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מצפה

HANNATON

From Disconnect to Reconnect

The Relationship Between Israel and American Jews at 75

MITZPE
The Journal of
the Hannaton Educational Center

Issue 6, April 2023 (Nisan 5783)

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The Relationship Between
Israel and American Jews at 75

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The Hannaton Educational Center publishes a bi-annual journal to generate vibrant spiritual and intellectual discourse relevant to contemporary Jewish life. In Hebrew, ***Mitzpe*** means a high place from which one can look into the distance. We chose this name for our journal because it aims to merge the perspectives of a distant observer with one rooted in the realities on the ground.

MITZPE focuses on diversity within Jewish life and humanistic and Zionist values, which reflect our times in the spirit of the Hannaton Educational Center.

MITZPE is also an acronym for Leadership, Zionism, Pluralism, and Humanism – the cornerstones of the Hannaton Educational Center, from which we seek to build layer upon layer into a home that inspires hope in the presence of our complex lives and for the future.

The journal is published both in physical copies and digitally.

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Editor's Note

Issue 6
מִצְפֶּה
MITZPE

There are those who liken the connection between the two largest Jewish centers today to a romantic relationship. Some compare these two centers to two homes, while others are reminded of the ancient centers of Jewish life – the Land of Israel and Babylon. And some see Israeli and American Jewry as linked by a delicate thread that now threatens to rupture.

In Israel, there are several ever-relevant issues that touch on the Jewish people as a whole: the Western Wall compromise, the cancellation of the 'grandchild clause' of the Law of Return, funding for liberal Jewish movements, and so forth. Should Israel be making decisions about these issues alone? What role must the Jewish state play vis-a-vis American Jewry? What is the role of American Jewry at this moment in our shared history?

We've chosen to dedicate the current issue of our journal to these questions. We see it as vital to hear both Israeli and American voices. Therefore, our contributors to this issue hail from both Israel and the United States, and the issue will be released in both Hebrew and English.

Among the various points of view presented here, we can point to several differences. American Jews, it appears, see the political lens, including their political criticism of Israel and its leadership, as inseparable from their relationship with Israel and Zionism. By contrast, the Israeli contributors to this issue see other important subjects as central to their relationship with American Jewry: Jewish education, Jewish pluralism, the problem of assimilation, and, generally speaking, the ability to inhabit a complex reality that brings together seeming ideological contradictions.

However, what many of these articles have in common is a call for real, honest, continuous dialogue – dialogue in which it is permitted and even encouraged to criticize, share the things that trouble us, and push toward shared solutions.

At this time of the year we have to choose the story we will pass on – Vehigadita L'Bincha – "You shall tell your son", the Passover Haggadah commands us. We hope that we will be able to maintain the common story and that we will continue to weave it together. We hope that reading this issue will bring us closer, from disconnection - to connection.

Nira Nachaliel
Coordinator for Pedagogy and Writing
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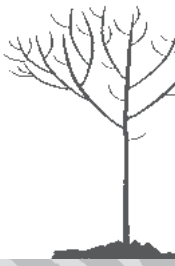


Antisemitism and a Proud, Shared Commitment

What Connects Us?

Arnold M. Eisen

Two thoughts about the complex relationship between Israel and the Diaspora came to mind as I sat in shul this Rosh Hashana

The first was that the State of Israel was mentioned only twice in the course of the very long service: in the twin prayers for the welfare of Israeli and American soldiers, both recited in my congregation in Hebrew; and in the (Hebrew) "Prayer for the State of Israel" that, as always, was recited along with the (English) "Prayer for Our Country." References to the Land of Israel and/or the holy city of Jerusalem were frequent. But inside the time and space of the Rosh Hashana tefillah, it was as if the modern State of Israel did not exist. This is not unusual on my side of the Israel-American Diaspora divide.

My second reflection – perhaps a partial explanation for the first – was that, outside the time and space of that tefillah, Judaism did not exist. Traffic flowed as it always does on the streets of New York. Mail got delivered as it does every day except on Sunday. Lawns were noisily mowed. Busses ran according to weekday schedules. It would be different in the State of Israel, I knew, and not only because the country observes a holiday schedule on Rosh Hashana. Israelis, whether "religious" or "secular," have a strong sense that they are playing a part in the making of Jewish history. Their personal fate is bound tightly to the Jewish story; the future of their family cannot be separated from that of their people. When sirens sound in Sderot or Tel Aviv, American Jews who care about Israel are concerned, but we do not run for cover. The Hebrew prayers that we American Jews say in synagogue – for the most part, the same prayers said in Israeli synagogues – read differently here because Hebrew is neither the language we speak every day nor the language in which we dream. The relation between those who pray and their prayers is altered. So is the relation between

Prof. Arnold M. Eisen is a Chancellor Emeritus at The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.

American Jews and Judaism. We have to reach out for connection to an identity that in Israel comes with the territory. Those of us who work hard at sustaining a close connection to Judaism and to Israel are defying the odds that come with being a relatively small minority within the very small minority of Americans who are Jews.

The "disconnect" between the majority of American Jews and the majority of Israelis – documented in numerous surveys – is therefore not surprising. Each "side" knows so little about the other! Indeed, the great majority of American Jews know little about Judaism, Jewish history, or the contemporary Jewish situation. Many are happy to visit Jewish synagogues and neighborhoods when traveling abroad, and about half, at last count, have visited Israel, but they generally evince no sustained curiosity about the Judaism(s) and the Jewish communities that animated those sites in the past or do so today. Most American Jews do not read or speak Hebrew; nor do they read Hebrew literature in translation, seek out Israeli films or follow Israeli news closely on the web. Israelis who are fluent in English have an advantage in this respect, and those who do not know English can easily access American Jewish culture. The political and societal realities on both "sides" are complex and rapidly changing, making them hard to grasp even for insiders, let alone from afar. It is not surprising that so few make the effort to overcome that distance. And we all have so much else on our minds at the moment: pandemic, climate change, ongoing poverty, refugees in the tens of millions, growing threats to democracy.

The great majority of American Jews know little about Judaism, Jewish history, or the contemporary Jewish situation

What then gives reason for hope of reconnection between Israeli and American Jews. Rising antisemitism, for one thing. Hatred by other groups may being Jews closer to one another. More and more American Jews see antisemitism as a significant threat to their community, and increasing numbers feel personally threatened by it. They understand that violent attacks on American synagogues are related to violent attacks on the "Jewish State." The open hostility of white nationalists toward Jews is evident for any Jew with eyes to see. I don't think that we can rely on antisemitism to slow the process of assimilation or return wandering Jews to identification with the Jewish people. Antisemitism may send such Jews in the opposite direction, or give them added reason to keep their heads down when Jews are counted. One cannot know for certain – and I don't want Jews in any case to choose Judaism because antisemites have singled them out for opprobrium. There are so many other and better reasons for doing so.

Pride, for one. Survey data show that the great majority of Jews in America are proud to be Jews – proud of our history, proud of our people's contemporary achievements in America as well as in Israel, proud of the values of justice and compassion for which we are known. This is an important basis for efforts to renew connection, and offers hope that American Jews are open to learning more about the people and the tradition with which they are happy to identify. Significant majorities of American Jews also believe that Jews are obligated to remember the Holocaust. This commitment too can serve as the basis for learning the stories of the individuals and communities who fell victim to the Nazi onslaughts – and about the communities that have been rebuilt and are now thriving in America, in Israel, and in the rest of

the Jewish world. Some Jews, no doubt, have decided that, in the shadow of the Holocaust, there is no point in being Jewish and certainly none in religious belief or observance. Millions of other Jews, however both in America and in Israel, share commitment to the major tenet of "Jewish civil religion:" *am Yisrael chai*. The Jewish people must live: in Israel and outside of Israel; making vital contributions to the societies and nations of which we are a part but also remaining distinctive in our history, customs, and values.

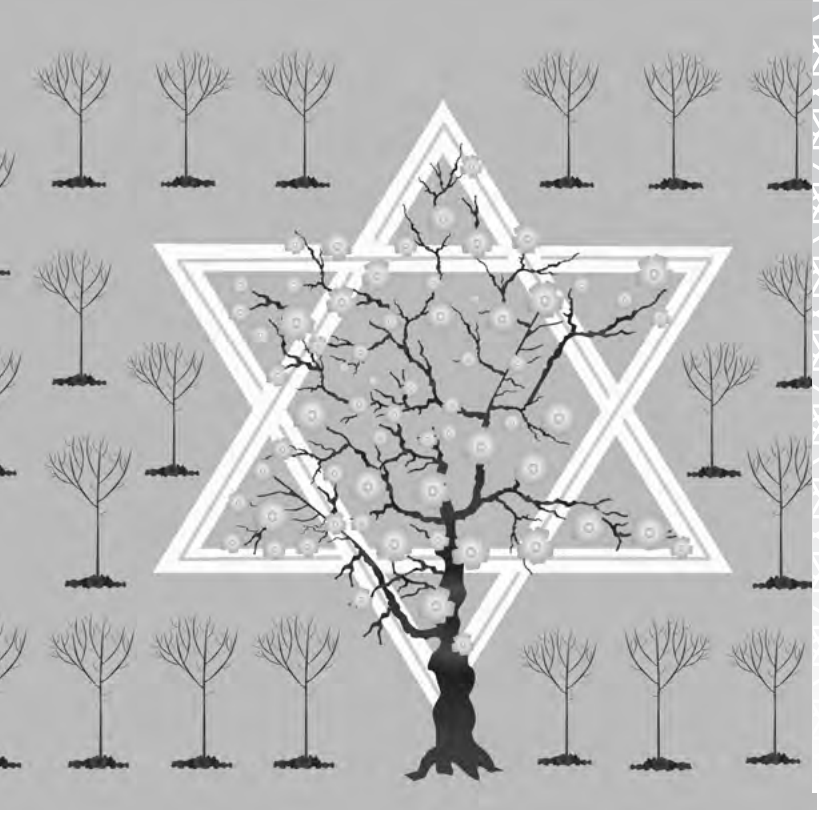
In the end, I believe, that shared commitment will prove decisive. We will stand together as Jews because of what we stand for. If we fail to live up to our values – as individuals or as a community – our ability to stand is weakened. The "covenant of fate" will continue to unite Jews so long as we serve the "covenant of destiny" as well. Both covenants will always be understood in more than one way. Those differences will exist in Israel, in America, and between the two. Keeping the covenant means something different when Jews constitute a minority of 2% of the population as opposed to exercising the power of a governing majority, backed by armed forces and foreign allies, which is responsible legally as well as morally for fellow-citizens and neighbors who are not Jews.

So little is certain in our world in 2023! The COVID pandemic continues to shape economies and claim lives. Catastrophic effects from climate change seem imminent. But I am certain that Jews will not agree on the meaning of Jewishness any time soon – and that this variety, which has strengthened our people over the centuries as well as weakened us, will continue to bring us together as well as pull us apart. I was pleased that former Prime Minister Yair Lapid, in his Rosh Hashana greeting last year, called upon Jews around the world to "remember that we are one family" and asked that, as part of that commitment, we "focus on what unites us, and know how to talk about the things we disagree upon. That's what a family does."

Amen. One of the great pleasures for me when I spend time in Israel is the ability to speak freely and frankly about controversial issues of the day without fear that criticism of government policy or the actions of other Jews will play into the hands of Israel's enemies or antisemites. Some vocal supporters of Israel contend that all criticism of the State should be forbidden for that reason, no matter how responsibly it is offered. They have largely succeeded in shutting down honest debate in their communities. Synagogues and other organizations fear that, in the current polarized political climate, any disagreement about Israel or other vital Jewish matters will lead to irreparable divisions and threaten the very survival of the group. The things that matter most are often those that are least talked about. I fear that silence hurts us far more than disagreement. We need to speak and listen more. "That's what a family does."

One of the great pleasures is the ability to speak freely and frankly about controversial issues without fear that criticism of government will play into the hands of Israel's enemies

I hope that Hannaton will encourage a variety of Jewish voices, both American and Israeli, who will speak honestly about what unites and divides us. We need to renew a way of talking to one another that is strong, loving, judicious, faithful, and responsible. Let's resolve that in 5783 our teshuva will include renewed turning toward one another at the same time as we face outward courageously to the world. ■



A Solid Zionist Identity

He's a Likud MK (Member of Knesset), a resident of the pluralistic community of Hannaton in the Galilee region, originally from a religiously traditional family, and the founder of the Tavor Leadership Academy. We sat down for a conversation with the new Minister of Diaspora Affairs, Amichai Chikli.

You're a new (and young) minister in the government, a resident of Hannaton, and a man of the right... Where do you come from? Tell us a little bit about yourself.

When they call me up for an *aliyah* to the Torah, they say my Hebrew name: Amichai ben Eitan v'Camille. Everything starts with Abba and Ima, my mother and my father. I'm the son of Eitan and Camille Chikli, who made *aliyah* to Israel from France. My mother was born there, in France, and my father was born in Tunisia. I grew up in a traditional household in Jerusalem.

After high school, I spent a year at the Maayan Baruch *mechina* (pre-army leadership academy), back in the very early years of the *mechina* enterprise. That was a formative year for me, and it encouraged and pushed me to forge my identity in a serious way. That year was like handing me a compass just before my ship sailed off to sea. Several key figures at the *mechina* had an influence on me – Erez Eshel, who would go on to establish many other such academies, and Prof. Yosef Ben Shlomo, a senior lecturer in Jewish philosophy and Holocaust studies.

In the army, I served in the Golani Brigade and in other units. I was a combat soldier and a commander, eventually attaining the rank of company commander. During my M.A. studies at Tel Aviv University, I began to found the Tavor Leadership Academy. This *mechina* placed an emphasis on combat service and officer positions, with a connection to Zionist identity as its keystone. I believe that the desire to take on additional functions and combat roles in the army comes from a solid Zionist identity.

The Tavor Leadership Academy gradually became an important institution, and today it holds many programs for the army and for young people in their *mechina* or national service year. I stood at the head of Tavor for more than ten

years. From there, I went into politics.

Where does your personal connection to the Diaspora in general, and American Jewry in particular, come from?

The first meaningful connection I remember was at Camp Ramah Israel. The camp was run by NOAM (Conservative Judaism's youth movement in Israel) and attended by American kids from USY (United Synagogue Youth, the Conservative youth movement in the United States). It was a great experience, even though my English was pretty broken, which they thought was funny.

As an adult, of course, I visited the United States every year in my capacity as the head of Tavor.

What do you think Israelis can learn from American Jewry?

We ought to be impressed by the commitment shown by many communities, such as the Jewish Federation of Detroit, which worked with Tavor for many years. I was astonished to see that the federation's convention, attended by dozens of people, was run like the Knesset – with a president, numerous functionaries, calls to order, and so on. It was impossible to miss the federation's commitment to the future of the Jewish people through action and philanthropy.

Another area is Jewish education in the United States. When I realized how much it costs to send a child to Jewish day school in America, my jaw dropped. This means that American Jews who aren't well-off - really well-off - have no chance of educating their children at a Jewish school. It's a tragedy, and the statistics are well known.

I participated in a conference of the IAC (Israeli-American Council, an umbrella organization for Israeli-American communities), and it was wonderful to see how much effort was invested in preserving Jewish "togetherness," despite the many different political positions represented there. We can definitely learn from them.

As a cabinet minister, what's your position on the State of Israel's role with regard to the Diaspora?

When we say "Diaspora," we're usually referring to North America. That may be the largest community, but Diaspora Jewry also includes many other, smaller communities, such as throughout Europe – in Ukraine, France, and England, for example – as well as in Latin America and so forth. It's a broad term that covers the entire spectrum of religiosity – Lithuanian Haredim, Hasidim, Modern Orthodox, the liberal streams, and more.

When it comes to the liberal streams of Judaism, the discrepancy between their strength and size in the United States and their numbers in Israel creates a really serious challenge. This is because, for the average Israeli, we might as well be talking about aliens. They've never met liberal Jews in their lives, they aren't even aware of the possibility, and that makes things difficult.

If so – what's your role with respect to pluralistic Jewry in the United States?

Politically speaking, these are challenging days when it comes to Diaspora Jewry, because the opposition is putting on a lot of pressure, generating a panic. This panic has also been exported to Diaspora Jewry – consciously and intentionally, of course – in order to put another source of pressure on the government. This crosses a red line. It's unacceptable to put American Jewry into play in internal political disagreements. The "grandchild clause" of the Law of Return has direct bearing on Diaspora Jewry, and so it's crucial to hear their voices on this subject at an institutional level. But for other

subjects – it's not the job of Jews across the sea to decide how judges are appointed in Israel.

Where do you see the cooperation between us, i.e. Israeli and Diaspora Jewish communities, and where are the boundaries of cooperation crossed?

We have two shared challenges that are extremely important:

1. The continuity of the Jewish people. "The eternal nation" is a platitude, but it requires hard work if we want to make it come true. At the moment, not enough hard work is being done.
2. The struggle against the systematic attempt to undermine the basic legitimacy of the Jewish state's existence. These efforts are expanding, particularly in the United States, and becoming a real trend.

These two challenges are related to one another. On the one hand, there's a weakening of domestic Jewish-Zionist identity. And on the other hand, there's a conceptual onslaught against this very identity, against the very idea of a Jewish state, against our collective identity.

We can understand that if names such as Shiloh, Hannah, Rachel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Mt. Ebal, are unfamiliar to American Jewish students, they'll never be able to explain the Jewish people's connection to the territories of Judea and Samaria.[1] In practice, anyone who can't explain this will find themselves outside the story.

This also has to do with the challenge of BDS.[2] Paradoxically enough, a student on the University of Michigan campus experiences BDS more intensely than an Israeli here, even though the influence and the ramifications of the BDS movement are ultimately on us here, on the State of Israel.

For this reason, the student at UMich is a crucial link in the chain simply because he happens to be there – even though no one chose him for the task. If he's not a Zionist, or if he opposes Israel, he's not part of this task. But most Jewish students are pro-Israel.

We often hear from pluralistic American Jewry that on the one hand they're connected to Israel, and on the other hand they increasingly feel that this home of theirs doesn't want them or respect them, which weakens their Zionist identity. What do you make of that?

It says in the Mishna, in Pirkei Avot: "Any love conditional on something – when the thing ceases, the love ceases" (Pirkei Avot 5:16). For this reason, if someone's love for Israel depends on who the government is, I have a problem with that.

If you'll forgive the corny metaphor, my function as Minister of Diaspora Affairs is to be a bridge – to explain to the Israeli public and policymakers the voices I hear from Diaspora Jewish leadership, and at the same time to convey to Diaspora communities, as accurately as I can, the government's positions on matters of interest to them. Take the grandchild clause, for example. Even though I don't think it's Diaspora Jewry's place to decide, I'll happily explain the debate to them. There's room in the discussion for criticism, but not for mudslinging or hysteria. They need to be part of the discussion without intervening in the government's decisions.

In your opinion, what's American Jewry's role with respect to Israel?

Their role is to maintain strong communities. I'm a fervent believer in the return of the Jewish people to Zion, but on a broader strategic level, the resilience of Jewish communities in the United States – resilience of identity, security-

1 The West Bank

2 The movement to for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel

related resilience, financial resilience – is an asset to the State of Israel. It's an asset in an infinite number of ways. These communities are the best ambassadors in the world, and once they care and they have a shared identity, they'll invest in continuity both in the United States and Israel, come to visit Israel, and so on. It's not just philanthropy – even when they just come to visit, that's deeply important.

Will you support the Diaspora unconditionally, in any situation? And do you expect the Diaspora to unconditionally support Israel as well?

We're family. Every Jew in Israel and across the sea is like a brother to me. That's why someone with a solid Jewish identity would never speak in terms of civil war.[3] A sentence like that couldn't possibly come out of the mouth of a Jew with a real connection to his Jewish identity. It goes way beyond politics.

In this sense, the role of the Minister of Diaspora Affairs – sort of like the role of Israel's president – isn't a political role. It's not my job to influence the political views of Jews in France, Argentina, or Miami.

You've only held this position for a short time, but we'd love to hear: What are the major aims you want to advance? What's important for you to advance on a personal level?

I'm choosy about my goals – you have to be very focused, because the only thing that's certain in politics is uncertainty... My primary goal is to make Jewish education [in the Diaspora] more accessible so that it won't be reserved for the rich. That's the task – to invest in a *girsa deyankuta*, something we take in with our mother's milk, that won't be forgotten so easily. For a child who's never been exposed to knowledge of Judaism, even Birthright trips won't help.

The Ministry of Diaspora Affairs has the ability to create partnerships and matching. Our goal is to create an initiative similar to Mosaic United, called Alef-Bet, that will be dedicated to this goal. We'll build partnerships with Jewish schools that teach the Hebrew language, Jewish identity in all its streams and diversity, and Jewish history, and that strengthen the connection to Zionism and to the State of Israel. These fields are an entrance requirement in order to participate in the initiative, and there's no point in investing in a school that doesn't work to promote them.

As a minister, what's your commitment to pluralistic Jewry?

On controversial issues, such as the *ezrat Yisrael* (the mixed-gender section of the Western Wall), it's hard to reach concrete achievements. Instead, my goal is to prevent harm. I don't think there'll be a change to the status quo, because the Haredim have considerable political power. My goal is not to move backward, even if we don't move forward.

I'm talking about things like the attempt to legislate punishments for immodest dress at the Western Wall – that kind of legislation doesn't help anyone.

When it comes to the *ezrat Yisrael*, we can take simple actions to support it without leading to an uproar. Putting aside questions of one stream of Judaism or another, we need to make sure that families who want to put notes in the Western Wall without splitting up can do so.

What's gone wrong along the way? What do we need to fix, and how can we fix it?

I'll quote the great Zionist leader Yitzchak Sadeh: The width of the base determines the height of the peak. When the base – the common

3 This term has been thrown around here and there in Israeli political discourse over the past months.

▷▷ Continues on p. 58

Unconditional Love?

Yoav Ende

On Love and Difficult Conversations Between Israeli and American Jewry

Perspectives

In coming to understand the great, complex, profoundly meaningful challenge of the relationship between Israel and American Jewry, two events have had an influence on me. These events were somewhat extreme, but certainly not uncommon or marginal.

One of these experiences took place several years ago. I attended the funeral of a relative who, like my father, had immigrated to Israel from the United States, making his home and raising his family in Israel. At the funeral, his loving grandson delivered a eulogy in which he referred to the deceased as "a Holocaust survivor." At first, I didn't understand what he was talking about; I thought there must have been some mistake. A few moments later, I understood what he meant – and I couldn't believe what I had heard.

Rabbi Yoav Ende is the Founder and Executive Director of Hannaton Educational Center, and lives in Hannaton.

In religious circles, I sometimes hear the term "silent Holocaust" used to describe the contemporary situation of American Jewry. This horrifying phrase assumes that there is no value to non-Jewish life, and that assimilation is no different than death in the gas chambers. Moreover, it assumes that there is no vitality, no creativity, no innovation, no reproduction of the Torah or of the Jewish people in the United States – so that escape from the United States and *aliyah* to Israel is the only conceivable future for a Jew.

There can be no doubt that assimilation is a deeply painful phenomenon that challenges us as a religion and as a people, and that poses a particular challenge to the Jewish people outside of Israel. We've invested the best of our mindpower, our resources, our educators, and our hearts in finding ways to deal with this reality, which only seems to grow more entrenched with the years.

Even putting aside the difficulty of using the word "Holocaust" here – putting aside the cheapening of the Holocaust that such a use entails – this expression paves the way to total detachment between the two communities. This is because our ways of thinking inevitably lead to real-world consequences. If we believe that American Jewry is lost forever, a story with a foregone conclusion, why should we focus our efforts there? All the more so, why should we attempt to learn what's happening there? Quite the contrary – we need to avoid the dominant trends in American Jewry like the plague. From here on out, the stories of the two communities become disconnected from one another.

My unfortunate experience at the funeral exemplifies the vast distance between Israeli Jews and their American compatriots, and it reflects the dwindling of our ability to work together. How can we even start to explain ourselves to one another? Where can the conversation even begin?

My second experience took place 15 years ago, when I was a student at the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies. We studied alongside American rabbinical students who were required to spend a year in Israel in the context of their studies. You can learn Torah anywhere in the world, but the connection to Israel, to Zionism, the marvelous and complex experience of being here – that you can only get in Israel.

I remember one conversation with an American student while we were learning about Tu Bishvat. I talked about the fruits of the land of Israel, about planting saplings, about the renewal of the holiday, and so on. He – my *chavruta*, my study partner – looked askance at me. For him, he said, the holiday had nothing to do with the land of Israel. It was a celebration of nature, of sustainability, a holiday that emphasizes our connection to nature and our responsibility for it, which we share with God.

I tried to claim that this was one of many ways of understanding Tu Bishvat, or perhaps an additional interpretation of the holiday, but he doubled down. From his perspective, there was no connection whatsoever between Tu Bishvat and the land of Israel.

This interaction, one of the most significant among many such moments, led me to realize that the distance between the United States and Israel can't only be measured in miles; it's a distance in thought, a distance in identity, a distance in narrative. Not everything in Judaism is connected to the land of Israel, but the creation of a Judaism in which the land of Israel plays no part is very dangerous indeed.

The distance between the United States and Israel can't only be measured in miles; it's a distance in thought, a distance in identity, a distance in narrative

These two encounters represent two dangerous trends that are liable to lead to two separate stories: one for the Jewish people in the United States, and one for the Jewish people in Israel. As the stories grow distant, so too will our hearts – unless we understand the depth of the danger we face and the responsibility we have to combat it. In the face of these trends, we must act wisely.

If we want to address the issue head-on, our starting point has to be open dialogue. Not a one-time conversation or an angry polemic – those can often make the problem even worse. We must have an honest, brave, direct conversation in which we try to learn from one another, to engage in "disagreement for the sake of heaven." We must aim to create a shared language and a shared way forward – a language and a way to write our story together, the story of the Jewish people and the State of Israel, now and forever.

A Covenant of Fate, a Covenant of Destiny

I wish to return to the terms *brit goral* (covenant of fate) and *brit yeud* (covenant of destiny) coined by Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik in his famous essay "Kol Dodi Dofek" ("The Voice of My Beloved Knocks"). I will make use of these terms, albeit in a slightly different fashion. With the help of these terms, I will attempt to clarify Soloveitchik's view of the revival of Israel and the place of the Jewish people in this process.

> What is the Covenant of Fate? Fate signifies in the life of the nation, as it does in the life of the individual, the existence of compulsion. A strange force merges all individuals into one unit. The individual is subject and subjugated against his will to the national existence, the existence determined by fate, and it is impossible for him to avoid it and be absorbed into a different reality...[1]

Today, is the existence of the State of Israel a kind of "covenant of fate" – a fact in which we happen to live, a challenge we have to struggle with? Perhaps today, 74 years later, the State of Israel is no longer understood as a miracle, as a dream come true beyond our wildest expectations, as a mission that unites the entire Jewish people - but rather as a mere fact of fate. Israel's complex reality has ramifications for Jews all over the world because we are all one people. Sometimes, it seems that, at least for some people, the State of Israel itself is the greatest challenge to the existence of American Jewry.

On the other hand, we are also part of a covenant of destiny:

> What is the Covenant of Destiny? In the life of a people (as in the life of an individual), destiny signifies an existence that it has chosen of its own free will and in which it finds the full realization of its historical existence. [...] The nation is enmeshed in its destiny because of its longing for an enhanced state of being, an existence replete with substance and direction. Destiny is the font out of which flow the unique self-elevation of the nation and the unending stream of Divine inspiration...[2]

Do we feel that we are partners in the fate of the Jewish people, in the image of our shared destiny?

In which of these covenants do we find ourselves today? How does the younger generation, including a new generation of Jewish leaders, see the situation? We've undergone a dramatic revolution, leading to an era in which Jewry has a physical home and a state – and a Jewish people in diaspora. In the great center of Jewish life in the United States, our fellow Jews live in security and freedom; they have the capacity to learn and shape the Torah, maintain their Jewish identity, and even participate in the leadership of their country.

Do we still see the enormity of the miracle? Do we still understand the extent of the revolution? Are we committed to the welfare of the Jewish people as a whole, and to establish a connection between it and its land that will set

1 Soloveitchik, J. D. (2006). Listen, My Beloved Knocks. Translated by David Z. Gordon. New York: KTAV Publishing House.

2 Ibid.

the imagination aflame and strengthen not only Israel, but the entire Jewish people?

We cannot detract from the importance of historical awareness, nor what it means to lack historical awareness. Nonetheless, historical awareness is not enough. The real question is: What is the significance of the State of Israel today, in 2023? What is the place of the Jewish people in the story of the State today? This is the question we must grapple with.

Today, in the present generation, the State of Israel is forging its way forward. Perhaps the task of our generation is to determine what kind of state will be built here. Does this task belong only to those of us who dwell in Zion? Is the maintenance of a Jewish center in the United States a task that belongs only to American Jewry? Or do we bear a mutual responsibility, a shared destiny?

This question – a covenant of fate or a covenant of destiny – is tested not only on an intellectual or an emotional level, but on the level of action. Do we feel that we are partners in the fate of the Jewish people, in the image of our shared destiny? What do our actions in practice, both in Israel and in the United States, tell us about our story? Are we consciously building a shared story? Or, trapped in a reality that grows more complicated by the day, are we merely responding to it, creating more and more distance from one another? Sometimes it seems to me that we are like those Jews who try to bring others closer to Jewish life, but whose actions merely serve to push them away.

Difficult Conversation

In my conversations with American Jews, the question comes up: Is Israel the center of Jewish life today, or are there two centers, the United States and Israel, just as there once were Babylon and Israel? Or are there several centers, none more important than any other? I see Israel and the Jewish people as a body and a heart, in that neither can exist without the other. Each clearly needs the other – the other's Torah, the other's philosophy, the other's love, the other's help.

Pluralistic and Modern Orthodox Judaism in America are more universalistic and more sensitive in their theology and philosophy than their parallel communities in Israel

It is my good fortune that my Judaism has a creative and philosophical center in the United States; this is a fact for which I am grateful. This center enriches my life, and sometimes I feel that it has almost saved my Judaism. This is because pluralistic and Modern Orthodox Judaism in America are often more universalistic and more sensitive in their theology and philosophy than their parallel communities in Israel. Here in Israel, patriotism is a built-in element of our theology, which I also appreciate – because we have been given the task of building a Jewish, democratic, Zionist, and humanistic state. The fulfillment of such a task is possible, although not certain. This is the destiny I see before me.

In their book *Difficult Conversations*, Sheila Heen, Bruce Patton, and Douglas Stone define three chief elements of a difficult conversation: the facts ("what happened"), feelings, and identity. A difficult conversation tells us who we

are, as individuals and as a society, which is why it causes feelings to run high. In other words, when I have a conversation with a friend on a subject related to my identity, I'm asking not only who my friend is but who I am.

The conversation between the Jewish center in Israel and the Jewish center in the United States is a difficult, complex one, because it touches on the essence of our identities. We need to know how to have conversations of this kind, and how to have them without forcing our interlocutors into polarized positions – Zionist or anti-Zionist, patriot or traitor, humanist or fascist, and so forth. A genuine connection between the two sides recognizes each side's commitment to their opinions and even celebrates the existence of different positions. Our disagreement doesn't hinge on a dichotomy of views – support or opposition to Zionism, the necessity of *aliyah* to Israel or the total negation of *aliyah* as a Jewish ideal. We need a much richer conversation, an argument that we can agree to keep having.

If we try to pinpoint the ingredients of such a conversation, we can define it as a conversation between liberal American Jewry and the State of Israel, and vice versa – between the State of Israel and liberal Jewry. The American Jew might say: When Israel stops being liberal and democratic, the connection between us will come to an end. This is because a regime of that kind is against my values and my identity, and I'm not willing to identify with a country that doesn't represent me. In turn, the Israeli might say: If so, your love of Israel is conditional. What kind of a connection is that?[3]

One might think that the term "dual loyalty" describes a situation in which one loyalty clashes with another. In fact, however, dual loyalty describes a situation in which one loyalty contradicts another. Therefore, an American Jew can be a patriotic American citizen and a Zionist supporter of Israel without running into the problem of dual loyalty. American Jews have dealt with this question for a century now. We are capable of living with many different loyalties, as long as they do not contradict or cancel out one another. It would seem that the question of dual loyalty no longer exists with regard to the particular country in which I live, but rather with regard to myself as a person. If progressive American Jews feel that their identity contradicts their ability to be Zionists and/or supporters of Israel because Israel's conduct is deeply opposed to their values – for example, with regard to the occupation or on issues of religion and state – this will inevitably lead to a rupture of the bond between us and a disconnect of the heart.

We must find a way to express disagreement with Israel without distancing ourselves from it

We haven't reached this point yet, but it looms before us as a warning sign. Remember, a difficult conversation is one that challenges our identity as individuals, as a group, as a state, as a people. It's not easy to have a conversation like this. But do we have any other choice?

3 We could suggest a conceptual distinction between one's relationship to the State of Israel, which is currently in a complicated and even dangerous political situation, and one's relationship to Israeli society, which contains a far broader and richer spectrum of opinions and beliefs than those represented in the political sphere. However, the ability to distinguish between the two requires a certain level of commitment and closeness. Moreover, this kind of distinction cannot be sustained indefinitely.

Unconditional Love

> Any love conditional on something – when the thing ceases, the love ceases. Love that is unconditional will never cease. What is an example of conditional love? The love of Amnon and Tamar. And of unconditional love? The love of David and Jonathan. (Pirkei Avot 5:16)

Can we achieve a love that is not dependent on Israeli politics, a love that supports all members of the Jewish people regardless of their views on Israel? It's not easy. But just as in a family, not wanting to stay in contact or work on our relationship is a one-way ticket to division and detachment.

True, a covenant relies on the desire and the freedom of both parties to maintain it, and people and societies in pursuit of justice, truth, and peace are allowed to set down their red lines. But don't forget that it's always harder to see the complexities of physically and mentally faraway places than those of our own. Many Israelis believe that American Jews don't understand the complexity of life in Israel. At the same time, Israelis themselves don't understand the complexity of Jewish life in America, particularly liberal Jewish life.

Zionism arose so that we could step out of the beit midrash, stop waiting for the Messiah, and take our fate into our own hands. Today, with a state, an army, and an economy, it would seem that the Jewish people is far stronger than ever. The monumental challenge before us is not only to continue our existence as a state, not only to defend the state. Rather, it is to return to the beit midrash and learn together, to define our identities and our connection. Both sides have a share in this challenge, and we need to take hold of it with both hands.

Let's insist that this beit midrash bring us together and not push us apart, and that it be able to contain our vast diversity. We must find a way to express disagreement with Israel without distancing ourselves from it, to create dialogue that makes room for mutual influence, to intervene respectfully, and to understand the various realities at play.

Israel must understand that if it is to deal with the challenges faced by the Jewish people, the Jewish people must be part of the conversation. The preservation of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state is a task for the entire Jewish people, not only the citizens of Israel. After two thousand years of exile and 74 years of Israel's existence, we can say that we're still only at the beginning of the road. Israel must understand that its internal arrangements with respect to religion and state – for example, the cancellation of the grandchild clause of the Law of Return, which is once again under discussion – don't just impact its own citizens, but the entire Jewish people, and therefore they must be included in the conversation. We must keep in mind that mature, grown-up love isn't a constant honeymoon. It means being willing to work on the connection and not giving it up.

> We aren't asking whether to continue together, but how to continue - while some American Jews are asking whether it's worth it to continue at all.

The Role of the Streams of Judaism

"The establishment of the State of Israel led to a dramatic change not only in the situation of the Jews, but in the nature, expressions, and characteristics of Judaism [...] The historic importance of this change is no less profound than the change that took place after the destruction of the Second Temple and the emergence of rabbinic Judaism, a change that forged post-Temple Judaism". [4]

4 Ish Shalom, B. (2011). "A Theology of Sovereignty: Judaism at a Crossroads?" Akdamot 30, 9-21.

What characterizes this change? To what kind of Judaism will it lead? Will the gambit succeed? What will the Jewish people look like, and what kind of connection will exist between its constituent parts? In our day, Israel is shaping itself. This is a fateful moment for us, and we stand at a crossroads. In the past, we were asked to create a state as a home and a shelter for the Jewish people. Today we are asked to forge the character of the state, Israeli society, and the Jewish people – while continuing to struggle for the existence of the state.

After 74 years, two Jewish centers – Israel and the United States – have become the central forces in shaping the Jewish people, its way forward, and its Judaism. Many talented educators and leaders in the United States and other diaspora communities have devoted their work to Jewish education, Jewish identity, and the connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel. We cannot overstate the value, creativity, and successes of these leaders.

However, at the same time, there is a new current of young, idealistic leaders who are unwilling to hold onto a complicated picture with love, albeit occasionally with a broken heart. These young people, who are slowly but surely disconnecting from Israel, may be part of the next generation of Jewish leadership. Perhaps this is the difference between us. We aren't asking whether to continue together, but how to continue – while some American Jews have set a mirror to us, asking whether it's worth it to continue at all.

The different streams of Judaism were founded in order to save Judaism and the Jewish people from assimilation. We could have stayed in the ghetto, we could have assimilated, but we understood that another way was possible. The streams have since become movements that have molded the Jewish people and taken responsibility for its continuation. These religious movements are necessary not only to facilitate man's conversation with God, but also – perhaps primarily – to instigate processes of change within the Jewish people. As a Conservative rabbi, I believe that Conservative Judaism may have a supremely important role to play today: facilitating conversation and leading the way on various societal levels, from leadership to young communities. In order to fulfill this role, it must reach out beyond its borders.

I hope that Conservative Judaism will have the foresight to create a way forward for the entire liberal movement and to serve as a beacon of inspiration and meaning for the Jewish people.

We are living in an era characterized by the extreme polarization of individuals, opinions, and perspectives. There have always been disagreements, but today, more than ever, we are insulated in our own echo chambers and perceive those who oppose our worldviews as not only wrong, but dangerous. Within the culture that surrounds us, we must remind ourselves that "these and those are the words of the living God, but the halakha is in accordance with Beit Hillel [...] Why was Beit Hillel privileged to have the halakha established in accordance with their opinion? Because they were agreeable and humble, and they would teach both their own statements and the statements of Beit Shammai. Moreover, they put the statements of Beit Shammai before their own statements..." (Eruvin 13b). ■

Israel – Diaspora Relations

What Unites Us, What Divides Us

Bradley Shavit Artson

What are the areas of consensus today between American Jewry and Israeli Jewry, and what are the points of controversy? The dean of the Ziegler Rabbinical School in Los Angeles sharpens them

I want to try to speak with you from the perspective of someone who is deeply embedded in the American Rabbinate, which is to say in Jewish life as it is lived in the United States, both from the perspective of ten years as a congregational rabbi in Orange County, California and, for the past 25 years, as the Dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at American Jewish University, USA and of the Zacharias Frankel College at University of Potsdam, Germany. You know that we Jews are a contentious group and we have strong opinions. So I want, in the spirit of an open dialogue, to affirm what I think are some areas of consensus, and where our discussion – all of us together – might proceed along fruitful lines.

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By way of an introduction, let me say that I think there is a broad consensus in our love of Zion and our love for the land of Israel. That broad consensus continues to unite and inspire America's rabbis and America's Jews. Paradoxically, it is our love of Zion and our Jewish commitment that leads us to speak out when we have something to say. I'd imagine I was not the only American whose first response, upon hearing of another terrorist attack against Israeli civilians, or another missile lobbed against Israel's cities, was to think about those poor victims, and that any thought about the political implications were secondary. I am sure I am not the only American whose best friend in college is now a citizen of the State of Israel, whose nephews and nieces are Israelis, who has aunts, uncles, and cousins in the State of Israel. The connections that link American Jewry and the State of Israel are very real and far more important than mere politics.

It is because of my commitment to my nieces and nephews that, when I have something to say, I need to say it. They tell me that the silence of American Jewry is putting their lives at risk. We have to be able, for the sake of our families and for the sake of our people, to have faith in the process of democracy (which thank God Israel is and thank God America is) to be able to speak our piece and to listen to other responsible viewpoints. We may differ as to how best to show our support for Israel. But we must show support for Israel, and on that imperative, I think there can be no question.

Our love of Zion and our Jewish commitment leads us to speak out

What is it that still unites us? I believe that I speak for my colleagues in the rabbinate and the Jewish community in the United States when I assert publicly and proudly that Israel has the right not only to exist, but also to thrive. The Jewish people, like all peoples of the world, have a right to national self-expression. But the nation of which we are part is larger than the State of Israel; it embodies all Jewish people everywhere. We all of us have a link to the land of Israel and to its government. We all have a right to be part of the on-going polity that is the Jewish people, which preceded the existence of the Third Jewish Commonwealth, which preceded the existence of the Second Jewish Commonwealth. It is the peoplehood of the Jewish people that created the State of Israel and not vice versa.

Another point of consensus: All Jews everywhere have a stake in what happens in Israel. There is a wonderful ancient Midrash that compares the Jewish people to a sheep, noting that when you strike any of the limbs of a sheep it bleats with its mouth. So too with us: when a Jew is hurt in Buenos Aires or Johannesburg or New York or Tel Aviv, Jews everywhere ought to cry out.

The third area of agreement: There is an ongoing war against the existence of the Jewish State, and an equally corrosive war of antisemitism against the living reality of the Jewish people. That war takes many forms: through diplomacy, the media, through military action, on social media and through acts of violence, including terror. All Jews everywhere have a moral obligation to stand in solidarity with Israel in the battle against that war.

Finally, there is a recognition (asserted by the Rabbis since the Emancipation) that Jewish survival will take place only if there are Jews who are educated in what it means to be Jewish, who are living their understandings of Judaism, however diverse. That is true whether you are in the *galut* of Phoenix or the *galut* of Tel Aviv. Regardless of where a Jew lives, without a Jewish education, without a commitment to living a Jewish life steeped in the best of our sources and embedded in the richness of our heritage, pursuing a life of justice, morality, and holiness, there isn't sufficient cause for us to continue our endeavors.

Let me tell you a story along that line because it moves me exactly into what divides us: the Los Angeles Jewish Federation has a partnership with the City of Tel Aviv. Most years, we bring Israeli teenage students from Tichon Hadash to study in different schools throughout greater Los Angeles, both Jewish day schools and public schools. At a recent event, one of the girls got up to speak and she said as follows, "I am sixteen years old. The first time I stepped foot in a synagogue was when I went to Stephen Wise Temple in Los Angeles. It was great!" she said. "I can't wait to tell all my friends back in Israel how wonderful it is inside synagogues." Her comment made me think that perhaps we need to start flying young Israelis to the Diaspora to experience firsthand the many rich and divergent ways to live as Jews.

We have been living rich and meaningful Jewish lives in the Diaspora for over 2000 years. We have learned how to maintain and

to build vibrant Jewish communities because we have been doing that for millennia. Don't get me wrong: Israel is the crowning miracle of Jewish life in this century, and I am awe struck by the accomplishments of the State of Israel and its people. But the achievements of the Diaspora also have much to teach. What we need is a full partnership in which each of us recognize the wisdom and the insight that the other partner brings to the table. Rather than one side preaching to the other, we ought to be able to learn from each other, and to learn that sometimes what works in one place isn't what works in the other.

In that regard, I must say that the issue of pluralism in Israel is, in my opinion, not simply an issue of misunderstanding. The fact that rabbis in Israel are funded or not because of their denomination, the fact that my colleagues with whom I went to rabbinical school are by law not allow to perform weddings or funerals in the Jewish State, threatens the unity of the Jewish people. It was the great Anatol France who commented that the majesty of the law is such that both rich and poor are prohibited from sleeping on park benches. To portray the lack of recognition of all streams of Jewish life in the State of Israel as simply a mutual misunderstanding is I believe, with all due respect, a distortion.

And then, finally, it is the great glory of the Torah – to which we owe our ultimate allegiance – that we are commanded to have mishpat echad, one standard of justice for all people. Alas, there are areas in Israeli civil life where that has not yet been realized (as indeed is true in every democracy including the United States). But one of the areas that divides us, then, is when we see areas in which those living in Israel and the Palestinian territories are treated unequally and we see the government – instead of defending them – attempting to maintain a status quo of inequality.

In that regard, special mention must be made of the continuing acts of vigilante violence against Palestinian farmers, families, and civilians. While acts of terror are real, and a Two State Solution may remain a distant aspiration, we must insist in the meantime that Israel apply its own laws to prevent and prosecute acts of settler violence against Palestinians attempting to harvest their own crops, play in their playgrounds and nature reserves, access jobs and travel for holidays. American Jews, like their Israeli family, are committed to the Torah's injunction to justice equally for all the Land's residents. In the current occupation, applying laws of equity, personal safety, and property ownership is the crucial path forward for any long-term solution and is essential to maintain strong support in the next generation of American Jews for the core vision of Zionism, which is national self-determination.

Israel and the Israelis aren't going away. Palestine and the Palestinians aren't going away. There is no military solution. The only way forward is for us to work together.

The future flows from these four bedrock insights. Our job is to embrace this reality, embolden others to link their aspirations to this reality, to block their fears from blinding them, both to these four insights' inevitability but also to their desirability. After all, don't we want an Israel that is a bulwark for Jewish vitality, security, and thriving? And don't we also want an Israel that is a light to the nations, not only those distant, but first to its closest neighbors?

Rather than one side preaching to the other, we ought to be able to learn from each other

The only way to be effectively pro-Israel today is to do the slow, patient work of supporting

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An Old/New Zionism for an Old/New People

Shuly Rubin Schwartz

Many engaged and knowledgeable Jews feel anguish at the thought of having to choose between supporting both Palestinian rights and a thriving Jewish state. This should not be a choice. Both commitments were intrinsic to the founding of the Jewish state

Last August, I had the privilege of attending the international conference marking the 125th anniversary of the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland. What an exciting and moving event. Over a thousand of us came together in the same place and on the same date as that original gathering to celebrate Theodore Herzl's remarkable achievement in assembling 197 delegates with varying Zionist views to discuss the idea of creating a homeland for the Jewish people.

I could not help but think of my great-grandfather, Aron Shimon Shpall. Like Eliezer Ben Yehuda he spoke only Hebrew to his children in his Eastern European home in Kremenets. An ardent Zionist, he dreamt of one day living in the land of Israel. However, when forced to leave because of worsening pogroms, the family's circumstances led the Shpalls to the United States and not to Palestine. This did not deter Aron from his goals. He and his family settled in New Orleans, where he served as assistant principal of an afternoon school that provided young Jews with an intensive, six-day-a-week, Hebraic Jewish education. My family continued his tradition of speaking Hebrew to our children and devoting ourselves to the Zionist dream, while mostly living outside of Israel.

How thrilled Shpall would have been to know that the Jewish State would be established a mere 51 years after the first Zionist Congress! All of us in Basel understood viscerally how important it was to mark this moment communally to celebrate the miracle of a thriving State of Israel poised to celebrate its 75th anniversary this May. Conference speakers were brimming with ideas for addressing societal issues in Israel, including economic inequality and a lack of affordable housing, as well as global challenges such as

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climate change, all with the aim of maximizing Israel's success and ensuring its sustainability.

But for all the spirited and fascinating talk, the silence on other vital issues–the needs of the Israeli Arab population, the unresolved status of Palestinians, the lack of religious pluralism–was deafening. The panel I was asked to participate in– "A Twenty-first Century Zionism for a Twenty-first Century Jewish People"–was one of the few places where those challenges could be addressed. I attempted to do just that and will share and expand on some of my thoughts here.

In the early 20th century, Zionism's supporters included several Conservative/Masorti luminaries affiliated with my institution, The Jewish Theological Seminary. As a historian, I find it instructive to recall their reasons for promoting the Zionist project and to ask how–and if–their understanding of Zionism's value for the Jewish people can inform a Zionist vision for today and tomorrow. JTS Chancellor Solomon Schechter, among the earliest religious leaders in the United States to openly support the Zionist cause (1906), saw Zionism in the context of his concern about Jewish assimilation in the United States. After careful consideration, he came to value Zionism, in the religious-national sense of Ahad Ha-am, as a "great bulwark against assimilation"–a way to strengthen Judaism and the Jewish spirit not only in the Land of Israel but around the world. Mordecai M. Kaplan, who led the JTS Teachers Institute from its inception and taught at JTS for several decades, infused the curriculum for Jewish educators with classes in Hebrew, Israeli dance, Jewish music and art, and the study of Jewish history, thought, and texts. For Kaplan too, Zionism was "contemporary Judaism in action," with the potential to regenerate Judaism in the Diaspora and create a robust, pluralistic Jewish civilization in the Land of Israel. Henrietta Szold, the first female student at JTS and the visionary founder of Hadassah, the American women's Zionist organization, believed that Zionism would serve as a catalyst for reviving and cultivating Judaism as a robust, normal way of life, not merely a creed. Szold anticipated the challenges posed by Jews newly living in Palestine alongside Arabs who were already inhabiting the land. In her words and her deeds, she promoted the importance of cultivating ways for Jews and Arabs to learn, work, and live together.

For some, their love of Israel is tempered by concerns about equity, racism, and what they perceive as tribalism

What strikes me in the views of these leaders is their keen appreciation of the symbiotic relationship between Jews in and outside Israel. Even before its creation, they knew that Israel's impact would be far-reaching, and that its relationship with diaspora Jews would be both enriching and complicated. But what does Zionism mean now, especially for young American Jews who lack the historical touchpoints and cultural references that shaped pre-1948 and early-State Zionism? The intellectual, communal, and political context through which young Jews connect with Israel, especially in the last 20 years, differs dramatically from my own.

These young people have grown up knowing only a thriving Israel; they take its existence for granted. As Americans, their world view, especially of late, has been shaped by new insights into the historic and contemporary shortcomings of the United States that have touched many of us. As a result, for some, their love of Israel is tempered by concerns about equity, racism, and what they perceive as tribalism. They worry that the state of Israel is falling short of its ideals as a Jewish, democratic state. For many, Zionism is not a path to Jewish pride and engagement

but rather a source of shame and alienation, leading them to consider distancing themselves from Israel. Some dismiss these young American Jews as uninformed, naive, or misguided. That may be true of some, but many engaged and knowledgeable Jews feel anguish at the thought of having to choose between supporting both Palestinian rights and a thriving Jewish state. This should not be a choice. Both commitments were intrinsic to the founding of the Jewish state (even if the terminology differed), and they remain a priority for many Israelis today.

If we are committed to the Jewish future and to a Jewish state that lives up to our highest ideals as a people, we must engage with those whose love and support impels them to critique. A 21st century Zionism must be one devoted to strengthening Israel as a Jewish, democratic state. This new Zionism can be forged only through deep learning, active listening, and engaged dialogue–across ideological lines and through extensive encounters among Israeli and American Jews.

We love Israel despite its lackluster support for non-Orthodox Judaism and its failure to appreciate how diverse Jewish customs, outlook, and practice uniquely enrich Israeli life

As chancellor of JTS, an institution devoted to serious Jewish learning and open inquiry, I am passionate about educating the next generation to embrace the complexity that results from such an approach. Devoted to a flourishing Judaism and to a Jewish, democratic state, JTS fosters an honest appraisal of Zionism's past, present, and future–rooted in history and anchored in love–which can point a way forward for the courageous leaders of today and tomorrow.

I believe a constructive Zionism for the 21st century asks that we:

- **Work together to further liberal democracy in the Jewish State**. The political struggle regarding Palestinians finds its parallel in the struggle for Jewish religious pluralism. We love Israel despite its lackluster support for non-Orthodox Judaism and its failure to appreciate how diverse Jewish customs, outlook, and practice uniquely enrich Israeli life. The two issues are inextricably linked, and intolerance in one arena breeds it in others.
- **Internalize the notion that "*ahavat Israel*" is a two-way street.** We each need to hone our skills of radical empathy: Israelis need to deeply understand where young American Jews are coming from just as American Jews need to appreciate the unique challenges that Israeli Jews face.
- **Create opportunities for more American and Israeli young people to be in person-to-person relationships with one another,** including by bringing more young Israelis to the U.S. to learn about the American Jewry. We must be open to new ways of conceiving of the relationship in the third decade of the 21st century.
- **Commit to embracing the value of a nuanced lens.** States and governments fall short, as do we. Let's celebrate the wonders of the Jewish State, be clear-eyed about the ways in which it falls short of its ideals, and commit to doing our part to make it better or lend support to those who do so. Let's model a relationship that grows ever stronger and more committed to growth as a result of engaging with complexity.

As President Herzog said to us in Basel, "The Jewish People are one big family, and being family means regularly checking in with each other."

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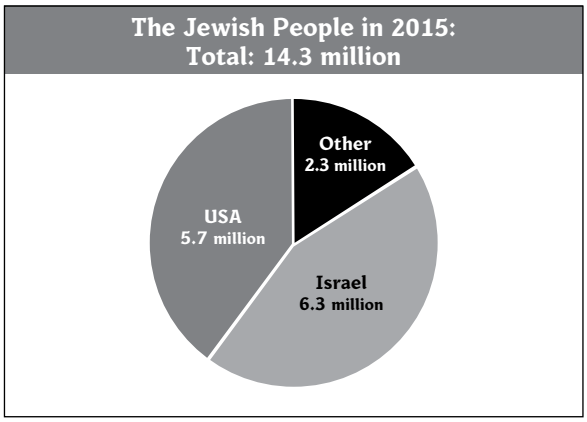
America and Babylon - Mother or Father?

Anat Israeli

On Center and Diaspora, Fatherhood and Motherhood, Spirituality and Physicality

The current demographic portrait of the Jewish people, distributed as it is between Israel and the Diaspora, is not new. Indeed, it is remarkably similar to the image reflected in sources dating back to the Talmudic period, starting in the third century ACE. Approximately 85% of the world's Jews live in one of two population centers. One is the Land of Israel, the Jews' sacred, historic home; the second is a prosperous, peaceful exile, then Babylon and today the United States of America.



According to data published by Prof. Sergio Della Pergola, *Ynet*[1]

The numbers in the contemporary demographic portrait are, of course, many times larger than the equivalent numbers in the Talmudic period. However, the percentages then and now are probably quite similar. There is also a notable resemblance in the political, economic, cultural and religious dynamics: supposedly, all the diasporas of the Jewish people, including the largest and strongest among them, have recognized the primacy of the center in the Land

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1 Della Pergola, S. (20 September 2015). "The Jews, The Year 2050: And Here is the Forecast." *Ynet*.

of Israel, sent donations, occasionally visited, supported it politically, and accepted its authority in certain matters. On the surface, both then and now, that has been the case. However, beneath this picture – at least in the Talmudic era – rages a hidden struggle for primacy, a struggle that gradually comes out into the open.

In late antiquity, the two great centers were home to a reciprocal and vigorous creative process that culminated in the works of Talmudic literature. Yet as the center in Babylon grew stronger and more established, the center in the Land of Israel suffered from the gradual erosion of its power, becoming weaker in comparison to the increasing strength of the Babylonian diaspora. Ultimately, sometime in the early Middle Ages, primacy finally and officially passed to Babylonian Jewry; the Babylonian Talmud, not the Jerusalem Talmud, became the most-learned text in the Jewish canon.

Is this history liable to repeat itself? We have no way of knowing, and history does not necessarily repeat itself. There can be no comparison between the strong, well-established Israel of our day and the Jews of the Land of Israel in the Talmudic period, who were partly subject to obstructive and hostile Byzantine Roman rule. Likewise, the spiritual-religious stability and continuity of American Jewry cannot yet be compared to that of Babylonian Jewry, which preserved its identity for many centuries. We may wish ourselves hundreds more years of Jewish presence in the Land of Israel, and hope that it may retain its centrality with respect to the Diaspora. In the meantime, we may learn something from the two Talmuds about the complexity of the relationship between two great Jewish centers.

Supposedly, all the diasporas of the Jewish people, including the largest and strongest among them, have recognized the primacy of the center in the Land of Israel, but beneath this picture rages a hidden struggle for primacy

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In the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods, an intricate system of interplay existed between the communities in the Land of Israel and Babylon. A constant two-way interaction connected the two communities. This two-way interaction between the Babylonian exile and the Land of Israel entailed not only physical migration, but also additional dimensions: this was also a profound and complex spiritual movement. In the following, I wish to present a reading of a short story from the Babylonian Talmud, a story in which psychological and gender-related depths lurk beneath the ideological and halakhic surface. This story may help us to understand the complex nature of the competitive relations between the two centers of Jewish life in Israel and the United States.

The story, which appears in Tractate Kiddushin of the Babylonian Talmud, describes Rav Assi's relationship with his elderly mother. Rav Assi, known in sources from the Land of Israel as "Rabbi Assi," was one of the great third-generation *amoraim* (later sages) in the Land of Israel, and a friend and colleague of Rabbi Ammi. The two of them were known as "the esteemed priests of the Land of Israel" (B. Megillah 22a), and were dedicated students of Rabbi Yohanan, the greatest *amora* of the Land of Israel, who stood for many years at the head of the yeshiva in Tiberias throughout the third century. It turns out that Rav Assi fled to the Land of Israel in his youth as a result of his complicated relationship with his mother, and thus reached Rabbi Yohanan's yeshiva in Tiberias:

Rav Assi had an old mother. She said to him, "I want jewelry," and he made it for her. She said to him, "I want a man," and he said, "I will try to find one for you." She said to him, "I want a man as handsome as you." He left her and went to Eretz Yisrael. Rav Assi heard that she was coming after him. He came before Rabbi Yohanan and said to him, "What is the halakha with regard to leaving Eretz Yisrael to go outside of Eretz Yisrael?" Rabbi Yohanan said to him, "It is prohibited." Rav Assi said, "If one is going to meet his mother, what is the halakha?" Rabbi Yohanan said to him, "I do not know." Rav Assi waited a little while, and then came back to him. Rabbi Yohanan said to him, "Assi, you are determined to leave. May the Omnipresent return you in peace." Rav Assi came before Rabbi Elazar and said to him, "God forbid, perhaps he is angry?" Rabbi Elazar said to him, "What did he say to you?" Rav Assi said to him, "May the Omnipresent return you in peace." Rabbi Elazar said to him, "If he was angry, he would not have blessed you." In the meantime, Rav Assi heard that her coffin was coming. He said, "Had I known, I would not have left." (B. Kiddushin 31b)[1]

The story raises the need to choose between mother and father, and thus between Babylon and the Land of Israel

Rav Assi's elderly mother comes to him with repeated demands of a clearly erotic character; the last, "a man as handsome as you," exposes the subject of the mother's forbidden desires. In response, Rav Assi flees to the Land of Israel. In this way, Rav Assi indeed fulfills the commandment of settling the Land of Israel. However, he does not fulfill this commandment for religious reasons – as Rabbi Yohanan and his fellows in the Land of Israel would surely have wanted – but for strictly personal reasons, as has been known to happen, and not just in the days of the amoraim of Babylon…

Soon after, he is alerted that his mother is coming after him. The story continues after Rav Assi has already arrived in Tiberias, and has heard that his mother is coming to the Land of Israel. We do not know how much time has passed, whether months or years. At any rate, over two-thirds of the story concerns Rav Assi's deliberations as to whether or not to go out and meet his mother. Finally, he receives the news that his mother's coffin is coming – that is, that she has already passed away. His response, which concludes the story, is: "Had I known, I would not have left."

The story of Rav Assi has three partial parallels in the Jerusalem Talmud. According to one of them:

> May a priest defile himself in honor of his father and mother? Rabbi Yasa heard that his mother had come to Bostra. He went and asked Rabbi Yohanan, may I leave? He said to him, if it is because of danger on the road, leave. If it is in order to honor father and mother, I do not know. Rabbi Samuel bar Rav Yitzhak said, Rabbi Yohanan still needs to answer. He importuned [Rabbi Yohanan], who said: If you have decided to go, return in peace. Rabbi Eleazar heard this and said: There is no greater permission than that. (Y. Berakhot 3:1, 23b; Y. Sheviit 6:1, 16b–17a; Y. Nazir 7:1, 34a)

In the parallels in the Jerusalem Talmud, the subject and the context is the restriction on leaving the Land of Israel, and the conflict has to do with whether the commandment to honor one's mother justifies leaving the Land of Israel for "profane" land – a question lent additional force by Rav Assi's priestly lineage. In these

1 Translations based on the Koren-Steinsaltz Talmud, available on Sefaria: https://www.sefaria.org.il/Kiddushin.31b.7

versions of the story, Rabbi Yohanan answers that if such a departure is necessary to ensure the safety of the mother, it is permitted, but if it is purely for the sake of honoring one's mother, he does not know how to answer.

By contrast, in the version in the Babylonian Talmud, the commandment to honor one's mother is not mentioned at all; Rav Assi's motivation to go out and meet his mother is not necessarily honor. (It must be noted that the general context in the Babylonian Talmud pertains to the commandment to honor one's parents, and from this point the Babylonian Talmud goes on to discuss the question of honoring one's parents after their deaths. However, the subject is not mentioned at all in the dialogue or in the story as a whole.)

Rather, this version relates the opening passage of the story, which, unlike its parallels in the Jerusalem Talmud, describes the relationship between Rav Assi and his mother at relative length. From this opening passage, it turns out it was not the holiness of the Land of Israel that brought Rav Assi there, but shock at his mother's behavior. Thus, in the Babylonian Talmud, the center of gravity in the story shifts from a halakhic comparison between the two commandments, as we saw in the Jerusalem Talmud, to a psychological depiction of mother-son relations.

The story deals with the relations between a son and his mother – a mother whose sexuality plays a dominant role in her requests to her son. These are impossible, perverted relations that cause her son to physically flee from her.[2] The narrator then dwells at length on the relations between Rav Assi and Rabbi Yohanan, seemingly without cause. In doing so, the narrator sets up Rabbi Yohanan as a spiritual father to Rav Assi; Rav Assi is torn between his feelings for Rabbi Yohanan and his feelings for his mother. While the mother is portrayed as demanding, seductive, tainted by materialism and sexuality, the famous "father" is a great sage who understands Rav Assi deeply, accepts his distress, and permits his son-student to do as he wishes. In contrast to the sentimental, sexual Babylonian mother (characteristics symbolic of a foreign, even immodest culture) who repels her son, an intellectual, halakhic father is positioned in the Land of Israel, "the land of the fathers." Rav Assi takes seriously this father's responses and finds it difficult to leave him. Thus, an analogy of contrast is established between the biological mother in Babylon and the spiritual father in the Land of Israel.

In contrast to the sentimental, sexual Babylonian mother who repels her son, an intellectual, halakhic father is positioned in the Land of Israel, "the land of the fathers."

Rav Assi's concluding words, "Had I known, I would not have left," have been interpreted by various commentators in two primary ways.[3] The first interpretation maintains that Rav Assi had already gone out to meet his mother, and that he is sorry to have left the holy ground of the Land of Israel without cause, even for a moment.[4] The second

2 Admiel Kosman (2008; pp. 127-153) spells out what hides between the lines of the mother-son relationship here. In his view, not only is the mother attracted to the son, but the son is unwillingly attracted to his mother. This reading of Rav Assi directs Kosman's interpretation of the story. Here, we will attempt to suggest an alternative reading. See also Valler 1993, pp. 105-108; Rovner 2005.

3 A comprehensive survey of the traditional and modern interpretations of the story may be seen in Kosman 2008, 127-153.

4 This interpretation is espoused by the Maharsha (Rabbi Samuel Eliezer Halevi Eidels, 1555-1631), the Iyun Yaakov (Rabbi Jacob Reischer, 1661-1733), and others.

interpretation is that Rav Assi regrets having gone to the Land of Israel in the first place, rather than remaining in Babylon.[5] Had he known that his mother would die so quickly, he would not have left. Perhaps he would have held out for a little longer had he known that her remaining days were few; perhaps he is sorry that he did not nurse her in the time before her death; perhaps he even thinks that his departure cut short her life.

According to the first interpretation, Rav Assi's initial request was only to greet his mother and bring her back with him to the Land of Israel. However, an explanation of this kind assumes that the story is concerned with the question of whether honoring one's parents justifies a temporary departure from the Land of Israel, as in the Jerusalem Talmud, and ignores the the relationship between Rav Assi and his mother, the central drama of the story in the Babylonian Talmud. Such a disregard for the heavy psychological weight of the story seems like an attempt to avoid the darkness at its heart. This explanation also assumes that the Land of Israel, which at first served Rav Assi only as shelter, has since taken on such a central religious significance for Rav Assi that he finds even the slightest departure difficult and is more upset about leaving than about the death of his mother. Thus, this first interpretation assumes a dramatic religious and philosophical transformation with regard to the Land of Israel – a transformation undergone by Rav Assi in the unspecified time between his departure from Babylon and his mother's arrival in the Land of Israel.

The physical migration between Babylon and the Land of Israel has been completed, and reinforced by an emotional and religious migration

Shulamit Valler has raised the possibility that Rav Assi wished to obstruct his mother's arrival, and thought that going out to meet her would prevent her from settling beside him in the Land of Israel. According to this possibility, Rav Assi's emotional detachment from his mother is so thorough and final that he wishes to distance her from himself at any cost. This possibility, too, sidesteps the grand drama faced by Rav Assi, although from another angle: by attributing to him total alienation from his mother and utter indifference to her difficult situation.

Rashi interprets Rabbi Yohanan's answer as follows: "He reasoned that [Rav Assi] was resolved to return to his place in Babylon." Rabbi Yohanan believes that Rav Assi wishes to determine whether he may return to Babylon, probably in order to live there with his mother. Rashi seems to attribute this understanding only to Rabbi Yohanan, but it is possible that this was also in fact Rav Assi's intention. If so, we must understand Rav Assi's concluding words, "Had I known, I would not have left," as an expression of regret over having left Babylon at all. We may then understand Rabbi Yohanan's final answer to Rav Assi, "Assi, you are determined to leave. May the Omnipresent return you in peace," which highlights the matter of "return," as Rabbi Yohanan giving his blessing for Rav Assi's return to Babylon, despite the halakhic probibition, once he comes to understand the scope of Rav Assi's distress. According to this more likely interpretation, Rav Assi regrets not that he has left Eretz Yisrael in order to meet his mother (once again, a conflict that is not mentioned at all in the story), but that he has left Babylon for the Land of Israel. He is saying: "Had I known before

5 This is the interpretation of the Rashash (Rabbi Samuel Strashun, 1794-1872), as well as Rovner and Kosman. See Kosman 2008, p. 132, n. 12.

my departure from Babylon that she would soon die, I would not have left her." Thus, in the final analysis, Rav Assi returns and chooses his Babylonian biological mother over his spiritual father in the Land of Israel.

Therefore, the story raises the need to choose between mother and father, and thus between Babylon and the Land of Israel. Babylon is the homeland identified with the mother, and it is difficult if not impossible to detach oneself from it. Even should he successfully remove himself physically, it seems that the hero remains emotionally connected, and he feels considerable guilt over his abandonment of her.

Rav Assi's extensive deliberation, his flitting between sages, and his fixation on Rabbi Yohanan's imagined anger likewise expose his fear of the need to choose between mother and father. They also reveal his ambivalence between a return to his mother in Babylon – a return decidedly regressive in nature – and the continuation of his flourishing life in the Land of Israel, "the land of the fathers."

Thus, the story is open to two contradictory readings that both emphasize the conflict between mother and father, between Babylon and the Land of Israel, found at the heart of the story. Rav Assi's final words, according to the interpretation set forth here, may also be read on two levels. On the national level, they explain why, despite the masculine spirituality of the Land of Israel, the Jews of the Babylonian exile find it difficult to go there, and most stay in the bosom of their Babylonian mother. On the personal-psychological level, they illustrate that the exit from the woman's body does not conclude with birth, and that separation from the mother is accompanied by a complex and ongoing emotional process. This is, however, only one possible way of understanding the story, and most commentators chose to interpret otherwise.

According to the more common reading of the story, Rav Assi is entirely comfortable with his choice of Father-Israel, to the point that even a brief and temporary sojourn away from him and towards Mother-Babylon pains him. This interpretation suggests that the physical migration between Babylon and the Land of Israel has been completed, and reinforced by an emotional and religious migration. Rav Assi has firmly decided on Father-Israel.

In designing a story open to two contradictory readings, the Babylonian creators and redactors of the story expose, consciously or not, a deep truth. Rav Assi's unresolved drama belongs not only to him - it is also the inheritance of the Babylonian sages, and perhaps also of American Jewry, and Diaspora Jewry in general, today. ■

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"It's Not You, It's Me"

An Optimistic Take on the 'Western Wall Crisis' and Jewish Peoplehood in Israel

Naama Klar

The Western Wall Crisis as a Surprise in Israel-Diaspora Relations

Five years ago, on the morning of June 25, 2017, the Israeli government shelved the Western Wall compromise, which was meant to enable egalitarian prayer in the central plaza of the holy site. The compromise was scrapped unilaterally and seemingly out of nowhere. This particularly came as a surprise in light of the fact that the compromise was canceled after four and a half years of discussion between Israel and Diaspora Jewish leaders, mediated by Natan Sharansky, then the chairman of the Jewish Agency.

The response was fierce, in a deviation from the usual civility of American Jewish organizations' conduct towards Israel. "The Federation in Chicago will not be hosting any member of Knesset that votes for this bill," said Steven Nasatir, president of the Chicago Jewish Federation. "None. They will not be welcome in our community."

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Similar replies were heard from major philanthropists who had dedicated their lives and their wealth to Israel and the Jewish people. Criticism and rebuke that had once been heard only behind closed doors suddenly resounded in the public square. Charles Bronfman, one of the Jewish world's most prominent philanthropists, wrote to Israel's then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he knew of no other country that "denies any Jew based on denomination." In case the message was not sufficiently clear, the Jewish Agency Board of Governors revoked Netanyahu's invitation to its annual gala. These events made waves well beyond the Jewish community, and were covered in leading newspapers such as the New York Times.

Only the Jewish people's holiest site – the Western Wall, symbol of the Jewish nation – could have aroused such a heated and public response.

The cancellation of the Western Wall compromise was ostensibly just one more link in a chain of events that had distanced and even alienated Israeli Jews from their brothers in the

Diaspora. In the past few decades, many events of this kind, primarily with regard to issues of religion and state, or majority vs. minority rights (both within Israeli society and in Israeli-Palestinian relations), have brought tensions to a head (and sometimes led to solutions).

However, the cancellation of the Western Wall compromise in 2017 created a unique crisis. The primary victims were at the heart of the active Jewish leadership, the tiny percentage of Jews who have devoted their lives to the wellbeing of Israel and the Jewish people. This stands in contrast to other crises in the past, which primarily targeted the Jewish periphery – those Jews farthest removed from Israel or from their Jewish identity, for whom every negative scrap of information only makes Israel or Judaism feel even less relevant to their lives.

Therefore, the response to the Western Wall crisis came from senior Jewish leadership, who decided to air their dirty laundry in public this time. Because of the intensity of the crisis and its public nature, it also initiated a process of repair and rebuilding, as I will discuss in this article.

The question of whether non-Orthodox Jews can feel at home at the Western Wall exists within a larger context. With the cancellation of the Western Wall compromise, numerous tensions that had simmered in the Israel-Diaspora relationship for many years finally came to a boil. The crisis took place in a blind spot that has gradually formed in Israel in recent decades – a blind spot that pertains to the core question of Zionism: What does it mean to be the national home of the Jewish people in the 21st century?

The Home of the Jewish People – Israel's Mission

Zionism is the liberation movement of the Jewish people. As such, Israel's mission is not to invent new cherry tomatoes or the Iron Dome, and not even to create an exemplary society. Rather, Israel's mission is to fulfill the Jewish people's right to self-determination, a right that is reserved for nations alone. This mission can only be accomplished through the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people – not only for the Jews here in Israel, who as of now still do not comprise the majority of the world's Jews, but for the entire Jewish people.

Israel's mission is not to invent new cherry tomatoes or the Iron Dome, and not even to create an exemplary society. Israel's mission is to fulfill the Jewish people's right to self-determination

For dozens of years, Israel successfully fulfilled this mission, primarily by keeping its doors open for Jewish immigration. Even when Israelis were forced to share their bounty with new immigrants, Israel continued to facilitate and absorb immigration. The important Zionist value of Jewish immigration still plays a central role, with almost no dissent. However, for Israel to fulfill its mission as a national home for the entire Jewish people, this value alone is no longer sufficient. As a result of profound global trends (citizens of the world; a class of "global nomads"), trends in Israel (cycles of immigration and emigration, and the erasure of the old dichotomy between the two), and trends in world Jewry (the persecution of Jews at a historic low), immigration may remain an ideal, but it can no longer comprise the be-all and end-all of Israel's mission. Therefore, it is a Zionist imperative to reinvigorate and strengthen Israel's mission as the national home of the Jewish people.

"Negation of the Exile" – Israeli Society's Blinders

The primary obstacle for Israeli Jewish society in dealing with this crucial issue is "negation of the exile," a deeply rooted idea in Israeli Zionism. Negation of the exile is a view that runs through the Zionist movement, finding expression and language in the writings of J. H. Brenner and others. According to this view, exile is a temporary and undesirable phase that will ultimately come to an end with the immigration of all Jews to Israel. Those who stay in exile will either not survive or not remain Jewish.

The challenge faced by the generation of Israel's founders was the establishment of a national home. If we compound that task with the negation of the exile, what we get is the view that the Israeli Jew is more important and exalted than the Jews who remain in the Diaspora and/or "support Israel from the outside."

Even today, this view is widespread in Israeli Jewish society. Diaspora Jews can make up for their supposed inferiority by immigrating to Israel, and then Israelis will admire them for the fact of having done so. However, there is a good chance that the new immigrants will encounter mockery and indifference toward the world they have brought with them, as well as pressure to become "as Israeli as possible, as fast as possible."

Thanks to our negation of the exile, we Israelis have a tendency to see our brothers' situation in the Diaspora as lesser, temporary, undesirable, unsustainable. This perspective, which informs Israel-Diaspora relations today, does not allow Israel to flourish and endangers the fulfillment of the Zionist vision.

Thanks to our negation of the exile, we Israelis have a tendency to see our brothers' situation in the Diaspora as lesser, temporary, undesirable, unsustainable

The Dangers of this Approach

The State of Israel, like other young nation-states around the world, needs two sources of legitimacy to exist. The first is international legitimacy. Thus, for example, BDS organizations understand that the deterioration of Israel's international legitimacy will weaken Israel, and so they act to further this deterioration. The second, and more important, is internal legitimacy – legitimacy among the Jewish people. The right to self-determination is reserved for nations, and perhaps this right may only be fulfilled once a critical mass of the nation grants full weight to the national idea.

At first, the Zionist movement suffered from a lack of legitimacy within the Jewish people. The early Zionists were wise enough to band together and cooperate to an astonishing extent, but almost every group that comes to mind was opposed to Zionism at its inception: educated Jews, local patriots (nationalists), socialists, the ultra-Orthodox, the Reform Movement, and so forth. Only a specific configuration of historical events – an increased persecution of Jews that reached its apex with the Holocaust; a growing international willingness to allow the formation of a Jewish home (for example, in the Balfour Declaration); and of course Jewish immigration to Israel, which determined the reality on the ground – led to massive support for the Zionist idea among the Jewish people by the time the establishment of the state was announced.

However, only in 1967 did the support and consent of the majority of the Jewish people gain a strong foundation. In that year, "the year of the Zionization of Diaspora Jewry,"

the seeds were sown for both unity and division: Israel's victories in the Six-Day War, particularly the liberation of Jewish holy sites such as the Western Wall, led to a widespread faith that the Zionist idea had a chance of succeeding, and inspired amazement and pride throughout the Jewish world. That year, more and more Jewish organizations, such as the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the Union of French Jewish Students, began to systematically define themselves as Zionists. Israeli flags began to appear in synagogues across the Diaspora, among other such gestures. As we noted in the beginning of this article, the very same Western Wall that once played a major role in world Jewry's mass embrace of Israel in 1967 is now the site of the two sides' bitterest arguments.

The primary fear is that recent events, in which Israel has failed to fulfill its mission as a national home for the Jewish people, have eroded the Jewish state's basis of legitimacy among the Jewish people. The depth of the danger posed by this possibility to the Zionist idea is inestimable. If Diaspora Jews actively or passively turn their backs on Israel, Israel will find itself more exposed in the international sphere; it will lose a unique and irreplaceable source of power for its economy, national security, philanthropy, and society; its international legitimacy will be damaged; and most of all – without the Jewish people, Israel will be unable to fulfill its Zionist mission, to serve as a national home for the entire Jewish people. Despite these dangers, the State of Israel operated from a "negation of the exile" standpoint in 2017, remaining blind to deeper trends and their significance.

The most basic action that we must take is the replacement of the "negation of the exile" idea with a philosophy of Jewish peoplehood - in our thoughts, our words, our deeds, and even in Israeli policy

Jewish Peoplehood as a Theoretical Response to "Negation of the Exile"

"Jewish peoplehood" is a somewhat odd phrase that has entered the Israeli lexicon, but its meaning is simple and intuitive: We Israelis - along with the majority of the Jewish people, who live outside of Israel - are members of the Jewish people. We are first and foremost a family, a large tribe. We are not only a religion and not only a Jewish nation (in the narrow sense of the word – i.e. sovereignty over the Land of Israel). Rather, we are part of something greater, more ancient, and more meaningful – the Jewish people.

Together, we share memory and history, a homeland and a language, a religion and a covenant with God, heritage and cultural assets, and more. We have an obligation to the generations before us, as well as to future generations, to whom we will bequeath the Jewish inheritance and mission. And we have an obligation to one another, each community to the other, because we are a nation.

In this sense, any idea that is not in the spirit of "peoplehood" diminishes the whole of the Jewish people. Today, we see two common mistakes: the belief that Judaism can exist only as a nation (in the narrow sense of sovereignty over the Land of Israel); and the belief that Judaism is only a religion (a common mistake among Diaspora Jews, and one which plays into the hands of our greatest enemies). Both of these views set their holders apart from the Jewish people as a whole, and they are not constructive for our future. This understanding is vital, as the future of the Jewish people is a concept that is undergoing a dramatic change in our day.

The challenge of our generation is not the establishment of a national home – not because the work is complete, but because we now face a different, complex challenge: to preserve Jewish continuity. What was obvious for countless generations – our self-definition as Jews, as contrasted to the other nations around us – may no longer be taken for granted today. Almost every Jew today has the option to choose whether or how to be a Jew. This challenge is the result of the Jewish people's remarkable success in weathering the storms of the past two hundred years, and even prospering. This success is no less than awe-inspiring – but it contains a new and complicated challenge. Jewish institutions and leadership are not responding to this challenge, making it that much harder to prepare adequately for the future.

We have reached an unprecedented point in the history of the Jewish people, one that challenges its continuity as a single people. If we do not take action, the continuity of the Jewish people will be in jeopardy.

In response to this enormous challenge, the most basic action that we must take is the replacement of the "negation of the exile" idea with a philosophy of Jewish peoplehood – in our thoughts, our words, our deeds, and even in Israeli policy.

According to the negation of the exile, Israel stands at the very center, and therefore Israeli Jews are more important than the Jews in the "outer circles." However, if the challenge is the continuity of the Jewish people as a single entity, all of us are equal around the circle, and no Jew is more important or elevated than his fellow. This is Jewish peoplehood.

After the Western Wall Crisis – A New Lease on Jewish Peoplehood in Israel

Educational and social activism toward Jewish peoplehood has already been taking place in Israel for several decades. In this context, we may note the Twin Schools program, the Jewish Agency's Partnership2Gether program, the educational programs of Melitz (Avraham Infeld and his students), and so forth. However, the Western Wall crisis was a wake-up call for leaders in Israel who are passionate about the issue of the Jewish people, and it led to an increase in the quantity and quality of such activities in Israel over the past five years.

As Winston Churchill once said, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." Indeed, today, almost six years after the Western Wall crisis, the societal treatment of this issue has gathered momentum and depth. As a result, today many more Israelis than in the past have been exposed to, and feel a sense of responsibility for, the connection between Israel and Diaspora Jewry. The credit for this change lies with Jewish philanthropy, such as the Jewish Federations, the Rodan Family Foundation, the Ruderman Family Foundation, the Koret Foundation, and the philanthropist Charles Bronfman, which placed heavy emphasis on the subject after the Western Wall crisis. Likewise, the change may be credited to the educational and social leaders working tirelessly for the value of peoplehood, and to the venerable organizations and institutions that took it upon themselves to advance the value of peoplehood.

First, in the past five years, the number of "reverse Birthright" delegations for senior Israeli figures has increased many times over. There are several organizations that have continued to lead and operate on this front. These delegations spend several days getting to know Jewish communities in the Diaspora. This is an

intensive, highly effective tool, but its primary disadvantage is that its cost makes it inaccessible to all but a select few.

Second, in the past five years, educational activity on the subject of Jewish peoplehood – in both formal and informal education – has become much more common and extremely impressive in its quality. This educational revolution has been achieved in partnership with governmental offices, particularly the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and the Ministry of Education. Additional participants in this field include venerable governmental agencies such as the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization, various educational organizations, and educational entrepreneurs. ANU – Museum of the Jewish People, where I work today, has hosted day-long programs on peoplehood for tens of thousands of Israeli children and teens, and we're still going strong.[1]

Will the State of Israel be wise enough to operate its holy sites for the good of all Jews, or will it work only for the good of its citizens (Israeli Jews)?

Today, the topic of peoplehood has been taken up by the Israeli Ministry of Education, through the study unit "Jewish Israeli Culture" and through the Youth and Society Administration. Informal education also dedicates attention to peoplehood; for example, youth associations and youth movements appoint "peoplehood coordinators," who work with Israeli youth to cultivate a connection to Diaspora Jewry. The subject of peoplehood is also part of the yearly curriculum in most of Israel's pre-army academies, and it is built into a growing number of leadership programs in Israel.

Third, in the previous elections for the Knesset, the vast majority of the Jewish political parties addressed Israel-Diaspora relations in their party platforms. It should be noted that more than half of these parties articulated this section of their platforms for the first time in the 2020 elections. Most of the platforms declared that the government bears responsibility for Jewish communities in the Diaspora and is responsible for maintaining a connection between these communities and the State of Israel.

Fourth, in 2018, the Reut Group established the Jewish Peoplehood Coalition.[2] The coalition provides a platform for dialogue among leaders committed to the issue of peoplehood. Today, it brings together approximately 500 Israeli leaders who, together and individually, advance the approach of Jewish peoplehood in various ways. In recent years, despite its significant internal diversity and its many disagreements, the coalition has succeeded in enabling collaborative activity, both in words and in deeds, that advances a shared vision of Israeli society as part of the broader Jewish people. I believe that much of the progress on this front has been achieved thanks to the opportunities for networking and collaboration granted to the Jewish Peoplehood Coalition by its members.

Since September 2021, my colleagues at Reut have conducted a quarterly mapping of all the activity in the field of peoplehood in Israel.[3] This mapping is meant to provide a snapshot of our

1 See the museum's website: anumuseum.org.il.

2 See the Reut Group's website: https://www.reutgroup.org/peoplehood-coalition.

3 This survey is available on the Reut Group's website: https://www.reutgroup.org/.

progress, in light of the challenges along the way, until we reach the desired aim: an Israeli society that sees itself as part of the broader Jewish people. The mapping reveals that in the past two decades, activities in the field of peoplehood have more than doubled; a third of these activities commenced only after the Western Wall crisis. These new programs are developing new content and reaching diverse audiences.

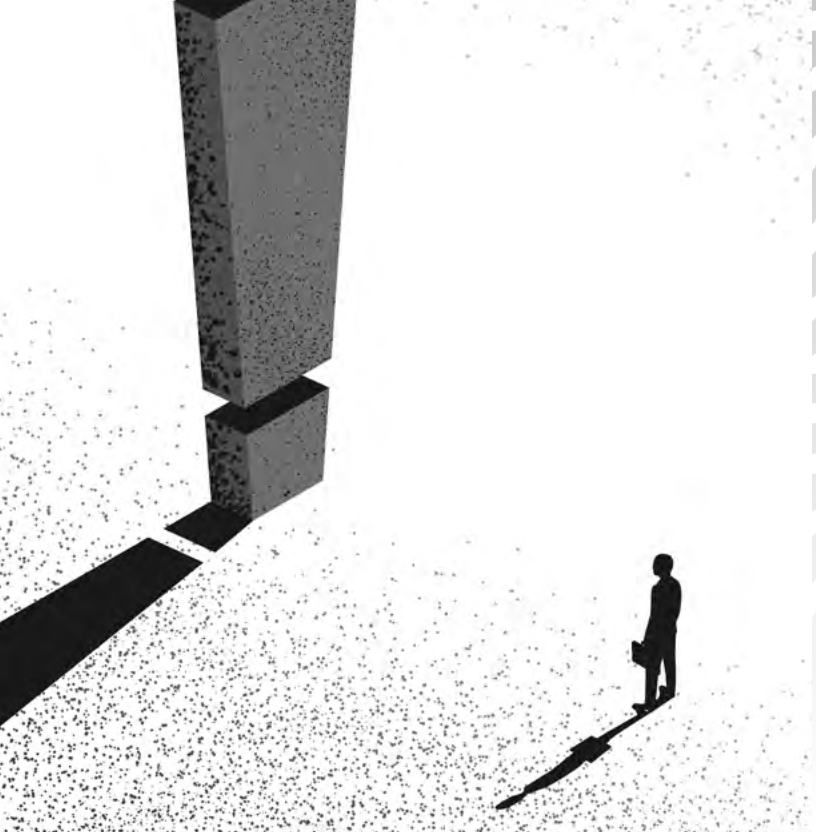
It is hard to put one's finger on a change in views. However, the results of the above attempts to strengthen Israel's connection to the Jewish people have already proved themselves in a number of surveys. In 2022, the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs conducted a survey showing that 56–58% of Israelis recognize their responsibility and commitment to the continued existence of Jewish communities in the Diaspora. Further, it found that 57% of Israelis believe that Israel should take the interests of Diaspora Jews into account when making security and foreign policy decisions that affect them directly.

The Home of the Jewish People – From Walls to Family

The story of the Western Wall, the story of the tension between those who feel at home there and those who do not, has not yet come to an end. This crisis is not merely connected to the struggle for pluralism or the endless saga of religion and state in Israel - it touches on the Zionist vision itself. In recent years, the Western Wall has served as a diagnostic tool for Israel's ability to perform its function as a national home for Jews around the world who are not citizens of the state. Will the State of Israel be wise enough to operate its holy sites for the good of all Jews, or will it work only for the good of its citizens (Israeli Jews)?

The Western Wall is a powerful symbol, of course, but it is not the issue. "The crisis behind the crisis" is that most Israelis are indifferent to the situation; they do not understand it at all and do not feel that it has any relevance to their lives or their identities. In order to solve this crisis, Zionism and Jewish Israeli society must mature into their next stage, in which not only the existence and security of our national home's walls will be strengthened, but also our ties to our extended family. Our family is the Jewish people. Therefore, every Jew in Israel must see himself as a member of the great, age-old, vibrant Jewish people, and feel responsibility or even humility when it comes to his membership in this group.

"The crux is the people. The rejuvenation of the people precedes the redemption of the land. For us, everything rests on the people."
(A. D. Gordon) ■



Will Diaspora Progressive Zionism Still Be Around in 2030?

Jakir Manela

Stories and Reflections from the Lonely Front Lines

It was spring 2002; I was a sophomore in college. I was horrified by the second intifada unfolding in the news, and the campus dynamic was quickly deteriorating into combative shouting matches without any ability or interest in listening or learning from those who think differently. I joined a few like-minded friends to start a progressive Jewish campus group that identified as pro-peace, pro-Israel, *and* pro-Palestinian, aiming to cultivate understanding and empathy. Initially we were not interested in attending the pro-Israel rally scheduled to take place in DC that April, but a mentor encouraged me to attend, pointing out that our progressive voice and presence was sorely needed in that space. So a few of us chose to attend, wearing t-shirts that said "Shalom | Peace | Salaam" and carrying signs that said "I am Pro-Peace, Pro-Israel, Pro-Palestinian" and "We Have Faith in Co-Existence". Our experience at the rally was both formative and traumatic: we were shouted at, pushed and shoved, and spit on by pro-Israel Jews that day.

About eight years later, as a young Jewish professional, I attended the GA (the General Assembly of the Jewish Federations of North America) for the first time and got to see the Prime Minister of Israel speak in person. But that day in New Orleans, November 8, 2010, turned into another formative, traumatic event for me and other young progressive American Jews in attendance, when young Jewish protestors interrupted Netanyahu's speech chanting "The Occupation Delegitimizes Israel! The Occupation Delegitimizes Israel! The Occupation Delegitimizes Israel!" For at least 10+ minutes–and what seemed like an eternity–they repeatedly interrupted Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech to several thousand American Jewish leaders

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from all across the country. The crowd was shocked at first, and then increasingly angry – and I watched alongside a good friend as the protestors were dragged out of the convention hall as they continued to shout words we actually agreed with, while furious attendees shouted back at them, clearly overcome with rage. My friend and I looked at each other in that moment, shocked, and then she said to me: "I never want to go to Israel ever again."

Later that year, after stepping into my first Jewish nonprofit executive leadership position, I participated in a gathering of Jewish social and environmental educators, activists, and leaders from Israel, America, and Europe – many of us just meeting for the first time, and all of us trying to learn from and support one another in our sacred, difficult work. During an unforgettable dialogue session over Shabbat, Israeli social justice leaders lovingly called us out, their American counterparts: "Your silence on Israel was deafening," they said, "and we – your Israeli counterparts–need your support." Then, one after another, American Jewish progressive leaders stood up to talk about how silenced they/we feel, how we could lose funding or our jobs if we criticize Israel. Senior, veteran and trailblazing leaders admitted – collectively and individually – to feeling great pain over the silence that American Jewry indirectly imposes on them. The heartbreak in that room was palpable.

Just a few years ago, after many years of relationship-building and impact in my work, I participated in an Israel dialogue experience with a group of lay leaders who wanted to break through the difficulties in talking about Israel and cultivate a more respectful, genuine understanding of different views about Israel. At one point we were asked to discuss the question, "Should American Jews be allowed to criticize Israel in public?", and I said to my small group, "Put another way, this question is asking whether we think J-Street should be allowed to exist..." to which a powerful community leader responded by asking me, "So you support BDS?". Panicked and upset, I assured him that was not the case, and was much quieter throughout the rest of that dialogue experience, fearing for my reputation and job security.

In November I sent out an essay to the 20,000 people on our national list–people who are interested in the intersection between Judaism and sustainability, and the powerful work we do in cultivating vibrant Jewish life in deep connection with the earth. I wrote about my recent experience on the Arava Institute-Hazon Israel Ride, how inspired I was by that experience, how much I believe in the work of the Arava Institute as a global leader in peace-building through environmental cooperation, and how despite–and in some ways, because of–the dismay that many of us feel facing the outcome of the recent Israeli elections, we *must* invest in building grassroots Israel-Diaspora connections, now more than ever. My message was criticized and challenged, not by far-flung outsiders, but by core leading constituents representing both the center/right and left of my constituency.

American Jewish progressive leaders stood up to talk about how silenced they feel, how they could lose their jobs if we criticize Israel

I share these stories–and there are many more–to reveal the excruciating experience of what it means to be an American Jewish progressive Zionist over the past 10-20 years. These experiences haunt me–how they felt, what they meant, and how they foreshadow where we've come and where we may be headed.

I hardly ever use the "Z word" anymore, and the "P" word is quite challenging now as well:

progressive. There are very few American Jewish progressive organizations leaning into Israel engagement like we do, and these days feel like we've entered a new chapter. Maybe I'm a dinosaur from a time gone by; I mean after all, I'm now 40 and first visited Israel as a 17-year-old in 1999, back when there was still abiding hope–for many–of some kind of near-term achievable peace and resolution to the conflict. That was a long time ago–I have visited Israel many times since, and often dreamed of living there. But today, there are two generations of adults younger than me (I'm a very old millenial) who have grown up with Israel constantly mired in tragic violence destroying innocent lives, Israeli and Palestinian. And while the conflict is complicated and Palestinian leadership is nowhere near innocent, our polarized political discourse has now evolved to the point where to be progressive one is expected to be anti-Israel. In that context, we must face a painful truth: young, liberal and progressive diaspora Jews are unlikely to embrace Israel on any large scale as long as the conflict rages on. We may not like it, we may think it's unfair, we may even point to the inspiring work of Israeli progressives on social justice and sustainability issues impacting Palestinians and Arab Israelis–and I resonate with all of these responses!--but none of them change these clear demographic and attitudinal trends across the younger generations of Jews in the Diaspora.

I hardly ever use the "Z word" anymore, and the "P" word is quite challenging now as well: Progressive

At a more recent GA, I attended a session focused on the disturbing rise of anti-semitism nationwide, and especially on college campuses–where anti-Israel rhetoric has reached fever-pitch. One speaker spoke eloquently about how anti-Zionist forces present a maddening one-sided, brainwashed view of what is clearly a much more complex, nuanced reality on the ground. The room nodded in strong agreement. An amazing woman agreed, and then said one of the most courageous things I've ever witnessed at the GA; she made the inverse point: yes, that one-sided view is profoundly problematic, and we commit the very same harm against our own kids. They grow up in sheltered Jewish communities hearing only one-sided, incomplete histories and narratives about Israel, and then they are confronted by something very different on college campuses. Why? Are we afraid to talk openly about the good, bad, and ugly parts of both the Israeli and Palestinian stories? Why don't we trust our kids enough to empower them with a more nuanced story? Why don't we trust ourselves? Do we think we can't handle it? That our kids will walk away? Is not critical thinking and robust debate and discourse a bedrock foundation for Jewish learning and community? When did we diaspora Jews become so delicate as to be afraid of debate? And surely now, now that the new Israeli government coalition includes heinous leaders who have profoundly violated our Jewish values of tolerance, compassion, justice and love–*now* can we find our voice?

Authentic, healthy relationships are based on mutual respect and trust. Israel-Diaspora relations badly need to heal, starting with a fundamental pivot away from the fear-based model that has brought us to this point. We are equal stakeholders in the Jewish future, equal stakeholders in what Judaism means in the 21st century, and equal partners who *must* be able to air our disagreements and challenges openly, honestly, and without judgment. In the Diaspora, we have to be comfortable and confident enough in ourselves to be radically more open than we ever have before.

And from that genuine posture of humility,

open-mindedness, and open-heartedness, let us find meaningful shared work that we can do together as one Jewish people–to manifest our shared values and achieve big things that we cannot do alone.

"Climate change will have a decisive impact on all areas of life in Israel, including: water, public health, agriculture, energy, biodiversity, coastal infrastructure, economics, nature, national security, and geostrategy. Israel's poor, elderly, and chronically ill will be disproportionately harmed. Anticipated rainfall reduction could decrease the flow of the Jordan River by 22%, imperiling the region's freshwater. The agricultural sector will be damaged, as will livestock and fishing. Rising sea levels will impact Israel's coastline, potentially leading to saltwater infiltration of aquifers and degrading coastal cliffs, displacing residences, hotels, heritage sites, factories, and more."[1]

The existential threat and moral urgency of the climate crisis compels us to respond with the full force of the Jewish people. We need all of us in this moment–all our brilliance and creativity, our resourcefulness and resilience, our power and influence–and we are activating a global Jewish Climate Leadership Coalition in order to mobilize Israeli and Diaspora leadership, to bring us together to tackle this crisis as one people.

There's been a beautiful tradition of Hazon bike rides, where a mini-Torah scroll is passed from one rider to another each day, carrying the Torah along for the journey. After the ride, the Torah was passed to me, and since then I carried it from Israel to Egypt, to COP27, and now back home. It is an awesome feeling–literally, full of awe–to carry a Torah wherever I go. And it's the physical embodiment of a deeper truth: that in every generation, we carry Jewish tradition forward, and we make it our own. That journey and that Torah will be infinitely stronger when we travel together.

If only we can find a way to do so...let's not pretend that today's Israel-Diaspora relationship feels inclusive, aligned, or even all that trusting and safe, especially for the Jewish left–progressives inside Israel and across the diaspora. And unless the structural dynamics of American Jewish life change dramatically, it is not so difficult to foresee a time in just a few years when there will not be any American Jewish progressive zionist leaders/organizations strategically prepared and motivated to make Israel-Diaspora engagement a priority, despite the pain that comes with such a choice. The solution is not easy or quick: we need to build a powerful coalition of impactful and influential Jewish progressive leaders across the United States, the Diaspora, and Israel in order to break through this cultural paralysis and decline. We need to listen to and learn from those on the frontlines of this divide – and then creatively and collectively experiment with interventions, over time, to learn how we might turn the tide. As we face this task, the cultural dynamics are daunting – almost as seemingly insurmountable as the climate crisis. But as the anthem says, our hope is not yet lost. ■

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1 Climate Change Trends and Impact in Israel". Israel's Ministry of Environmental Protection. November 2, 2020.

From Infatuation to Relationship

Jewish Leadership Meets Jewish Leadership

Nira Nachaliel

For three years now, a group of American rabbis from across the denominational spectrum has gathered for learning in Israel and a seminar in the USA. Three Israelis, graduates of the Beit Midrash for Israeli Rabbis, also took part in the program. I met with them for a conversation about the encounter and about the challenges - shared and different - faced by the two great centers of Jewish life.

The Rabbinic Leadership Initiative (RLI) program takes place at the Shalom Hartman Institute. It includes group learning, lectures by prominent figures in Israel, tours of Israel, and countless conversations between the participants.

The participants in the conversation that follows were:

Rabba Hadas Ron-Zariz, from Kibbutz Yifat. Hadas leads the Yifat b'Ruach community in northern Israel, and is among the founders of the Midrasha at Oranim. She teaches pastoral care and community support.

Rabbi Tzvika Graetz, from Jerusalem. Tzvika is the rabbi of the Hod ve-Hadar community in Kfar Saba. Previously, he served as the CEO of Masorti Olami. He was ordained by the Conservative Movement, the Beit Midrash for Israeli Rabbis, and Beit Midrash Har'el.

Rabba Dotan Arieli, from Shaar Haamakim. Dotan is a group facilitator on topics of Jewish identity and gender at the Midrasha at Oranim and the Kolot Beit Midrash. She is the head of pedagogy and an educator for the Kibbutz Movement's Kazeh Re'eh Vehadesh program.

First of all, tell us about one meaningful and eye-opening experience that you had during the program.

Hadas: This group led to many meaningful experiences for me – mostly by getting to know each other, which allowed me a peek into worlds both like and very much unlike ours. One of these experiences happened during Operation Guardian of the Walls. The night the operation

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began, we – Dotan, Tzvika and I – wrote in the program's shared WhatsApp group, trying to describe what was happening, each of us from our own perspective. We felt that the Americans stood with us, were worried for us, and wanted to understand, but that there was also a certain distance. This experience repeated itself in various ways over the course of our years together, whenever important things happened to them or to us.

Another experience was during the pandemic. Covid made clear to me both the similarity and the differences between us. Because it was a universal, worldwide pandemic, there was an expectation that the boundaries between us would break down and we would discover the deep similarities we shared. It's true that we had a mutual sense of worry for each other, but I felt that we went through different experiences. Maybe the differences came from the fact that they were responsible for many other people in their communities, because while Israel is a small country, Covid was a problem felt on a nationwide, and not only a community, level. So there was a dramatic difference in the ways we coped with the pandemic.

It turns out that we live in different cultures. With all the closeness and the love we share, and the mutual appreciation – at the end of the day, they're busy with their own lives, and we're busy with ours. We're very Israeli, even putting aside our Jewishness, and they are very American Jewish.

Tzvika: For me, as an Israeli, it was an interesting experience to walk through the streets of Jerusalem next to an important and influential American rabbi of Korean ancestry. People around me didn't know who she was. They thought that she was from Korea, maybe pro-Israel... No one imagined that she was one of the most influential rabbis in liberal American Jewry. Or when we went with them to Hebron, Israelis tried to educate them or explain things to them, not imagining that each of these rabbis serves as a leader for thousands of people. In Israeli society, no one even recognizes them, which attests to the extent of the disconnect between American and Israeli Jewry.

The same thing was true the other way around. The Americans weren't familiar with extremely influential figures in Israeli society. For example, here, it was a huge story when Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, a well-known and very conservative Orthodox rabbi and a settler, met with a female Reform rabbi. It almost didn't interest them at all. They didn't understand how big a deal it was in Israeli society.

I've always been optimistic, but I saw firsthand that it was very hard to work on the connection between us. In my opinion, our worlds have gone different ways, well beyond the cultural differences. Now, I'm worried that we just won't be able to connect. There's a disconnect. Today, we should be asking, "Where is our relationship going?" – What are we going to do about it?

It sounds like the encounter led to pessimism, not the optimism that I would have expected. Do you think the disconnect comes from a lack of familiarity with what's happening in Israel? Or maybe they don't want to understand, or can't understand – maybe because of their political views? How would you explain it?

Tzvika: The discourse is post-Zionist in the best of cases, a discourse cut off from the Zionist ethos held by most Israelis today. After 30 years of working in the field of Israel-Diaspora relations, I feel that we've lost large swaths of the Diaspora.

In your impression, what are the questions that the American Jewish leadership is most concerned with?

Tzvika: They are very concerned with the political issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Most have adopted a narrative dictated by a minority of Israelis, according to which Israel is an oppressor and a conqueror, and the Jewish people has failed the test of sovereignty. As I understand it, they're also committed to this narrative because they can't let themselves be identified with the American right.

They're also very much absorbed in the question of Jewish education. It seems to me that aside from a few excellent – and very expensive – private Jewish schools, Jewish education has failed in America, and Judaism there is on its deathbed. Jewish education requires tremendous resources, and even when they have those resources, it doesn't ensure Jewish continuity. Here, by contrast, there is the potential for a Judaism that's alive and kicking. We have a free education system, not to mention public services like universal health care. Our vibrant Judaism finds its expression in the flourishing of pre-army academies, among other things. A Jew can be fully a Jew when he lives in his land. I admire them for the choice they make every day to be Jewish, without throwing up their hands – to be a Jew outside of Israel is not an easy sacrifice to make. They try to hold onto Judaism with all their might and with all the money available to them, and it's slipping through their fingers. It's a great tragedy. When they understood that they couldn't fight rising assimilation, they practically stopped asking people to convert, and welcomed everyone as they were with open arms. In this way, the stable, familiar Jewish family is disappearing.

Recently, they've also had to deal with antisemitism from the right and left, and with all the security issues that come with that. And they're asking themselves questions about political identity, identification with Israel, and so on.

Hadas: There are issues in Israel that aren't relevant to their lives and don't really interest them. And we're also not that interested in what's happening there. The question of Judaism in America is a very serious question. They're dealing with assimilation, with Jewish education that's becoming less deep and meaningful. They're like the finger in the dike.

Most of American Jewry can be split into two factions – they're either right-wing and Zionist, or they're left-wing and post-Zionist. These rabbis have to live with complexity all the time, also when it comes to Israel. Sometimes it seems that they're the last ones left who haven't made an either-or choice, who insist both on a liberal Jewish outlook and on a connection to Israel. From that perspective, I feel similarly to them, as I share the Beit Midrash for Israeli Rabbis' view of complex leadership and complex Zionism. I identify with their struggle not to let go of Israel, even if sometimes they wish they could.

They are my partners, and my friends' and colleagues' partners, in trying to hang on to the complexities of a Zionist left and a pluralistic Judaism. This is exactly why our role is to strengthen the connection between us. They make us stronger, and we make them stronger.

In your eyes, why is it important for encounters like these to take place?

Dotan: It's important to meet for a serious, extended encounter. There were some figures in the group who showed me how to hold complex and ostensibly contradictory positions. Of course, it's hard for them to understand the complexity I live in – as an Israeli, a Zionist, and a liberal, with children living here and serving in the army. They can be in conversation about this with me and with all of us. This is a conversation that gives me strength. The encounter is important and empowering for me. Whether

there's criticism or support – the conversation and the deep sharing are important.

Hadas: They broaden my horizons and "force me" to see and confront things that I don't see or avert my eyes from. I'll give an example: I didn't go to Hebron for many years, and I tried to avoid going. Maybe I wanted to bury my head in the sand. American Jews visit Hebron much more often than Israelis, and certainly more than left-wing Israelis. The paradox is that thanks to the program, I made it there and I saw the complicated situation. There's something in their perspective, the dialogue with them and their view from the outside – which is at the same time very familiar and empathic – that expands my own way of looking at things. During Operation Guardian of the Walls, we talked to them about the complexity of army service and about our hopes for peace and the preservation of human rights. This is the complexity we live in, this is our struggle, and I want North American Jews to share in it with me. The fact that they made an effort to come to Israel during the war gave me a feeling that the conflict doesn't just belong to us in Israel; it's also theirs. I began to feel that this community of rabbis was a unique group that could see reality, with all its challenges, and feel responsibility toward one another. We're brought together by our insistence on always hearing another perspective from other people.

Tzvika: On a personal level, I enjoy meeting with them, and I've built deep and meaningful friendships with dear friends. But I served as the CEO of Masorti Olami for ten years, I worked a lot with Diaspora Jewry and specifically American Jewry, I was an ambassador for the Jewish Agency. The subject of the Diaspora was very close to my heart. I wrote, I developed curricula. I dedicated and still dedicate my life to the field – and I believed in it. Today, I believe in it less.

Today, they operate from a universalistic view of Judaism, and in my opinion this will lead to the end of an authentic Judaism connected to its roots. I'm sorry to say that I think Judaism in the Diaspora has a time limit. We have a responsibility to make sure that they don't disappear, to make sure that everyone who can make aliyah does, to protect the leadership. We have to bring them to a place where they can live and develop their Judaism so that we, pluralistic Jews in Israel, will be a more significant presence or even a majority.

Dotan: The ongoing conversation between equals, between peers, creates intimate, close contact with American Jewish leaders. It creates a connection on an individual, social level, on a professional level, and on a moral level. In this way, a strong, educational connection is formed – a true partnership.

Is there something that we Israelis can learn from them?

Tzvika: We can learn from them about the choice to be Jewish, and about building quality institutions like their excellent, creative schools.

The connection to them is important to me simply because they are my brothers and I am responsible for them. I don't need them in the same way that they need us. I need them to build pluralistic Judaism in Israel.

Hadas: Our three years of learning together created a close partnership. From them, I've learned a profound sense of responsibility for the Jewish people. I also appreciate their willingness to lead large, complex communities of people with different needs, and to be there, on the front lines, out of a powerful sense of mission. I'm happy that we've built a friendship that allows us to learn from one another, out of a desire to learn about ourselves through their loving and critical eyes. Thus, I can hear their opinion about what goes on here in Israel, and I don't feel any need to condescend or correct.

When someone from the group comes to Kabbalat Shabbat in my community, or quotes a dvar Torah of mine in his or her community – we

draw on each other as spiritual and intellectual partners, and our world gets a little bigger.

And what did they learn from you? What's the advantage of having them come here, not just learn it all there?

Dotan: It's important to note that the program is directed at the American religious leadership. We're only three Israelis among 30 participants, so the interaction wasn't always mutual.

They think about the deliberations and challenges in our lives within their political and cultural contexts. Today, after three years, they have gotten from us a more complex understanding of Israeli society, and of course friendship, love, and encouragement.

Hadas: To build a beit midrash of people who are different from one another – that takes effort. There's a value to an ongoing connection with American Jewish leaders, one that isn't built on short seminar programs that remain at the level of small talk. An ongoing, personal encounter builds trust, and so they can listen to us on issues that are politically controversial in Israel. We talk about the dilemmas in our lives in a deep, complex way, and we don't use stereotypes to talk about conflicts. We discuss the challenges faced by the Jewish renewal movement in Israel, or about left and right, from each of our perspectives. From meeting with us, they get to know another angle on Judaism. That said, sometimes I feel that it's a challenge to really convey to them the experience of life in the Jezreel Valley, or issues of Jewish pluralism in Israel.

All of us deal with Jewish renewal in the Israeli sense, from within the well-known dichotomy of religious and secular. Do you think that the question of Jewish education is something we have in common, a point of connection? Can the two communities help one other in these areas?

Tzvika: I'm not sure that our work on Jewish renewal is so similar. The Israeli community that I work with is looking for an authentic connection to text because this is a connection to their past, to the language they speak, and to the land they live in. I got the sense that my American partners immediately try to connect the texts to the present day, so that Torah study will feel relevant and speak to a Jew living in the Diaspora, far from the Hebrew language and the Land of Israel. They also spend more time on progressivism. In Israel, we don't spend as much time on that.

Dotan: I think that we have a lot in common on the question of Jewish education – how do you teach pluralistic Judaism, how do you create a diverse Judaism, how can you make room for every authentic and honest Jewish voice? How do you incorporate modern values – progress, gender equality, democracy, sovereignty, and so on – into Jewish life? We can definitely help and support one another in those and other fields in order to get to know the various perspectives and become inspired by one another. Together, hopefully, we'll be able to create a Jewish language suited to modern life, to the 21st century, to a time with a strong Israel and a strong Diaspora.

Hadas: The connection between Israeli and American Jewry is like a romantic relationship. When we first got to know liberal American Jewry over 20 years ago, it was like falling in love. We discovered something new, and we learned all kinds of new ways to express our Judaism. Today, the infatuation has developed into a serious relationship. We've decided to stay together and nourish each other. I want to continue my connection with these leaders, the complex ones, the ones who aren't extreme, the ones who want to come and visit me in Israel, who don't want a divorce from me. Then the question of what I receive and what I give becomes much more complicated. It's a partnership, not a hierarchical relationship between one person who knows and one who

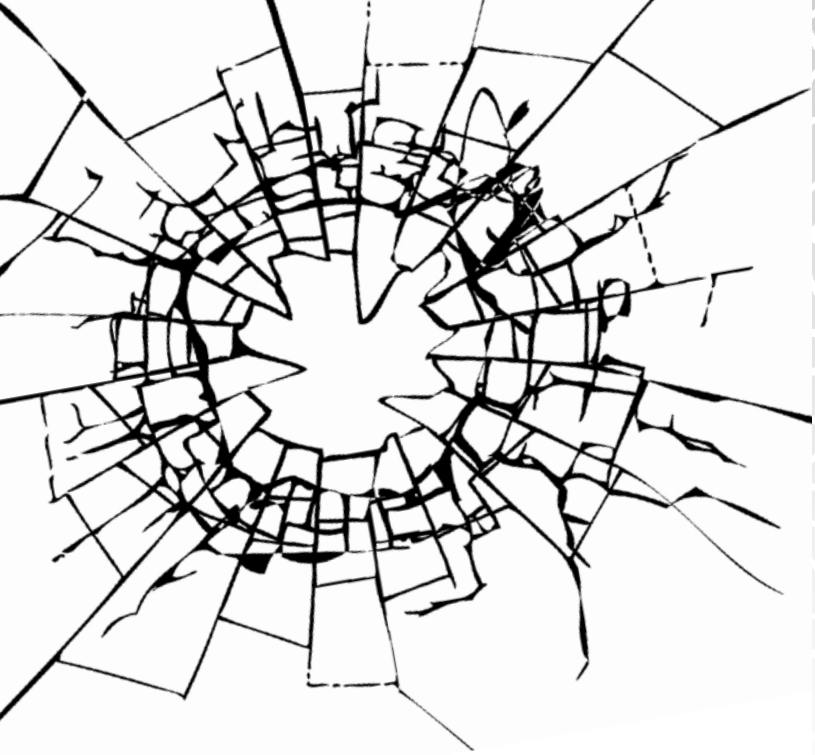
doesn't. I believe that we also enrich them.

Tzvika: I'll use Hadas's lovely metaphor of a relationship, and say that today I'm looking for a "new relationship." The current relationship, which I worked to build for so many years, is between two people who can't be together. They're not in the same territory, they're not in the same house, they're divorced parents raising their kids – the Jewish people – together. It's a sort of frigid Ashkenazi relationship [he adds with a smile]. I'm looking for a new relationship, here in the streets of Israel. I'm looking for settlers, Mizrahim, ex-Soviet immigrants. We need to leave the familiar liberalism of our American brothers, because it prevents us from delving deeper into Israeli society.

Hadas: It's important for me to make my world a little bigger all the time. We're partners, and we'll talk to them. We won't bring them "Judaism," we'll just meet them. The challenges of American Judaism don't contradict the things that need to happen here in Israel. You, Tzvika, grew up with them and now you're moving on. My process has been the opposite – I grew up on the "negation of the exile," and today I have a different view of American Jewry. It's obvious to me where my own center is, but in order to make my own home important, I need to encounter other possibilities.

Dotan: A connection with them doesn't contradict an ability to work from the inside. We can use the image of two homes for the Jewish people. These are two homes that may not occupy the same territorial space, but that share history, a story, sentiment, culture, commitment, love. Each one has a world of its own. We have to ask ourselves how to make sure that external connections don't threaten the central, intimate connection within these homes, but rather deepen it.

When the conversation came to an end, I was left with new ideas about a possible connection between pluralistic Israeli leadership and American Jewish leadership – a connection that doesn't draw its strength from specific controversial issues or even agreement between us, but rather from the kind of relationship that we want to establish, and the methods of communication that we can use to promote the relationship. ■



Every Redemption Needs an Exile

Udi Bernstein

Meditations on the Challenge and the Necessity of Exile

Human beings are creatures of interpretation. We experience the world through a search for meaningful context. We seek a single interpretive framework that ascribes its own coherence and internal logic to events and situations. We need an organizing anchor to guide us through the grand navigation of life – through the mysterious, the arbitrary, and the dangerous. We must have plot and continuity; we build the path as we walk it. At the same time that we experience reality, we construct its story for ourselves.

Humanity requires a unifying idea in order to cooperate, to advance, and to feel a sense of control. As we experience the world, we experience its explanation. We transform hills and valleys, paths and forests into a map. We live within reality, but we also create its representation, which instills reality with logic and coherence. And what makes a map a map is its drawing of boundaries – what is in and what is out, what is at the center and what is on the margins, what belongs and what does not. We may understand the drawing of maps as an evolutionary act directed at a group, and in particular, at the core of the group. For in nature, when you are not part of the group, you are vulnerable.

So we create a center and margins, an interior and an exterior; each designs itself in relation to the other. For there is no I without an Other, and there is no Other without an I. Every Beit Hillel needs a Beit Shammai, and every Beit Shammai needs a Beit Hillel; every messiah needs a false messiah; religiosity needs secularism, and secularism needs religion; every "modern" needs its "post-"; every conservatism needs progressivism, and every progressivism needs

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conservatism; every canon needs apocrypha, and the apocrypha need a canon; every house needs its outside; every theory needs a refutation, and every refutation needs a theory to refute; every culture needs an avant-garde, and every avant-garde needs a culture; every sage needs a prophet, and every prophet needs a sage; every Garden of Eden needs an expulsion, and every expulsion needs a Garden of Eden; every Land of Israel needs an Egypt, and every Egypt needs the Land of Israel; every redemption needs an exile, and every exile needs redemption.

Every place needs a fence, and every fence creates what is outside the fence. Each needs the other to mark its boundaries, reinforce its existence, find its place on the continuum. It is like a man in a dark room who feels for the walls in order to understand – This is the room. When we create maps, we define places that are dependent on what lies outside them. "Definitions" are "finite"; they establish what is within their finite boundaries and what is beyond them. The boundary between interior and exterior defines both, and thus a context is built; the whole world becomes a clear map on which there are continents and seas, borders and named countries.

Now that there is a map, we can start to wander. And there – outside the finite boundary but within the definition – may be found the nomad and the refugee, the asylum-seeker and the traitor, the homeless, the pilgrim, the invader, and the exile. The tent-dweller needs the nomad to make the walls of his tent seem more secure; every institution needs refugees from it in order to confirm its existence; every homeowner needs the homeless in order to understand the pleasure of having a home; the redeemed need the exile in order to savor their redemption.

Thus, the organizing principle lends us words to define everything in existence and its opposite. As long as words are defined – there are boundaries in the world. We have attained an imagined order for our world. It is ever clearer, it has meaning, and it can ostensibly even be predicted. And there is also a place in the world for those outside the border – every place has an outside and an anti-, and thus we eliminate true placenessness from the world. The nomad and the refugee, the asylum-seeker and the traitor, the homeless and the pilgrim, the invader, the exile and the political exile, are all outside, but their identity exists in relation to the place they stand beyond.

Exile, by its very nature, helps the real place to define itself. The fence between the real place and its outside creates a bond between the two. Each defines itself according to the other. The interior defines itself by means of the exterior, and vice versa. Thus, exile may be found outside, but it is an integral element of the inside; it is part of the idea, part of the power dynamic, part of the conversation. Sometimes, it is a ghost within existence – the ghost of what once was, resurfacing to remind us that it is still here and liable to return. It is a perennial warning that there is a bug in reality. Every house requires the destruction of the house, the past in which there was no house, the past in which the house was destroyed, and the possible apocalyptic future in which the house may be destroyed again - the owner of the house needs all these things to feel at home. He is like a man who looks at his shadow in order to understand his concrete existence.

The exile is a ghost within existence - the ghost of what once was, resurfacing to remind us that it is still here and liable to return

The exile is not a nomad. The nomad's place is on the road, in transition. The exile's place, by contrast, is the place where he is not. The nomad is romantic, a kind of eternal

traveler, with a backpack and a soundtrack of road songs in the background. The exile, by contrast, is a somber figure singing melodies of longing. He bears an identity on his back, like the Jews carrying the seven-branched menorah on the Arch of Titus. The exile is not an invader; he did not come from "there" by sea and mountain in order to conquer "here." The exile is not a crusader. He does not go out on crusades.

But there is a kind of exile who might be called a pilgrim of exile. A pilgrim whose gospel is exile itself. He tells the house's inhabitants that the house is stifling, stagnant, intransigent, that its fortifications do not protect them but rather imprison them. This is exile as a gospel of freedom and constant creativity - exile as metaphysics.

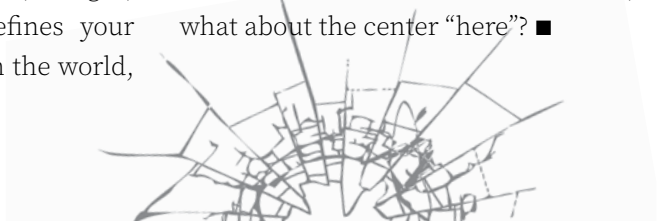
And then there is the political exile. He is found in an age where the ultimate organization is the state. The state creates its own overarching narratives as an organizing principle; it sets the boundaries of "here." It generates identities and enforces them. Aristotle, who was among the first to examine the state, opined that a man without a state is like a man without a tribe, without a code of law, without a home.

A state is a mechanism based on a grand narrative. It is a mechanism created to serve a certain goal, an institution born of an organizing principle and a context of meaning. It is like a chair - beyond its mere existence and its parts, the chair is the product of a fundamental idea that, through a sense of internal logic, function, and meaning, puts each part in its proper place. The state tells its grand narrative – inter alia, through legal categories that give names to the people in its sphere of influence: citizen, resident, refugee, asylum-seeker, traitor. The state defines your identity, and thus gives you a place in the world, always in relation to the state. You have an ID card, a passport, a broader framework in which you are positioned with regard to the state. The political exile marks his identity in relation to the place from whence he was exiled. He is in a place outside a place, standing on the fence and saying: "Look, we have a problem."

The very possibility of exile is threatening, because if you can be "there," why "here"? What is the "there" and what is the "here"?

Exile is threatening. The 'there' converses with the 'here,' telling it: "There is a place other than this one." Exile has an independent identity, the gospel of outsideness; it is a place outside of place, with a function, a reason, a story, a meaning. An exile of this kind, that chooses its own exile, poses a profound threat to the 'here.' This threat has been heard in the Zionist story ever since the early Zionists in the Land of Israel argued with American Jewry over the ideal future of the Jewish people; it has been heard since the debates over the universal message of Judaism as opposed to its particular, local message; since the aspiration to a world based on liberal, universal principles began to compete with concepts of sovereignty and territory. This threat has persisted even into the public conversation over the differences in the cost of living between Israel and Berlin. The question that is so threatening is this: Is life outside of the center a glitch in the system, something that must be fixed, a distortion of reality? Or maybe not – could this rather be a dual existence, where distinct centers maintain conversation with one another?

The very possibility of exile is threatening, because if you can be "there," why "here"? What is the "there" and what is the "here"? Who decides what they are? Where is the core? Where is the center? And if there is a center "there," too, then what about the center "here"? ■



The Silent Holocaust

Zeev Sharon

Zeev's grandfather, an ardent and anti-religious Zionist, immigrated to Israel from Poland. His brothers and sister immigrated to America. Of all their descendants, not a single Jew remains. Our concern for Diaspora Jewry cannot become a political or partisan issue; it is the task of our generation

I first heard the phrase "the silent Holocaust" in the corridors of the Jewish Agency. The term refers to the loss of Jewish identity among Diaspora Jewry. According to projections, over the next 30 years, 80% of Diaspora Jews will lose their Jewish identity and their connection to Israel. These figures primarily describe American Jews. Of the five million Jews currently living in America, in 30 years only one million will remain who define themselves as connected to their Judaism and to the State of Israel. Of course, we cannot compare the Holocaust of Europe's Jews and the trends in world Jewry today. Jews choose to marry non-Jews, or to sever their connection with Jewish tradition, the Jewish people, and the Jewish state, out of their own free will. The phrase "silent Holocaust," with its intentionally harsh connotations, alludes merely to a comparison of the numbers: the diminished numbers of the Jewish people.

The Hovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion) association was founded in Russia about 140 years ago. Hovevei Zion's goal was to convince Jews to immigrate to the Land of Israel, rather than to America. A number of the association's members said explicitly that the immigrants to America would ultimately assimilate; only those who immigrated to the Land of Israel, as well as their descendants, would stay part of the Jewish people. Rabbis Samuel Mohilever and Mordechai Eliasberg, as well as the intellectuals Moshe Leib Lilienblum and Leon Pinsker, came together and founded the association – not only to realize their vision, but to avert catastrophe.

Zeev Sharon has served as the head of the Arzei Halevanon-Hibat Zion pre-army academy since its founding 21 years ago.

Rabbi Mordechai Eliasberg wrote the following:[1]

> The "Hovevei Zion" society is made up of two kinds of members: religious members, and nationalistic members who lack the fire of religion. And because the society's duty is to settle Jews in the Land of Israel, where they will work in the fields and the vineyards and raise animals and so forth – in this, all the members are equal to one another, and the differences of opinion between them become insignificant.

In 1882, Leon Pinsker published his seminal work Auto-Emancipation, in which he set out the fundamental goals of his generation: aliyah to the Land of Israel, the establishment of a Jewish state, the cultivation of Jewish national sentiment, and dissemination of the Zionist idea and the importance of aliyah. Thus, he encouraged Jewish settlement in Israel, with the aim of preventing the demise of the Jewish people.

And how do things look 140 years later? For illustrative purposes, I will shift to first-person narration:

My grandfather, an ardent and anti-religious Zionist, immigrated to Israel from Poland. His brothers and sister immigrated to America. Of all their descendants, not a single Jew remains. But the story does not end here. My brother and my wife's brother, neither of whom are religious, left Israel. Both married non-Jewish women, and their children feel no connection to Judaism or Israel. The "silent Holocaust" has reached Israelis, too. About a million Israelis have left Israel, most for America. The Israeli community in America is assimilating at a more rapid pace than any other American immigrant community. Already in the second generation, their connection to Judaism and to Israel has been lost. There's no question that we're facing a serious problem.

To solve the problem, we have to understand why this is happening to us. We can make a distinction between two categories of people. The members of the first category are those who do not see the phenomenon as a problem, and think that "everyone should do whatever they want and whatever seems right to them."

A friend who belongs to this category wrote to me:

> I don't care in the least about the "second Holocaust," assimilation, or the loss of Jewish communities outside of Israel. Tradition and identity are things that you have to choose to commit to. I completely understand friends outside of Israel who find it too hard to make that choice, and who fall in love with, marry, and have children with non-Jewish partners – or who simply stop identifying as Jewish. As a human being, as an Israeli, I see my Jewish identity as important. But I don't want to judge someone outside of Israel who doesn't see things that way, and I'm not threatened by them. We're strong enough, and we have a strong enough identity. In Israel, I see Jewish identity as important, and so for anyone who wants a solution to their Jewish identity or their sense of belonging – your place is here. Zionism is the solution. But I don't agonize over Jews in America or New Zealand who make a different choice, and I don't feel the need to criticize them.

The first group is comprised of good, enlightened people whose postmodern, pluralistic worldview does not allow them (rightfully, in their view) to see a problem here. In order to change the approach of the people who hold this view, we have to convince them to change their attitudes toward belonging – to a tribe, to a people, to a land. Because a philosophical sea change of this kind requires considerable, complicated effort, and not everyone can handle it, I see this as a waste of energy and resources that could be better used to save the people in the second category.

The second category is made up of people who see assimilation as a serious problem that must be stopped, and who do not want it to reach their

1 This quotation is from Zalman Epstein's *Moshe Leib Lilienblum: His Approach and Way of Thinking* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1935).

family or their immediate surroundings. These people are looking for a solution to the problem, out of concern for themselves, their children, and future generations. Practically speaking, because of our limited resources in terms of budget and staff, I see it as preferable to establish a dialogue only with the second category.

One example of an attempt to reach out to the second category can be found in the words of David Myers, the President of the New Israel Fund (NIF) and the chair of the Department of History at UCLA.

In an interview with Yair Ettinger of Haaretz,[2] Myers defined himself as a "tribal Jew." He said that if his daughters were to marry non-Jews, he would not sit shiva for them, but he would see it as a "serious blow." His remarks came as a surprise, making waves among the liberal streams of Judaism and among NIF activists.

In a subsequent interview,[3] Myers expressed a more complex position:

> "In my view, we have to come up with a policy for accepting people who marry non-Jews. If my daughter goes out with a non-Jewish boy, of course conversion would be the right step to take. But if there isn't mass conversion, I think we need to expand our borders and think about ways to reach both partners somehow. I'm a Jew who believes that in order to preserve our historical tradition, it is preferable by far to marry a Jew. But I'm also realistic, and we need to find other ways. What's happening right now isn't working."

We must understand that the strongest, wealthiest community in the Jewish world today, with the most means at its disposal and the largest inventory of human resources, is the State of Israel.

In Israel, there are those who believe that anyone who wants to preserve their Jewish identity should make aliyah. It's their problem, and if they want to solve it, the onus is on them. If they choose not to live here – well, they'll just have to make do on their own. Sometimes, though, even Diaspora Jews who want to make aliyah are unable to do so. Moreover, over the past 100-plus years, Diaspora Jewry has donated billions upon billions of dollars to Israel. Countless Israeli institutions – hospitals, military bases, synagogues, research institutes, universities, and more – boast plaques bearing the names of the individuals, families, and institutions who have donated to them. Now, our brothers in exile are in distress. As Jews in the Jewish state, we have a crucial national and historical duty to help them, wherever they may be found. This is mutual responsibility, the essence of the Talmudic aphorism "All Jews are responsible for one another."

The Israeli community in America is assimilating at a more rapid pace than any other American immigrant community

In my humble opinion, our concern for Diaspora Jewry cannot become a political or partisan issue; it is the task of our generation. We have identified the situation, honed in on the problem, and now it is time to act. We need to join forces. Every sector must turn to its parallel in the Diaspora in order to strengthen their Jewish identity and even suggest the possibility of aliyah. The Reform must speak to Reform Jews in the Diaspora, Conservative Jews to communities like their own, the Orthodox to their community, secular Israelis to secular Diaspora Jews. Wherever it is possible to work together, we must do so – because if we do not,

2 Yair Ettinger, "Anti-Semitism, Assimilation and the Paradox of Jewish Survival," *Haaretz*, November 18, 2018, retrieved from https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/2018-11-18/ty-article-magazine/.premium/anti-semitism-assimilation-unlikely-keys-to-jewish-survival-nif-david-myers-interview/0000017f-db77-db22-a17f-fff7c0790000.

3 Zvika Klein, "In a Certain Sense, the Settlement Enterprise Has Won," *Makor Rishon*, February 28, 2019, retrieved from https://www.makorrishon.co.il/news/119253.

we will no longer have anyone to work with. We must recreate the remarkable, historic decision made by the diverse founders of Hovevei Zion.

For the reasons described above, we must develop structured educational programs suited to the needs of each and every sector – programs that will kindle and strengthen participants' desire to connect to their Jewish roots. These programs will fill participants with pride that they belong to an ancient and wise people, a nation with an exceptional history – the nation that changed human history and brought the principles of faith and freedom to the world.

The words of the American author Mark Twain may serve as an illustration:[4]

"If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one quarter of one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly, the Jew ought hardly to be heard of, but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk.

His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine and abstruse learning are also very out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world in all ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself and be excused for it. The Egyptians, the Babylonians and the Persians rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greeks and Romans followed and made a vast noise, and they were gone; other people have sprung up and held their torch high for a time but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, and have vanished.

The Jew saw them all, survived them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert but aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jews; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"

This is what we need to show Jews who have grown distant from their roots.

A., a graduate of the Arzei Halevanon pre-army academy, returned some three years ago from a Jewish Agency delegation to a community in America. He told us sadly that he would be the last emissary from Israel to reach the community, as the community lacked the necessary financial resources for the funding and upkeep of an Israeli emissary. He said that in a meeting of all the principals of Jewish schools in America, the principals had discussed the need to submit a request to the Israeli government to maintain and fund American Jewish education. As is widely known, American private education is not funded by the state. Israelis who arrive in America lack the financial resources to pay for private Jewish day school education for their children, and so their children attend public schools. Sadly, these children often do not receive any kind of Jewish education at all, and from there, in the land of all its citizens, it's only a short leap to the loss of their Jewish identities.

Our brothers in exile are in distress. As Jews in the Jewish state, we have a crucial national and historical duty to help them

For this reason, three years ago, Arzei

4 Mark Twain, "Pleasure Excursion to the Holy Land," in *The Innocents Abroad: Or, the New Pilgrim's Progress* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1869).

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Creating a Hybrid Jew

Sophie Fellman Rafalovitz

I was born in Guatemala City to a mixed Ashkenazic and Sephardic family. There we were members of the Reform temple and I have many memories playing on the big lion statues outside the Sephardic synagogue or on the spiral steps of the Ashkenazic synagogue.

My first observation regarding religion occurred when I arrived in Israel at the age of nine. Here in Israel you needed to state what you were. At first, this statement referred to "religious" or "not religious". Next, came another label if you happened to have one: Masorti, Reform, Ashkenazi, Sephardi.

As I grew up in Israel, particularly once I started getting involved in the NOAM youth movement and made friends who had Anglo parents, I was preoccupied with comparisons of what it was to grow up in different cultures. I especially had an attraction to American Jews and thought it was awesome that we in NOAM had a sister movement in USY. At the same time, however, I was put off by visiting American teens, and, like many of my Israeli peers, threw around the phrase "Ameri-kaki" or "stupid Americans."

Fast forward to my adulthood and parenthood. We've lived in the U.S. twice, once for four years and once for three. Both times, the question of staying in the U.S. after my *shlichut* service came up. Both times I was very clear: I want my children to be Israeli.

By our second *shlichut* in the U.S., we already had three children. We moved from Israel to Chicago and fell in love with the community there. For the first time in my adult life, I felt surrounded by parents who shared our values, in contrast to the handful I had found here in Israel. The kids lived and learned respect, manners, and pluralism. When we arrived and enrolled my children in the Jewish day school, they were shocked by being in a school where children

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wore kippot and incorporated into their schedule daily prayers. By the time they left, they thought nothing of it.

Yet I missed many things about Israeli education. I was thrilled to share certain values with my new American friends, but felt the lack of other important values I shared with parents in Israel. I missed students having and vocalizing strong opinions. I missed how initiative and leadership were encouraged. I missed the large range of emotions kids in Israel are taught to feel: dismay, anger, excitement. I missed how Jewish holidays are part of society's DNA.

The biggest service we could do to the Jewish people might be to come up with a new prototype of Jew: one that combines both cultures

I increasingly felt that the strengths of American Jewry were the precise weaknesses in Israeli Jewry and vice versa.

One night, we had a goodbye dinner for the school *shlichim* – two young men who were volunteering in my kids' school. I went as a parent and as a professional who had been very involved in mentoring them and guiding the school on how best to work with them.

I sat next to Judy, the head of school and we talked about Israelis vs. Jewish Americans. For the first time, it occurred to me that the biggest service we could do to the Jewish people might be to come up with a new prototype of Jew: one that combines both cultures.

I realized during that time and particularly in the midst of that conversation that by going on *shlichut*, I actually created a hybrid Jew. My children would be very much Israeli, but with a bit of American inside them as well. That idea excited me, even though I know it doesn't come without its own set of consequences.

But can that be done on a larger scale? What do we actually need to do to begin that merging of qualities? That hybridization?

When we returned to Israel last year, I realized precisely how difficult that task is. People naturally hold on to their identities. Their culture and mannerisms tell the story of who they are. So perhaps by becoming hybrid, one is also losing part of what made their identity in the first place. In Chicago, the Israelis felt it impossible to truly fit in with their American Jewish counterparts. Instead, they congregated with each other, creating a parallel infrastructure of Jewish community. On Hannaton, where we live now, I see a similar issue: a fairly large Anglo community attracted to each other within the larger Israeli community. And here too, you can see it: the Jews who associate more as American and those who identify as more Israeli struggle sometimes with finding a common language or solution to problems. In the end, it's sometimes easier for each group to socialize within itself.

For me, creating a place where Jews can meet other Jews has become a core value in my life. In light of the latest Pew research, it seems to me that it's urgent. The Pew research, which was published several years ago, notes that Jewish

identity as a whole is weaker than it was before. As Jews, we are drifting farther and farther apart. The recent elections in Israel, as well as the political scene in the US, tell us a similar story.

At the Hannaton Educational Center, we hope to create precisely that setting: a place where Jews from around the world can learn together, exchange ideas and learn from each other. Religious Jews, secular Jews. Diaspora Jews, Israeli Jews. Jews and non-Jews. We aim to create a haven where that feeling of distance and impossible gap might be bridged.

My feeling is that by doing this we just might be creating an environment where my dream becomes tangible. Maybe Hannaton will be the birthplace of the new Jewish prototype.

*

Several years have passed since I first wrote this article. On a personal scale, I sometimes wonder whether creating my own "hybrid" children was wise. My son wants nothing to do with Americans and my youngest daughter would rather live in America. Sometimes their sense of belonging is not clear. When one is part of another culture, then they don't belong all the way in the culture they live in. In my volunteering role, I have been the chair of the Masorti Movement for the past six years. I see the shift in Israeli society - hybrid Jews of all kinds are becoming more and more common. These increasing "hybrid" identities are a breath of fresh air in today's polarized Jewish people. ■

Increasing "hybrid" identities are a breath of fresh air in today's polarized Jewish people

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denominator, the level of connection to Jewish and Zionist identity, the level of connection to our story – is weakened here in Israel, and when liberal Judaism is virtually unknown among secular Israelis, it creates a disconnect in two directions – either indifference to Judaism or antagonism to non-Orthodox Judaism.

In the United States, too, Jewish identity isn't at the height of its power, and certainly not Zionist identity. We're living in a time that isn't exactly a golden age, either for Judaism or for Zionism.

We could even call it a crisis. How are we going to get ourselves out of it? Either there will be Jewish young people who care about preserving the continued existence of the Jewish people, and who will take meaningful steps in this direction over time, or there won't be.

We've already mentioned BDS, which is doing damage – after all, it's increasingly fashionable to compare Israel to an apartheid state. At an important conference that took place in the Knesset in February 2023, attended by hundreds of participants from around the world, Professor Irwin Cotler, a former Canadian Minister of Justice, pointed out the significance of this comparison: Apartheid is a war crime, and if the State of Israel is a war crime, that means it must be erased. Moreover, its actions to defend itself have no moral standing, because if it's illegitimate, you can hurt it with no compunction. This is why students, particularly Jewish students, need to understand and know how to refute those claims. It doesn't even need to be stated that there isn't the slightest connection between the racist South African regime and the reality here in Israel, including the reality in Judea and Samaria.

One last question – Why did you choose to live in Hannaton? Are you still happy with that decision today?

I had three motivations: It was important to me to settle in the Galilee for Zionist reasons; I don't believe it's possible to live a full Jewish life outside the framework of a community; and I was looking for a community that would be based in a deep connection to Jewish and Zionist identity without judging people on the length of their *tzitzit*.

I think Hannaton is a model with the potential to be much more widespread, because it allows for a wide range of diversity – from a traditional identity to a liberal or an Orthodox identity. It's enough that Jewish identity be important to you. It's a space that isn't judgmental. That's been my experience here, and it's what I love about this community. ■

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Though disagreements will always exist, "we must always insist on open, sincere engagement."

This kind of dialogue is hard, but it is essential to building lasting relationships. It demands radical empathy, the ability to cherish one's experience fully and also deeply empathize with the experience of others. As we forge a true 21st century Zionism, let us measure our words, approach others with humility, listen more deeply, engage more closely, understand the perspectives of others who differ from us, and work together with them to envision a more perfect future for the Jewish people, for Israel, and the world. ■

▷ ▷ **continued from p. 21**

Palestinians in their legitimate aspirations for peace and self-determination. Only those who find their way to support these two dreams as compatible and reinforcing will align with the work of a sustainable peace.

It is my prayer that this year sees a growing number of Israelis plant their Zionism in hope, generosity of spirit, and courage. Not constricted and desiccated by inherited fear, not captive to the worst excesses of its most militant enemies, but rather a Zionism always in search of allies, one that fosters common interest, one excited to create, with Palestinians, a regional hub of vitality, creativity, and expansiveness. Two states for two people, sharing a love of a common land.

In this work, Israeli and American Jews must advance a threefold agenda: asserting the right of the Jewish people to national self-determination in our ancestral homeland, affirming the Jewish love of an Israel that is democratic, pluralistic, and an incubator of the best of Jewish culture and creativity, and insisting that such a worthy Israel will best thrive when our Palestinian brothers and sisters can also express their own national self-determination in their own democratic, pluralistic framework.

I want to close where I began: Jewish life without the State of Israel is unthinkable. Israel is a great and ongoing blessing, and we must continue to stand in solidarity with the people and State of Israel. But solidarity means that we American Jews have to contribute not only our financial resources and our organizational skills, but also the benefits of our opinion, which Israelis are welcome to share or disregard as they choose. But there needs to be a willingness to listen to each other, to welcome diverse ways to love and support Israel and the whole Jewish people. There needs to be a free flowering discussion between our communities both of which are variegated and complex, neither one of which can be reduced to a single party line. ■

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Halevanon started the "Hibat Zion" program, which trains idealistic, Zionist Israeli young people as emissaries to Diaspora communities. Students in the program prepare for their time abroad over a year of intensive study. At the end of the year, they are sent out as emissaries in communities around the world. The emissaries go out with the knowledge that they are participating in "the most important patriotic duty for Israeli youth today." Hopefully, the program will expand to include the entire network of pre-army academies in Israel.

We will conclude with the words of two Israeli paratroopers who parachuted into occupied Europe during the Holocaust. Hannah Senesh wrote: "A voice called and I went; I went because the voice called." It was the power of that voice that led Senesh and her comrades to mount the plane, and to parachute into Nazi-occupied Yugoslavia in the dead of night in order to come to the aid of her brothers in exile in their hour of need. Her comrade Abba Berdichev wrote in his will: "I am happy that it has been my lot to be among the chosen few of the Jewish settlement – those who will bring its tidings, its encouragement, and its aid to the Jews in exile."

May we merit to be faithful emissaries, in the spirit of those heroes. ■

The New Pumbedita

Nathan Alterman
Translated by Lisa Katz

"The role and mission of American Jewry is as a second national center, outside the State of Israel, like the Babylonian exile in its day."
US Zionist credo

Perhaps — as God is my witness! —
two centers
are necessary.
In the prosperous State of Israel,
the sages of Morocco, Tiberias, and Tunis
will dwell.
While the rest of the learned
in Cincinnati
are settled.
And in Brooklyn your people will enjoy la dolce vita,
as subjects of the New Pumbedita.
Without losing citizenship or traveling rights,
they will, as in Babylon, their own Talmud
inscribe and their tractates complete.
Isn't it great?
This happened once (it's a reincarnation)—
and the people didn't suffer debilitation.
The nation will develop so beautifully
if we promise it two centers
and a chapter.
— Perhaps. Especially
with philosophical-historical backing
that's pseudo profound.
In any case
it's good
that the American Zionists
are so unbound!
Their brains are awake, it's never too late
for new ideas to cogitate.
It's just strange that their thinking
in only one direction
is moving:
They strive to advocate
Why they shouldn't
immigrate.

Yishai Shalitin

Evolution of a People

This work depicts various stages in the history of the Jewish people – from images representing the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, in all the complexity of these historical epochs, to an expression of the future stages. It reflects the hope that the Jewish future will be characterized by healing, mutual development, and a pure spiritual connection.

The Hannaton Educational Center is an Israeli center of pluralistic Jewish learning and leadership for young Israelis, youth and rabbinical students from abroad, hosting groups of educators, families, synagogue communities, and others. The Center is located in the Galilee and offers a pluralistic and diverse approach to Jewish learning and living, experiential education, interreligious community involvement, and social activism together with a strong connection to the land and specifically to the Galilee region. Program participants are given an educational foundation in Judaism, democracy, and humanism, strengthening their Jewish identities while training them to become leaders in their communities. The immersive community framework provides a welcoming atmosphere for the thousands of young Israelis, Diaspora Jews, educators, soldiers and other professionals who participate in our programs.

Our aim is to create a state that is Jewish and democratic, while at the same time strengthening our basic principles of humanism and egalitarianism so we can ALL feel a shared story and sense of responsibility. We welcome diversity - both political and religious – and embrace people regardless of beliefs, background, gender, or sexual preference.

We fulfill this mission through informing, engaging, and nourishing future Jewish leaders so they may serve as a driving force for change. Our connection to the region is inseparable and is part of our ideology of developing the Galilee, stemming from the understanding that the Galilee is vital for the future of Israel.

מצפה

חנתון
Hannaton
Educational Center