is sponsored by the CRB Foundation, The Joint Authority for Jewish Zionist Education, and The Charles R. Bronfman Mifgashim Centre, in cooperation with Jewish Education Service of North America and Israel Experience Inc.

6. Elan Ezrachi and Barbara Sutnick, *Israel Education through Encounters with Israelis*, a booklet in the series *Israel in Our Lives*, published by the CRB Foundation, the Joint Authority for Jewish Zionist Education, and the Charles Bronfman Centre for the Israel Experience (Jerusalem: Mifgashim, 1997).

Religion and Democracy in Israel

BY JACK J. COHEN

In 1948, the Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael committed itself to the cause of democracy. The State of Israel, which had been authorized by the United Nations, granted automatic citizenship to all its residents, Jews and non-Jews alike, who were prepared to accept it. Under Israeli law, every citizen is theoretically entitled to full equality and the right to participate in all facets of government.

Jews, of course, like majorities everywhere, will seek to retain their hold on the reins of power, but they are duty-bound to protect the right of Arabs and other minorities to compete for political leadership and to benefit fairly from all the services the state has to offer. It is to be expected that Israel's religious and ethnic minorities will also demand to serve in government positions and to compete, without discrimination, for employment in all enterprises. Thus far, Israel's record in these matters has

been spotty. It could not have been otherwise, given the circumstances under which Israel came into existence and that have prevailed ever since.

The adoption of democracy marked a break from the halakic conception of Jewish polity and sovereignty. The rule of rabbis and scholars of rabbinic law has given way to the rule of the entire citizenry. But this revolution in the conception and practice of authority is incomplete and has left the country in a condition of great confusion.

A Biblical Perspective

The problem was posed simply by Yeshaia Leibowitz in the aftermath of the establishment of the State of Israel. He asked, "Is society a religious problem? Do the needs of a society and its organization constitute a religious enterprise? Is there a dogmatic quality in religion which imposes on its members a particular point of view regard-

Jack Cohen is the Emeritus Director of the Hillel Foundation of the Hebrew University. He served as Rabbi of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism prior to making aliyah in 1959. This article is an altered form of a paper that he delivered in 1995 before the Rainbow Club, a Jewish-Christian theological discussion group that meets monthly in Jerusalem.

ing questions of society and state?"¹ Halakhists and anti-halakhists have been unable to resolve this ideological dispute, and they continue to hide behind the fortresses of their respective ill-defined rhetorics. I suggest that the problem of religion and democracy in Israel has to be seen as the renewal of a biblical perspective on the nature and destiny of the Jewish people.

In order to understand the course of events in Israel, we must once again ask the biblical questions that exercised our ancestors as they endeavored to settle into the soil of Eretz Yisrael and to construct here a new people and a new society and culture. Who and what is a Jew, and how do we perceive the identity and role of the Jewish people among the nations? What is the basis of the Jewish claim to Eretz Yisrael? What are the borders of the land?

In what sense is Israel a Holy Land? Who determines its holiness, in view of the rival claims of Jews, Christians, and Moslems to so many sites and structures? Within the Jewish community, to cite just one example of the problem, the Western Wall is governed by rules promulgated by the Ministry of Religions, but to many Jews these rules are a desecration of its historical significance. Can holiness like that of Jerusalem be shared? Can the question be decided by democratic procedure? It seems to me that when holiness is at stake, votes are irrelevant.

What should be the guidelines for relations between Jews and non-Jews within the Jewish State and between

Israel and its neighboring states? What steps have to be taken in order to bring Israel's social democracy into line with its political democracy? What should be the role of Israel's religious leaders in efforts toward equalizing the political, economic, and social level of Arabs with that of the Jewish majority?

How should Jews today understand God, humanity, and the cosmos? Can or should there be one theology for all Jews? What rituals, worship, and symbols should distinguish the Jewish people? Should those symbols also serve as the official marks of Israel identity? What are the ethical values that should guide Jewish behavior?

Judaism and Israelism

The foregoing questions are now raised in the new setting of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious democracy. In the biblical era, the Israelites never regarded the peoples of Canaan as their partners in the construction of a state. Today, Israel's Arabs and other minorities are, by law and by the democratic sensibilities of enlightened Jews, considered to be equal participants in the determination of Israel's political future.

At the present juncture in history, the Jewishness of the State of Israel dominates its emerging, pluralistic culture. However, as time goes on, the distinction between Judaism and Israelism will become increasingly apparent. The Jewishness of Israel will become less a matter of law and more an expression of the cultural ethos of the Jewish majority.

As Israel's minorities become more

accepted and self-confident, they will strive to put a rein on conscious or thoughtless legal and social discrimination against them. And if, as all signs indicate, the Jewish majority adheres to its democratic commitment, Arab ethnicism and Moslem, Christian and Druse religiosity will play more vigorous and visible political and cultural roles. As long as Jews retain their majority status, they will exercise political control and wield cultural influence, but Arabs will eventually occupy high governmental and diplomatic posts.

This slow but inevitable outcome of the democratic process does not necessarily contradict the assertion of Rabbi Yehudah Leib Maimon, Israel's first Minister of Religious Affairs, who stated that law in Israel "...must be founded on Torah and the Jewish tradition."² Presumably, the application of Jewish law in Israel's public life will be determined by the natural will of the Jewish majority. That will, in turn, will be formed by the maturation of the Jews and Arabs in apprehending the values and ways of democracy.

Concurrently, as a result of the interaction of Jews and non-Jews in the daily affairs of life, a new Israeli cultural language and style will gradually emerge. This Israelism of the future has already sprung baby roots in dietary habits, semantic borrowings between Arabic and Hebrew, musical and literary novelty, and a growing recognition that being an Israeli is not identical with being a Jew.

On their part, Arab citizens of Israel realize that they carry additional

cultural baggage to that in their Palestinian valise. A more intensive study of religion and democracy in Israel would have to treat the Arab dimension fully. But space precludes fulfilling that obligation here.

The Impact of Emancipation and Enlightenment

In order for Israel's democracy to fulfill its mandate, Jews will have to respond creatively to the continuing revolution in Jewish existence in the wake of the Emancipation and Enlightenment. The former has generated a new form of Jewish nationalism and the need to establish unprecedented forms of polity. The latter has undermined the ideological foundations on which halakhic nomocracy rested for two millenia.

Menahem Elon is one scholar who understands the problem in all its facets. His masterful exploration of Jewish jurisprudence leaves us with the following question: Is the collective will of our people strong enough and the minds of Jews in sufficient agreement to insure at least a common national-religious core of the halakhah as a matter of personal commitment?³ Note that he speaks of "personal commitment" rather than the authority of the halakhah. The desperate efforts of traditional Jews to restore the halakhah as the basis of the Jewish-led government in Israel are noteworthy for their passion. But while political conditions give halakhic loyalists an occasional victory, the war has long been lost. The question is no longer, how can the halakhah regain its authority, but what in this vast heri-

tage should and can be salvaged for adaptation to Israel's democracy?

Non-halakhic Jews have the power to push Israel's democracy in any direction they wish. But in what sense will Israel be Jewish for them? The early Zionist settlers thought that they could dispense with the traditions of their pious forbears and create a Judaism of their own. The halakhah would continue to atrophy. The Zionist roots would be traced back to the Bible and the natural life it depicts. Jewish nationhood would be restored, and the ersatz culture of minority existence in foreign lands would be superseded. Clearly, this perception of Jewish history prevented the creative elements of pioneering Zionism from reaching their potential. The Zionist leaders recognized the importance of the Bible, but they never grasped its lessons for nation-building.

The Bible and Nation-Building

By the time that biblical authors began to record the history of the Hebrews, the people of Israel had evolved a noteworthy culture. This is evident in the biblical reflections on Israel's proto-history, the stories of the patriarchs, and the account of the settlement of Canaan. Today, we tend to suppress the fact that modern Israel also has a proto-history. Before the State of Israel was declared, several generations of Jews had embarked on new social experiments including the kibbutz, moshav, and Histadrut, had revived Hebrew as a spoken language, had instituted a modern educational network, had enunciated a revised set of prophetic ethical values, and had

begun both to fashion an indigenous aesthetic culture and to reinterpret Jewish spirituality in the key of "secular humanism."

A minority of the people, who remained loyal to the halakhic tradition, restored practices that are applicable only on the soil of Eretz Yisrael. They also succeeded in establishing their own effective educational system. Noteworthy, too, is the fact that the traditionalists were aided in their efforts by the secularist majority who, despite their rejection of the halakhah, regarded the former as partners in the rebuilding of a national Jewish life.

Current Issues

Israel's 1948 decision for democracy has never been seriously challenged, but its parameters are unclear in four main areas:

- The scope of human, civil, and national rights.
- The nature of religious freedom and the propriety of religious establishment.
- The electoral system. [I shall not examine this issue in this paper.]
- The respective powers of legislative, executive, and judicial authorities.

When viewed in the biblical perspective, these current problems recall what happened once before as the Hebrews evolved from patriarchy to monarchy. Political and spiritual leaders were in constant tension in trying to set the moral foundations of the state and in determining in whose hands power should reside and what

should be its limits. This struggle for power has now resumed and involves, as it did in ancient times, the necessity of reckoning with the needs of non-Jewish inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael.

Authority and power are clearly spiritual, as well as political and technical concerns. One illustration of this assertion will have to suffice. At one of the Clinton-Rabin press conferences, a journalist from a fundamentalist Christian paper asked the president: "In view of what the Bible has to say about God's gift of the Holy Land to the Jews, is the Israeli government acting properly in turning over large tracts of land to the Palestinians and to Jordan?" Clinton dodged the question by claiming that it belonged in Rabin's court. In his response, Rabin did not cast doubt on the assumption that any soil on our planet belongs to its settlers by divine fiat. When political stakes are high, a secularist like Rabin will not muddy the waters by asserting his belief that the Bible is, after all, man-made. Recourse to historical revelation or to sacred history is one of the popular ways of supporting national claims to land. This is one more instance that problems need to be seen, as in the Bible, as neither religious nor secular, but as spiritual in a uniquely Jewish way.

The Complexity of Identity

Jews and Arabs in Israel are engaged in sorting out the tangled threads of their religions and nationalities. The problem is more complicated than in biblical times because of the spread of freedom and the availability of many

new theological and spiritual options. We Jews no longer have an either/or choice, such as Joshua offered our ancestors — either the old-time religion of their Hebrew origins or the new Mosaic dispensation. Further, the identity of the Jewish people cannot be equivalent to the State of Israel. Jewry remains a trans-territorial people, united by bonds of fate, religion, and culture. However, to depict the Jewish condition in this way is merely to state the problem.

Israel and Jewish identity cannot be identical, any more than the identity of Israel's Arabs can be synonymous with their Israeli citizenship. A new international Jewish covenant will have to be created to take account of the widely-scattered Jewish communities, especially those seeking to survive as minorities in the free world.

Israel's Arabs, meanwhile, have to grapple with their minority status in a Jewishly-dominated democratic state. They, too, have to examine their national and religious roots as Christians, Moslems, and Druse. What constitutes Arabism and Palestinianism, and how are Arab citizens of Israel to regard their identity as Israelis? To complicate matters, Arabs have to determine how far they wish to follow the path of westernization, which has made deep inroads into their traditional life-style. For instance, Moslem Arabs have to choose between Islamic fundamentalism and a secularized Islam. The former is antithetical to democracy, and the latter leaves them with an Arab nationalism of insecure spiritual roots. Christian Arab Israelis are

equally uncertain about the meaning of their Palestinianism and their Israelism. Can their Christian beliefs contribute to their identity as Palestinian Arabs and as Israelis? And how are they to relate to the democratic ethos? These are issues of which Israeli Jews must be aware.

Halakhah and Democratic Rights in the Jewish State

Israel is hard put to adjust its Jewish purpose to its democratic avowal. The noted writer A. B. Yehoshua, for example, argues that Israel must remain both Jewish and democratic. But since he maintains that the symbols of the state must express its Jewishness, does not this preclude equal citizenship for Arab and other minorities?⁴ It is true that similar contradictions are to be found in many democratic countries, where the sancta of religious majorities are the official state symbols, but the question still remains as to the consistency of such use of symbols with the principle of equality. Minorities are denied the spiritual motivation to identify with the states in which they are citizens. They cannot honestly pledge allegiance to a flag or sing a national hymn which implies that they are aliens. Yehoshua and many Israelis have not yet fully grasped the implications of pluralism for state nationalism. They seem unable to overcome their paternalistic stance toward non-Jewish citizens. However, it must be admitted that their position is strengthened by the ethnic uniformity of most of the surrounding Arab

states.

Here are just a few of the questions that flow from the effort to preserve the State of Israel as both Jewish and democratic: What are to be the features of the public domain? Should transportation on sacred days be limited because of halakhic demands? Should it be restricted as a gesture to the sensitivity of the Orthodox? Should commercial entertainment be available on Jewish religious holidays? Who is to decide these matters? Are non-observant Jews to be completely free to create their own patterns—including raising, importing, and preparing non-kosher meat—anywhere in the country where law permits the establishment of commercial enterprises? What is to be permitted to non-Jews? There is already a status quo in some of these areas, but the questions are bound to persist as long as halakhic and non-halakhic Jews disagree as vehemently as they do.

How much of the halakhah can or should be adapted to Israel's legislative, judicial, and administrative practices? There are those—Itzhak Engelard is a case in point—who argue that halakhists should not secularize Jewish law by making it subservient to democratic procedures. Others, from the Orthodox Menahem Elon to the humanist Haim Cohn, claim that such adaptation is to be expected in a modern Jewish state.⁵

Acutely difficult are the laws of personal status. This area is well-known and needs no elaboration here. For political considerations, Israel's founding fathers handed virtually complete authority over matters of

marriage, divorce, and conversion to the Orthodox establishment. Adjustments are beginning to be made in these areas in response to the demands of non-Orthodox Jews for equal status. Liberalization of laws affecting women is proceeding at a slower pace. But if democracy is carried to its moral conclusion and civil marriage is permitted, we might witness an irrevocable split in Jewish ranks. Neither halakhists nor democratic-minded Israelis seem to have an answer to this challenge. The halakhists are trapped by the limits of the halakhic system, and the democrats have been unable to cope with the complexities of fashioning a new Jewish identity under freedom. The outcome is uncertain, but only disestablishment and some sort of compromise can guarantee the future of a united Jewish people.

The Abrahamic Religions and the Spiritual Agenda

Democratic notions of authority, polity, decision-making, pluralism, this-worldliness, freedom, and equality have had a marked impact on Judaism and Christianity and, to a lesser extent, on Islam. Equally, we should not overlook the seeds of democratic ideas that are scattered in each of the Abrahamic religions. On the whole, however, it is the historical religions which have to come to terms with political and social democracy. If I read democracy right, it eschews all exclusivism, claims of absolute truth or goodness, and entitles each person to follow his or her conscience and spiritual or aesthetic taste in worship and religious observance. Perhaps

most important, democracy encourages individuality and creativity that, in many instances, is still suspect in the three religions.

The central biblical concern, the quest for God, has naturally been affected under democracy. Thus, major denominations have surrendered claims that their supernatural revelations are authoritative for all people. Democracy might be defined not only as a political doctrine and method of rule, but also as a critique of traditional religions' conceptions of polity, and as a counter or supplementary spiritual culture. At the same time, this new spirituality has its own limitations that stem from failure to appreciate the life-enhancing elements in the historical religions.

Democracy in a New Biblical Era

Democracy and religion need each other in the formulation of ethical values for the 21st century. Democracy frees the imagination, but religion is needed to prevent the human mind from losing touch with moral responsibility. The possibility that we will destroy ourselves, and the earth with us, is frighteningly real. In the Tower of Babel myth, man is depicted as trying to acquire divine power. In our current attempt to master the art of ultimate destructiveness, we seem to worship Satan. Freedom has been distorted into exaggerated permissiveness, and science is often twisted into scientism. The response to these and other abasements of human worth must not be a wholesale, thoughtless return to theological and ethical sys-

tems that were responsible for monstrous suffering in the past. Rather, religionists and democrats together must refine old values and seek new standards for the unification of humanity.

Israelis, I repeat, have to regard themselves as facing a new biblical era. They will have to reconstruct the Jewish people on its native soil, but this time without falling into the trap of ethnocentrism. They will have to learn how to update the universal vision of the prophets so that the revitalization of the Jewish nation can be a blessing to all the peoples of the Middle East and to all peoples.

In Israel, all the Abrahamic religions, while remaining particular in form, must abandon whatever remnants of chauvinism they still possess. The democratic state we share must guarantee freedom for and from religious and anti-religious ideas and practices and must encourage open debate about their respective validity

and worth. At the same time, while deepening ethnic and religious ties, all citizens of Israel must seek areas of commonality which will characterize their identity as Israelis and justify Israel's statehood. The state must implement its purpose as the Jewish homeland, but it can be considered democratic only if its minority groups can come to regard it as the locale of their fulfillment, individually and as members of historical communities.

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1. "Religion and State," in *Jewish Religion and the State of Israel* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 5711), 101.
 2. "The Renewal of the Sanhedrin," in *Jewish Religion*, 39.
 3. *Jewish Law: History, Sources and Principles* (in Hebrew), 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973).
 4. "Am Yisrael," in *Mussaf HaAretz*, 27 December, 1995.
 5. See my essay, "Is the Halakhah Viable—A View from Jerusalem," in *Jewish Civilization: Essays and Studies*, ed. Ronald Brauner, (Philadelphia: Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, 1979), 1: 179-198.

Reflections of a Reconstructionist *Oleh*

BY ELLIOT L. SKIDDELL

A historic opportunity presented itself to my generation to take part in the rebuilding of a nation, to reestablish a commonwealth after twenty centuries, to end the long era of homelessness for the Jewish people, and we found a thousand reasons for not doing so, discovering comfortable ways of feeling involved in that historic process without actually planting our feet on the soil itself.¹

I had been thinking about aliyah for a long time when I read these words by my teacher Ira Eisenstein. My generation also, indeed every generation of Jews born since the creation of the State of Israel, faces the same historic opportunity, for the process of rebuilding the Jewish people in its homeland is nowhere near complete. I had found many more than a thousand reasons for not following

through on my thoughts about aliyah, but as I surveyed the situation in the Diaspora, in Israel, and in my own life I reached the conclusion that the future of the Jewish people is being created in Israel and I wanted to be part of that future. In 1992 my family and I came on aliyah. I sincerely believe it was the fulfillment of my being a Reconstructionist Jew, for I understand Zionism to be the ultimate aim of Reconstructionism.

Israel: A Living Laboratory

My own personal Zionist conclusions were, in large part, a result of my reading of Kaplan and Eisenstein. Zionism means for me actualization, and that can only mean, in a Zionist context, aliyah. If it is true that, for Reconstructionism, Judaism is the expression of “peoplehood” and the Jewish people’s ideals and aspirations, then that people needs a territory over which it exercises sovereignty, where it can put into practice those theories

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and ideals. Israel serves as a living repository of the ideals and aspirations of the Jewish people. As the land in which those ideals and aspirations were conceived and developed, Israel is the only place that can serve as the living laboratory for actualizing them. Only in Israel can the Jewish people test their social and moral theories against the realities of modern life. Israel serves as the vehicle through which the Jewish people can carry out the teachings and collective wisdom of its generations. "What Jews need now is living collective experience that they can share in common."² Israel is that living, collective experience that all Jews share in common. Is it any wonder then that it sometimes disappoints, sometimes thrills, but is always real and not ideal?

In *Judaism As a Civilization*, Mordecai Kaplan wrote, "for the Jews no progressive corporate life anywhere is possible without the establishment of a national home in Palestine...Judaism is unlikely to survive, either as an ancillary or as a coordinate civilization, unless it thrive as a primary civilization in Palestine."³ Though these words were written during the period when the debate raged as to whether it was necessary to have a state, for me they have become even more meaningful and more powerful as a result of the creation of the only state where Judaism is the "primary civilization." Now that the State of Israel exists the questions with which we struggle deal with the nature of the state and its society, the expressions of Judaism and Jewish culture that are manifested in Israel, and the relation-

ship between the Jewish people in their sovereign land and the communities of Jews who do not live in Israel.

An Israeli Bat Mitzvah

Many of the issues and conflicts of life in Israel, as well as my hopes for the future, manifested themselves in connection with my oldest daughter's Bat Mitzvah in April of 1996. The weeks prior to the Bat Mitzvah were very tense. We knew Sarit would do a great job but the tensions of life in Israel were intruding on our plans. A few days before our family and friends started arriving some Katyusha rockets fell at the school where my wife teaches, and the faculty and students spent the whole day in the shelters. That was the start of "Operation Grapes of Wrath" and an unexpected "vacation" from school for my wife and daughter.

On the Shabbat of the Bat Mitzvah our family and friends gathered in the Masorti Synagogue in Carmiel, where we have been members since our aliyah. Among our guests were many Israelis, as well as many new immigrants. For most of the Israelis this was their first time in a liberal congregation. Most of them were of "the synagogue I don't attend has to be Orthodox" variety of secular Israelis. Among my daughter's friends there had been more than a little skepticism that she actually was going to read from the Torah, wear a tallit, and participate in the service. Many of their parents thought that perhaps she was exaggerating or did not understand what was to happen at the service. So, when Sarit was called up

to the Torah, wrapped herself in her tallit, recited the blessings, and chanted from the Torah and Haftarah, there was a great deal of curiosity and I think not a little envy from many of her friends and their parents. They were being exposed to a new way of thinking, to a very different approach to Jewish expression, of which most had been unaware previously and to which some had even been hostile. A lot of eyes, and minds as well, were opened.

Some time later a friend of my daughter's expressed to her parents a desire to experience a Bat Mitzvah like Sarit had done. Her parents, who had not attended the service, reacted negatively. My daughter's friend did not become a Bat Mitzvah, but she vowed to herself and to her family that if she one day has a daughter, that daughter certainly will! In this way, I believe that change is happening in Israeli society. Just as fifty years ago Bat Mitzvah was considered revolutionary in the American Jewish community and has now become accepted, so I believe it will happen here. As more and more Israelis are exposed to the possibilities, they will be more and more likely to adapt the approaches which, for American Jews, are commonly accepted. The presence of more liberal, western *olim* (those who make aliyah) would accelerate the process, but it is already under way.

Rediscovering Religious Tradition

The growing phenomenon of secular Israelis engaging in serious study of Jewish texts is also part of this process.

Although the media tend to focus on conflicts between "religious" and "secular" in Israel, the truth is that there are many efforts to find common ground and there is a growing recognition that the future of this society requires us to understand the ideas and ideals which gave rise to the state. Throughout the country there are study circles, classes, and new institutions of learning that are furthering this activity. The secular Israeli does not want to continue to abdicate responsibility for the tradition, having realized that the vacuum thus created is filled by the forces of fundamentalism. This is also a sign of maturation on the part of Israeli society. There is a realization that as the peace process unfolds the challenges to the future of Israeli society will be internal, not external. The serious study of Jewish texts gives substance and basis to the existence of this society. Also, it is natural at this stage in the country's history, at age fifty, to want to reflect and to understand "from where have we come" in order to help us determine "where are we headed."

The events of the past few years have also instilled in many a need to explore the tradition. Given the nature of Israeli society this can lead some into the "*hozer bateshuvah*" ("return to orthodoxy") mode, but for many more secular Israelis there is a real desire to "own" the tradition in their own way and to contribute to the creation of an indigenous Israeli approach to non-orthodox Judaism. Judaism, in the Israeli context, has to be understood as the "civil religion" of the majority of the state's citizens, who

attend Pesach *sedarim* and fast on Yom Kippur because these are part of the culture of Israel.

For many, though, it is not enough to know that these are cultural modes of operating. There is a real desire to understand where these cultural traditions come from, and so we have witnessed this growing phenomenon of study circles, text classes, and discussion groups, the results of which will only be felt in years to come. For some this desire may mean new or renewed observance of customs, for others a greater familiarity with the literature that serves as the intellectual and philosophical underpinnings of the society that was created by the pioneering generations. Whatever approaches are undertaken, or whatever the results for individuals, for Israeli society it is a case of the old being made new and the new being made holy, in the words of Rav Kook, or of giving Jews the “freedom to be creative as Jews” and to enable Jews to “read their tradition with fresh eyes,” in the words of Mordecai Kaplan.⁴

Small Steps towards Change

On Simchat Torah thousands of people throughout the country participate in *Hakkafot Sheniyot* in public squares and plazas. At least in part, these originated as an act of solidarity with Jews in the former Soviet Union who were participating at the same time in their *Hakkafot*, and by extension, they are understood by many today to be a symbol of connectedness between Jews in Israel and Jews in the Diaspora.

In our little village the *Hakkafot*

Sheniyot started out as a real community affair with everyone participating, men and women, old and young. Some time after our revelry had begun, a Lubavitch rabbi from Safed appeared. One of the members of our community who had become a “*Ba'al Teshuvah*” had invited him to come and “conduct” our celebration, as if we did not know what to do ourselves. The first thing the Lubavitch rabbi did was to separate the men from the women. Most of the women stood to the side; a number went home. My daughter and some of her friends—including the girl who vowed to give her daughter the Bat Mitzvah that was being denied her—came to me and asked if there weren’t something I could do. I replied that this was not the occasion to initiate a religious battle, so we would just have to put up with it. But, I added, “you won’t always have to put up with it. You are the ones who can change all this; your generation can bring about a lot of changes.” And I believe they will.

The social stigma attached to driving on Yom Kippur is very strong even among the most secular of Israeli Jews. That is why we spend Yom Kippur in our village and not at the Masorti Synagogue in Carmiel, where we normally pray. The synagogue in our village is transformed on Yom Kippur into a very Orthodox congregation, including a division between men and women. But, being small, it is not easy to maintain that separation. In fact, the separation consists of the men sitting inside the room in the clubhouse which serves as the synagogue and the women sitting just outside.

Arriving after the *Tefilot* had begun my wife, Julie, and I sat together in the first row of chairs just outside the door of the synagogue room. We were soon joined by other couples, creating a de facto mixed seating area. This was accepted by everyone as a creative solution to an unarticulated need. Certainly this would not be acceptable in certain quarters, but the fact that it was accepted without comment or objection by this very typical "middle Israel" type of community bodes well for the development of indigenous, creative approaches to issues in Jewish life.

Perhaps "it takes a village," and such approaches on the small scale can have a ripple effect that leads to changes in the way these issues are approached on a national scale. However, it will take much time, great effort, and wisdom for that to happen. This society is still young and immature in its approach. The current struggles taking place within Israel are one more phase in an ongoing *Kulturkampf* that will continue for a long time to come. From this struggle, though, can emerge creative, synthetic solutions to the problems which confront the society.

Sometimes, it seems that Israel has suffered from a societal form of arrested development resulting in a prolonged adolescence. Adolescents often see the world in clear, unmitigated black and white. They have not had the time or experiences to begin to develop the shades of gray that characterize adult thinking. With age comes wisdom and as Israel passes the milestone of fifty we can already see

that efforts are emerging to deal with societal issues in ways that do not always have to lead to confrontations and conflicts.

Religion and State

Individually, Jews may prosper and enjoy full political and social equality...wherever they live in free countries. But so long as they constitute a minority, they can scarcely be in a position to develop fully the high purposes and ideas implicit in their Jewish heritage.⁵

Implicit in daily life in Israel is the challenge to try to incorporate the ideals of Jewish tradition into daily life. In a Torah commentary in the *Jerusalem Report* (15 May, 1997), Deborah Weissman (director of the Kerem Institute for Humanistic Jewish Education in Jerusalem) recounts the time that the late Tzuriel Admanit (one of the founders and leading thinkers of the religious kibbutz movement) was asked by a reporter to identify Israel's most pressing religious problem. His response was "the social gap between rich and poor."

If Tzuriel Admanit was right in thinking that the social gap in Israel is a religious problem, then perhaps in the Israeli context religion actually does belong in politics. Israel has been struggling with its self-definition since its founding, and that struggle will no doubt continue for some time. The question as to whether Israel is a Jewish state, a state of the Jews, or a state in which the majority of the

population happens to be Jewish is inextricably bound up with the question of the nature of democracy in Israel. There are those who say that Judaism and democracy cannot function together, that one will necessarily have to abdicate to the other. Part of the genius of the Jewish people has always been their ability to take foreign concepts, in this case democracy, and fuse them with Jewish values and understandings in order to create something that is the best of both.

The principle of voluntarism in religion, which in the United States has led to the separation of church and state, was come upon at first simply as a *modus vivendi* to prevent the transfer to the new world of the old world struggle among the different churches for state power. Now, however, that the separation of church and state has become an integral part of American democracy, it is recognized as essential in order to keep religion free from the corrupting influence of power politics and enable it to “speak from outside society, free to praise and free to rebuke...Now that Israel is to be the homeland of the Jewish people and its civilization, it will have to foster the kind of Jewish religion that can afford to be voluntaristic and that will renounce all ambition to engage in power politics.”

Many western *olim* deplore the

involvement of religious parties in political life and agitate for the separation of church and state—or Knesset (Parliament) and Bet Knesset (Synagogue)—which they experienced in their countries of origin. But, despite Kaplan’s analysis, Israel was not founded with a need to separate the two in order to be rid of old world inter-church power struggles. Indeed, Israel was created precisely as the only place where Jews would have the opportunity to base a society on their traditions and teachings. Perhaps the kind of Jewish religion that needs to be fostered in Israel is not one that shuns power politics but *engages* in politics in order to strive for the betterment of society by imbuing that society with Jewish values.

The Prophetic Perspective

Unfortunately religious life in Israel has become identified with legalistic observance and not with the prophetic aspects of our tradition. And yet, if as Jews, we strive for holiness in our lives and in our society, then we have to incorporate those teachings as part of our understanding of religion and we must understand that much of our ritual observance is intended to reinforce the social message. As Israel matures and faces the challenges of its spiritual life with the same intensity and effort as it has faced the challenges to its physical existence, I believe that we will see a gradual emergence of approaches to Jewish life that incorporate these social teachings.

Observance of ritual and halakhic minutia will undoubtedly remain important for certain segments of the

population but other voices will also be heard. What we are witnessing now in the struggles between various points of view, whether in the courts or in the neighborhoods of Israel, is part of that process. It may be difficult at times, but it is healthy for this society to work out its issues in this way. It certainly is exciting to be part of it and to be able to participate in the struggle, even in small private ways. "For us Jews, the upbuilding of Eretz Yisrael is more than liberation. It is religion in action."⁷

A New Generation of Pioneers

I can't predict the future, but I can act in ways that fulfill my desires for the future and, in that way, help to bring about the future that I desire. Malcolm Gladwell has argued in a recent article in the *New Yorker* magazine that social and economic problems reach a "tipping point" after which they rise or fall drastically. In other words, a critical mass is reached which then leads to a societal shift. One individual can have an impact by serving as an example to others, these others in turn influence still more people around them. Small changes lead to big changes as they spread their influence geometrically.

At this time and place in the history of the people of Israel each individual is a part of the historic undertaking that is the State of Israel. As these changes take place and the society shapes its future the individual becomes part of something larger—the life of the people. I have always believed that this was what Kaplan was talking about with regard to the

Jewish people—being part of something larger. I believe that is also the message for Israel. "The organic collective life resulting from the common interests which people, living in close proximity, must of necessity share is...more existentially real and certainly of far longer duration than any individual member of the group."⁸

My daughters recently asked me if I saw myself as a *halutz*, a pioneer, for coming to live in Israel. There is a certain romance and grandeur in thinking of oneself in this way, and those were certainly exciting times when the *halutzim* established the settlements and reclaimed the land. But today we are pioneers of a different type, though no less exciting or challenging, for we are charting the future of the Jewish State and of the Jewish people.

One of the most accurate descriptions of Israel that I have ever read comes from the master spy novelist John le Carré in an interview that was recently published in *The Jerusalem Post* (21 November, 1997). Commenting on his first visit to Israel, in the course of research for his novel *The Little Drummer Girl*, le Carré said that what he found in Israel was "the most extraordinary carnival of human variety that I have ever set eyes on, a nation in the process of reassembling itself from the shards of its past, now Oriental, now Western, now secular, now religious, but always anxiously moralizing about itself with...ferocity, a nation crackling with debate, rediscovering its past while it fought for its future." I consider it a privilege and a challenge to be part of this historic

opportunity, to be part of this human carnival, and to do my small part in the work of assembling the future from the shards of our past.

1. Ira Eisenstein, *Reconstructing Judaism: An Autobiography* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1986), 240.
2. Mordecai Kaplan, *A New Zionism* (New York: Theodor Herzl Foundation, 1955), 71.

3. Mordecai Kaplan, *Judaism As a Civilization* (Philadelphia and New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America and Reconstructionist Press, 1981), 273.
4. Mordecai Kaplan, *A New Zionism*, 137, 140.
5. Mordecai Kaplan, *A New Zionism*, 133.
6. Mordecai Kaplan, *A New Zionism*, 92.
7. Mordecai Kaplan, *A New Zionism*, 144.
8. Mordecai Kaplan, *A New Zionism*, 135.

The Coincidence of Beliefs among Jewish Religious and Secular Humanists

BY YA'AKOV MALKIN*

Cooperation among humanist Jews from all branches of Judaism is based on a belief in one of Hillel's fundamental aphorisms: Do not do unto others what you would find hateful if done to you. This shared supreme value allows secular and religious Jews to believe in many other common values (the term "value" here means an esteemed and preferred truth).

Among these values we would include: The belief in equal rights and opportunities for all human beings; the belief in the freedom and the right to choose one's own lifestyle; the belief in the need to defend the dignity of each human being, regardless of gender, race, or nationality; the belief in our obligations to a society that allows us to be fully human; and the belief in democracy as the system most likely to

guarantee the conditions for humanism and the fulfillment of the ideals of equality, freedom, and dignity for each human being.

These values are consonant with and incorporate the fundamental principles of Immanuel Kant which constitute the supreme values in western philosophical thought and are compatible with Hillel's principles: You must never view a person as a means but as an end; and the more ethical a principle, the more general it is.

On the basis of these shared values, humanist Jews, both religious and secular, can reach agreement on most matters of social policy and of foreign policy relating to other nations. This kind of basic agreement was the driving force behind the cooperation within the Zionist movement between

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secular and religious parties in the period prior to the establishment of the State of Israel and during its early development. This basic agreement also motivates secular and religious Jews in our own day who join together as the peace camp to fight for equal rights for the two nations living in the land of Israel, and against any tendency to dominate or to expel one nation at the hands of the other.

Divergent Beliefs among Liberal and Orthodox Jews

The conflicts between the beliefs of liberal and orthodox Jews come into focus in regard to the question of the obligation to obey the rules of the Shulḥan Arukh and the rabbinic decrees based on it. While those who believe in halakhah believe that observing the mitzvot is an obligation that falls on every Jew, liberal Jews believe that observing mitzvot is a privilege, not an obligation. All are free to observe or transgress all mitzvot except those whose obligation derives from humanist and Jewish values inherent in halakhah.

Liberal Jews believe that any mitzvah or custom that is contrary to ethical principles or detrimental to society should remain unobserved or be changed. Examples where changes can and should be made include halakhot that oppress the female half of the Jewish people—in the family, in education, in religious courts, in the synagogue, or in demeaning prayers and blessings such as the blessing, “Praised are you....who did not make me a woman.”

The relationship to women is the touchstone for Jewish humanism. The custom of exiling women from the main sanctuary of the synagogue and from closeness to the Torah scroll symbolizes discriminatory customs from the medieval period that are contrary to humanist values as expressed by Hillel, for certainly any Orthodox man would find it hateful to be discriminated against in the way that women are discriminated against in the Orthodox community, in the synagogue, the religious courts, or in the right to choose or be chosen as a ḥazan or religious leader. If men do not want to pray near the female half of the Jewish people (perhaps in some cases for fear of having contact with a menstruating woman), why don't they pray in the restricted women's space and allow the women to use the main sanctuary?

The relationship to women is one of the tests of the application of humanist principles in Judaism. The conflict between humanist principles, such as that of Hillel, and the anti-humanist principles which characterize discrimination against women, cuts across the dividing line between religious and secular Jews alike. In both camps there can be found varying degrees of chauvinism and haughtiness. Conversely, in both camps humanists can be found working for the equality of women and men in society, family, law, and religion. The conflict is not between religious and secular, liberal and orthodox; the conflict is between humanist and non-humanist values.

While democratic laws inexorably

lead to the overcoming of the laws and customs that express values which discriminate against and oppress women, many rules of tradition are exploited and continue to exist in large spheres of religious Judaism.

Courageous rabbis such as Rabbi Gershom dared, more than a thousand years ago, to abolish polygamy among the Jews of Europe, anticipating equality between women and men in a meaningful way. In our day the rabbis of most of the world's observant Jews have dared to abolish the *mehitzah* that divides men and women in places of prayer and to break down the barriers that have faced women who wanted to become *hazani'ot*, rabbis, or judges and teachers in matters of religion and Jewish studies. However, in Israel customs and laws exist which continue to oppress women in areas of religion in spite of the fact that such laws often represent a minority viewpoint within religious Jewry worldwide—which is itself a minority within the worldwide Jewish people.

Education for Critical Thinking

The belief that one has to educate for criticism and the possible rebuttal of Scripture and holy texts and of accepted assumptions is common in many circles of both religious and secular Judaism. Belief in education for critical inquiry is a continuation of the traditional fruitful debate which turned pluralism into a principle common throughout the culture of the Talmud.

Many of the ancient rabbis believed

that even in the most bitter debates, such as those between the schools of Hillel and Shammai, varying opinions were seen as being the words of the living God. The principle of pluralism that developed in the Talmud under the influence of the Greek notion of dialogue teaches that one can approach truth only by means of debate and the experiences of rebutting every opinion and aphorism. Avi Seguy, in his book *Elu V'elu (These and These Are The Words of the Living God)*, is right when he notes that this perception matches the perceptions of such thinkers as John Stuart Mill and Karl Popper.

What cleared the way for many of the teachers and students of contemporary secular and religious Judaism was this belief in education for the critical thinking necessary for revealing the difficulty contained within each statement and claim, and the talmudic belief in transforming this difficulty into a question worthy of discussion.

However, critical thinking free of any limitations as an educational goal or strategy clashes with a widespread belief within Orthodox Judaism that holds sway over religious institutions in Israel and forbids those who study from even looking at forbidden books, paintings, plays and movies. The belief that there are subjects and writings which must not be questioned, critiqued, or discussed limits the intellectual horizons of the student, perpetuates anachronistic concepts and prevents the development of halakhah. Thus, generations of intelligent men studying in Yeshivahs are con-

denmed to develop their intellectual abilities within the narrowly circumscribed space of the thought and culture within which they live.

Value-Based Education

The foundation of humanist value-based education is education towards critical thinking as the basis for clarifying and refining values, honing them through use for the purpose of evaluation and selection. By means of this education one can select, strengthen, and ground the validity of rules of conduct, do away with commandments whose time has past, or that have become, in our opinion, unethical.

Values influence the ways individuals run their lives, family, community, state, etc. Anti-humanist values such as male chauvinism or racism do damage to public policy and social order and must be continually critiqued in centers of learning and in Jewish and Israeli institutions of education. By means of this education for critical inquiry one can view with new eyes literary works in the Bible that have been obscured by mountains of commentary and midrash so that the content of their message has been altered in our consciousness. Midrashic literature is made up of independent thought which was created under the influence of biblical literature and it should be studied as such. When this literature is confused with biblical literature in the consciousness of teachers and students, it obscures the original work and its literary uniqueness, plot, and ideas.

This is what happened to the Song

of Songs, when far-fetched interpretations were attached to this secular erotic poem characterizing it as a love story between God and the people of Israel. Similarly, it is a common belief among many Bible students that Jacob fought with a winged angel, even though Jacob wrestled with God and called the place of struggle Peniel/face of God because he saw God face to face there. When Kafka writes his story in which a man struggles until the light of dawn reveals that he alone was in the ring, it is a midrash on the wrestling of Jacob. However, Kafka does not alter the original in the consciousness of the reader. Kafka offers one of many ways in which secular Jews understand this wonderful story about a man who struggles with his fate throughout a lifetime and prevails.

Education for critical inquiry is neither negative nor is it aimed at refuting traditional conventions; it is rather aimed at refining and constantly renewing them. Such education allows us to liberate ourselves from all holy and traditional interpretations and to evaluate them as independent literary works insofar as they have value in our eyes.

Mitzvot: Obligation or Choice?

The opposition between the belief in obligatory observation of the commandments and the belief in the freedom to alter them rests on the foundation of all oppositions between beliefs common in religious and secular Judaism. Secular Jews see themselves as free to keep mitzvot or not; to observe traditions or to change them;

to eliminate customs and laws when they are opposed to human values or democratic laws. Belief in the superiority of humanist values and democratic laws over all religious laws demands an examination of the commandments and their observance in the light of changing beliefs and circumstances. This was the revolutionary principle of the oral law, which the conservatives of the religious establishment of the time, the Saducees (and their heirs, the Karaites) opposed.

Humanist Jews believe that free will is an accepted principle in Jewish religion. Therefore, one must choose one of the many pathways by which it is possible to practice Judaism. Education for critical inquiry and discussion encourages an awareness of options available within Judaism and of the obligation to choose between them. In our day most Jews choose to practice their Judaism in alternative ways to that of the Orthodox halakhic tradition — both in the major branches of progressive Judaism (Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist) and in the streams of secular and traditional Judaism in Israel.

Prayer books are revised and new Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremonies are practiced in most Jewish communities in the Diaspora. Secular Jews are writing new Passover Haggadahs, excising offensive texts that are contrary to their beliefs and choosing passages from literature and contemporary texts which seem relevant to their lives, just as the creators of the Haggadah tradition in Iraq did at the end of the first millennium almost two thousand years after the celebration of

Passover began.

In secular communities in the kibbutzim and in secular communities in the United States and Canada, non-religious Sabbath ceremonies and celebrations were developed. Studies of “Judaism as culture” have displaced “Judaism as religion” where Jewish cultural studies have, of course, included the development of Jewish religion and its branches.

Those who believe that Torah is on earth and not in heaven, that things are established by a human majority and not by a Bat Kol (Divine Voice)—as is clearly indicated in the Talmud in the story of Akhni’s oven (B. *Bava Metzi’a* 59b)—understand that the choice of how to actualize Judaism will be determined by the evolving needs of both orthodox and secular Jews.

The Authenticity of Pluralism

Hence a conclusion that appears odd at first sight: An orthodox Judaism that sanctifies Scripture, in a Karaite way, as if it had an “eternal validity,” strays from the path carved out by talmudic Judaism that insured the development and continuity of Judaism as an evolving pluralistic civilization. Liberal Judaism continues in this direction when it takes a critical view of not only the Shulhan Arukh but of most of the Talmud.

The creators of the Talmud knew that there were no longer prophets who heard God’s voice and that they themselves spoke in their own names. Therefore, they encouraged debate and conflicting opinions and established the mechanism of the majority

decision in order to arrive at temporary decisions even though they acknowledged that it is possible that in the future the opinion of the minority will become that of the majority. The tablets containing the Ten Commandments written by God were shattered into small fragments and what remains was produced by human beings.

“Both these and those are words of the living God” means this—in all cases of opposing opinions a kernel of truth exists that gradually becomes revealed in the clash of ideas. Halakhah is understood, therefore, as an ongoing process. At every point there are majority opinions made by people, for this is God’s will: “Follow the majority.” The human majority becomes the supreme sole divine authority, even if it is only temporary.

Principled pluralism brings the position of the talmudic rabbis close to the humanist approach shared by religious and secular Jews alike. We see the passing of divine authority from those who speak in God’s name (such as prophets who claim to be God’s spokespeople) to human beings who decide according to their own reason and by means of the decision of the majority, and in accordance with the principles of the prophets who believed in the primacy of social justice over any cultic mitzvot. Many rabbis—such as the Maharal (Judah Lowe of Prague)—believed even in later generations that halakhah should not be fixed, that it is forbidden to stop its progress, that it must continue to develop by means of controversy and the changes that result from it in

accordance with changing circumstances. Preventing halakhah from moving forward and permanently freezing it in the Shulhan Arukh is contrary in spirit to the pluralist approach contained in the Talmud.

Freedom to disagree with the opinions of ancient authorities, and the freedom to select among the available options and to create new choices joined to the talmudic principle of the recognition of the majority, create the basis for democracy, the system that best serves the aims of humanism.

Democracy and the Renewal of Halakhah

The recognition of pluralism as a characteristic of Jewish national culture was adopted by the Jewish State when it was established in the middle of the twentieth century. Democracy as a humanistic form of government expresses the values of pluralism more than any other form of government and makes possible the development of Judaism as a civilization. The statutes and basic laws of the secular Jewish State continue to develop Jewish halakhah. A legislative body elected by the majority of the citizens of the Jewish State, including the non-Jewish minorities contained within it, and the Supreme Court of the State of Israel add a new layer to halakhah in the civilization of the Jewish people.

The fundamental humanistic principles of the Jewish State were formulated in the Proclamation of Independence of the State—just as the Ten Commandments functioned in our literary memory as a basic docu-

ment for the Jewish people of the revelation at Mt. Sinai. The Israeli legislative body gradually recognized these humanist principles as the “Basic Laws of the State” that promise equal rights, freedom, and honor for every individual. When the laws of the secular Jewish state come up against rabbinic dictates, a secular Israeli Supreme Court decides between them. *Even the supremacy of the law of the State of Israel over the laws of orthodox Jewish law is consistent with Jewish tradition. The three Jewish states which preceded the State of Israel were not governed by halakhah but by non-religious authorities.*

Pluralism Is Not Relativism

Pluralism as a principle based on humanistic and Jewish values is opposed to moral relativism. Disagreement is liable to draw us to truth as it reveals elements of truth in the opposing opinions, only if the opinions and beliefs expressed during the debate take a clear and unequivocal stance and express a well defined and well reasoned truth. The opinions of the school of Hillel and the school of Shammai were not in themselves indecisive and confused but rather decisive and unequivocal in their conclusions. Precisely because of this it is said, “Both these and those are the words of the living God.”

Principled pluralism—the faith in the value of a multiplicity of opinions and beliefs, in the critical thinking that results from the struggle among them and of the necessity of encouraging dialogue between opponents—expands the possibilities of free choice,

encourages personal expression and the fulfillment of each individual and his or her capacity to examine reality and the ideas with which it is illuminated. In this regard humanists believe in the educational value of democracy since it encourages each person to forge his or her own path, and each Jew to actualize Judaism in his or her own way. In order to insure a society guaranteeing individual freedom and rights, we must insure that each individual will fulfill his or her obligations to the society and guarantee its continuity and defense. The existence of societal and ethical obligations of individuals is a condition for society’s ability to fulfill the rights of individuals living within it. Therefore, every democratic society needs not only a system of obligatory laws but also a system of humanistic values internalized in its educational systems, which form the basis of an individual critique of each person.

Democracy and the Renewal of Jewish Civilization

Humanistic belief in pluralism is fundamentally opposed to relativism which sees all values, humanist and non-humanist alike, as only different from each other and not as arranged in a hierarchy. Because humanism believes in humanization as a supreme value and anything that furthers humanism as superior to anything that dehumanizes people, it cannot agree that chauvinist and racist values are identical in their ethical worth with values that insure equality of rights for all people, for people of all genders and races. The principle of

pluralism of course necessitates listening to the opinions of those who oppose this principle, but it rests on the Kantian principle that the more general the application of an ethical principle, the more ethical it is. Pluralism encourages those who seek to fulfill their vision through democratic means and encourages value-based critical education based on the belief in humanization as a supreme value. *Relativism* eliminates the possibility that one can approach the truth.

The recognition of pluralism as characteristic of Judaism as a civilization necessitates recognizing and encouraging the special nature of each branch and group within Judaism in order to benefit from its possible contributions. It also demands a struggle against those customs belonging to one branch or group which stand in opposition to the principles of humanism and humanization, such as tens of thousands of orthodox Yeshivah students in Israel shirking their

duty to serve in the Israeli Defense Forces, or the complete discrimination against women in certain branches of Judaism as mentioned above.

Even when the democratic majority determines that one can legitimate discriminatory laws against a particular group, and this determination makes the discrimination legal, one must continue to struggle against it until it is repealed if it appears to us to be unjust.

One must obey all democratically legislated laws, but one must struggle against them until they are repealed if they are opposed to the humanist values in which we believe. The humanist camp in Israel struggles against laws that have been imposed by the religious minority on all Israeli governments who have had to rely on the political support of that religious minority. Therefore, one must adopt the biblical precept: "Follow the majority but not so far as to do evil."

Interpreting Jewish History in Light of Zionism

BY JACOB J. STAUB

How seriously should the Zionist reading of Jewish history affect the way that we interpret the meaning of the Jewish past and hence the significance of contemporary events? It turns out that the growing distance between the perspectives of Israeli and non-Israeli Jews both emerge out of and are affected by the way we understand the history of the Jewish people.

History and Memory

Jewish identity and meaning centers on our collective memory. Our festival calendar moves us from Egyptian slavery (Pesach) to the revelation of the Torah (Shavuot) to the wandering in the wilderness (Sukkot)—punctuated by the Babylonian/Persian exile (Purim), the Maccabean Revolt (Chanukah), and the destruction of the Second Temple (Tisha B'Av). The daily liturgy reinforces the liberation with references to the Exodus. Even the Kiddush on Shabbat represents

itself as a remembrance of the Exodus (*zeker litzit'at Mitzrayim*).

These are more than casual references. As we say explicitly at the Pesach Seder, we are obliged to view ourselves as if we ourselves were slaves and participated in the wondrous liberation. We are supposed to reenact our sacred history by way of experiencing its power in our own present lives.

Fifteen years ago, Professor Y.H. Yerushalmi made a point of distinguishing between the experiential power of the reenacted memory of pre-modern Jews and the distancing study of history in which modern Jews engage.¹

His point was direct and compelling: Jews today mistake the commandment to remember as a directive to study our own history. But before the modern era, Jews did not engage in historical study. The historian's objective is to describe his or her subject in historical context, so that

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the subject is understood as a product of a particular period, not our own. The student of history is thus distanced from the past.

Traditional Jewish memory, by contrast, related to the sacred past in a-historical terms. Jews lived timelessly, suspended between the destruction of the Second Temple and the expected messianic redemption, and they interpreted contemporary events as either the fulfillments of prophecy or signs of the coming endtime. Contemporary events in themselves had no meaning for them; their significance was understood with reference to the sacred past or the awaited future.

Yerushalmi's troubling point was that with the advent of history in our era, and with the wholehearted embrace of history by today's Jews, our study of the Jewish past alienates us from the very heritage we are trying to embrace. The more we learn about the historical contexts underlying biblical or rabbinic texts, the less likely we are to experience their sacred, transformative power.

The Mythic Power of History

It is true that our historical consciousness can serve as an obstacle to our experience of the sacred power of traditional texts and rituals (although there is much more to be said about the ways in which that power remains). But contemporary historians now possess a new power to shape our sense of reality by the way in which they organize and explain the past—not entirely unlike the way in which sacred myths functioned in the past.

History is inevitably interpretation. Historians do not present us with uninterpreted factual data. They select data that they uncover in their research, choosing what they consider significant based on the assumptions that they bring to their work, and shaping the data into coherent narratives that reflect those assumptions.²

When I study medieval Jewish history with rabbinical students, our first challenge after reading the work of an historian is to extract his or her assumptions and determine how they affect the conclusions that are presented. Does he assume that all rabbinic leaders lived pious lives that reflected the most noble of rabbinic teachings? Then he is liable to justify the actions of those leaders. Does she assume that all Jews who were forcibly converted to Christianity maintained heroically their loyalty to Judaism? Then she is likely to believe the Inquisition's accusations about Judaizing conversos. And those who read and accept their historical accounts inevitably have their views of reality shaped by these unspoken assumptions.

The Zionist Reading of Jewish History

Nowhere do we face this challenge more acutely than in the overwhelming influence that Zionist theory has had upon the interpretation of Jewish history.

Beginning with its earliest proponents (Pinsker³ and Herzl⁴), Zionists have argued for the necessity of the establishment of a Jewish state on the grounds that Jewish powerlessness

after the destruction of the Second Temple left us vulnerable to the cruel, anti-Semitic whims of non-Jewish rulers. Not only is a Jewish state, in which we can determine our own fate, needed to protect us from persecution. It is needed to effect a renewal and healing of the Jewish soul, which has been impoverished and disfigured by 2000 years of powerlessness in the Diaspora. There thus emerged the Labor Zionism that celebrated the return to manual labor on our own soil.

As the result of this viewpoint, in the first decades of the state, secular Israeli Jews virtually eliminated from the curriculum the study of post-destruction Diaspora Jewish history and culture. Their models and heroes were biblical prophets and kings and heroic *halutzim* (Zionist pioneers), not talmudic sages, and certainly not the generations of medieval Jews—powerless, persecuted, and unenlightened—whose traumas Zionism sought to transcend in its pursuit of the normalization of the Jewish people.

The Kaplanian Reading

If Zionists are those who make aliyah, then North American Jews aren't Zionists. But if we define a Zionist as someone who affirms the centrality of the State of Israel, then Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan (one of the earliest North American advocates of Zionism) and his followers qualify.

Kaplan affirmed the legitimacy of Jewish communities outside of Israel, but in the classic Reconstructionist diagram, Israel is at the center, and we

are on the circumference. Following Aḥad Ha'Am, Kaplan believed that the flowering of Jewish civilization in Eretz Yisrael would serve as a radiating source for Jewish communities elsewhere, where Jewish civilization is necessarily secondary to the primary culture in which we live.

The Lachrymose View of Jewish History

How does this scheme affect our perception of ourselves? This question comes up weekly in a seminar on medieval Jewish history. Affected subliminally by Zionist theory, we are subject to a constant inclination to assume that medieval Jews endured lives of misery, humiliated by anti-Jewish legislation, ever fearful of the next attack or expulsion, buffeted from trauma to trauma as they proceeded inevitably to the Spanish Inquisition and the Nazi Holocaust.

The great historian of Judaism, Professor Salo Wittmayer Baron, sought to correct this attitude, which he labeled “the lachrymose view of Jewish history.” Most medieval Jews in most places in most years were not the targets of pogroms. Most lived lives that, protected by charters and privileges, were far more secure and prosperous than the overwhelming percentage of non-Jews around them. And contrary to our expectations, even those communities that were savaged by attack often demonstrated a resiliency that led them to flower demographically and culturally immediately afterwards. Jews awaited the messianic redemption that would finally free them from uncertainty, but

they rarely aspired to self-governing power in the pre-messianic world.⁵

Jewish Accommodation in the Diaspora

More to the point, applying the Zionist assumption to the study of pre-modern Jews inevitably skews our understanding of their experience. They were not outraged by regulations that treated them differently from non-Jews because they had no aspiration to equality or integration into the larger society. In fact, they welcomed (at least their rabbinic leaders welcomed) restrictive legislation because they *wanted* to be separate; the integrity of Jewish communal culture depended on separation.⁶

Even the most rationalistic among them awaited God's imminent redemption, but while they waited, they flourished: writing legal commentaries and healing amulets; composing liturgical poetry and songs about love, wine, and natural beauty; decorating synagogue walls and arches and researching physics and astronomy; traveling the world as international traders and tending vineyards; communing mystically with the Holy One and making medical advances; creating exquisite handicraft and investigating philosophical questions. Their leaders became the trusted advisors of rulers, and ordinary Jews befriended non-Jewish neighbors.⁷ They carried with pride the disabilities that came with Jewish status, and they flourished.

Should we dismiss 1700 years of Jewish experience as a futile attempt

to fend off the inevitable auto-da-fé or gas chamber? Of course not. Most of what we value most about our heritage was generated by Jews who did not live in Israel—certainly not when Jews were self-governing there. Only fifty years after the Holocaust, however, it is extraordinarily difficult not to chart every anti-Semitic persecution as a point on the road to genocide. Israelis can do so more easily, given the Zionist reading of Jewish history. But those of us who have chosen not to live in Israel, and who are devoted to a vital, evolving Jewish community, cannot afford to buy into that myth. It is a myth that foretells our own destruction.⁸ It is the Zionist myth of *shelilat hagolah* (the negation of the Diaspora).

Future Uncertainty

North American Jewish communities have no assurance that our current safe and even privileged status will continue indefinitely. Jews have flourished for centuries in other lands, only to have things turn sour and brutal. But difficult as it is to utter, neither is the success of the Zionist experiment guaranteed forever. Only those who believe that the supernatural hand of God guides the course of history have the luxury of knowing that everything will turn out well in the end.

Which is not to say that we should ignore the consequences of our people's powerlessness through the centuries. Much of our heritage was created by people who were traumatized by their vulnerability to attack and who lived in the narrow alleys of Jewish quarters that were overshadowed by

towering mosques and cathedrals. We should not be surprised or ashamed when we encounter violent attitudes towards non-Jews, or triumphalistic affirmations of Jewish chosenness that debase other religions, or halakhic double standards for how one treats a Jew and a non-Jew. They emerged out of a very specific historical context, different than our own.

It was extraordinarily fortuitous that the Zionist movement emerged in time to create the State of Israel to serve as a refuge for Jews when so many Jewish communities came under attack and survival strategies that had succeeded for centuries failed. For all of its manifest problems, Israeli Jewish society retains its promise for a renewal of the Jewish spirit.

Israel is not, however, in the words of the Israeli prayer, *reshit tzemihat ge'ulatenu* (the beginning of flowering of our redemption). Even as we give it our love, loyalty, and support, we should recognize it as a flawed, vulnerable, human enterprise, as have been all the other Jewish communities throughout our long and varied history. Time will tell whether Jewish power succeeds—strategically and morally—more than powerlessness.

The Power of Historical Myth

The way in which North American Jews narrate the story of the Jewish collective past has consequences. If we assume the Zionist perspective that the essential, unifying feature of all Diaspora experience is that, sooner or later, Jews come under attack, we may find ourselves reacting inappropriately and self-destructively to our own cir-

cumstances—by failing to invest adequately in our own future, for example, or by overreacting to isolated incidents of perceived anti-Semitism. If Jews in ninth-century Muslim Spain had lived out that myth, we might not now count in our heritage the poetry of Ibn Gabirol or the philosophy of Maimonides—people who lived centuries later. If twelfth-century Jews in the Rhineland had assumed that perspective after the massacres of the First Crusade (and they certainly would have been justified), the rich tosfastic study of the Talmud might never have developed.

Similarly, we would do well to be cautious about viewing all of our past as leading inevitably to the Holocaust. In the first decades after the liberation of the death camps, that perspective helped us to cope. Focusing on heroic conversos and martyrs affirmed the Jewish ability to defy all attempts to wipe us out. But North American Jews clearly need another *raison d'être* than anti-Semitism. We need as many models as possible of Jewish life through the centuries in which Jews flourished and celebrated their lives. Those models exist.

We need not and should not use the Zionist vision as the measure with which we judge the rest of Jewish experience—past, present, and future. The messianic promise of the Zionist dream is no closer to realization today than it was fifty years ago. Until it is realized, we would do well to narrate the Jewish experience as a chain of diverse communal experiments, adapted to wildly varying circumstances, in which the Jewish people

found expression and meaning for as long as we could do so.

1. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982).

2. For an excellent treatment of this topic, see Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). For a review of the issues as they apply to Jewish historians, see Michel Nutkiewicz, "Jewish Historians and the Historical Sublime," *Reconstructionist* 50/6 (1985): 26-30, 34.

3. Leo Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation*, 1881.

4. Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 1896.

5. One notable exception was the fascination of Hasdai Ibn Shaprut (tenth century Cordoba) with the Jewish Kingdom of Khazaria. See his letter to the king of the Khazars in *Masterpieces of Hebrew Literature*, ed. Curt

Leviant (New York: KTAV, 1969), 159-169; or in *Eyewitnesses to Jewish History*, ed. Ariel Eisenberg et. al. (New York: UAHC, 1973), 68-74.

6. See Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980).

7. For startling evidence of everyday relationships between Jews and non-Jews, see Leila Gal Berner, *A Mediterranean Jewish Community: Barcelona's Jews in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998).

8. See Y.H. Yerushalmi's poignant response to Rosemary Radford Reuther's breast-beating confession that Christianity is inherently and irredeemably anti-Semitic. The Jewish historian seeks to affirm the ways that the Church, pre-Holocaust, protected Jews. To accept Reuther's thesis is to face a bleak future. *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* ed. Eva Fleischner (New York: KTAV, 1977), 79-92, 97-107.

Zionism after Israel: Some Modest Proposals

BY DEBORAH DASH MOORE

Watching Israel's fiftieth year celebrations, American Zionists may wonder whether there remains any role for them to play in the unfolding Jewish historical drama. Championing "the God that did not fail," as Martin Peretz dubbed Zionism in a review of its achievements on its centennial,¹ may be appropriate for an anniversary, but does it justify launching Zionism, especially Diaspora Zionism, into a second century of life? Although such concerns are hardly new, they possess particular urgency now because of the coincidence of the dual anniversaries of Israel and the Zionist movement. I think, in fact, that Zionism still has unfinished tasks both in Israel and in America. However, before making a few modest proposals for a 21st century Zionism, it might be useful to recall previous criticisms of Zionism and premature announcements of its imminent demise.

The Viability of Zionism

Take the question of the viability of

Zionism. Israelis have regularly declared Zionism's irrelevance: after the establishment of the state in 1948, following the 1967 Six Day War and then again after the Yom Kippur War of 1973, and more recently after the signing of the Oslo peace accords in 1993. Each of these significant turning points in Israeli history fueled arguments questioning the continued purpose of Zionism. If Zionism intended to establish a nation state of the Jews, then surely 1948 achieved that goal. If security for Israel was part of Zionist requirements, then the 1967 or 1973 Israeli military victories or even Israel's first conventional war in 1982 in Lebanon undoubtedly fulfilled Zionist requisites. If the dream of normality—a state like other states and Jews living like other peoples—was the touchstone for Zionism, then certainly the 1993 peace accords (or, on a more macabre note, the murder of Rabin) consigned Zionism to the dustbin of history. If ingathering persecuted Jews signaled Zionist fulfillment, then the airlift of Ethiopian

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Jews and the massive aliyah of hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews marked Zionism's final culmination.

All of these arguments carry weight, especially if one emphasizes how Zionism intended to solve the Jewish problem. However, if one switches focus from the historical meaning of Zionism for East European Jews to Zionism's meaning for assimilating Jews in the west, then one recognizes that even after all the important Israeli landmarks, Zionism still has a message for contemporary Diaspora Jews. And that message is not one of normalization, nor of ingathering exiles, nor of fighting antisemitism and rescuing Jews. Instead Zionism in the Diaspora aims to solve the problem of Judaism for assimilating Jews. Zionism provides a vehicle of conversion to an affirmative Jewish identity, to a sense of solidarity with other Jews that is the basis of peoplehood and Diaspora nationalism. Nationalism in a nation state like Israel differs from Diaspora nationalism which unites an international people. Because Zionists achieved so many of their political goals, we tend to forget some of the spiritual aims that were integral to Zionism throughout its history.

Spiritual Zionism

Spiritual Zionists emphasized Zionism's power to regenerate Jews—especially those who were alienated from Jewish life—and to inspire individuals to rebuild vibrant Jewish communities. A spiritual Zionist like Horace Kallen argued that Jews cannot win emancipation as human

beings unless they first gain acceptance as Jews: "the prerequisite to liberation of the individual is the liberation of the group. . . ." But that is only the first step because Zionism also demands "complete individual liberty for the Jew *as Jew*." Now what does this mean at the end of the 20th century for American Jews? To be a Zionist today involves not just championing the centrality of Israel but also affirming the significance of politics as a vehicle of Jewish self-expression. Zionism is a liberation movement for Diaspora Jews. Borrowing from the feminist movement's insight that the personal is political, we understand that to be Jewish involves making a political statement. A political statement—not necessarily a religious one (although many cultural and spiritual Zionists would argue for the vital connection between Zionism and Judaism, and not just the revivifying power of the former on the latter).

Despite all of Israel's signal successes, this spiritual dimension of Zionism remains unfulfilled in America today. Many of the young Jews I teach are still uncomfortable making a political statement of being a Jew. They think that if they don't believe in God or don't observe Jewish traditions that they are not Jews. They cannot fathom the political dimensions of Jewish identity. They cannot understand, for example, why a Jewish professor who does not fast on Yom Kippur should nonetheless not teach her classes on that day. Not teaching on Yom Kippur makes a political statement about Jewish legitimacy in a world where Jews are a minority still

oppressed by the majority culture. Zionism reverses J. L. Gordon's dictum, "Be a mensch in the street and a Jew at home." Zionism says to Diaspora Jews: "Be a Jew in the street and a person at home."

Zionism asks American Jews today, as it did fifty years ago, to perform their Jewish identity in public to demonstrate their solidarity with other Jews. When Young Judaea leaders insist that American teenagers visiting Israel on its summer program say the blessings after eating a meal in a restaurant loudly and with enthusiasm, the message they want transmitted is less the importance of prayer than its proud public performance. Hence Zionism's sancta differ from Judaism's sacred system. Belief in God, in Torah, in mitzvot: these belong in the realm of Judaism. Affirmation of the Jewish people and commitment to its liberation: these are critical to Zionism, as is the necessity of Israel's existence, the importance of Hebrew, the reality of Jewish history, and the centrality of politics.

The Differing Realities of Israel and Diaspora

Now this may sound fine in the abstract, but the reality surely suggests that American Jews and Israeli Jews are moving further apart, that there is little to bind them to each other beyond Judaism, itself an increasing source of tension. Where, for example, is the street located on which Jews should be Jews? Many American Jews today live in suburbs and many suburbs don't even have sidewalks. How

can one be a Jew in an automobile? What happens when public space is privatized? American Jews have no problems with suburbia. It conjures up security, intimacy, a fine place to raise children among others of the same socioeconomic class, good schools, clean shopping centers, peace, quiet, and privacy. This is a piece of the American dream that few Israelis share despite their growing affluence and the Americanization of their marketplace. Similarly, American Jews cherish mobility. Mobility means personal freedom, individual opportunity, the pursuit of happiness; another piece of the American dream. Imagine living around the corner from your parents, near the home where you grew up. Impossible! For Israelis, this attitude makes no sense. They ask: Why do you have to jettison your families to gain a personal identity? Why is freedom connected to mobility? How can you live in a place without sidewalks?

So how can Zionism speak to the very different lived realities of American and Israeli Jews? Zionism can, I think, mediate and translate between cultural norms offering opportunities to Israeli and American Jews that would enhance their lives and allow them to experience the solidarity of Jewish peoplehood even as they struggle for liberation. Many American and Israeli Jews don't care to be Jewish or are indifferent. They are satisfied being Israelis or Americans. Zionism potentially can provoke them, suggesting that their satisfaction is premature.

Toward a 21st Century Zionism

Here are a few modest proposals for a 21st century Zionism. This idiosyncratic list emphasizes the spiritual dimensions of Zionism, mostly keyed to American norms. These suggestions will further a sense of connectedness and identity among Jews, important dimensions of Jewish peoplehood, since they start with where American and Israeli Jews can be found today and where I anticipate they will be tomorrow.

- Take on the characteristics of an American religion. By that I mean not that Zionism should become a form of Judaism but that it should acquire attributes of religion in America. It has many choices in this regard. It could become evangelical, witnessing to young and old, but especially to the young, the inner truth of Zionism and how its message will transform your life, giving you a clear sense of purpose, a new identity, a chance to start over and to become one of the elect.

It could also adopt the 12-Step model, which is very popular among American Jews as well as Christians and undoubtedly could easily be exported to Israel. (A number of years ago sociologist Charles Liebman reported with a mixture of amazement and despair on a program based on Weight Watchers that a Los Angeles synagogue had adopted to lead members to greater Jewish ritual observance.³) Within the framework of Judaism, a 12-Step approach is controversial because it places the individ-

ual's choice and will at the center of observance rather than God's commandment. It also flies in the face of religious authority since any sense of obligation comes from individual desire. Within the framework of Zionism, however, a 12-Step approach might work very nicely. It answers the personal needs of individuals and flourishes from their personal commitments. It starts with the individual but expands to small, intimate communities. And it possesses the power to mobilize the ethical dimensions of small groups. Think global: Jewish peoplehood. But act local: small scale groups. Of course it requires that individuals recognize that they have a problem—in this case that would involve their identity—and that they are ready to overcome their alienation.

Zionism could also be a place that was safe for Jews and others who sought to join the task of liberation. Zionist circles could provide a way to integrate Jews and fellow travelers into Jewish solidarity and community without leading to agonized debates over such religious issues of birth and parentage or even upbringing.

Raising Historical Consciousness

- Raise historical consciousness. Since Zionists have always encouraged Jews to be Jews in public, to affirm a connection with other Jews that transcends national borders, now let American Zionists champion knowledge of the American Jewish past through visits to historic sites, courses of study, museum exhibits. Let Zion-

ists help American Jews go public with their history. Why not bring cadres of teenage Israelis to visit the States for six weeks to learn about the American Jewish experience and to come to understand America? Such a program would strengthen Israeli sympathy for American Jews as well as reducing Israeli ignorance. (It would also help Israelis improve their English.) Like the programs for American Jewish youth in Israel, comparable American programs for Israelis would build identity and community and demonstrate some of the virtues of American Jewish life, e.g. its religious pluralism, its commitment to civil rights and civil liberties, its innovations in regard to women's role in public and communal life. No, I don't think such a program would encourage Israelis to emigrate. Teenagers tend to be somewhat chauvinistic and there is much about America—its materialism, its extremes of wealth and poverty, its racism—that would undoubtedly make Israelis recognize the virtues of Israel.

Zionism As Religion

- Become a leisure-time self-improvement organization. It is true that Americans have less and less leisure time, but they also look to use their leisure for self-improvement. American Zionists could provide a variety of leisure-time self-improvement activities. I don't mean to suggest that we need Zionist gyms, or that Zionists should do what Jewish Community Centers do, but I do think that Zionist hiking groups promoting ecological awareness or Zion-

ist study groups, not to mention Zionist social action groups, might encourage American Jews, especially young people, to become committed and knowledgeable about Israel and Israeli culture.

These modest suggestions derive largely from my reading of the American experience and undoubtedly appear trivial. (But then, much of American culture is genuinely trivial.) Gone is a concern with ideology that engaged the passion of European Jews and that was transported by them to America. In its place is religion, broadly understood as a moral community of believers who share beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, in this case, Zionist sancta. In America, as de Tocqueville observed over a century ago, "the sovereign authority is religious." (Of course, he went on to say that "consequently, hypocrisy must be common.") Religion flourishes in America as perhaps nowhere else in the western world. Jews are among America's least religiously observant groups, as far as Judaism is concerned. But if you examine the many alternative religions in America, Jews are strongly represented. Often, as in 12-Step programs, they don't see their actions as "religious" and thus find it easy to participate. If Zionism is going to continue in America as a Jewish movement, it could surely benefit from the techniques that attract Americans to commitment, action, and identification.

1. *The New Republic*, 8 and 15 September, 1997.

2. Quoted in "Horace M. Kallen," by Milton

R. Konvitz, in *The "Other" New York Jewish Intellectuals*, ed. Carole S. Kessner (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 154.

3. Charles S. Liebman, "Ritual, Ceremony and the Reconstruction of Judaism in the United States," *Studies in Contemporary Judaism* 6 (1990), 275.

Israel and the Diaspora: A Reconstructionist Reconsideration of Zionism

BY DAVID A. TEUTSCH

Recently I received a thoughtful letter asking for reconsideration of a note in *Kol Haneshamah: Limot Hol*, the Reconstructionist daily prayerbook, that describes the prayer for rain inserted in the ninth blessing of the *Amidah* as remembrance of the rain cycle in ancient Israel.¹ After reading several scholarly articles on that subject, I now believe that the policy of reciting the prayer for rain beginning on December 4 reflects the custom of the Babylonian Jewish community in talmudic times, not that of the land of Israel, as the note in question suggests. It is quite startling to realize that the Babylonian Jewish community purposely observed a different day for the recitation of the prayers for rain in order to better reflect the needs of the Babylonian Jewish community due to

the nature of weather and farming there.

Even more surprising, Babylonian Jews followed not the Jewish lunar calendar but the Babylonian solar calendar to fix the date for starting the prayer for rain. In the process, they asserted not only the difference in needs between Babylonia and Israel but also the need of every Jewish community to reshape its aspirations and perspective based on where it is located in the world and the natural and political circumstances in which it finds itself. The struggle for hegemony between the rabbinic communities of Babylonia and Israel is quite well known. The greater size and learning of the Babylonian Jewish community resulted in its asserting itself against the older community of Israel, which had history and land on its side. This

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conflict was temporarily resolved only with the destruction of much of the community in Israel fourteen hundred years ago.

A Relationship Emerges

The American Jewish community of the 1930s could not yet imagine a *yishuv* strong enough to make any claims of hegemony over world Jewry. In the 1930s more American Jews looked to Eastern Europe for Jewish authenticity than they did to the struggling and fragile Jewish community of Palestine. With the destruction of much of European Jewry and the emergence of the State of Israel in the 1940s, all that changed rapidly. Fifty years after the founding of the State of Israel, we are still in the throes of working out our relationships, and the relationships are complex. They have a personal level, interpersonal level, Jewish communal level, theological level, and an international governmental level.

The years after 1948 brought a gradually growing affection and bond between the Jews of North America and the young Israeli state. The growth in that relationship through the 1967 Six Day War is well documented. Equally well documented (for example, in the work of Steven M. Cohen and Charles Liebman) are the growing alienation and misunderstanding that now often characterize the relationship between American Jews and Israelis. What has happened, and what are the causes?

Reconstructionism and Zionism

From its inception, Reconstructionist Judaism has been publicly and enthusiastically Zionist. Ties between the leadership of the Reconstructionist movement and the Labor Zionist movement were highly visible for much of this century. The rhetoric of Mordecai Kaplan about upbuilding the land rang out from the pulpit of his congregation, The Society for the Advancement of Judaism. He wrote on the theme frequently and reinforced his views by significant stays in the Holy Land, including a visiting professorship at Hebrew University from 1937 to 1939.

The early logo of the Reconstructionist movement placed Zion as its center. But to understand what that meant for Kaplan, we need to remind ourselves that Zionism was about the full rebuilding of the Jewish people and Judaism's reinvigoration as a moral and cultural force. It was not simply a question of sovereignty and land. Reconstructionist Zionism was, and to some extent remains, this-worldly messianism. "Zionism" is code for the creation of the Israel—and the Jewish people—of our dreams. The centrality of Zion reflects the spiritual Zionism of Aḥad Ha'Am. Aḥad Ha'Am never expected all of Jewry to live in Israel, but he did expect that a culturally, morally, and spiritually vigorous Jewish community in Israel would become the focus of the Jewish world, fueling not only an extraordinary flowering of Jewish cul-

ture but also providing a compelling moral and spiritual voice.

Thus, placing Zion at the center of the Reconstructionist logo conveyed a dream about the thriving of Jewish peoplehood with Israel at its heart. Israel is theoretically capable of producing an intense form of Jewish culture that grows out of the ancient connection to its land, its ability to reinvigorate the Hebrew language, and the unambivalent development of an Israeli culture that is not secondary to an indigenous majority culture. This phase of Reconstructionist Zionism did not anticipate, however, the degree to which Israel would be westernized or affected by materialistic hedonism, or the degree to which major political and economic problems would overwhelm other Israeli concerns.

Dream and Reality

But indeed the challenge was clear by the 1950s. Kaplan, in his book *A New Zionism* (1955), argues strenuously for tackling head-on the fundamental issues facing Israel lest it grow into just another “levantine state.” By then, Kaplan feared that the moral and religious problems facing the state would result in corruption so deep that it could never be the center for his new Zionism. That fear remains with all of us who share some of Kaplan’s vision.

For example, the existence of a state religion in Israel not only stifles the development of religious pluralism; it has also encouraged disdain on the part of many Israelis for Jewish voices that might address the problems of

our day. The conflict between Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews and the prejudice that exists among different ethnic groups of Jews baffle and frighten us. That Arab villages are funded far more poorly by the government than Jewish villages challenges our sense of fairness and social justice. The struggle for peace in the Middle East is negatively impacted by right-wing religious rhetoric. The political scene in Israel is sometimes tainted by demagoguery and corruption. The culture that has emerged in Israel reflects a materialism that suggests some of America’s worst aspects have been imported to Israel. Thus the Israel of our reality is often in shocking tension with the Zionism of our dreams. Furthermore, Israelis sometimes seem interested in American Jews only for their ability to influence American public policy with regard to economic support of Israel. In the face of all that, many American Jews have simply turned away. They seem to be saying that if Israel cannot immediately inspire and uplift them, they would rather not deal with Israel at all.

In considering the meaning of this shift, we should keep in mind that the positive picture of Israel (David the kibbutznik making the desert bloom and defeating the Arab Goliath) that helped a generation of Jews overcome their self-perception as victims after the Holocaust has not, for most American Jews, been replaced with something positive. The current and more critical image of Israel has a significant negative impact on American Jews’ identification with Jewish peoplehood, in part because negative

reports about Israel are experienced as far more prevalent in the American press than positive stories about Jews. This is one reason why what happens in Israel is vital to American Jews.

On the other side of the equation, it is clear that Israelis have much to say that is negative about American Jewry as well. Israelis rightly point out that most American Jews are woefully ignorant about Judaism and Jewishness. They not only cannot follow a simple conversation in Hebrew; they don't know very much about Jewish or Israeli culture. American Jews are gradually assimilating through the choices they make in their daily lives. American Jewish organizations are often high-handed and demanding in the way that they deal with Israel and Israelis. Little surprise that Israelis become angry and frustrated when American Jews critique them for their materialism. Is it not a case of the pot calling the kettle black? Experiencing the relationship between American Jews and Israel, it is quickly clear that we are dealing with two siblings who are both deeply alienated from each other and deeply drawn toward each other.

A Two-Way Relationship

Perhaps a good way to move beyond this impasse is to remind ourselves of some of the things that we need from Israel. First, and in some ways most important, is the living language of Hebrew. Not only does this connect us in a different way to prayer and text; it also has provided an extraordinary flow of Hebrew literature that interacts with contemporary

culture from around the world and critiques it while expanding Jewish culture. As the *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace after Meals) composed by Rabbi Ira Eisenstein and Emanuel Goldsmith has it, "Jewish culture is alive once more in *Eretz Yisrael*." Furthermore, journeying to Israel brings a powerful emotional response in Jews that may require difficult struggle but nonetheless deepens our sense of what peoplehood is about. We don't always respect or admire every member of our family, but Jews always take family utterly seriously. Traveling the land results in re-encountering Jewish history and memory in a way that can occur nowhere else because this is not only the place of our people's birth. It is also the place from which our formative tales emerge. We need the experience of reconnecting to land and story.

We also want Israel to be an exemplar of the best of Jewish values. This will not occur unless we manage to achieve the level of mutual moral engagement that Kaplan urges in *A New Zionism*. But if Israel can play the role of exemplar, it will have as powerful an effect on the North American Jewish community as the victory in the Six Day War did in capturing Jewish hearts.

We also need the educational institutions of Israel. They are extraordinary repositories for advanced academic Jewish studies at the university level. They also provide wonderful opportunities for in-depth study at the elementary and secondary levels. We have all seen the impact of junior year at Hebrew University or summers

spent in text study. That is why the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College co-sponsors the Liberal Beit Midrash in Jerusalem.² Perhaps most of all, we understand that Israel is the only place where Judaism is acted out in every day and every way, where the encounter between Judaism and contemporary life is full and intense. We have much to learn from an experience in which Jewish civilization is primary.

And Israelis have much to learn from us as well. The American Jewish community has mastered the use of pluralism, democracy, and volunteerism in a way that can have a transformative effect on life in Israel. Our ability to debate moral questions vigorously, however limited it sometimes seems, could allow us to provide a model for solving some of the challenges facing Israel due to political and religious extremism. And we have much to say about the possibilities of adapting Judaism to changing times so that the choice need not be Orthodox theological assumptions or no meaningful Judaism at all. These are areas where increasing numbers of Israelis are struggling, and where they need our partnership.

Building Relationships

How do we go forward from here in light of the frequent and increasing alienation between American Jewry—the strongest Jewish community in the world—and Israel? Part of the answer lies in increased mutual exposure and dialogue. There are many reasons why the RRC has long had the policy of requiring a year of study in Israel for all of our rabbinical students. Hebrew

language acquisition, familiarization with the land of the Bible, and the impact of full immersion in a Jewish society all play a role in making the year invaluable, as does the importance of understanding Israeli politics and the challenges facing the state. But as important is the need for building bridges between the powerful Jewish communities in America and Israel. Rabbinical students form relationships with Israelis that act as a bridge over the gulf between the communities. Many of these relationships last a lifetime.

We need to make it easier for Jewish professional and lay leaders to spend larger blocks of time in Israel. We also need to encourage American Jews to visit, not just to take a whirlwind tour of the sites, but to participate in volunteer and study programs that will bring them in regular contact with Israelis. We particularly need to send our young people for extended stays to Israel—for summers certainly and for a year of study if possible. Such visits should be preceded by substantial and careful orientation programs, and they should be followed by careful debriefing as well. Research has shown that these visits are critical in maximizing the positive impact of the experience.

Just as important, we need to bring Israelis to the United States. They need to have meaningful experiences of the liberal Judaism of our congregations, the thinking of serious Jewish theorists, and interaction with American Jews as they really live. The RRC is attempting to find ways to bring Israelis to Philadelphia for prolonged

periods of study as part of this effort.

Reconstructionism in Israel

We need to help Israelis create a form of Reconstructionist Judaism that reflects their social situation. The ideas of Reconstructionist Judaism are, if anything, more important to Israel than they are to America. But the forms of social organization will necessarily be different. We are based in congregations in North America because the structure of Jewish religion here (i.e., the congregation) is the one we have learned from the larger American society, a structure that helps us fit into the larger society. In Israel, where reliance on professional teachers may be much less important (in part because there is no language barrier in studying Hebrew texts) small study groups and *havurot* may be a much more cost-effective and socially acceptable large-scale means of Jewish social organization than in the United States. We need to be supplying resources in Hebrew for such study groups and to be providing the means to help them organize. The goal should not be to duplicate the North American Reconstructionist movement in Israel but to help an indigenous Israeli movement utilize the same ideas for developing a network that works for them. This Israeli movement will be an ideal dialogue partner for North American Reconstructionists.

We need to focus our fiscal giving not only on building up a Reconstructionist presence in Israel but also on strengthening democracy and pluralism. It is clear that some people in the

American Jewish community have no qualms about strengthening religious fundamentalism and right-wing fanaticism in Israel. We must respond by strengthening organizations committed to civil rights and pluralism.

For many years the American Jews who lobbied for a peace initiative when the Israeli government was not yet interested were attacked as self-hating, destructive, and unpatriotic. They were in a position not unlike the early American opponents of the Vietnam War. In retrospect it is clear that resistance to the Vietnam War reflected both high ideals and patriotism. In this context the attacks on the authenticity of liberals and progressives by Israeli and American Jewish politicians and religious leaders seem dangerous and misguided. The future of Israel may depend on our support for those in Israel who reflect our values.

Toward a New Zionism

Where do we go from here? We have a shared fate, we Jews in America and our brothers and sisters in Israel. What we do politically, morally, and religiously affects us both psychically and in terms of the eyes of the rest of the world.

Several times each day Israel comes up in our prayers. We pray for the "rebuilding of Jerusalem." We pray for "peace in Israel." We pray for "restoration of Zion." Our Jewish consciousness cannot remain a Jewish consciousness if we exclude Israel from our thoughts and deeds. How do we manage this? Kaplan's Zion—the messianic perfection of the world and

the re-invigoration of the Jewish people—is still at our center. The real Israel, with its full vigor and its flaws, cannot be at the center in the same way. Rather, like Babylonia, we realize that the weather and social situation are different.

Equally important, the American Jewish community, even without the rest of the Diaspora, is greater than Israel in terms of numbers and wealth, and close to its equal in terms of academic Jewish scholarship. American Jews—like the Sadducees of old—respond powerfully to the officials and trappings of the Jewish State, but on key issues we more strongly than ever choose to follow our own direction. Nevertheless, we must remain in dialogue with the real Israel as an equal partner. And both American Jewry and Israel need frequent reminding that our shared goal is building the Zion of our dreams.

Thus we must move toward forging a more mature long-term relationship between the two largest contemporary Jewries. This will require mutual listening, openness to mutual criticism, and empathy for the differences between us. If we develop that kind of mature relationship based on hard work and mutual caring, then at last we may exceed Herzl's dictum about Zionism: if we will it, it will become more than a dream.

1. The letter was from Peretz Rodman, a scholar in Jerusalem. He referred me to several articles by Daniel Lasker. The blessing is found on pp. 110/111, and 228/229, and 304/305.

2. The Liberal Beit Midrash for English speakers opened in 1997 with the co-sponsorship of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, and Leo Baeck College. It meets on the Bet Shmuel campus of the WUPJ in Jerusalem.

American Jewish Public Affairs and Israel: Looking Back, Looking Ahead

BY MARTIN J. RAFFEL

Looking Back: Israel Emerges As Central Communal Concern

Prior to 1967, the organized American Jewish community's public affairs involvement with Israel was relatively limited. The battle against anti-Semitism and all forms of discrimination, as well as the struggle for civil rights topped the agenda. Nevertheless, there were systematic efforts being undertaken by the community to combat both Arab propaganda in the United States and the Arab economic boycott against Israel. Two important organizations that address Israel-related issues were established in the 1950s: the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (Presidents Conference).

The Six Day War in 1967, which was widely viewed as a struggle for Israel's survival, transformed American Jewish public affairs and galvanized American Jewry as no issue before or since. Building U.S. support for Israel—to counter Arab military, economic, and political aggression—became a major focus of attention. The perception of Israel's vulnerability was reinforced by the terrible losses suffered in the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

The Survival Agenda

The 1967 conflict resulted in Israel capturing not only the Sinai and Golan Heights, but also the densely populated West Bank and Gaza Strip as well as East Jerusalem. Thus, Israel began to administer the affairs of a large Palestinian population (today numbering about two million) who had been living under Egyptian and

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Jordanian rule. This new reality created the political, strategic, and moral dilemmas which lie at the heart of today's peace process.

As it had done since the founding of the state, the Labor Party led Israel's governments from 1967 to 1977. These governments, which were committed to the principle of territorial compromise, were strongly supported by most American Jews. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), designated "official representative of the Palestinian people" by the Arab world, was engaged in horrific acts of terrorism against Jews in Israel and elsewhere in the world. Alternative Palestinian peace partners did not exist. As a result, the 1967–77 time frame was characterized by overwhelming consensus in the Jewish community in support of the Israeli government and its positions.

At the same time, the period following the Six Day War witnessed the first movement of Jewish settlers—including the religiously-motivated Gush Emunim—into the areas captured during that conflict. The West Bank, for these Israelis, was Judea and Samaria, an integral part of the Jewish people's ancient homeland. In the eyes of some Israelis, this phenomenon only served to burden an already complicated and difficult situation, and to make prospects for peace with the Arabs even more remote. The emergence of a fledgling settlers movement received relatively little attention in the U.S., but it did generate opposition from a small, but vocal segment of the Jewish left. Moreover, some Christian leaders, especially from the

liberal Protestant churches, began to espouse positions sharply critical of Israeli policy. The silence of these same leaders leading up to the Six Day War was deeply troubling to American Jews who had worked with them in the past in various social justice settings.

Possibility of Peace

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's dramatic journey to Israel in 1977 persuaded most Israelis and American Jews that perhaps acceptance by the Arab world was possible after all. What heretofore was a public affairs agenda dedicated almost exclusively to Israel's struggle for survival changed abruptly. Interpreting and supporting a realistic peace process—if restricted at this stage to Egypt—became another crucial dimension of Jewish public affairs engagement. It was evident that the U.S. had to play a key role in assisting the parties to reach an agreement. Therefore, in addition to serving as Israel's principal supporter, the U.S. would need to be a credible mediator of the Arab-Israeli dispute. This meant periodic disagreements, mostly in private but sometimes in public, with Israeli policies and approaches. President Jimmy Carter, of course, had an enormous impact on the ultimate success of the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations at Camp David. Despite the positive outcome, many in the Jewish community had a sense of unease with what they perceived to be undue American pressure on Israel.

The breakthrough with Egypt was taking place as a Likud-led govern-

ment assumed the reigns of power in Israel for the first time. This government, headed by Prime Minister Menachem Begin, successfully concluded the negotiations with Egypt. But it also dramatically accelerated the establishment of new Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The government asserted the geopolitical need and right to retain all of these areas not only to insure Israel's security but for historical and religious reasons as well.

The Peace Process Stagnates

The peace process then stagnated for an extended period of time and Egypt entered a period of strain with the rest of the Arab world because of its treaty with Israel. Middle East politics played out as one of the principal battlegrounds of the Cold War, with the Soviet Union serving as patron to the Arab states and the PLO. Differences in Israel and within the American Jewish community over the question of territorial compromise flared periodically. However, such differences seemed somewhat less pressing since there did not appear to Israel to be any credible Arab partner with whom to negotiate, and the organized Jewish community largely supported this position.

The Israeli government's policy of encouraging Jews to move into the administered territories generated contentious debate. Opponents of the policy asserted that it undermined efforts to get the Arab parties to the negotiating table and would make a peace agreement more difficult to achieve once they came. While many

American Jews felt uncomfortable about settlements, particularly as they were consistently a point of contention with U.S. administrations, the community generally accepted the argument that they should not be characterized as a serious obstacle to peace. After all, many American Jews reasoned, settlements in the Sinai had not stood in the way of an agreement between Israel and Egypt. It is worth recalling, however, that all of those Jewish settlements, including the town of Yamit, had to be removed by Israel in order to achieve that agreement. The status of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is one of the issues to be resolved in permanent status negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, the elected body which governed the internal affairs of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. There is a consensus in Israel, which is supported by the American Jewish community, that every effort should be made to include as many settlers as possible within Israel's final borders.

Serious Challenges for the Jewish Community

In contrast to the 1967 and 1973 wars, which were recognized as necessary struggles for survival, the 1982 Lebanon War was not supported by segments of Israeli society and of the American Jewish community. The massive Israeli bombing in Beirut and the Sabra and Shatilla massacres committed by Christian forces allied with Israel were troubling to many. The Jewish communal consensus regarding

Israel was tested as never before. The Intifada, which erupted throughout the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in late 1987, with its disturbing scenes of the Israeli army suppressing a massive civilian insurrection, presented serious interpretive challenges to Jewish public affairs agencies. Israel was subjected to harsh criticism in the media, with reportage and editorial comment often devoid of context and historical perspective. The organized Jewish community found itself torn between the natural impulse to defend Israel and its own questioning about the morality of Israel's handling of the situation. In the end, what dominated the internal debate, and the messages conveyed to the general community, was the realization that only a negotiated political agreement could resolve the underlying issues that led to this explosion of violence. Again the perceived absence of an acceptable negotiating partner—especially after Jordan's King Hussein renounced any claim to the West Bank in the summer of 1988—tended to mitigate the impact of the Intifada on the Jewish community.

Dramatic Developments in the Peace Process

That equation changed fundamentally with the end of the Cold War and the defeat of Iraq's Saddam Hussein in Operation Desert Storm. These developments created conditions ripe for a renewed peace effort. The 1991 Madrid peace conference, engineered by the Bush administration, was a watershed event. For the first time, Israel entered into direct, face-to-face

negotiations with Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinians.

The September 1993 signing of the Declaration of Principles (known as the Oslo Accords) between Israel and the PLO, grounded in the mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestinian people, was in some ways an even more historic breakthrough. The Israeli-Palestinian agreement paved the way for a formal peace treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994. These events, occurring in rapid succession, led to a growing perception in the Jewish community that the Israeli "survival agenda," which had dominated the Jewish community's public affairs work since 1967, was becoming obsolete. Many expressed confidence that this process inevitably would lead to normalization of Israel's relations with its neighbors. Imbued with optimism about the future, the Jewish community began to think about the challenge of relating to Israel in an era of peace.

The Breakdown of Consensus

This dynamic peace process, however, also caused many of the traditional political differences within the community to rise more forcefully to the surface. There were real peace partners now, and discussions about the future of the territories Israel captured in the Six Day War, including the status of Jerusalem, were no longer mere academic exercises. Not surprisingly, those American Jewish groups with a particular political point of view—either from the left or the right—intensified their efforts to influence public debate on these

issues. The ultimate targets of these activities were the White House and the Congress. Not surprisingly, members of Congress and other leaders in the general community often expressed confusion about the Jewish community's positions on the peace process.

Furthermore, those who were uncomfortable with the Oslo process—both Israeli leaders associated with the then opposition Likud Party and right-wing Jewish activists—openly sought to frustrate the Israeli government's peace agenda on Capitol Hill. They encouraged members of Congress to reject U.S. financial aid to the Palestinian Authority. In such an environment there was greater need for those organizations that reflect Jewish communal consensus—such as the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), the organized Jewish community's national coordinating body for the multi-issue public affairs agenda, the Presidents Conference, and AIPAC—to be more active and visible. In December 1995, the three groups organized a "National Peace Process Advocacy Day" in Washington to dramatize the community's support of Oslo to members of Congress.

Likud Returns to Power

In 1996, Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu, who had been among the strongest critics of the Oslo process, became the first directly elected Prime Minister in Israel's history. A number of crises have taken place during the first eighteen months of his administration, including armed confrontations between Israeli

soldiers and Palestinian police. Those events occurred following Israel's opening of an ancient tunnel in Jerusalem's Old City.

At the same time, there have been advances as well, particularly an agreement with the Palestinians on Israel's redeployment in the city of Hebron. The Netanyahu government has agreed in principle to a further redeployment, subject to full Palestinian Authority compliance with its obligations under Oslo, and also has urged acceleration of the permanent status negotiations.

Israel's insistence on reciprocity is understood and widely supported by the organized Jewish community. Critics of the Prime Minister have expressed concern about the depth of his commitment to fulfilling an agreement he had so vigorously condemned before. The protracted stagnation of the peace process—to the extent Netanyahu is seen as contributing to that stagnation—could result in strained U.S.-Israel relations and to erosion in American Jewish support for the Israeli government. Only time will tell whether Netanyahu will lead Israel to a successful completion of the historic process commenced in Madrid.

Importance of Consensus

The rationale for seeking and nurturing consensus warrants clarification. As a rule, U.S. policy toward Israel and the Middle East is not determined on the basis of the Jewish community's positions and attitudes. The President, Secretary of State, and other foreign policy officials, as well as

the Congress, can be presumed to act on the basis of their perception of American national interests. However, there is no question that the community's views are weighed seriously by decision-makers in Washington. Of course, the positions with the greatest impact are those representing the broadest communal consensus.

An illustration of this point was Israel's request in the early 1990s for U.S. loan guarantees to assist in absorbing the wave of immigrants arriving from the former Soviet Union. While there was considerable opposition in the Congress toward Israel's settlements policy, which was shared by a significant portion of the American Jewish community, there also was strong communal resistance to the administration's attempted use of the loan guarantees as leverage to change Israel's policy. This agreement on the issue of linkage enabled the community to persuade an overwhelming number of members of Congress to support the guarantees despite the administration's posture.

The Jewish community has long opposed the conditioning of U.S. diplomatic, military, or economic assistance to Israel, including foreign aid, on Israel's willingness to follow U.S. policy requests. Regardless of differences that currently exist, or which may emerge in the future as negotiations proceed, that principle is likely to remain firm.

Rise of American Jewish Influence

The Israeli survival agenda has served as a powerful tool for bringing

Jews into the American political process and for building their identification with the organized Jewish community. Support for Israel, according to Dr. Jonathan Woocher, director of the Jewish Educational Service of North America (JESNA), is an important component of American Jewry's "civil religion." Unquestionably, Israel-related public affairs involvement helped establish the Jewish community as a serious political force. AIPAC was recently rated by *Fortune* magazine as the second most influential lobby in Washington, D.C. The emergence of many well-funded Israel-oriented political action committees (PACs) founded in the 1970s and '80s also contributed to the reality and perception of Jewish power.

This formidable political clout—which is often exaggerated by foreign leaders who line up for meetings with Jewish organizational officials during visits to the U.S.—has proven to be useful in other areas as well. It is highly unlikely, for example, that Switzerland and other countries that profited from the assets of Holocaust victims would be as forthcoming were it not for the intervention of the American Jewish community.

At the same time, this influence—and the perception of influence—built around the issue of Israel, does not come without a price. It has tended to distort Washington's and the public's view of the nature of Jewish public affairs commitments. The perception is widespread that only Israel really matters to the Jewish community. The fact is that the community still devotes considerable

attention to an array of domestic and other international concerns. In addition, some observers argue that Israel-related political activism has retarded the development of American Jewish religious and cultural identity. However, some Jews who initially entered the organized Jewish community through the public affairs door may have gone on to acquire religious and other types of communal associations as well.

It also is important to be realistic about the limits of Jewish power. The loan guarantee episode, referred to previously, instructs that it is unwise to believe that American presidents can be easily pressured by the Congress, especially in regard to foreign policy issues. Despite the overwhelming congressional support of Israel's request for humanitarian assistance, it took the election of a Labor-led Israeli government in 1992, which instituted a change in settlements policy, finally to win President Bush's support for the guarantees. Similarly, in 1981, President Ronald Reagan managed to overcome strenuous congressional and Jewish community opposition to the U.S. sale of AWACs surveillance planes to Saudi Arabia. While the campaign against the AWACs sale was unsuccessful, this massive effort bolstered the image of the Jewish community as a major player in Washington and gave great institutional impetus to AIPAC.

Ongoing Efforts on Behalf of Israel

The vigorous policy debates that

take place from time to time within the Jewish community, which are necessary exercises in the shaping of consensus, receive much attention from the Anglo-Jewish press and the general media. As a consequence, the important ongoing work being done by American Jewish public affairs agencies tends to be overlooked. These efforts include supporting U.S. economic and military assistance to Israel, developing educational programs to enable Jewish activists to be more effective pro-Israel advocates, sponsoring missions to Israel and providing other learning opportunities for leaders in the general community, countering inaccurate and imbalanced material in the media, fighting the Arab economic boycott against Israel, and developing constitutionally-sound federal and state laws that contribute to the battle against terrorism.

Public affairs activity also has centered on the United Nations, which played a critical role in Israel's early years. The 1947 Partition Plan calling for a Jewish state and an Arab state in British Mandatory Palestine laid the foundation, and Israel's acceptance as a member state following its declaration of independence in May 1948 provided international legitimacy. Since then, the world body was transformed, largely through Arab and Soviet influence, into a stridently anti-Israel and even anti-Semitic forum. The nadir was reached in 1975 when the General Assembly adopted a resolution equating Zionism with racism. In recent years, with the Jewish community playing an active advocacy role, the UN repealed the repugnant

Zionism resolution and has begun to take a somewhat more balanced approach to Middle East issues. Despite this positive trend, Israel, because it does not belong to any of the UN's regional groupings, remains the only member state excluded from full participation in the Security Council and other important UN bodies. The organized Jewish community has been supporting Israel's efforts, reinforced by U.S. diplomacy, to gain admission to the Western European and Others Group (WEOG).

Looking Ahead: The Survival Agenda Continues

The future of the Jewish community's Israel-related public affairs activity depends on the course of events in the region and the world, as was the case during Israel's first fifty years of existence. Unfortunately, interesting discussions about the Jewish community's relationship with an Israel at peace may be premature. There are many possible scenarios.

Among the more optimistic visions is that, building on the treaties already signed with Egypt and Jordan, Israel concludes agreements in the next 3-5 years with the Palestinians, Syria, and Lebanon. With the exception of a number of rogue states, like Iraq and Libya, the rest of the Arab world is likely to follow suit. These formal treaties gradually lead to a reconciliation between Israel and most of the Arab world. This process will be lengthy, judging by the enduring resistance to Israel's legitimacy on the part of intellectual and professional elites

in Egypt and Jordan. The forces of extremism are contained, and the region generally moves in the direction of greater democracy, stability, and sustained economic growth.

Alternatively, the peace process could stall indefinitely. Exploiting conditions of poverty and the corruption of traditional Arab regimes, Islamic radicals expand their influence. The new "moderate" leadership in Iran does not significantly alter that country's policies. Hamas emerges as the dominant force in the Palestinian community and many of the Arab states, including Egypt and Jordan, increasingly are affected by Islamic fundamentalist movements. These trends, coupled with the progressive proliferation of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons in the region, threaten Israel's security. The development of such a scenario is not out of the realm of possibility.

How developments play out in the Middle East is significantly influenced by U.S. leadership. The U.S., with the support of the organized Jewish community, will be called upon to continue pressing Israel and the Arab parties—without seeking to impose solutions—to make progress in their negotiations. Beyond the peace process, the international community must be mobilized to encourage democracy and political moderation in the Arab world, and to find mechanisms for discouraging radical Islamic fundamentalism and the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction. This challenge, even if the more positive scenario begins to unfold, will occupy American Jewish

public affairs agencies for many years to come. AIPAC traditionally has stressed securing U.S. foreign aid to Israel and fighting U.S. weapons sales to Arab states. In recent years, the organization has begun to shift its focus toward measures intended to contain the threat posed by Iran. It was instrumental in drafting legislation which imposes American economic sanctions against countries and companies assisting Iran in missile technology and economic development.

Growing Interest in Israeli Domestic Issues

As the external threats facing Israel diminish (assuming they do), the Jewish community is likely to take more interest in domestic Israeli issues, particularly those that have an impact on the nexus between religion and state. The current controversy surrounding proposed conversion legislation in Israel suggests that American Jews may be ready to play a more active and sustained role in this area.

The relationship between Israeli Jews and Israel's approximately one million Arab citizens has been the subject of growing interest among American Jewish public affairs agencies and specialized organizations such as The Abraham Fund. It can be expected that this issue will receive greater attention in Israel and among American Jews, who can identify with challenges facing a minority group living within a majority religious/cultural environment.

In response to concern being

expressed in Israel about absorption problems facing Ethiopian immigrants, particularly in the area of education, the organized Jewish community, under the leadership of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, has established a coalition to respond to this issue. A number of public affairs agencies, including the Anti-Defamation League and the Religious Action Center of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, as well as the JCPA and the Presidents Conference, have advocated to the Israeli government in support of additional programs and resources for the Ethiopian community. A separate "professionals" coalition in Israel was established to monitor the Israeli government's response and to develop concrete initiatives that will effectively address the educational challenges confronting Ethiopian children. This effort provides a model that could be utilized by the Jewish community in responding to other domestic Israeli issues as well, such as Jewish-Arab coexistence, civil liberties, women's concerns, the environment, etc.

Israeli Resources Respond to American Concerns

In addition, American Jewish public affairs activists may look increasingly to Israel as a source of ideas for dealing with domestic challenges confronting this country. The Partnership 2000 program, sponsored by National UJA and implemented by local Jewish federations across the country, is promoting people-to-people exchanges in

a broad range of areas including those relevant to the Jewish community's public affairs agenda. Dr. Mitchell G. Bard, executive director of the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, has produced a series of books describing how U.S.-Israel cooperation can benefit America in various fields, including education, biotechnology, and care of the elderly. These "shared values initiatives," as Bard calls them, are tailor made for national and local community relations agencies. These agencies' ongoing relationships with various religious and ethnic groups, local school boards, as well as state and local elected officials would enable them to develop programs that could have a significant impact on issues at the grass roots.

The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) has been a pioneer in this regard by importing to the U.S. and other countries the successful Israeli Home Instruction Program for Pre-School Youngsters (HIPPY), which trains mothers from low socioeconomic backgrounds on how to enrich their children's pre-school experience. Bill Clinton, while governor of Arkansas, was one of the first U.S. officials to adopt the NCJW-sponsored program.

In the international arena, the Israeli-American partnership has had an impressive track record of achievement in aiding Jewish communities in distress—including support in the 1970s and '80s for Jewish Refuseniks struggling to leave the Soviet Union for freedom in Israel and the West, and the rescue of the Ethiopian Jewish community in Operations Moses and

Solomon. But international initiatives need not be limited to narrow Jewish interests. For example, in the spirit of *tikkun olam*, American Jewish activists could come together with Israeli counterparts to pursue development projects in third world countries.

Challenge for the 21st Century

As the 20th century draws to a close, Israel is involved in a difficult and complex peace process which, under the best of circumstances, will take years to complete. But Israel's long cherished dream of peace with the Arab world appears to be within reach, and American Jews will continue to be involved in efforts to advance this objective. However, peacemaking, it seems, has failed to stimulate the same level of grass roots response in the Jewish community as the survival agenda. Moreover, it has proven to be a sharply polarizing factor which at times has degenerated into strident intracommunal rhetoric and even violence. In Israel, some assert, this polarization contributed to an environment that led to the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The next generation of American Jewish activists are likely to seek out new avenues for involvement. For them, a working partnership with like-minded Israelis to shape a modern, technologically advanced, democratic, and pluralistic Jewish state may well emerge as the dominant Israel-related public affairs enterprise of the 21st century.

These public affairs ties also must be seen against the backdrop of trends

generally affecting American Jewish-Israel relations. With the exception of the Orthodox community, this includes, among American Jews, a continuing process of assimilation and intermarriage as well as a diminishing attachment to Israel. On the other side, there are young Israeli Jews who generally feel less linked to their Jewish roots and to the Diaspora. The vastly different reactions to the conversion controversy—with most Israe-

lis failing to understand the passionate response this issue has aroused among American Jews—is symptomatic of the growing gulf between these communities. Utilizing our shared Jewish heritage as the foundation, Israeli and American Jews will be challenged to find creative new ways to build a strong, mutually satisfying relationship during the next fifty years and beyond.

Vintage Perspectives

A retrospective from the pages of early volumes of our journal addressing the topics and themes of current issues



What follows is the lead editorial in *The Reconstructionist*, 28 May, 1948 (Volume 14, Number 8). No changes have been made with regard to gender or political perspective in order to present the editorial as a document of its time. Original punctuation and italics have been preserved.

At the beginning of this issue (p. 2) is a reproduction of the cover of that same issue. Readers with a keen eye will note that the center of the Reconstructionist seal is labeled "Palestine" in English and "Eretz Yisrael" in Hebrew. That notation was changed in the Fall of 1948 to "Eretz Yisrael" in both Hebrew and English, and later on "Eretz Yisrael" was replaced by the term "Zion."



The Miracle Has Happened

"We hereby proclaim the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine, to be called Israel....

"The state of Israel will promote the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; will be based on precepts of liberty, justice and peace taught by the Hebrew prophets; will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens without distinction of race, creed or sex; will guarantee full freedom of conscience, worship, education and culture; will safeguard the sanctity and inviolability of shrines and holy places of all religions; and will dedicate itself to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations....

"We call upon the Arab inhabitants

of the state of Israel to return to the ways of peace and play their part in the development of the state, with full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its bodies and institutions, provisional or permanent.

"We offer peace and amity to all neighboring states and their peoples....The state of Israel is ready to contribute its full share to the peaceful progress and reconstitution of the Middle East. *Our call goes out to the Jewish people all over the world to rally to our side in the task of immigration and development and to stand by us in the great struggle for the fulfillment of the dream of generations—the redemption of Israel.*"

"The redemption of Israel"—no

phrase could more happily express the historic significance of the moment of the birth of the new Jewish state. In the spiritual exultation with which Jews everywhere greeted the news of the declaration of Israel's independence and of its recognition by the United States, one sensed an awareness of the transcendent importance of the historic occasion. Something more than a mere change in political situation had taken place. Our generation has had the *zekhut* to witness and bear testimony to a triumphant act of faith, to the successful assertion of the spiritual forces making for freedom, justice and peace in the face of apparently insuperable obstacles.

Who would have believed possible fifty years ago what has happened today? On what scientific sociological laws could one have then foreseen that the Jews would, in the year 1948, reconstitute their national state in the homeland from which they had been exiled almost 19 centuries ago? True, a few visionaries like Herzl and his colleagues might have dreamt such a dream, but any sensible person, any rational intelligence that did not indulge in wishful thinking, could have given a thousand reasons to prove that the dream would never be realized. That a people deprived of its land for almost two millennia, a people scattered, maligned and reviled by multitudes among whom they lived, a people whose significant history the world thought had ended with the establishment of Christianity, leaving it a mere ghost of a nation, a people that had largely come to doubt its own right to a collective existence—that

such a people could resettle its desolate land, restore fertility to its soil, establish rural and urban communities, revive its ancient language and civilization, and finally achieve independent statehood in the midst of peoples bent on thwarting that consummation—such an achievement partakes of the miraculous. It is an evidence that men can draw on a Divine Power to make dreams come true if those dreams conform to the law of righteousness that expresses His transcendent purpose in the evolution of human society. That is why Jews gave expression to their gratitude in the words of the ancient *berakhah*, thanking God *shehehyanu, vekiyemanu, vehiggiyanu lazman hazeh*, for having “kept us in life and sustained us and enabled us to reach this moment.”

If comments in the press and on the radio are any indications, the non-Jewish world also seems to have sensed that something extraordinary was being enacted before their eyes, something of far greater import than the mere struggle of a small country for liberation from foreign domination. If such miracles of redemption can take place, if such dry bones can live again, who knows what further wonders God can work? The moral forces that have been all but stifled by the suffocating atmosphere of cynicism and materialism created by the power politicians can now rally and breathe a little more freely.

Perhaps history, in one of its great cycles, is about to repeat itself. As in the first century B.C.E., so again today, Palestine is the center of the

world's attention. Now as then a civilization saddened and disillusioned with the results of war and economic and military imperialism has its gaze fixed in wonder and a degree of expectancy on Zion. And for much the same reason, for again there has been demonstrated in the land and by the descendants of the same people a supreme faith in the possibility of redemption. Who knows? Perhaps the world will take new courage and faith from the miracle of Israel's resurrection as a nation in our day. Perhaps the United Nations will see in it a token of redemption for humanity, a *besarah tovah*, an evangel (the Greek translation of that Hebrew phrase meaning "glad tidings"), and perhaps, it will now address itself with new faith and confidence to the holy task to which it is dedicated, of establishing peace, justice and cooperation among the peoples of the world.

Let us then rejoice, but, in the spirit of the psalmist's admonition, "Let us rejoice with trembling." We have won a great victory, but not the final victory. We have won the recognition of the right of our people to a collective existence and a free and independent national home. But the Arab world, backed by evil predatory interests elsewhere, is still bent on destroying all that we have built. Much remains for us to do. We know now that the apparently impossible can come to pass because nothing is "too wonderful for God." But we must expose ourselves to His redeeming power by willing our own redemption from the *galut* psychology. We must respond to

the final appeal of the Declaration of Independence of Israel by rallying to the support of the Yishuv in its struggle for the "redemption of Israel."

Henceforth the Yishuv is politically on its own. We American Jews have no part in its political decisions and are not committed in advance to its political policies. But we and the Yishuv are still parts of the same people bound together by indissoluble cultural and spiritual ties which we must do all in our power to strengthen. There must be an end to the nonsense that only a common creed or a common cult binds Jews together and that we have no more interest in the state of Israel than in any other "foreign" states. We have the immediate task of seeing that our country gives substance to its recognition of the Jewish state by making possible the defense of that state against the powers that menace it, and by taking the lead in getting the United Nations to apply sanctions against the aggressor Arab states. We must oversubscribe the United Jewish Appeal. We must back Haganah in every way possible. We must make educational use of the valor, heroism and devotion to ideals of social justice displayed by the Yishuv, in order to produce a generation of American Jews of equal spiritual stature. All this American Jewry must do in order to merit the thrill of joy that we have already experienced in the birth of the new Jewish state and to share in the redemption of Israel which the Jewish state is designed to effect.

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