



Twenty-Five Essays about the Current State of
ISRAELI-AMERICAN JEWISH RELATIONS








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INTRODUCTION

Almost from its inception, the State of Israel has confronted the unique challenge of framing its relationship to world Jewry. The 1950 Law of Return awarding immediate Israeli citizenship to any Jewish immigrant to Israel defined Israel's identity in distinctively Zionist tropes. Similarly, the Ben-Gurion/Blaustein Agreement the same year affirmed the value of mutual responsibility between Israel and American Jewry, while asserting the principle of non-interference in one another's affairs.

Over the ensuing decades, Israel benefited greatly from the political and economic support provided by the American Jewish community. The pro-Israel consensus, in particular illustrated by the formation of AIPAC in 1954 and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations in 1955, helped make possible the support that Israel needed from the United States government, especially in the context of Israel's numerous wars for survival.

In recent years, however, we have witnessed a widening of the gap between Israel and American Jewry, to the point that some observers claim that the Jewish people has never been so divided as today. The pro-Israel consensus began to fray around the edges in the 1990s and has not fully recovered. Indeed, some American Jewish groupings began lobbying in Washington in direct opposition to policies favored by Israel's democratically-elected government. Meanwhile, in 1994, former Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin claimed that Israel no longer required philanthropic support from abroad and urged Jewish leaders instead to focus their resources upon Jewish education in their home communities. Most importantly, several social scientists documented declining attachment to Israel, particularly among the millennial generation.

The most critical factor driving this distancing clearly is assimilation. Distancing from matters Jewish inevitably entails distancing from Israel as well. Israeli policies with respect to the peace process and religious pluralism only aggravate the distancing for some. More broadly, Israel, confronting implacable foes who refuse to recognize her existence and continually threaten her with elimination, has shifted, for now at least, to what appears to be a more particularistic society, in some ways at odds with the more liberal and universalistic ideals of American Jewry. The "bromance" between Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Trump gives voice to this alienation for many who question whether the warm friendship between them marks the decline of liberal Zionism, and whether liberal American Jews can remain firmly attached to a more conservative-leaning Israel.

Given AJC's longstanding efforts to strengthen American Jewish-Israeli ties, and in particular in anticipation of AJC's first-ever Global Forum in Israel, in June 2018, coinciding with the country's 70th anniversary, we invited a cross-section of Jewish public intellectuals and opinion leaders, both in Israel and in the U.S., to reflect on the status of Israel-Diaspora relations, and on what may be done to enhance bridge-

building within the Jewish people. More specifically, we invited respondents to reflect on the following three questions:

1. Which issues pose the greatest challenges to sustaining strong American Jewish-Israeli ties and why?
2. Do you see relations between these two communities becoming closer or more distant over the next five years?
3. What strategies or initiatives ought to be considered to bring both communities closer to one another?

Generally, the responses received vary in diagnosis, ranging from dismissing any possibility of rupture to proclamations of imminent crisis. Some call for a “reverse Birthright,” bringing influential Israelis for candid encounters with American Jewry and American Jewish life. Others look for changes in Israeli education regarding the diaspora, while still others believe American Jewry has failed to inculcate greater appreciation and understanding of Israel as part of its core educational curriculum, thereby downplaying the greatest Jewish success story in modern Jewish history.

We offer this publication both as affirmation and in admiration of what Israel has achieved over its first seven decades, as well as an effort to contribute to an agenda for Jewish peoplehood in the 21st century. We thank in particular Lindy Wisotsky, Assistant Director of AJC’s Contemporary Jewish Life Department for coordinating this project, Margery Greenspan, AJC’s Creative Director, for the artwork and layout, and Lawrence Grossman, AJC’s Publications Director for expertly editing each of the essays.

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THE PROBLEM IS AT HOME, NOT IN ISRAEL



Most American Jews have the idealized (and inaccurate) idea that their community has been Israel's greatest bulwark of support. In truth, American Jewry as a whole was neither deeply interested in nor powerfully supportive of Israel until the state, facing the prospect of military destruction in 1967,



ELLIOT ABRAMS

managed to pull off an astonishing Israeli victory. Even today, the percentage of American Jews who have visited Israel is far lower than that of other Anglosphere Jewish communities—England, Australia, and Canada. And while Jews in those communities tend to support or oppose political parties based on their policies toward Israel, American Jews on the whole do not.

The issues that pose the greatest challenge to strong American Jewish-Israeli ties are not the oft-cited left/right matters such as settlements or access to the Kotel. While such issues are important, they largely reflect the fact that Israel has by now been governed for 17 consecutive years by right-of-center governments, while America has not—and American Jews are mostly left of center. It's not coincidental that the lowest points in bilateral relations in recent decades came when the United States had a left-of-center president whom most American Jews admired, Barack Obama, while Israel had a Likud government under Benjamin Netanyahu. If a different political constellation of parties were to form an Israeli coalition government and adopt different policies,

or be more successful at explaining its approach to American Jews, some of the intermittent tension would be reduced.

But just a bit. The greater challenge is indifference—the kind of indifference reflected in the fact that roughly 60% of American Jews have never once visited Israel—and that's even counting the well over four hundred thousand sent there by Birthright.

That indifference demonstrated by so many American Jews is often not the product of deep political opposition to some Israeli policy, but rather of disaffiliation from the community and assimilation into the 98 percent of American society that is not Jewish. The intermarriage rate for non-Orthodox Jews is now above 70 percent, and most children in intermarriages where there is no conversion to Judaism are not raised as Jews. The Pew polling center has had to invent a new category to describe the many Americans who have thus disaffiliated from the religion of their forbears: "Jews of no religion." And the children of such individuals are most often "non-Jews of no religion" or sometimes, quite simply, Christians.

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Why, after all, would we expect an individual with two Jewish parents who has out-married, not sought the conversion of his or her spouse, does not belong to a synagogue, and is not raising his or her children as Jews, to be concerned about “sustaining strong American Jewish-Israeli ties?” Similarly, why would we expect the child of such a marriage, raised without any Jewish education or experiences by parents who practice no religion and do not view themselves as part of the Jewish community, to care about such ties? Yet it is such individuals, “Jews of no religion” and persons of mixed Jewish and Christian descent raised with no Jewish religious or community ties, who are increasingly showing up on the surveys.

Israel cannot fix this problem by changing its “right-wing” policies, nor can any steps taken to bolster official ties between Israel and America. In other words, it is not an Israeli-American problem, but an American Jewish problem. Over the next five years it is unlikely to change much, and it may grow somewhat as these social trends continue.

To be sure, travel to Israel is an excellent idea, and Birthright is a blessing and should be expanded. A reverse Birthright that lets more young Israelis spend time in the United States—instead of the usual post-army trek to Nepal or Thailand—would also be a good idea. But the deeper question is how the American Jewish community can arrest the ominous trends that will reduce its size in every succeeding decade. Beyond the key but ineffable ingredient of faith, the answer appears to be education—specifically, Jewish day schools. This is a factor that plays a critical part in sustaining Jewish continuity in the other Anglosphere Jewish communities: it is reported that “More than 60 percent of British Jewish children attend Jewish schools, where Israel is a central feature of their education,” and “Some 70% of Jewish children in Australia attend a Jewish day school at some point in their school lives.” In the United States, day school attendance is far lower—estimated at 25%. While the American day school pupils come almost entirely from Orthodox homes, the numbers for other Anglosphere countries make it clear that such schools in these communities also service many non-Orthodox families—the part of the community most susceptible to assimilation, which are not exposed to the benefits of full-day Jewish schooling in the United States.

One reason for the discrepancy is that Jewish schools receive government aid in Australia, England, and most of Canada—but not in the United States. Perhaps more American Jewish youngsters would attend Jewish schools—and be taught about Israel—for at least some part of their K-12 education if it were free, as public school is,

or at least were not extraordinarily expensive. But the American Jewish community has often been in the forefront of opposing aid to religious schools. It is hard to argue that this is done to protect religious freedom, as if there were none in Canada, England, and Australia. And thus one critical step that American Jews might take to enhance ties with Israel, individually and collectively through their many influential organizations, is to reverse their position on aid to non-public schools. Stop opposing, start supporting; let the aid follow the child. Indeed, let the aid follow the children to Jewish schools where they will learn solidarity with other Jews and with Israel.

Feeling a close and unbreakable tie to Israel is not the product of magic, but of visits there and learning about the country’s history, challenges, achievements, and role in Judaism, Jewish history, and Jewish life in the contemporary world. We can surely do better at arranging for that.



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GETTING ABOVE POLITICS



Here in D.C., Israel talk is often steeped in such intense red and blue that we risk losing the white and blue. The desert monotones we associate with Israel's stones and sand sometimes disappear under a punch of American political color. The color saturation is so strong that we are in grave



ERICA BROWN

danger of compromising the primal love many of us feel for our Jewish homeland. We access that love through a multiplicity of portals: its people, its spirituality, its history, its music, its landscape, its innovations, its heroes, its food, its artists, its tourist traps, its miracles, and its mysteries. But now the rainbow of Israel's possibilities is covered by large political blotches that disproportionately discolor our relationship.

We talk so much about the politics of Israel, we risk losing these other conversations and intersections of interest. Unless we can generate another kind of discourse about Israel, one that is "politics and..." our relationship across the sea will increasingly sour and deteriorate over the next five years. Sure, a change in the identity of some politicians would help shift the conversation, but only to a degree. After a little time to learn the new cast of characters, we'll be back where we began: at a virtual standstill.

Unfortunately, many American Jewish organizations are so intensely political when it comes to Israel that they obscure the need for alternate conversations. Pleased as I am that so many people show up in DC every March to support Israel at the AIPAC conference, I am

saddened that it is essentially a political pilgrimage, while vital issues like Jewish identity, history, charity, activism, study, prayer, and community-building with an Israel focus get virtually no attention. I wonder, at times, if we've replaced the Temple pilgrimages of old with a new "haj."

Below are four reasons why the 24/7 deluge of overly-politicized conversation about Israel needs to change:

Political talk today is coarse talk. You don't need to be a pundit to know that political talk today is crass, overreaching, judgmental, damning, and self-assured to the point of arrogance. If we as a global Jewish community get mired in the sphere of politics, we too will find ourselves choosing a harsh word over a soft one, wearing away at the remaining threads of civility. Of course, civility is not sameness. The Talmud is one of the greatest documents of debate ever created. And the sages of old did whip out the occasional insult even in the midst of arguments for the sake of heaven. But political arguments today tend to be shouting matches that privilege form over content.

Political talk today is not always interesting. There was a time when politics was sophisticated and

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nuanced. The people I grew up with who talked politics were thoughtful and informed. Politics was the art of gentle persuasion, winning people around to another way of thinking within a framework of shared principles. It's been way too long since I've had a conversation like that. We've forgotten how to have those conversations largely because we assume negative intent when we learn someone is of a different political persuasion. Political talk today is rarely conversational. It's confrontational, less rigorous, less principled, less interesting. It shuts down curiosity rather than growing it.

Political talk today is about today. There's a memorable distinction in the Talmud between *haye sha'a* and *haye olam*, our day-to-day needs and our ultimate needs. Too much of either one or the other makes it difficult to maintain a balanced life. Politics today feels a lot like technology in the sense that it's becoming quicker and more instant. Remember the days when we had to dial-up and wait to get an internet connection? No more. Now we are all about the minimum wait. We hate to wait. But politics is unlike technology, in the sense that the speed designed to help us work more efficiently and smartly has a dysfunctional effect on political life. When we talk about Israel, we are dealing with a country whose meaning for us stretches over millennia, but you would never get that from reading anything in the papers about Israel now. It's all today's news, with little or no historical or religious context. It's so time-sensitive and fleeting that it's hard to feel even a glimmer of the transcendence that elevates Israel's poetry, its prose, its Zionist ideology, and its constant blossoming of possibility.

Political talk today is often dangerous and incendiary. The stakes are great—we all know that. One decision in the Oval Office can set off a barrage of scrimmages. One dismissive insult captured in a tweet can set back years of diplomacy. One wrong word can send a young woman with an explosive belt into a crowd. One violent interpretation of a sacred text can set off global protests. When so much Israel talk is nothing more than political talk, we walk in a minefield of words that can erupt into catastrophe.

I am not so presumptuous as to try to identify the "greatest challenge" to American Jewish-Israeli ties. I do believe, however, that the lopsided degree to which American Jews talk about the politics of Israel at the expense of its literary, spiritual, financial, agricultural, culinary, and artistic contributions has immense consequences for the relationship of American and Israeli Jews. It's shocking how ill-informed many American Jews are about their history, their religion, the Hebrew language and the texts that have shaped Judaism, and yet we jump on the political bandwagon as if we are all experts on the Middle East.

Relationships change when language changes. If we keep speaking the same way about Israel and its politics, then unless the politics and the politicians change, the conversation doesn't change either, and neither does the relationship. I, for one, would like to speak more about Yehuda Amichai and less about Bibi Netanyahu, more about drip irrigation and less about annexation, more about Israeli cuisine and less about the United Nations. Today even hummus is political.

I'd like to see mainstream Jewish organizations with a political arm find creative ways to introduce and interject more non-political conversations in the work they do and the events they sponsor with an eye to creating a more well-rounded approach. I'd also love to see the same organizations balance the here and now with Israel's past. How many people who have read the latest lobbyist's report on the State of Israel also know what Maimonides had to say about the Land of Israel? There's a deeper and meaningful context in which conversations of today can and should take place.

This is not because politics is not important. It's because every relationship needs subtlety and complexity. Especially in relationships that matter most, news of the moment must be nestled in a profound and long-lasting well of eternity.



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A PATH OUT OF PATHOLOGY



A healthy modern Judaism requires connection to a thriving State of Israel. Even Jewish identity in the United States, with all the richness of its own history, is inextricably bound to the miracle of the Jewish recovery of sovereignty and construction of a state in the ancient homeland of the Jewish people. But the



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relationship between Israel and the Diaspora has been sick for some time, and is getting worse. The problem can be summed up in three common attitudes, two of them American Jewish and the other Israeli.

Who cares about Israel? Many non-Orthodox Jews in the United States (and even some Orthodox) have been alienated from an Israel where decisions about such matters as conversion or recognition of non-Orthodox rabbis are controlled by ultra-Orthodox political parties. That most American Jews are politically liberal does not make matters easier, but that hardly mitigates the sense that Israelis, by and large, disregard their interests and concerns. Lacking, in many cases, the basics of Hebrew and knowledge of Jewish history, and knowing of Israeli disdain for American Jewry (more on that below), they reciprocate it.

Israel is still a struggling pioneer state, and I feel guilty that I am not there. Hence, particularly in Modern Orthodox and some Conservative synagogues in America, there is an archaic maintenance of Israel Bond drives (at a time that Israel has perfectly good access to the capital markets) and Israel Defense Force-related charities (when, for example, Israel's care for soldiers with post-traumatic stress is as good as American

soldiers get). Thus, the most Zionist element of American Jewry does not acknowledge that Israel is a prosperous if troubled state that does not need the American Jewish community's financial support. Particularly in communities that can afford second homes in Israel, or whose children make Aliyah, there is often confusion about allegiances and loyalties, and concern about Israel can come at the expense of commitment to the future of the American Jewish community.

American Jews are doomed. Or, as one North American *oleh* put it to me in a Jerusalem restaurant not long ago, "American Jews are finished. I've washed my hands of them." This from a man who regularly turns to wealthy American Jews to support his own work—which makes him, to my mind, a metaphorical scavenger among the dying on the battlefield. This view is not uncommon among Israelis, who, in their turn, know nothing of the history of American Jewry and who, when not eagerly planning to study in or even move to the United States, think of American Jews as the cousins who were too chicken to join the army. Which is why many Israeli diplomats prefer to deal with evangelical Christians, whose support for Israel is unqualified (for now), rather than put up with irritating American Jews.

Neither American Jews nor Israelis have faced up to the fact that the American Zionist movement, which played an important role in the creation of the State of Israel, needs to grow up. To be more specific, Jews on both side of the divide need to change the relationship from one of money flowing from the U.S. to Israel (there are plenty of wealthy Israelis who should fund their own philanthropies) to one of cultural engagement. In the same way, both groups need to understand that American Jews will not emigrate en masse to Israel. Even as large numbers assimilate into the broader American society, an American Jewish community will in all likelihood retain its identity. These realities require the two branches of the Jewish people to find a new path to coexistence.

Concretely, this means that American Jewish philanthropy should go to support the institutions of American Jews—above all, schools and synagogues. It means that engagement with Israel should focus on education, including learning Hebrew and fostering travel to Israel. It means that Israelis should rethink their relationship with the American Diaspora and abandon the patronizing contempt that characterizes so many Diaspora-Israel interactions. That requires Israel to move closer to Ahad Ha'Am's Zionism than to Theodor Herzl's.

American Jews, for their part, should rediscover and affirm a distinctively American Jewish identity that includes American patriotism as a core tenet. The words of Moses Seixas's letter to George Washington in 1790 still hold: "Deprived as we heretofore have been of the invaluable rights of free Citizens, we now (with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty disposer of all events) behold a Government, erected by the Majesty of the People—a Government, which to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance—but generously affording to All liberty of conscience, and immunities of Citizenship..." Small wonder that the Jews of Newport saw the creation of the United States as "the work of the Great God, who ruleth in the Armies Of Heaven and among the Inhabitants of the Earth."

Washington's response, that "It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights," is the key point. Israel and the United States are unique in that Jews did not have to be emancipated in either country: they were, and remain, citizens from the start. For that reason, American Jewish patriotism is not the patriotism of gratitude, but of belonging, something truly astonishing in the history of the Jewish people.

A relationship built on respectful cultural ties between American and Israeli Jews has much to offer, not least because each side has something that can enrich the other. Nothing can match the depth of Jewish culture in Israel, from modern Hebrew literature and art to religious and secular scholarship. At the same time, in the United States Jews are and have long been in the vital center of a culture that has global reach. At the heart of Judaism is a tension—hopefully, a productive one—between the closed community of faith and belonging, and the universal mission of a "light to the nations." If a new generation of American and Israeli Jews can figure out how to manage that relationship, Jews everywhere will be better off for it.



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WHY ARE TODAY'S NON-ORTHODOX JEWS MORE DETACHED FROM ISRAEL?



The Distancing Debate: From Whether to Why

About a decade ago, some learned observers debated whether in fact American Jews were becoming more distant from Israel. Ari Kelman and I were on the side of the Israel-distancing argument—as analysts, that is, certainly not as protagonists.



STEVEN M. COHEN

Our 2007 study, “Beyond Distancing,” argued that younger Jews were becoming less attached to Israel. We attributed the trend largely to the intermarriages among their parents in previous decades, as well as to the younger adults’ diminished overall Jewish engagement, owing in part to their own high levels of marriage, romance, and friendship with non-Jews.

Today, the analytic argument has shifted. Hardly any informed observers maintain that American Jewry is as close to Israel as ever. The few who do may have the entire American Jewish population in mind, rather than the non-Orthodox alone; the zooming numbers of younger Orthodox Jews serve as a counterweight to the declining Israel engagement of the non-Orthodox. Alternatively—or in addition—some commentators with a more upbeat view of Jews’ relationship with Israel sometimes argue that we need only wait until marriage and Jewish parenthood work their magic

on elevating all manner of Jewish involvement, including attachment to Israel. Unfortunately, as Sylvia Barack Fishman and I have demonstrated, marriage and Jewish parenthood are both chronologically more distant and demographically less frequent. For many, it will take years before they are parents of a Jewish toddler, and indeed, only a minority of non-Orthodox Jews are likely to enjoy that status. Regrettably, the Herbert Hoovers of Jewish prognostication—those who argue that Jewish identificational prosperity is just around the corner—are being refuted by profound changes in Jewish culture, family, and community, the culmination of nearly three centuries of post-Emancipation Jewish history.

But while the debate over the reality of distancing has largely but not entirely subsided, the dispute about the causes of distancing continues. To some extent, American Jews’ identities have changed in ways which make Israel less appealing.

Alternatively, or in addition, Israeli actions and policies have alienated erstwhile and potential American Jewish allies, friends, and lovers; or they have worked to diminish, if not preclude, the emergence of new lovers of Israel and neo-Zionists among broad swaths of maturing young people.

The debate over explanations is not only over the facts: it is overlaid with political overtones. The politics of the Jewish conflict over the Israel-Palestinian conflict immediately colors the empirical assessment of why non-Orthodox Jews are more distant from Israel. Those who are largely aligned with current Israeli policies—often, politically conservative—instinctively prefer to blame American Jews' changing identities for their failure to feel inspired by and protective toward Israel. In contrast, critics of Israeli policies toward the Palestinians or in matters of Religion and State—often, politically liberal—are inclined to blame the policies for driving away politically liberal Jews, those who form the majority of the non-Orthodox American Jewish public. As Charles Liebman might well say, each political camp has an “elective affinity” for one explanation or the other. Conservatives blame the Jews. Liberals blame Israel.

It is within this context that we approach the major empirical questions. Most fundamentally, are younger Jews indeed less attached to Israel than their elders? If so, why? And more broadly, which Jews are more attached to Israel and which less attached? This question is crucial for understanding the past, present, and future relations of American Jews to Israel, and what we can do about it.

The Data: Bay Area Jews

To address these questions, I turn to *A Portrait of Bay Area Jewish Life and Communities*, sponsored by San Francisco's Jewish Community Federation and conducted by Jack Ukeles and myself. We found 350,000 Jews living in the 10-county Bay Area, a number somewhat higher than the Jews of Greater Chicago and less than those in the Los Angeles area. In many respects, Bay Area Jews, in the aggregate, resemble those found throughout the Mountain and Pacific regions of the United States, although not as Jewishly engaged as the LA community.

With low rates of Jewish engagement, high rates of intermarriage and political liberalism, and a very large number of young adults, the Bay Area figures to come in at the lower end of the Israel-attachment spectrum, as compared with Jews nationally. That said, there's no reason why the basic contours of the relationships between Israel attachment and its determinants should differ markedly from those found elsewhere—and indeed, we would arrive at similar conclusions were we

to draw upon the Pew 2013 survey, or, for that matter any of the major Jewish community studies conducted in recent years.

Distant Youngsters

The survey contains several measures of Israel attachment; all show the same pattern with respect to age: The younger adults (age 18-34) score far lower on Israel attachment, however measured, than the “seniors” (age 65+). The seniors are twice as likely to feel very “emotionally attached to Israel” (25% to 11%); almost twice as likely to see “the existence of a Jewish state in the world” as very important (70% vs. 38%); almost twice as likely to feel “comfortable with the idea of Israel as a Jewish state” (73% vs. 43%); and, as well, almost twice as likely to sympathize more with Israel than the Palestinians (60% vs. 32%).

The lower levels of Israel attachment should not be interpreted as meaning that the young adults have ensconced in the “anti-Israel” camp. In leaving the Israel team, they're not all going over to the opposing side (although some are). For the most part, they're sitting on the sidelines, much as Ari Kelman and associates recently and perceptively found in their qualitative study of Jewish students on select California campuses.

Parents Matter

Much of the reason for the young/old differences can be attributed, at least statistically, to the far higher degree of parents' intermarriage within the latter group. Of those with one or two Jewish parents, just 9% of seniors were raised by mixed-married parents, as compared with 54% of the young adults.

As has been found repeatedly, the children of two Jewish parents are far more attached to Israel than those raised by one Jewish parent. The children of the in-married are more than twice as likely to feel very emotionally attached to Israel (25% vs. 10%). In contrast, those raised by one Jewish parent are almost three times as likely to say that they are not at all attached to Israel (38% vs. 14%). The reasons for this disparity are not hard to fathom. In this data set and so many others, parents' in-marriage strongly predicts extent and intensiveness of Jewish education, Israel travel, overall Jewish engagement, as well as one's chances of marrying a Jewish spouse—all of which are independently associated with Israel attachment, however measured.

Jewish Engagement

Indeed, all measures of Jewish engagement in the Bay Area data—whether centered around home practice, communal affiliation, or subjective attachment—strongly relate to Israel attachment. For example, we can take the simple question

about the importance of being Jewish. Contrasting the 25% who say that being Jewish is very important to them vs. the 8% who say it's not at all important, we find a huge gap in the number who feel very attached to Israel: 47% among the most Jewishly attached as compared with just 4% among those who see being Jewish as not at all important.

In fact, the power of Jewish engagement (as measured here by an index of subjective Jewish identity) to predict Israel engagement is so strong that, statistically, it largely explains the impact of parents' intermarriage. In effect, the adult offspring of intermarried parents are less engaged with Israel primarily because they are less Jewishly engaged. That said, parental in-marriage status does continue to exert an impact on Israel engagement, even after we take into account Jewish identity differences.

The Liberals Have Left

In January, 2018, in a survey of the American public, the Pew Research Center reported startlingly large gaps between Republicans and Democrats with respect to relative sympathies for Israel or the Palestinians. While Republicans massively sided with Israel over the Palestinians (79% vs. 6%), Democrats were evenly split (27% with Israel and 25% for the Palestinians). Previous Pew surveys had pointed to weakening support for Israel among younger Americans, the less religious, and the more liberal.

As an old Yiddish saying has it, "How the Christians go, the Jews go." In the current instance, Israel engagement is highest for self-identified conservatives and lowest for those who checked "very liberal," with liberals and moderates arrayed in between. Thus, conservatives (9% of Bay Area Jews) outscore the very liberal (25%) on feeling very attached to Israel (33% vs. 17%), seeing the existence of a Jewish State as very important (68% vs. 46%), and feeling comfortable with the idea of a Jewish State (77% vs. 46%).

Even larger gaps between right and left are associated with sympathies for Israel or the Palestinians. Conservatives overwhelmingly side with Israel (70% vs. 6%), as compared with 27%/15% among the most liberal. For liberals, then, policy differences with Israel seem to outpace overall disenchantment.

All Together: Age, Politics, and Jewish Engagement

Looking at the whole picture: While Jewish engagement is the factor that most strongly influences Israel attachment, political identity and age continue to exert their influence even when controlling for the other relevant factors.

In other words, younger Jews are still less engaged with Israel even after we take into account the fact that so many are the children of intermarried parents, that they are generally less Jewishly engaged, and that they are slightly more liberal than their elders.

In short, no one factor is driving variations in engagement with Israel. Weakening and more personalized Jewish identity is clearly more influential than politically driven alienation, but the latter is operating as well. It seems reasonable to infer that non-Orthodox Jews today are less attached to Israel than in the past in large part because of declines in their levels of overall Jewish engagement. At the same time, politics plays a role, albeit a secondary one.

Any interventions seeking to strengthen American Jews' attachment to Israel will need to go beyond the variety of unquestionably valuable and effective programs to increase travel to and study in Israel. The research points to two other planes of action. One entails the full panoply of efforts to engage, educate, and connect American Jews. The other entails attending to the alienation of liberals from Israeli policies and from Israel itself. Only changes in Israeli policy and greater communal acceptance of pro-Israel/anti-Israeli-government American Jews can hope to diminish the departure of Jewish liberals from the dwindling camp of Israel-engaged American Jews.



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PERFECTING AN IMPERFECT RELATIONSHIP



It is tempting, as Israel celebrates its 70th birthday, to describe the relationship between North American Jewry and the Jewish state in the direst terms. Crisis narratives sell, especially among Jews, and what story could be more anxiety producing than that of an irreparable rupture between the two major centers



ELLIOT COSGROVE

of contemporary Jewish life? The issues are explosive: an Israeli Chief Rabbinate running roughshod over American Jews, continued settlement expansion potentially foreshadowing the death of a Jewish and democratic state, and a dangerous rise in partisanship over American Jewry's political support for Israel. Divergent Jewish communities have arisen, one an intermarried American Jewry for whom Israel has ceased making a visceral claim, and an Israeli Jewry (secular or haredi) for which the existence of Diaspora Jewry is a fleeting and soon to be irrelevant nuisance.

Tempting as it may be to adopt such a narrative, it not only suffers from imprecision and oversimplification and ignores the innumerable benefits that the relationship provides to both North American Jewry and Israel, but it also prevents communal leaders *on both sides* from mapping out the measures necessary to secure our bond for the next 70 years. It would be more accurate to say that the relationship between North American Jewry and Israel is far different and more complicated than it was 20, 40, and certainly 70

years ago. The difference and complexity must be understood and appreciated at this momentous juncture in Israel's history.

For those willing to look, there are ample signs of renewal, growth, and redefinition. Two of the most significant recent transformations of American Jewish life have centered on Israel: Birthright and AIPAC. Birthright has connected a generation of over 600,000 American Jews to their Judaism by way of Israel—a monumental achievement, unimaginable to prior generations. As for AIPAC, one need only stand among the 18,000 advocates for Israel in Washington D.C.'s Convention Center to see how strongly Israel engagement has seized the imagination of so many. It has become a new civil religion of American Jewry—one with Israel at its center. Gap years, be they spent in Israeli yeshivot or start-ups; pride in Israel's presence on the world stage, whether the cause be desalination plants, earthquake relief in Haiti or Gal Gadot, Israel is finding new ways to shape the identity of American Jewry. Even Israel's most thorny challenges have found expression in mainstream media and culture (*Fauda*, *The Band's Visit*, *Oslo*). This is not the



Entebbe, pepper-picking, Naomi Shemer Zionism of my youth. It is different, more complicated and more understandable to my children than to me—but it is there, evolving before our very eyes.

The relationship between American Jewry and Israel must change, if for no other reason than that both communities have changed and continue to change. Long gone are the days of Israel as the scrappy David facing looming destruction at the hands of the Goliath of the Arab nations. Not only has Israel's military strength often flipped this equation around, but the question of who is Israel's friend or foe is in a constant state of flux. No longer is Israel the needy recipient of world Jewry's beneficence and wisdom; in some instances, the direction of the relationship has turned the other way. The coming generation of American Jewry understands Israel neither a theological response to the Shoah nor as a firewall against real or imagined present day anti-Semitism. The problems Israel faces, whether socioeconomic, intrareligious, political or territorial, can be understood but not solved by American Jewry, no matter how well-meaning. Likewise, American Jewry's challenge in explaining Zionism in a cultural moment marked by the cross-currents of hyper-individualism, America first-ism, and intersectionality is a task that has nothing to do with the policy decisions of this or that Israeli government. Critical as the bond shared between our communities is, both Israelis and American Jews would do well spending more time examining the internal challenges facing their own respective communities than pointing out the flaws of the other. The relationship between American Jewry and Israel must enter a new chapter, less co-dependent and more interdependent, a relationship that is ultimately in the best interests of both communities.

So, what can we do?

First, we should continue doing what has worked thus far. Does Birthright provide a penetrating understanding of Israeli society—most likely not. Is it and programs like it worthy of our support—absolutely! Does an AIPAC conference provide a nuanced and textured exploration of Israel's geopolitical challenges. Not by a long shot. Should pro-Israel advocacy be a constitutive building block of American Jewish identity—absolutely! Whatever the flaws of these and other efforts may be, we must never allow them to eclipse the boon they provide for American Jewry's relationship with Israel.

Second, we need a Marshall Plan to restore, rebuild and defend the Zionist narrative among American Jews. The Zionist story is a compelling one, especially in our time, of how a historically marginalized people was able to reclaim its homeland and become, after thousands of years, a dynamic exemplar of self-determination. But

it has proven difficult to defend it against the counterclaims of BDS and intersectionality, especially for the American Jewish college student ill acquainted with even the basic facts of Israel's history and reason for being. We need more Israel education, better Israel curricula (at all levels), and better trained Israel educators (both Americans and Israeli *shlichim*).

Finally, if American Jewry is truly invested in drawing closer to Israel, our first step must be to draw closer to Judaism. Far too often, and for far too many American Jews, attachment to Israel serves as a compensatory act for a paper-thin Jewish identity. Orthodox, Conservative, Reform—it doesn't matter. Only an engaged American Jewry will engage with the Jewish homeland. Only an engaged American Jewry will be taken seriously by America, and, for that matter, by Israel. Whatever our concerns about the Chief Rabbinate, the future of the two-state solution, and the Iran deal, let's first make sure we are lighting Shabbat candles and building vibrant Jewish identities of our own.

The French writer Paul Valéry once wrote that we are all destined to live in the time into which we are born. When it comes to the relationship between Israel and North American Jewry, ours is neither the best nor the worst of times—it is simply the time in which we live. Better than adopting a headline-grabbing crisis narrative, those invested in the future of the Jewish people must take a sober look at our present landscape—bullish, bearish, and otherwise. We must fortify those efforts that presently work, shed those which have run their course, and create anew where the need demands. Like two strings on a violin, American Jewry and Israel, though separated by a distance, when touched by a bow can make a beautiful sound, in dialogue and partnership, interdependent stakeholders in a shared destiny.



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THE ODD COUPLE: AMERICAN AND ISRAELI JEWS



“Can this marriage be saved?” columns have enlivened American periodicals for decades, advising alienated life partners. Jews in America versus Jews in Israel resemble those struggling couples. Diverging world views and existential and quotidian realities permeate Israeli-American relationships.



SYLVIA BARACK FISHMAN

The Pew Research Center's studies of *Israel's Religiously Divided Society* (March 2016) and *Portrait of Jewish Americans* (October 2013) vividly illuminate these tensions.

Israelis comprise (so far) a Jewish majority in a Jewish country embedded in a hostile, unsettled region. American Jews, in contrast, are a tiny though elite minority navigating a mostly secure, tolerant, open society. In Israel Jews are surrounded by other Jews: almost universally, Israeli Jews report that most of their friends are Jewish and that most of their friends also share their status as either *Hiloni* (Secular), *Haredi* (UltraOrthodox), or *Dati* (Religious Zionist) Jews. Only Israeli *Masorti* (traditional) Jews report many non-*Masorti* friends, according to the Pew Israel study, probably because there are comparatively few of them in the country. Such homogeneous Israeli friendship circles may serve as echo chambers, reducing meaningful interaction with divergent viewpoints.

In contrast, barely one-third of American Jews say that most of their friends are Jewish, Pew's U.S.

study shows. Equally important, American Jews typically associate with Jews from streams of Judaism other than their own.

Politically, despite a substantial and vocal minority of politically conservative American Jews (including a majority of those who are Orthodox) the majority of American Jews describe themselves as “liberal” or “moderate.” In contrast, the majority of Israeli Jews lean from the “center” to the “right,” as Pew's Israel study shows, especially those Israelis who emigrated from Arab and FSU countries where Jews were regarded as pariahs.

These and other Israelis think American Jews are politically naïve, and too worried about what non-Jews think. Many are convinced that American Jewry will continue to lose its distinctive identity and disappear through intermarriage and assimilation—both expressed by the Hebrew word *hitbolelut*. But in their own eyes, America's Jews often interpret their openness as the happy result of America's embrace of diverse immigrants, the generosity of the American public school

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system, and, more recently, the positive effects of multicultural pluralism. And such American Jews sometimes fault what they see as Israeli chauvinism.

American Jews are far more socioeconomically and educationally homogeneous than Israeli Jews. Clustered at the upper end of American educational, occupational, and income charts, Jews in the United States are about twice as likely as Israeli Jews to have earned higher educational degrees: 58% of American Jews have BAs, compared to 33% of Israelis, and 28% of American Jews have postgraduate degrees, compared to 12% of Israelis. Israeli society includes a much larger proportion of comparatively undereducated Jews as well: only 2% of American Jews today have not finished high school, compared to 25% of Israeli Jews.

This ubiquitous American academic experience shapes Jewish attitudes beyond formal education: The American universities that Jews attend highlight the viewpoints and concerns of other groups and discourage tribal loyalties. In this liberal, universalistic framework, Jews are regarded not as a distinctive minority population, but rather as a subset of entitled, privileged, affluent white Americans.

In dramatic contrast, the foundational experience for many Israeli Jews is not so much the university—which Israelis typically attend in their twenties to acquire occupational credentials—as it is service in the Israeli Defense Forces, the IDF, after high school. The IDF experience colors everything—the way in which parents and children and husbands and wives relate to each other, male friendship networks that enhance career options, and—perhaps most important—the palpable Israeli awareness of potential personal and national vulnerability to harm. This perceived vulnerability sometimes expresses itself in Jewish discomfort with Arab Israelis.

Not least, the Pew Israel study revealed that Israeli and American Jews differ profoundly in their Jewish map of meaning. Israeli Jews feel passionately about strong family bonds and communities. Israelis are much less invested in Jewish religious institutions than American Jews—but much more tied to traditional Jewish holidays and customs. While 60% of *Hiloni* Israeli Jews never set foot in a synagogue (comparable American Jews typically attend High Holiday services), a third of *Hilonim* (33%) have kosher homes, surpassing the total American average of 22%. Almost universally, Israelis comment that “being connected with Jewish history, culture and community” is “central to their Jewish identity.”

In contrast, American Jews stress urbane, sophisticated “Jewish” qualities: Americans (49%) are more than twice as likely as Israelis (16%) to view “being intellectually curious” as an essential Jewish characteristic. “Having a good sense of

humor” is essentially Jewish to 42% of U.S. Jews but to only 9% of Israelis. More than two-thirds of American Jews see “leading an ethical and moral life” as essential to Jewishness, compared to fewer than half of Israelis.

Israeli and American Jews often express criticism of and frustration with each other. Many Israeli Jews resent American Jewish downplaying of the Iranian existential threat to Israel. Many Americans wish Israel would foster greater Jewish diversity, less religious coercion, and more liberal approaches to gender issues. In recent years, Obama’s and then Trump’s presidency have sharpened oppositional anxieties, further alienating many American and Israeli Jews.

Nevertheless, American and Israeli Jews, both personally and collectively—as in the Pew and other studies—express strong feelings of connection to each other.

These kinship emotions are genuine, but deeper mutual understanding is required to sustain and nurture a working relationship. Like the odd couples discussed in American periodicals, we American Jews and Israeli Jews must see, listen, and open our hearts to each other. We must accept that our aspirations and anxieties will probably always diverge, although that recognition is painful. We must aim for empathy, and try to reawaken our appreciation of each other’s strengths. By coming to terms with, rather than avoiding, our singular as well as our common experiences we can rebuild and pursue a common destiny—and this “marriage” can be saved.



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AFFIRMATION OF THE DIASPORA: TOWARDS A NEW NARRATIVE



Zionism, rooted in age-old Jewish tradition, is a movement that rejects the Diaspora and asserts that the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people will come with the founding of a Jewish state. This “negation of the Diaspora” has two main components: first, the belief that Jews will never be physically



AMITAI FRAIMAN

safe amidst foreign nations, and second, that the Jewish people—and Judaism itself—have been corrupted by diasporic life. Such negation of the Diaspora, so prevalent in the early Zionist movement, was necessary not only to ignite the Zionist project, but also to sustain it. In founding a state, the Zionist movement sought to address both issues, physical security and cultural authenticity, by creating a “new Jew.”

The American context represents the antithesis of this approach, and offers a competing solution. Unlike Israel, which envisions the Jewish people as a nation among nations, America has enabled Jews to assimilate socially, while maintaining their cultural identity as one minority among many.

As Zionism won the hearts and minds of Jews around the world, especially immediately after the Six-Day War, Diaspora negation was widely adopted. In Israel, the educational system has always adhered to this doctrine and sees nothing about Diaspora Jewry worthy of emulation. After all, how can we portray American Jewish life in

a positive light while asking our youth to join the IDF? In the U.S., meanwhile, vast resources are invested in forging a connection with Israel, often at the expense of quality, affordable Jewish education for the masses. What message does a young person get about his or her Jewish identity if it is neglected, and replaced by a trip to another country?

The narrative of Diaspora negation has been that Israel represents Jewry’s (and Judaism’s) sole, authentic future, while the Diaspora is a pale vestige, destined to wither. Over time the ubiquity of this narrative has created an unbalanced power dynamic which continues to exacerbate the growing gap between the two Jewish epicenters. The real tragedy of Diaspora negation is not only that it is no longer instrumental (as it had once been at the dawn of Zionism), but that it has become detrimental to each epicenter individually, as well as to the relationship between them. *Indeed, it is Diaspora negation that poses the greatest challenge to sustaining strong American Jewish-Israeli ties.*

The Jewish people have historically been dispersed, and the relationship between the different communities strongly influenced our nation's development. Today, Israel and American Jewry, as the epicenters of world Jewry, have unique and indispensable voices to add to the conversation. Israel has become the quintessence of Jewish particularism, the manifestation of "chosenness." For the past 70 years, the experience of being a sovereign nation-state has fundamentally influenced the culture, politics, religious beliefs, and practice of Israel's Jews. American Jewry, in contrast, epitomizes Jewish universalism, *tikkun olam*. Life as a minority group catalyzed American Jewry to develop impressive communal structures and to collaborate successfully with other faiths and minorities. Furthermore, the abundant cultural and economic opportunities offered by America have led the Jewish community to think more creatively about questions of boundaries and affiliation, and to adopt a more universalistic posture.

Regrettably, in the absence of open dialogue, each community will continue to be limited by its own environment, each giving way to the negative manifestations of its respective lens. In Israel, religious and political extremism will grow, even as Jews in the U.S. contend with the twin ills of increasing assimilation and decreasing affiliation.

If nothing is done, these trends will only push us further apart.

What strategies or initiatives ought to be considered to bring our communities closer? *First and foremost, we must uproot the idea of Diaspora negation.*

If denigration of Jewish communities outside Israel continues, Israelis will neither value the relationship nor invest in it, and American Jews will become further distanced from Israel. We must replace the prevailing narrative with one of Jewish peoplehood.

But how?

Consider the following proposal: Imagine a "reverse Birthright" in which Israeli Jewish-education university students spend a week in the U.S. and learn with their American peers about American Jewish life in all its aspects. Imagine, too, a follow-up seminar in which those same American students, now in Israel as part of their studies, continue to study with the Israeli peers with whom they took part in the "reverse Birthright." Through this reciprocal encounter, Israelis would see American Jewry and Israel through American eyes, and American Jews would see Israel and American Jewry from an Israeli perspective. This program would deepen participants' relationships and generate educational curricula necessary for a sustainable and equal relationship. The new

narrative created and shared by educators would influence students and their families throughout the Jewish world, bring the two communities closer together, and over time, generate a renewed commitment to Jewish peoplehood. Only through such direct encounters and cross-pollination—as equals—will each center learn from and counterbalance the other, and curtail its own negative trends. Ultimately, our goal must be to encourage each community to emulate the other's strengths, so that together we can fully realize our potential.

Where will our relationship be five years from now?

This depends on whether the two communities can pivot away from Diaspora negation and toward a partnership in which universalism and particularism are harmoniously balanced. The Zionist movement's original task was to create a safe haven for the Jewish people. Seventy years later, as Israel grows stronger by the day and is no longer threatened by diasporic alternatives, we must think about the evolving role of the Jewish nation-state. Changing such a deeply rooted construct is difficult, but not as difficult as founding a state. The potency of Zionist thought, rooted in millennia-old traditions, has been its ability to continually recreate itself in striving for a better future. It is time for us to do the same.



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FROM PEOPLEHOOD TO BROTHERHOOD



“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

Dickens’s words aptly convey the current state of the Jewish people and the relationship between its the two largest Jewish communities, those in Israel and the United States.



SHUKI FRIEDMAN

On the one hand, Jews have never been stronger and more influential—and the State of Israel is certainly more secure and powerful today than ever before. On the other hand, when it comes to the maintenance of Jewish identity and the relations between Jewish communities, the picture appears far grimmer in comparison to earlier generations.

One of the most significant threats the Jewish people face is internal: the great difficulty in sustaining the shared ideas and narratives that create a sense of Jewish unity. In recent decades, the overarching narrative framing this unity was peoplehood. I propose an alternative that stresses brotherhood and “familyhood.”

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, relations between Israel and the Jewish Diaspora (primarily the Jewish community in the United States) have largely been framed by a utilitarian discourse centered on the benefits for both sides of maintaining good relations. Now, though, as we celebrate Israel’s 70th anniversary, it is apparent that this is no longer working. Even as American Jews continue their political and financial support of Israel, Israel’s dependence on such aid has steadily decreased over the years. Many Jews around the world view Israel as a second home, but as time goes by, the idea of Israel as an actual home becomes more abstract and less tangible.

What is “brotherhood?” In the book *In Search of Solidarity: An Israeli Journey* (published by the Israeli Democracy Institute), linguist Ruvik Rosenthal defines it as the foremost level of partnership in every respect—the term people use to convey their closest relationships.

In the Bible we see that before the people of Israel became a people, the Children of Israel were a family, and that even after they are called a “people,” they are still described as members of the same family. In the Bible, brotherhood plays a central role in denoting the responsibilities individual members of the Jewish people have toward other members of the group. The Bible often uses the term “brother” in setting out many of the social and moral obligations Jews have toward one another, even if they have no actual familial ties.

For example: “And your brother shall live with you,” regarding the obligation of charity (*tzedakah*); or, “You shall not hate your brother in your heart,” teaching the emotional orientation ethically required of a Jew toward other Jews. These are just two examples from the many biblical sources that use brotherhood as a frame to describe relations between Jews, and the way in which Jews ought to conceive of their attitudes and mutual responsibilities.

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Unlike other relationship, brotherly or family relations require a foundational commitment to the other, regardless of one's own personal interests. Unlike a partner, or even a friend, where there is usually a utilitarian dimension to the relationship, family ties rest on recognition of a common origin and a common fate.

One is born into brotherhood and family. They become an essential part of one's identity, and provide benefits as well as costs and obligations. Siblings may have very different world views, value systems, or chosen lifestyles, but they will always remain family. Differences and disagreements may make the relationship difficult, but will never dismember it. Even amid anger or criticism, the kernel of closeness and love remains.

So how can the concepts of brotherhood and family help reframe relations between the two largest communities of Jews in the world? By serving as a constant reminder of our shared fate, totally unrelated to any mutual or unilateral interest. Family is a framework that accepts difference, criticism, and even anger—which can be aired and discussed, even if the experience is a painful ordeal for both sides.

Of course, I am aware that the use of “brotherhood” as a old-new narrative for relations between Jewish communities and between individual Jews has its disadvantages. It can sound sentimental and schmaltzy, and the demands it makes of us may be more difficult to fulfill than those of peoplehood.

Is the concept, then, nothing more than an empty slogan?

Yet the Jewish tradition, starting from the Bible, uses brotherhood and family over and over as a prime metaphor for Jewish connectedness.

Certainly, it is no minor undertaking to welcome several million brothers and sisters into our family, considering the differences between us and the many disagreements such an extended family will bring with it. And yet brotherhood and family offer a new horizon for thinking about the Jewish people, the communities of which we are comprised, and the individual members that make up the sum of its parts.



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TIME FOR AMERICAN JEWRY TO STAND UP



Relations between Israel and American Jewry are at a crossroads precisely when both are at their historical peaks: Israel celebrates its 70th birthday from a position of unprecedented strength at the same time that American Jews comprise probably the most powerful and influential Jewish



GIDI GRINSTEIN AND ARI AFILALO

community ever. While this remarkable moment in Jewish history is the outcome of decades of *joint* efforts, the underlying alliance that made it possible is now weakening to the detriment of both sides.

The reasons for the current strains on the relationship are well known. The cancellation of the “Kotel Compromise” reflects the continuing refusal of the Israeli government to recognize the legitimacy of the Reform and Conservative movements as valid branches of Judaism. In addition, the rejection by Israeli authorities of conversions performed by rabbis outside of Israel and the alleged blacklisting of those rabbis by the Chief Rabbinate has ignited a fire that continues to smolder. Moreover, as Moshe Halbertal has noted, the accumulation of religious legislation undermines Israel’s very *raison d’être*, making Israel the nation-state of some Jewish people, not the Jewish people as a whole.

Many view this crisis as political, by which they mean that it is produced by the Orthodox parties that are in the current Israeli government. But the situation is also political in another sense: it involves a realignment of power within the Jewish world, where Israel projects superiority and much of world Jewry refuses to continue to entertain its own inferiority. This tension requires addressing a

fundamental question: what does it mean for Israel to be the nation-state of the entire Jewish people in the 21st century?

Zionism has always viewed the mission of being the nation-state of the Jewish people as fundamental to Israel’s purpose. A sovereign Jewish state was envisioned to be a vehicle to ensure the continued, flourishing existence of the entire people, and not just of its own Jewish and non-Jewish citizens. These ideals were shared by all the founding fathers of Zionism, were enshrined in Israel’s Declaration of Independence, and continue to manifest themselves in Israeli policies and laws, such as the Law of Return and the rescue and repatriation of endangered Jewish communities.

This Zionist outlook evolved to uphold fundamental inequality between Israel and Jews elsewhere, a concept known as “the negation of the Diaspora.” It viewed Jewish life outside of Zion as temporary and somewhat inferior, and held that over time Jews would either move to Israel or cease to exist due to the twin threats of anti-Semitism and assimilation. This became the accepted viewpoint not only in Israel but throughout the Jewish world, including among American Jewry and, particularly since Israel’s stunning victory in 1967.

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However, at the beginning of the 21st century, it is obvious that world Jewry has proven much more resilient than classical Zionism expected, and, as noted earlier, American Jewry is probably the most influential and prosperous Jewish community in history. Moreover, hundreds of thousands of Israelis have left the country and created an Israeli Jewish Diaspora, which continues to grow. Hence, the narrative of classical Zionism is no longer acceptable to large segments of the American Jewish community, who now demand a discourse of equals. Now, the only communities to which “negation of the Diaspora” may apply are those too small to thrive on their own, or where assimilation or anti-Semitism are too prevalent to permit a secure Jewish future.

The tension between a domineering outlook coming out of Israel and an increasingly assertive American Jewry has been simmering and exploding periodically, as with the Kotel Compromise. Unless it is addressed, the relationship between American and Israeli Jewries is bound to become more distant, except for those willing to accept Israel’s narrative. This prospect threatens both communities. While today’s Jewish world is probably more powerful and influential than the sum of its parts, that could change for the worse and even reverse itself, especially if the two centers of the Jewish world gravitate away from each other.

In the 21st century, the cornerstone of a resilient and prosperous Jewish people must be the idea that Israel and World Jewry represent an integrated society comprised of communities of equal standing. This narrative must posit that the continued existence and vitality of American, and indeed world Jewry, is as important to the Jewish future as Israel’s security and prosperity. Hence, a vibrant Diaspora is not only necessary for the economic well-being, security, and international legitimacy of Israel, but is also integral to Israel’s very mission and purpose. In other words, a vibrant Diaspora is not a Zionist compromise, but a Zionist imperative.

For such a mindset to take hold, the leadership of Diaspora Jewry must stand up vigorously for its place in Jewish history and destiny. It must unapologetically articulate why both communities are essential for a resilient and prosperous Jewish world, and why this outlook is integral to Zionism in the 21st century.

Furthermore, this outlook must be translated into a concrete agenda. For example, Israeli schoolbooks must reflect a respectful attitude toward world Jewry, the leadership of its civil service must

become acquainted with American and world Jewry, and its National Security Council should be as well-informed about the workings of the Jewish world as it is about the politics of the Arab world.

Establishing a coalition of leaders and organizations across Israel’s civic leadership that embraces the notion of Israel being the nation state of the entire Jewish people is now a matter of highest priority for world Jewry. Some will inevitably call this attitude post-Zionist. They will be wrong. This is the essence of Zionism in our times.

**A somewhat similar version of this piece appeared in Fathom Journal in April 2018.*



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HOMELAND



For me and other involved Jews of my generation, the establishment of the State of Israel seemed a miracle. We knew the world before Israel existed: we lived through the years of the Holocaust, and although safe in the United States, we agonized helplessly while the six million were slaughtered in Europe.



FRANCINE KLAGSBRUN

And then miraculously—or so it appeared—the State of Israel arose from the ashes of that disaster, and Jews formed a sovereign nation able to protect and defend itself. For many of us, centuries of anti-Semitism now took a back seat to our pride in this new state, which we saw and, were meant to see, as a homeland—and a haven—not only for those living in it, but also for Jews everywhere.

That was the view of my generation and perhaps my daughter's after me. Although she had no first-hand knowledge of the pre-state Jewish world, Israel was a source of pride to her too. As its economy grew and its culture expanded, it still tapped into feelings of loyalty and support, surrounded as it was by implacable neighbors bent on its destruction. But today's young American Jews see Israel differently. For many of them it is a strong and independent nation like any other, with no particular bearing on their lives. Others, like my grandchildren, who attend Jewish day schools and maintain an emotional connection to Israel, feel uncomfortable when that country moves in directions different from those they have known in America.

What are the issues? Of the many that impact on young—and older—American Jews, Israel's seemingly inexorable march toward the right most seriously threatens relations between Jews in the two countries. The dangers affect both religious and political ties. As the ultra-Orthodox have

grown in numbers and gained unprecedented clout in the Israeli government, we hear dismissive, sometimes insulting remarks about religiously liberal American Jews. Convinced that the Reform and Conservative movements are illegitimate, the ultra-Orthodox thought nothing, for example, of breaking a government deal made with those movements to expand the prayer space adjacent to the Kotel and allow for egalitarian services there. When a less satisfactory compromise was later offered, the message these American groups took from the entire episode was simply, "You don't matter."

The political message is equally distressing. Polls find an ever-widening gap between American Democrats and Republicans in their support for Israel, with the Democrats expressing more sympathy for the Palestinians and less for Israel than Republicans do. This does not bode well for the future, since American Jews, especially the young, tend to be Democratic and liberal. As such, they are inclined to oppose Israel's right-wing government, and to bridle at every expansion of the West Bank settlements. Even those with strong ties to Israel find themselves frustrated by that country's increasing indifference to a two-state solution. When government officials urge the annexation of West Bank settlements and the extension of Israeli law throughout the territories, possibilities for a Palestinian state, and thus the fulfillment of a two-state solution, fade

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away, and the specter of an undemocratic Israel that treats Palestinians as second-class citizens haunts American Jews. Indeed, the Israeli right's seeming disregard for the Palestinian condition makes it difficult for committed young American Jews to fight BDS and other anti-Israel movements, especially on college campuses.

Israelis have their own complaints about American Jews, the most trenchant being that since we do not assume the risks they do to protect the Jewish state or send our children out to fight when conflict erupts, we have not earned the right to press for policy changes in that land. In the religious realm, most Israelis, including the secular, still have relatively little interest in the liberal movements, which they see as primarily American institutions. As the old adage goes, the shul they don't attend is an Orthodox one. Beyond that, as Israel's industry and technology soar to new heights, some Israelis resent any hint of dependence on American Jews. "Our economy is better than yours," an Israeli historian shouted at me during a joint appearance. "We don't need your money!"

What to do about the forces pulling the two sides apart? If present trends continue, the divide will grow ever wider. Discussion and education can narrow that space, but only if rigorously and honestly pursued. AJC and other Jewish organizations need to be more proactive than ever in organizing dialogues between leaders of the two Jewish communities in which they confront—and debate—the challenges, and then seek common ground. And more than ever, the media should be exploited to publicize the joint activities.

American Jews need to acknowledge and appreciate the existential fears behind Israeli thinking and the real threats that country faces. They need to learn history—Jewish schools should teach Israel's history from its beginnings, so that students gain insight into the origins of the state

and the root causes for the Arab-Israeli conflict. On the Israeli side, there needs to be greater understanding of the liberal trends that affect so many American Jews and make it difficult for them to identify with the right-wing leanings of the state. And they need to grasp the crucial role American Jewish advocacy plays in the special relationship the United States has with Israel: the Israeli economy may not depend on Jewish dollars as it once did, but it still depends on the billions it receives from the American government. Israel needs American Jews, as they need it.

Golda Meir used to say that Jews do not have the luxury of not being optimists. I want to believe that though the old sense of Israel as a miracle may be beyond recapture, by working hard together to accept our differences, Israeli and American Jews will once again embrace the Jewish state as our common haven, and home.



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THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH-ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP



The divide begins with geography: American Jews live in the safest and most welcoming country in Jewish history, while Israeli Jews live in the most dangerous and unwelcoming region on the planet. As a result, the two communities have developed opposite strategies of coping. Appropriately



YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI

responding to its surroundings, American Jewry has become open and flexible, emphasizing social justice as a core Jewish value; while Israel, appropriate to its surroundings, has become the toughest kid on the block, emphasizing self-defense as a core Jewish value.

The consequence of these opposing coping strategies is an increasingly acute conflict: the aggressive strategy that helps keep Israel relatively safe in the Middle East undermines its moral credibility among many American Jews, weakening its most crucial international relationship.

There is little Israel can do to change that dynamic. Ever since the Yom Kippur War—Israel's last conventional war—its military conflicts have all been fought against terrorists based in civilian areas, with inevitably ugly consequences. In the coming years or even months, Israel may well find itself in yet another brutal war against Iranian

terror proxies in Lebanon and Gaza, and perhaps against Iran itself. Israel will not adjust its security policy to accommodate the moral concerns of American Jews. And so for some American Jews, Israel is increasingly a “problem,” a source of shame rather than pride—the contemporary version of the *Ostjuden*, Eastern European Jews who embarrassed the German Jewish elite with their supposedly crude behavior. Now, though, the divide isn't over etiquette, but over issues of life and death.

Given the built-in tensions in the relationship, Israel should be doing all it can to minimize friction on issues that are not crucial for its security. That means taking seriously American Jewish sensitivities and commitments, from religious pluralism to the fate of African asylum-seekers. Heeding American Jewish moral anxieties would also help Israel be more responsive to its own self-declared values, which are under increasing attack from within its political culture.

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For their part, liberal American Jews need to be more sensitive to Israel's security dilemmas. That doesn't mean suppressing criticism of Israeli politics. When Israeli governments expand settlements outside the so-called "blocs," for example—the areas likely to become part of Israel if and when an agreement with the Palestinians is reached—we need our friends to remind us of the political, diplomatic, and moral price we will pay for our reckless coalition politics. But criticism requires an awareness of the unbearable choices Israelis often face, especially in regard to the Palestinian dilemma. We need partners in anguish,

who struggle together with us over the security consequences of creating a Palestinian state, and the moral and demographic consequences of not creating one. Moralistic hectoring only further marginalizes American Jews in Israeli discourse.

But getting the fine points right in our relationship will become increasingly meaningless to American Jews and Israelis if we don't find deeper reasons for maintaining our intimate, long-distance bond. Along with a shared commitment to Israel's safety, the relationship desperately needs a cultural and spiritual infusion.



The two great contemporary centers of Jewish life have created vigorous forms of Judaism and Jewish culture. Israelis need exposure to American Jewish innovations—the spirit of owning Judaism rather than being owned by it. And American Jews need to be exposed to the deep Hebrew culture being created by Israelis—an exposure currently hampered by the ongoing scandal of Hebrew illiteracy among even many Jewishly committed American Jews. That silent crisis needs urgent addressing.

Finally, American Jews need to be paying closer attention to the positive changes in attitude toward the Diaspora occurring among Israelis. Notably, the old Zionist contempt for Jewish life outside of the land of Israel—*shleilat hagolah*, negation of the exile—has largely disappeared from Israeli discourse. It is hard to imagine a president of Israel today lecturing American Jews about their responsibility to move to Israel, as former president Ezer Weizman did only two decades ago. Likewise, it is increasingly rare to hear the pejorative word “*yordim*” (literally, those who descend), referring to those who leave Israel, who are now generally called “*mehagrim*,” emigrés.

American Jews also need to recognize the emergence of de facto forms of religious pluralism in Israeli Jewish life. Instead of relentlessly focusing on religious exclusivity at the top, the liberal denominations should be celebrating the stirrings of change at the grassroots. For example: Some municipalities now fund egalitarian synagogues (like Beit Tefilah Yisraeli at the Tel Aviv Port, officially endorsed by the Tel Aviv municipality). The Education Ministry has for years funded schools sponsored by the Conservative and Reform movements. And while the government deserves the withering criticism it has received for renegeing on its own deal that would have given liberal denominations formal authority at the Western Wall, in fact an area of the Wall has been designated for egalitarian prayer. That should be embraced as an historic breakthrough and exploited accordingly. The absence of vigorous egalitarian prayer in that space is an example of how Diaspora Jews miss opportunities to “establish facts on the ground,” which is how real change happens in an often anarchic Israel.

In recent years, a Jewish-oriented spiritual Israeli culture has emerged, replacing the self-absorbed secular Zionist culture that was so blatantly uninterested in the Diaspora. Israeli music is the most potent expression of this revolution. Once the carrier of the ethos of the “new Hebrew man,” Israeli music today is often the carrier of the rejudaization of Israeli culture. Some of Israel’s leading rock musicians are creating contemporary

versions of Jewish prayer. This creates openings for new spiritual relationships between Israelis and Diaspora Jews inconceivable a generation ago.

Exploiting the opportunities that already exist for transforming the relationship will require a new attitude on both sides. Israelis will need to begin taking American Jews seriously as Jews, as creators of new forms of Judaism that are worthy of our attention, and perhaps of adaptation to Israeli reality. And American Jews need to avoid substituting one form of simplistic relationship to Israel with its opposite: Where once Israel could do no wrong, now, for growing numbers of American Jews, it can seemingly do no right.

For the first time, American Jews and Israelis have a chance to develop a relationship between Jewish grown-ups. We need to recognize each other’s achievements, and understand, if not indulge, each other’s failures (which are often a consequence of geographic circumstance). And we need to learn to work as partners in those areas where we are truly equal—like our shared responsibility for the future of Judaism and the Jewish people.



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A STRATEGY TO ADDRESS ISRAEL'S RELIGION AND STATE TENSIONS



The one fundamental issue that threatens strong American Jewish-Israeli ties is the relation between religion and state. If more and more American Jews continue to feel like unwelcome strangers in Israel, we are going to see massive disengagement from Israel in the years to come, especially among younger



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American Jews. The message I have repeatedly heard from college students goes something like this: “The more Israel closes the door on me, the more difficult it is for me to put myself on the line and stand up for Israel and its policies.”

This is a scary prospect.

A strong relationship between American Jewry and Israel is critical for both communities. Israel as a central component of American Jewry's Judaism can provide a rallying point that gives life and a sense of purpose to a population that is losing interest in Judaism en masse. A strong American Jewry is critical for Israel both to secure and maintain U.S. support for Israel's security, and to help combat anti-Israel boycott movements. But beyond the benefits that each provides for the other, we must always remember that Israeli and American Jews are one nation, and that disengagement of American Jewry from Israel

would be catastrophic to Jewish peoplehood.

But that catastrophe is not going to happen. Political realities in Israel are shifting in a way that will enable significant progress on issues of religion and state. The change will enable all Jews to feel at home in Israel, and will inspire and empower American Jews to be proud supporters and advocates of Israel, without hesitation.

Some background is required here. The great majority of Israelis—more than 80%—supports a significant overhaul of Israel's policy on religion, including eliminating the Chief Rabbinate's monopoly of religious services. A majority also supports finding ways to allow non-Orthodox streams to feel more comfortable in Israel, and most certainly rejects rhetoric against fellow Jews from other denominations.

What has kept Israel from making these changes?

The answer is simple: politics. Almost every prime minister, whether from the right or the left, has turned to the ultra-Orthodox political parties to solidify their coalitions. And in return, these prime ministers have given them full control over religious matters. Only a weakening of ultra-Orthodox political power can enable a prime minister to follow the will of the majority.

Many will read this and think: "Well then, we have no chance of change. There is no possibility of their power diminishing since the ultra-Orthodox are having far more children than the rest of Israel, and as their population grows their political power will also grow."

But this is where the good news comes in. All the polling data indicates that ultra-Orthodox political power is not increasing in proportion to its huge population growth, and that in fact the opposite is happening. Polls over the last few years have consistently shown their political power decreasing and the reason for this surprising development is the integration of ultra-Orthodox young men into Israeli society.

There are currently more ultra-Orthodox soldiers and officers in the IDF than ever before, more ultra-Orthodox students in universities than ever before, and the highest ultra-Orthodox employment rate in decades. When ultra-Orthodox young men integrate into Israeli society, they remain religiously observant and maintain Torah study as their highest value, but they also become more moderate on issues of religion and state as they meet a wider range of Israelis for the first time in their lives. Daily interaction with people outside the ultra-Orthodox world generates a sensitivity to the wants and needs of others, and a growing recognition that coercion and control harm Judaism.

They also come to recognize that contrary to a basic premise of the ultra-Orthodox political parties, secular Israel does not want to make the ultra-Orthodox less religious, a canard they have been taught throughout their formative years. What the secular world wants is an end to attempts by the religious to force their way of life on them. Thus the younger generation of the ultra-Orthodox do not blindly follow the direction of the old guard, and tens of thousands are not voting for the ultra-Orthodox parties.

This shift in voting and political power will ultimately lead to a government constellation in which the ultra-Orthodox parties are no longer coalition kingmakers. This will allow for passage of legislation that provides a variety of options for religious services in Israel, and a more embracing attitude toward the non-Orthodox streams.

This analysis suggests a strategy to help bring American Jewish and Israeli communities closer together: a significant investment in ultra-Orthodox integration programs, with a focus on career training and employment placement.

The formula is clear: the more the ultra-Orthodox integrate into society, the more moderate they become. The more moderate they become, the less likely they are to vote for the ultra-Orthodox parties that have been holding the rest of Israel and the entire Jewish world hostage with their power over Israeli religion and their refusal to recognize other streams of Judaism. Once the ultra-Orthodox parties lose their power, the government and Knesset will be free to radically change policy on religion and state, which will lead to a more moderate and embracing Judaism. Jews in Israel and around the world will be proud of their Judaism and their Jewish state, allowing them to truly see Israel as home for the entire Jewish people.



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A NEW APPROACH TO ISRAEL: FROM DEPENDENCY TO AN INSPIRATION FOR AMERICAN JEWS



For centuries, even as Jews all over the world prayed for the welfare of their ancient homeland and even for a return there, the Land of Israel remained an impoverished backwater for pious and idiosyncratic Jews, totally dependent on charity from the Diaspora—Europe and then America. Even with the



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rise of the State of Israel in 1948, it remained a poor country for decades, in need of financial support, Israel Bonds, and strong lobbying to make sure that America and its allies would help protect, arm, and support the Jewish state.

The American Jewish community still provides hundred of millions of dollars in aid to Israel, and, in cooperation with other pro-Israel groups, influences the United States government to continue giving billions of dollars to Israel. But Israel has changed. It now boasts a powerhouse economy with a powerful military, and despite all the chatter of BDS on college campuses, Israel will surely continue to prosper and attain more international influence. Israel does not need American Jews nearly as much as it did in the past, if at all. In the long run, it can look to China, India, Brazil, and other economic leaders rather than the United States and Western

Europe for its future alliances. Thus, ironically, the greatest threat to the relationship between Israel and American Jewry is the success of the State of Israel itself. For now, Israel continues to invest in the relationship through programs like Birthright Israel and Mosaic, spending by Israel that can easily be justified as an investment in keeping the charitable spigots flowing. Israel has shown that it will not sacrifice any of its strategic interests—such as keeping the ultra-Orthodox parties or the pro-settlement parties in the government coalition—for American Jewish money or friendship.

A second serious threat to the strong relationship between the two Jewish communities is the perception in Israel, at least in the current government, that the largest religious movements of American Jews—Reform and Conservative—are on the decline, not essentially invested in Israel, and

therefore not important to Israel. I see no way for these movements to change this perception. The only positive angle of the situation is that American Orthodox Jews are strengthening their relationship to Israel. Theodore Sasson has pointed out that the 2013 Pew survey shows that the level of Jewish connection to Israel among younger Jews has remained steady. He believes that this is the result of the growing number of Orthodox Jews in America and the tightening of the Orthodox American-Israel relationship, which compensate for the erosion in the liberal denominations.

If Israel will indeed not need any relationship with American Jewry—and certainly not with the non-Orthodox 90% of the community—will this present a problem for American Jews? I believe it will. Throughout its history, Judaism has always had at its cultural and spiritual core a relationship with either Israel or the language of Israel. It is true, of course, that in some ways Yiddish and Judeo-Arabic served to bind the Jews together culturally, and each was regarded as, in some sense, the Holy Tongue. Yet there is no chance that these languages will come back to unify American Jewry. Only Israel can bring back to American Jewry a common, unifying cultural purpose. American Jewry and American Jews are so Americanized, even in their most Orthodox and traditional form, that a stronger connection to the Holy Land, to the Jewish State, must be the critical link between Tikkun Olam Jews, Trumpian Jews, and everyone in between, giving them all a uniquely Jewish focus that differentiates them from all other Americans. Jews have traditionally prayed toward Jerusalem, sung songs of Jerusalem, and dreamed of returning to the Holy Land. It is time to forget about Israel needing us, and focus on our need for Israel.

Since Israel no longer needs political or financial help from American Jews, the connection between us needs to go beyond, and totally around, the political sphere. We need to expand the Birthright Israel model and expose American Jews to the Holy Land itself: to the culture of Israel, to the diversity of Israel—including Arabs, Druze, Bedouins, and Christians—to the sounds and smells and tastes of the Land of Israel. The American Jewish leadership should of course continue to support and strengthen the State of Israel. But average unaffiliated American Jews, however, need exposure to their Homeland, to their birthright, to what mystically belongs to them just because they are Jews, and even if they do not see themselves as Jews by religion. Our Jewish organizational structures, from AIPAC to AJC, are highly invested in the political side, and work to excite the next generation of American Jews about the moral-political story of Israel, but the effort that will speak to the vast majority of American Jews addresses Israel beyond politics and beyond religious duty, and even beyond the idea of the nation-state

of Israel, as important as that is. We need to get American Jews to go to Israel and fall into irrational, apolitical love with it. We have to invest in getting American Jews to experience Israel so they can see that is so much greater, more beautiful, more colorful, and more sensuous than what they see in the media—even the social media. Get them there for a week, for a month, for an internship, for a sabbatical: whatever it takes, that is where the American Jewish community should be spending its money. We are blessed with a Jewish state to which every American Jew can fly, and experience with relative ease. Let us secure this non-political, non-religious bond not for a strategic State of Israel reason, but for the sake of keeping American Jewry united over our common cultural and historical heritage.



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ON UNIFYING NARRATIVES AND PARALYZING PARADIGMS



The challenge of sustaining strong ties between American and Israeli Jews involves numerous complex factors and many different stakeholders. I will focus on our mindset as a community, the one component of this web that is squarely in our control and whose potency has proven itself throughout our history.



ADENA PHILIPS

There is perhaps no greater story of a nation taking control of its destiny than the story of Israel. My identity as a Diaspora Jew and lover of Israel is sustained by accounts of our people's grit, perseverance, and pioneering spirit. Indeed, scientific research suggests that there is a positive correlation between redemptive narrative and resilience; no doubt, our people's cyclical recounting of our story for millennia has helped us thrive in the face of adversity. Wonderfully, alongside our vigilant custodianship of the Jewish story, we have also been dreamers, writing previously inconceivable chapters and innovating audaciously in the face of discrimination, scarce resources, and, at times, existential peril. Our people has been able to wield two opposing psychological tools to maintain and develop our character: dependence on storied paradigms to cement foundations of identity, and the ability to transcend old patterns of thinking to create disruptive pathways to innovation.

Are we continuing to achieve this stasis when it comes to the challenges at hand, or have we ceded to a fear-driven reliance on outdated, romantic paradigms? When we talk about Israel in American Jewish settings, we often disparage the growing detachment of American Jews from the "nation-state of the Jewish people," from the "only democracy in the Middle East," from the great Zionist project of "making the desert bloom." We lament the Israeli lack of understanding of the "shared fates" of Diaspora Jews and Israel, of the "dependence of Israel on Diaspora Jews." Certainly, these phrases touch on much that is alive and relevant today—however, they strike many in my generation as emerging from a different chapter of our people's experience, giving form to a story like a glove that fits almost, but not quite (the use of the word Diaspora itself, with connotations of dispersion, yearning, and transience, is an artifact of this phenomenon).



Holding fast to our old narratives, to the exclusion of engaging and opening ourselves to other newer ones, limits us to critiquing today's events through yesterday's lenses. We know that when humans encounter information, our modus operandi is to assimilate it immediately into our established neural pathways and long-held frameworks. In this case, our restricted vision posits the current scenario as a linear decline when the reality is a non-linear metamorphosis with distinct challenges and opportunities. We are turning a blind eye to a new, contemporary story, and in narrowing the scope of our vision, we are limiting our ability to creatively address our community's challenges now and into the future.

Our community is paying a high price for investing vast resources in old paradigms. Too often, we are missing opportunities by failing to create space for new frameworks and to reimagine the next chapter of our communal story. Here are three examples:

An Inapt Cast with an Unconvincing Protagonist:

We discuss the topic of Israeli security using the same paradigms we did 50 years ago. We craft a discourse and advocacy strategy for a "vulnerable David" pursued by a "Goliath," surrounded on all sides by enemies who are imminently "pushing us into the sea." To be sure, security is as vital today as ever, but both David and his antagonists have assumed new roles. The contours of the present dynamic are incongruent with our mascots and metaphors. What potential innovations are we leaving on the table by clinging to these unfitting paradigms?

Perfect Partners, Perfect Strangers: The

relationships between American nonprofits and Israeli civil society are based on a presupposition of a power dynamic that fails to recognize the evolution of both communities, shifting priorities, and exponential change—for example the advancement of Israel's economic sector and the texture of American Jewish identity as it relates to

denominations. What possible partnerships and joint ventures are we overlooking by failing to see stakeholders for the fullness of what each has to offer?

Blind Spots and Obstructed Conversations: The conversation on BDS has dominated the discourse and caused deep fissures within the American Jewish community. Instead of obsessively focusing the rhetoric on whether it should be permissible for someone in our community who is dissatisfied with Israel's actions to boycott Israeli goods, why not invest resources in identifying, supporting, and spotlighting Israeli companies that promote the resolution of the conflict? This lens shift from stick to carrot seems almost too obvious, yet our communal energy is wasted on refrains from a different era. Our assessments and strategies addressing this critical topic have often stifled potential for new paradigms with cynicism and jadedness, or overlooked it entirely.

To move beyond our communal blind spot, we need to invest in conversations and spaces that allow the people who have a stake in this issue—Israelis and Americans alike—to have their stories heard on their own terms. Young Israelis are not the people who came from Poland and Lithuania and fled persecution to “make the desert bloom.” Young Americans have grown up with a very different Israel story than those who danced at the Kotel in 1967. Words that we readily associate with Israel today—“technology,” “occupation,” “pluralism”—were irrelevant to the core issues a generation ago. We, millennials and baby boomers alike, need to move past *this is bad or good* and boldly step into *this is*. We need to let the stories of the past take a back seat—if only momentarily—in order to integrate the stories of the present.

Let's ask ourselves honestly—is our fidelity to this narrative born from a desire to reinforce a promise of destiny, such as it does when we sit around our dining tables recounting our redemption from slavery in Egypt? Or does it stem from fear? I believe the former has fueled integrity and advancement for our people; the latter, dogma. When we cling out of fear, we shortchange the power and endurance of the story of the people of Israel, which surely cannot be diminished by allowing some new conversations to take place in our boardrooms and synagogues.

The fear and alarmism around the distancing of the “next generation” of young American Jews is trapped in the narratives of the past. These Jews put values and passion before unquestioning allegiance and are willing to depart from conventional paths and societal expectations in order to stand up for what they believe in. Their Jewish identities and stories are rooted in multifaceted connections and experiences, and they

can leverage technology and global networks in ways we might never have imagined. We should be proud and supportive of this generation's potential. Perhaps if we stop applying old measuring tools to this population, we can make space for new ways of advancing the conversation, innovating solutions, and maybe, most importantly, reframing “the problem.” We need to trust each other to assimilate the strength of what came before, without being solely guided and driven by it.

Let's shift the question from “How can we get young American Jews who are connected to Israel to tell the story about Israel that we have always told?” to “What story are young American Jews who care about Israel's future telling about Israel, and what can we learn from it?” Let's be courageous in inviting these conversations, instead of tiptoeing delicately, at best, and censoring or ostracizing at worst. Let's shift from “Why don't Israelis understand or care about the importance of their relationship with American Jewry?” to “What are the common values and interests that bind American Jewry and Israel today, and how can we nourish them?”

I'm not suggesting that we reinvent the relationship ex nihilo and discard a history that transcends our current generation; sometimes the hardest paradigms to shift are those that need to be reshaped rather than rejected entirely. A course correction doesn't erase the wisdom of the past, but it can be critical to ensuring that we get where we need to go.



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HEADING TOWARD DIVERGENCE



The complex relationship between Israel and American Jewry appears to be heading toward crisis, and possibly even a genuine split, a divergence into two completely separate communities. The strong bonds that have maintained a seemingly thriving relationship for decades now confront



OPHIR PINES PAZ

growing rifts that challenge the connection between us. Is it still possible to change course and steer toward a future that provides common ground for continued discourse?

What Keeps Us Together?

There are strong and meaningful elements that bind Jews in Israel to those in the Diaspora. First and foremost, American Jews often see Israel as a source of inspiration that stimulates and sustains the Jewish community. Many organizations and programs facilitate this relationship in different ways, such as Taglit-Birthright, AIPAC, Israel Bonds, and the Jewish Agency.

Israel, for its part, appreciates the American Jewish community as a powerful and wealthy lobby that influences American politics far beyond its actual electoral power. The benefits are palpable for Israel so long as this lobby is geared toward safeguarding Israel's political and security interests in the U.S. and the UN.

What Sets Us Apart?

The common religion and cultural history that we share is, ironically, also a major source of a great and growing divide, and a root cause of some of the tensions between us. While religion and

state are separated in the U.S., religion in Israel is highly politicized. Nominally both a Jewish and a democratic state, Israel is gradually becoming more Orthodox Jewish and less democratic. American Jewry is far less Orthodox, featuring a wide range of different Jewish denominations and practices, including strong Reform and Conservative communities, unaffiliated and secular Jews, and dual-religion families.

In Israel, official Judaism is monopolized by the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate, marginalizing Reform and Conservative communities. The most recent manifestation of the problem has been the long, drawn-out battle of Women of the Wall that led to the outline of a compromise agreement allocating egalitarian prayer areas at the Kotel, which was consequently overturned. Additionally, other recent developments have made the Chief Rabbinate's monopoly over conversions to Judaism even stronger.

The American Jewish community is open to the world, which encourages assimilation and increases the chances of intermarriage. In Israel, however, the drive to preserve Jewish identity and a Jewish demographic majority in the Jewish homeland can lead, at times, to xenophobia.

In recent decades, Israelis have not only been moving increasingly toward the political right, but they also seem to be undergoing an alarming “Trumpization,” the adoption of aggressively anti-democratic, anti-minority, anti-refugee, and anti-non-Orthodox attitudes. This is in stark contrast to the Democratic affiliation of most American Jews and their liberal and humane approach to social issues, minorities, and human rights.

The chasm grows as Prime Minister Netanyahu sees a good political and personal friend in President Trump, generating deep discontent and alienation among American Jews, who largely consider the Trump administration an absolute disaster.

And then, there is the Occupation. In regard to its conflict with the Palestinians, Israel seems to have settled into a “no-action” stance. And while most American Jews are opposed to this status quo, an Orthodox minority, along with some wealthy individuals like Sheldon Adelson, meddle in Israeli politics by supporting and funding politicians and newspapers. The result is the consolidation and deepening of the Occupation.

For the first time since Israel was founded, support for it is no longer part of the mainstream American political consensus. The Democratic Party, formerly an anchor of support for Israel, is now split between advocates of Israel and backers of the Palestinians, making the Democrats resemble European leftist parties, which contain harsh and outspoken critics of Israel.

Where Are We Heading?

Our divergence on political views and religious values has also brought a significant shift of prominence and power in the American Jewish community. J Street, outspoken in opposition to just about everything Israel’s—and now also the U.S.’s—right-leaning governments are doing, from the conflict with the Palestinians to the Iran nuclear deal, is growing, and AIPAC might ultimately lose its unique influence upon American Middle East policy. This reflects the fact that most of the American Jewish community has felt repeatedly slighted by both President Trump and his good friend Netanyahu. If this trend continues and intensifies, American Jews, no longer able to identify with Israel’s restructured values, will just lose interest.

The situation is very dangerous. Often, crises can be overcome; we have managed to survive them before. But this impending split may be beyond our powers to bridge, and the result could be near total disengagement.

What Can We Do?

The founders intended Israel to be the Jewish homeland, but something has gone terribly awry. To preserve the integrity and unity of the Jewish people, the process of turning Israel into a bastion of religious Orthodoxy must be reversed. It is time to contemplate our actions; refine, redefine and recommit to Israel as the state of the Jewish people everywhere.

Israel has been taking American Jewry and its immense contribution to Israel for granted. We cannot keep talking about the Jewish people, and at the same time ignoring them when it counts. On issues related to the practice and organization of Judaism in Israel, a channel should be created to enable Diaspora Jews to have a voice. Global Jewry—meaning primarily the American Jewish community—must be included in the discussion of the proper relations of religion and state, since they are affected by whatever policies are adopted. This could be the way to address the divide between the two communities and prevent a complete disengagement between them.



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THE VIEW FROM HERE: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE'RE TOLD OUR JUDAISM ISN'T JUDAISM



Every Friday night, I enter the historic, majestic Central Synagogue in Manhattan for Kabbalat Shabbat services and watch hordes of my fellow congregants pouring into every pew. We bow in unison toward the east as we usher in the Sabbath bride during L'Cha Dodi, and affirm our fidelity to



ABIGAIL POGREBIN

God during the Shema. I'm encouraged by the fact that 2,400 Jewish families belong to our congregation and 750 are on a waiting list to join. It reminds me that American Jewish engagement is robust and real.

But then I recall the disparaging words of Israeli Minister of Religions David Azoulay: "A Reform Jew, from the moment he stops following Jewish law, I cannot allow myself to say that he is a Jew."

Year after year, I watch my congregation fast together on Yom Kippur; dance at our children's b'nai mitzvah; show up for each other's shiva minyanim; take classes in Torah, Talmud, Jewish history and Hebrew; sign up for missions to Israel;

commit our time, resources, and loyalty to UJA, AJC, AIPAC, Friends of the IDF, and others.

But then I read the words of Jerusalem Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, who last summer called Reform Jews "evil" and "worse than Holocaust deniers because they reject traditional Jewish law." I remember MK Moshe Gafni, Chair of the Knesset Finance Committee, saying, "Reform Jews are a group of clowns who stab the holy Torah," and the Deputy Minister of Education, MK Meir Porush, saying, "Reform Jews should be sent to the dogs."

Of course, these voices don't speak for all Israelis. But they do speak for Israel.

Those of us who affiliate with Reform Judaism, a 200-year-old movement that is rooted in tradition but embraces liturgy *and* modernity, are not overly focused on our rejection by Israel's religious—and in some cases, governmental—leadership. I'd venture that most of us don't spend our days seeking legitimacy from leaders who will never legitimate us. But it's hard to suffer continual denigration from our own people in a country we cherish—a nation we keep being reminded belongs to us too, and needs us, too. It's hard to reconcile being part of a Jewish state whose chief rabbis don't consider us Jewish, who don't consider our rabbis to be rabbis. Being disparaged is distancing. Being pushed away again and again can start to work.

I appreciate that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned Amar's vitriol, saying, "I categorically reject any attempt to delegitimize any part of the Jewish people."

I read the survey by Hiddush, an organization that advocates for religious freedom in Israel, which found that 65 percent of the Israeli Jewish public believes that Israel should grant equal status to the three major streams of Judaism—Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. (The number is even higher for secular Israeli Jews: 92 percent support equal status.) So I know that most Israelis don't subscribe to the dogma of their religious leadership. But the Haredi chief rabbinate maintains disproportionate power in Israel's government. This body remains the authority for determining kosher marriage, divorce, and conversion. Whether or not these decisions directly affect our American families personally, they do send a clear message about our brand of observance: it's flimsy by comparison.

At a time when American Jewish identity is already frayed and fragile, it would seem at the very least imprudent to discount the authenticity of the Diaspora.

When Netanyahu states, as he did last June, that "All Jews are part of one family," I believe he includes the two million Reform Jews like me in North America who cherish our Jewish practice and are asked to send big checks and full planes to Israel. But it's hard to feel like family when your relatives belittle your faith.

Most Jews I know won't be easily deterred from their love and support for Israel. We feel passionately about the country, and understand the complexity of its religious governance. At Israel's birth, the blueprint for religious leadership was drawn by one of my heroes, the unapologetically secular David Ben-Gurion, who agreed to cede religious authority to the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate without possibly knowing what he was setting in motion.

But I worry when today's Israeli political leadership appears to shrug off the alienation that can be generated when religious pluralism is treated as a pesky mosquito to be swatted away. I worry that my children and their cohort, who already have to sort through the pressures of BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) and SJP (Students for Justice in Palestine), will now also have to reconcile the YouTube videos of black-coated Israelis spitting on their Reform kin attempting to read Torah at the Western Wall, and reports of a blacklist of American Reform, Conservative, and even some renowned Modern Orthodox rabbis—a list created by the Chief Rabbinate to discredit clergy whose conversions (or whose letters certifying that someone who made Aliyah is Jewish) have been deemed invalid in Israel.

I agree with those who say that the battle for Wall space, which apparently doesn't obsess Israelis the way it does American Jews, has overshadowed the larger issues of pluralism about which most Israelis do agree: the "state-sanctioned religious discrimination and non-recognition" (the words of Peter Joseph in *The Forward*) under which non-Orthodox Israelis must live. But it can't be denied that the Kotel decision and the blacklist are two markers of repudiation, announcing: *your brand of Judaism isn't equal here.*

It is true that my fellow congregants and I don't pray three times a day or fast six times a year, and we have great respect for those who do. But we, too, are Jews of faith, practice, community, and commitment, and we, too, weep when we hear "Jerusalem of Gold." I fully realize that we are not Israelis, and I defer to Israel's citizens and their pressing priorities, namely national security and a thriving, fair economy. But one cog in the wheel of American-Israeli symbiosis seems to be missing, and it should matter more: the message to us conveying, "Your Judaism is still Judaism. Your marriages, conversions, and clergy count. And your prayers—be they offered at the Wall or in your heart—are just as faithful."



Abigail Pogrebin is the author of My Jewish Year: 18 Holidays, One Wondering Jew, and Stars of David: Prominent Jews Talk about Being Jewish. She just completed her term as president of Central Synagogue in Manhattan.

FEAR NOT THE STATE OF RELATIONS



What is the purpose of Israel-Diaspora state-of-relations discussions? As a professional Jew, I am often fascinated by Israeli-Diaspora discourse. I follow the studies, read the articles, look at the polls, crunch the numbers, debate my colleagues. Israel-Diaspora relations help me make ends meet.



SHMUEL ROSNER

Thank God for Israel-Diaspora relations. Thank God and the Jews for making sure there's always Trouble in the Tribe (as a recent book on this topic was tagged). If not for them, I'd have to go find a real job.

As a professional Jew I am grateful. But like most other professional Jews, I am also a Jew, and as a Jew, I am tired of the Israel-Diaspora discourse, bored by it, find it repetitive, whiny, unconstructive. As a Jew, I pity professional Jews who must spend their time talking about it, when they all know what each of them is about to say, when they had all heard it all and read it all before. Conference attendees, panel discussants, frequent-flyer world travelers—so many Jews who substitute talking about Judaism for Judaism, so many Jews who substitute talking about the state of Israel-Diaspora relations for Israel-Diaspora relations.

I truly do pity them—pity us. And I think it is time for them—for us—to consider another perspective.

Yes, young Jews in America might have a problem with Israel; Yes, Israel is not always attentive to Diaspora needs; Yes, non-Israeli Jews often criticize Israel without having a clue; Yes, they

sometimes even have the hutzpah to criticize Israel by claiming to be the more authentic guardians of Jewish values, whatever that means; Yes, Israelis do not always appreciate the great achievements of Diaspora communities; Yes, Israelis know little about these achievements, and often jabber when they talk about Diaspora assimilation; Yes, they (in the Diaspora) have no right to tell Israel how to guard itself; Yes, the occupation makes it harder to understand and accept Israel's policies; And of course, there's the Kotel compromise—a promise broken, a hope shattered, the cornerstone for every current Israel-Diaspora discussion.

Did we miss anything? Is there anything we need to add to this list? Whether we do or not doesn't make a difference, because the basic facts remain.

The fact remains that Israel is strong and is getting stronger, that it has a gravitational force unmatched by any other Jewish community. Exactly a hundred years ago, in 1918, at the end of the First World War, 60,000 Jews resided in pre-Israel Palestine. In 1948, there were 600,000. Today, there are more than 6,000,000. It is likely that within a few decades a majority of the Jewish people will be living in Israel.

The fact also remains that there are Jews living outside of Israel, and they will keep living there—8,000,000 strong. They have assets, intellectual and material; they have institutions and communities. They are still the majority of the Jewish people and will continue to be for a while, maybe even a long while.

Smart Jews understand that Israel is a country for which there is no substitute—it is the only Jewish state. But smart Jews also understand that Diaspora Jews have no substitute—they are the only group of relatives Israel has. As a family, we can do one of two things: We can do the mature thing and have relations, or waste our time talking about the state of our relations, with professional Jews like me serving as only-half-awake marriage counselors.

Divorce is not an option because no second marriage is possible for either group, and growing old all alone is a sad situation. Distancing—a Jewish buzz word of the last decade—is juvenile. It is a way for Jews to punish themselves for a sin they did not commit. It is also a warning that never works.

If “distancing” is a threat aimed at making Israelis more attentive to Diaspora sensitivities, it doesn’t work. It barely serves to annoy them. Israelis have more than enough real enemies, and don’t worry about fancy American Jews trying to bully them. If “distancing” is a battle cry aimed at making American Jews less dependent on Israel and more withdrawn from it, that too doesn’t work. It only makes some of them more distant from all things Jewish. If “distancing” is evidence hurled by some Israelis eager to prove that Diaspora Judaism is on its way to the ash heap of history, that doesn’t work either. I have yet to meet a Jew that was convinced to make Aliya because of the growing Israel-Diaspora divide.

So, what is the purpose of Israel-Diaspora state-of-relations discussions? To better understand each other, we need education, not group therapy. For more kindness we need manners, not marriage counseling. For devising policies, we need a debate, not mediation and a fear of controversy. For a sense of communality, we need culture—Jewish culture—not empty platitudes.

Do not expect a consensus. Do not expect similarity. American Jews will keep arguing whether #MeToo is a reason to ban Carlebach melodies from the synagogue—Israeli Jews will keep thinking this is both fascinating and bizarre. Israeli Jews will continue to hate, yet keep, their rabbinate—American Jews will not understand these priorities. American Jews might still feel that some of Israel’s

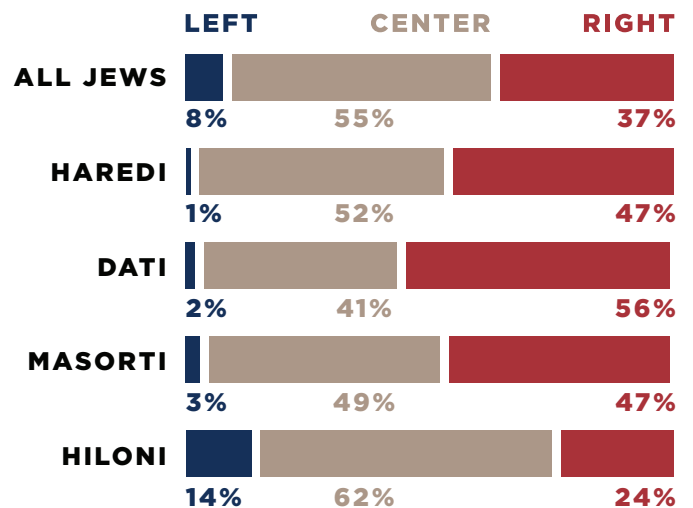
policies are immoral—Israeli Jews will dismiss these notions without paying much attention. Israeli Jews will keep mourning the coming demise of a Jewishly spineless, intermarried Diaspora—American Jews will not seek their advice as they search for life partners.

For those who want things to change here is one radical change I can propose: fear not the state of Israel-Diaspora relations. Fear only the boredom, the barrenness, the hollowness, of a Jewish discourse that focuses on the state of things rather than focusing on things—our many great Jewish things.



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Israeli Jews largely identify their political ideology with center or right



Source: Survey conducted October 2014-May 2015. Based on respondents who provided a political ideology. Respondents in the survey were asked to place themselves on a political spectrum from 1-6, with 1 representing the left and 6 representing the right. For purposes of analysis, 1 and 2 make up the “left” category, 3 and 4 are “center,” and 5 and 6 are “right.”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

AJC SYMPOSIUM ON AMERICAN JEWRY AND ISRAEL



By my estimate, more than one-quarter of young adult American Jews do not qualify as Jewish for the purpose of marriage in the State of Israel. This includes individuals who identify as Jewish by patrilineal descent, by non-Orthodox conversion, or by a mother's non-Orthodox conversion. Just



THEODORE SASSON

about every non-Orthodox Jewish family in America includes such individuals, and they are counted as full members of their Jewish communities.

For these people, their families, and communities, the marriage disqualification conveys a powerful symbolic message: Israel does not regard you as Jewish. The message damages the relationship of American Jews to Israel and poses a serious long-term threat.

The ranks of the marriage-disqualified will continue to grow. The Pew Research Center's 2013 national survey estimated the intermarriage rate for non-Orthodox American Jews at about 70 percent. Moreover, retention of the children of intermarriage has substantially improved. According to an analysis of the Pew data I conducted with Janet Aronson, millennial generation children of intermarriage were about twice as likely as their older counterparts to have been raised Jewish and to identify as Jewish in adulthood.

Jewish organizations from synagogues and JCCs to Hillel and Birthright have made outreach to interfaith families and to adult children of intermarriage a priority. Already when Pew published its 2013 report, half of young adult Jews were the children of intermarriage. In the years since, that proportion has undoubtedly increased, and will continue to increase in the years ahead.

Experts in Israeli law and policy might reasonably protest that patrilineal Jews are eligible for immigration under the Law of Return, and that successive Israeli governments have taken enormous heat to ensure that Israel continues to recognize non-Orthodox conversions carried out abroad for purposes of immigration and the population registry.

But none of that matters very much in the context of the Orthodox rabbinate's symbolic repudiation of a growing swathe of the American Jewish community. It is a message of rejection communicated routinely in the American Jewish

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press and amplified by liberal rabbis and communal leaders who oppose Israel's policies. It has become an aspect of American Jews' commonsense knowledge of Israel.

And to the extent American Jews feel that Israel rejects their Jewishness, political disagreements over West Bank settlements, containing Iran, and dealing with African asylum seekers—or whatever issues emerge tomorrow—may no longer be viewed as disputes within the family. The damage being done is to the basic conditions of Jewish solidarity.

Some will counter that the problem is not Israeli policies but the assimilatory practices of American Jews. Changing those practices, however, is utterly beyond the grasp of policymakers in either Israel or the United States. Changing Israel's marriage policies is not.

In Israel, a sizeable majority of voters supports the establishment of a civil marriage option. Such a

reform would address the demands of the large number of Israelis who—like their many American Jewish counterparts—do not qualify for a Jewish marriage under Orthodox guidelines, as well as the increasing number of young people who oppose the Orthodox framework for marriage as a matter of principle.

For American Jews, ending the Orthodox monopoly on Jewish marriage will help ensure that Israel remains a symbolic home for all Jews. Ironically, by getting out of the business of defining who is Jewish for the purpose of marriage, the State of Israel can affirm that all members of the Jewish people belong.



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AMERICAN JEWISH-ISRAEL TIES: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS



Challenges to sustaining strong American Jewish-Israeli ties arise from two major issues: the State of Israel's institutionalized denial of equal status and rights for non-Orthodox forms of Judaism, and the prevailing policies and actions of Israel's government in the territories occupied



GIDEON SHIMONI

since 1967. These two issues are closely linked due to a high correlation between Orthodox-religious Jews of almost all stripes and right-wing political views that favor continued occupation and settlement.

Dissension is at a peak right now because the Israel government recently gave in to Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) political pressure not to implement agreed-upon compromise solutions on the issue of non-Orthodox prayer rights at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. This has acutely offended affiliated non-Orthodox Jews, a segment of American Jewry deeply devoted to Israel. Their desire to feel Jewishly at home in Israel is being sorely frustrated, and what disappoints them even more is that the secular-minded public does not attach much importance to the cause of non-Orthodox rights in Israel. More importantly, Israel's ultra-nationalist and non-liberal tendencies and the apparently irreversible empowerment of its occupation and settlement regime are alienating a widening swathe of liberal-minded American Jews. A smaller but highly active number, most of them never particularly attached to Israel in the first place,

has even adopted the Palestinian cause, rejecting Israel's need or right to be a Jewish nation-state and joining the unrelenting international BDS campaign.

More crucial yet is the evident disruption of the pro-Zionist ideological consensus that has prevailed among most strongly identified American Jews since at least 1967. Not only has it undergone an internal political split, for example between AIPAC and J Street, but also long-dormant, explicitly anti-Zionist ideological groups have revived. Even Zionist youth movements, which used to form the mainstay of Zionist identity, are alienated, rarely even taking personally the ideal of aliya. Today, the data clearly shows growing distancing among the younger cohort of American Jews. Opinions differ as to the major cause: Is it Israel's swelling non-liberal, pariah-like image, or the broad-spectrum weakening of Jewish identification and association?

What underlies these conflicts are the very different conditions of life and Jewish identity in Israel and America. Nevertheless, the major

fissure within the Jewish people as a whole runs not between Israeli Jews and Jews elsewhere, but rather between Orthodox and non-Orthodox or secular Jews everywhere—although there are individual exceptions. In other words, paradoxically, the most divisive factor within the Jewish people today is the religion of Judaism. This division is evident in severe incompatibilities of self-identity and lifestyle. Some, such as preclusion of marriage and shared social and dietary experience, are even tantamount to anthropological differences. These differences, which exist within both American and Israeli Jewry, function simultaneously as binding factors for some Jews (mainly the Orthodox) and divisive factors for others. And by cutting across Diaspora-Israel divisiveness, they modify its effect.

The strains in American Jewish-Israel relations are exacerbated by periodic assertiveness of politically empowered Orthodox extremists. This is reflected, *inter alia*, in their offensive disparagement of Reform and Conservative Judaism and the misguided view that the non-Orthodox are themselves the major cause of “assimilation.” Within the broader Israeli public, there is little understanding of the difference between acculturation and assimilation, between total dissolution of Jewish identity and its contemporary transformation, enabling it to be durable and even creative under conditions of freedom in America.

In looking to the future, one can do no more than project present trends in relation to the main variables. One is the combined demographic and political strength of the Haredi and “Hardali” (Haredi-inclined branch of National Religious Zionists) wings of Orthodox Judaism in Israel. Clearly, the trend is for their continued ascendancy, and consequently the continued disaffection of many non-Orthodox American Jews.

A more crucial variable is the Israel-Arab conflict, where anything is possible. Major convulsions in Israel-Arab relations such as full-scale war or Palestinian terrorist uprisings are not unlikely, and they could cause even Jews critical of Israel to rally to its support. However, the present trend suggests the sustained political ascendancy of Israel's right-wing, largely national-religious-aligned bloc. Epitomizing the underlying attrition of liberal restraints within what is today normatively defined in Israel as Zionism is the absolutist canard: “God gave us exclusive right to the Land of Israel.” This has all but displaced the Jewish people's greater existential need as the primary grounding for the Zionist claim to precedence, not exclusivity, in attaining national statehood in Eretz Israel. The political reality is one of creeping annexation leading to a single quasi-democratic state, with markers of a “Palestinian” system of domination much like what was once futilely attempted in apartheid South Africa.

A third variable lies in the hands of the leadership echelons of organized American Jewry. A sharp fissure with Israel is highly unlikely. Judging by the record over the past few years during which the above trends in Israel have been all too obvious, sustaining a close relationship with Israel as an identity-strengthening and living cultural resource seems to be too vital to be dispensed with. In all likelihood, then, closely engaged even if critical attachment with Israel will be sustained. And besides, the influence of Orthodox—hence right-wing—individuals in the leadership of the American Jewish community, especially in professional roles, is growing. In addition, not only the real security threats to Israel but also the gross excesses of campaigns to delegitimize Israel produce a defensive reaction on the part of many Jews who are otherwise critical of Israel. I therefore expect that, overall, American Jewish-Israel ties will be sustained, although with dissonances, at least at their present level.

What can be done to strengthen the relationship despite persistent dissonance? Not much, given the fact that already there is no other example of diaspora-homeland relations in the world—and there are many other cases—that can match the richness and variety of existing Diaspora-Israel bonding programs. Despite much talk over the years, it has never been possible to centralize structural representation of Diaspora Jewries in Israel. Of course, enhanced initiatives are always desirable, most importantly in the social sphere of people-to-people programming such as Birthright. Ultimately, the most significant endeavors lie in the educational sphere—the fostering of the positive consciousness of peoplehood both in America and in Israel; a sense of community of fate (*goral*) notwithstanding divergent conceptions of destiny (*ye'ud*). This calls for diversified educational and social activity that fosters the value of belonging to the Jewish people, both vertically through historical memory and cultural resources, and horizontally through connecting Jews wherever they are to be found. In America, the key strategic question that should be posed is: What educational formula produces the familial peoplehood feeling that allows continued attachment to the Jews of Israel despite alienation from the behavior and policies of the State of Israel? The equivalent question in Israel is: what makes it possible for a liberal-minded Jew to work for peace through compromise and living in peace and harmony with the Palestinian people without relinquishing the bonds of peoplehood with fellow Jews in the Diaspora?



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ONE TRIBE, MULTIPLE MINYANS



Four out of every five Jews in the world live either in the United States or in Israel; 6.3 million in Israel, 6.7 million in the U.S. According to Pew Research Center studies, 7 in 10 American Jews feel attached or very attached to Israel. Over its seventy years, Israel has evolved into a “religion” for American



KEN STEIN

Jews, connecting the Jewish people into a collective worldwide family.

After three years of listening to scholars and communal activists engage in the seminars supported by the Lisa and Michael Leffell Foundation about “Israel’s Impact on American Jewish Identity,” I have no doubt that Israel has had a profoundly positive effect upon American Jewish cultural, religious, political, and intellectual life.

And yet, after 40 years of teaching about modern Israel at Emory and 10 years engaging in seminars and workshops with some 2,500 Jewish teachers in American congregational and day schools, it is clear that American Jews suffer from a profound gap in their understanding and knowledge about Israel and Israelis—a conclusion supported by survey research.

The gap is bridgeable from the American Jewish side, but only if content is learned and context internalized before criticism is launched.

Israel and topics related to it provide cement for American Jewish identity. American Jews take pride in Israel’s accomplishments. Most American congregations and national Jewish organizations have Israel programs. They include trips and

missions, support for educational and social activities in Israel, a variety of teen and adult educational experiences, and more. Expatriate Israelis are deeply involved in teaching Hebrew to our children, while other Israelis working in Jewish camps and on American campuses provide exposure to Israel, its people, and its problems. Yet the subject of Israel often creates disagreement within those congregations and organizations.

That is why caution has become the primary posture of the Jewish community. When an organization takes a public position on Israel, it opens itself up to charges that it is too strident or too cautious. A quarter-century ago, the national meetings of Jewish organizations devoted at least a quarter of their sessions to Israel; now, Israel barely find its way onto the final programs—it’s just too divisive. Hosting a particular speaker can spark public furor because of the views he or she holds on Israel, and so the choice of presenters is made on the basis of political balance rather than on substantive quality.

Congregations and organizations want, above all, to keep members from leaving or withdrawing their support. One rabbi told me, at a national rabbinic conference, “It is better for me not to speak about Israel at all from the pulpit. Rather than raise

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anyone's ire, I don't talk about it much. Besides, some people come to services to get away from the noise of politics."

Some American Jews believe they "know" how Israel should behave. Some of them are native Israelis, others have spent extended time or have family there. Most do not vote in Israel, so they use organizational and congregational affiliations to express their views. Others write blogs, are on Twitter or Facebook, or send endless emails. Over the last decade, new Jewish organizations have emerged across the spectrum—from Orthodox to agnostic, from progressive and liberal to conservative and even anti-Zionist—seeking to get Israel to change its policies.

But American Jews live in a political and strategic environment very different from that confronting Israelis. How can they possibly know what Israelis want and need?

The two Jewish populations differ in many ways. Jews in Israel are a majority (80%), and in the U.S. just 2% of the population. Jews in Israel express their Jewishness by being Israeli, knowing the country, serving in the army, and speaking Hebrew; American Jews, if they show their Jewishness at all, affiliate with organizations and congregations, institutions with which some Israeli Jews come into contact but with which they do not identify their Jewishness. Again, according to Pew Center Research studies, 92% of Israeli Jews consider themselves in the center or on the right, while 78% of American Jews identify with the center or the political left.

yawning gaps exist between Israeli Jews and American Jews on perceptions of Israel's long-term problems: 38% of Israelis and 66% of American Jews put security as Israel's highest priority, while 39% of Israelis and only 1% of Americans say economic issues are most important. In a poll undertaken by the Israel Democracy Institute in October 2017, Israeli Jews were asked about their personal priorities: at the top of the list, 26.5% cited reducing tensions in Israeli society, followed by 22.6% for improving the education system. Only 11.5% said that signing a peace agreement with the Palestinians was a top priority.

While more than half of Israeli Jews polled over the last several years would like an agreement with the Palestinians, a great majority say it is not likely. Among Israeli Jews, 42% say that settlements help Israel's security, while only 17% of American Jews agree.

Nevertheless, many American Jews believe that it is perfectly appropriate for them to praise or criticize Israel and comment on Israel-related issues, as members of the "family." After I gave a presentation recently at a local synagogue, a friend of 30 years told me it is his duty as a Jew to tell the Israeli government what it should do on a particular topic. I asked if it were his duty as a Jew to go to services more frequently, and he told me that this was not the same thing! For him and, I gather, for others, Israel is a matter of religion at least on a par with Jewish practice.

We American Jews can do better by lowering our voices and educating ourselves about Israel. That's even more important for our children. Let's not wait for the year or two before they go to college to give them a weekend Israel leadership seminar or wait for a Birthright trip. Jewish and Israeli history should be taught from middle school forward. In fact, let's start doing it at home and not rely on some institution to do it for us.

Before we train our teens and young adults to advocate for Israel, let's teach them the context of the issues.

Before we run off and tell Israelis that they have to make peace with their neighbors because we Jews in the United States live at peace in our neighborhoods, we need to remember that their neighborhoods are quite different and more dangerous.

Jews around the world are one tribe, but many minyans. Patience about Israel and with Israel is required. At 70, Israel is not perfect. It remains unfinished. And yet, by any measure, it has done pretty well for itself, and for us.



For four decades, Kenneth Stein has taught contemporary Middle Eastern History and Political Science at Emory University. He is the founding Director (1998) of the Emory Institute for the Study of Modern Israel and founding President (2008) of The Center for Israel Education (CIE). He has written six books and dozens of scholarly articles on Israel's origins and history and American foreign policy in the Middle East. He has published the most extensive documentary source compilation of Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict, and monographs titled Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin, and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace (New York: Routledge, 1999); The Land Question in Palestine, 1917-1939 (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina

Press, 1984), and recently for teens and adults, *The June 1967 War: How it Changed Jewish, Israeli and Middle Eastern History* (March 2017) and *From Tanakh to 1948* (October 2017). At Emory he has earned the highest awards for teaching, mentoring students, and internationalizing of the curriculum. His undergraduate class, "History, Politics, and Diplomacy of the Arab-Israeli Conflict" is one of the college's most popular classes. Through his initiative, CIE has educated 2500 Jewish teachers in North America, and they in turn have touched more

than 350,000 Jewish students in day schools and congregational schools. The ADL and the Israel on Campus Coalition recognized Ken for his courage in speaking out against the falsehoods in Jimmy Carter's book on Israel and the Palestinians. His most recent article is "What If the Palestinian Arab Elite Had Chosen Compromise Instead of Boycott in Confronting Zionism?" in Gavriel D. Rosenfeld (ed.) *What Ifs of Jewish History*, Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 215-237.



THE CHASM OF RELIGIOUS RADICALISM, GENDER, AND POLITICS AS A THREAT TO JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD



Something alarming happened at the Western Wall during American Vice President Mike Pence's visit to Israel earlier this year. Although the Jewish world has unfortunately become accustomed to the oppression of women at the Wall who wish to pray as equals to men, with the same Torah scrolls



ELANA MARYLES SZTOKMAN

and prayer shawls, Pence's presence elicited a new form of discrimination targeted at a specific subgroup of women: professional reporters. For the first time in the history of this national landmark, women in the media who were covering the event were sent to the back of the pack, behind a gender partition, where they could neither see nor hear the event and were thus unable to do their jobs. Not a single man in the American entourage nor any among the Israeli escorts did anything about this. The women writers and photographers—along with their readership—were left isolated in their outraged helplessness against the growing inferno of religious radicalism and all that comes with it.

This event was just one of many glaring signals that radical forces across several religions in many

countries are gaining formidable political influence. And it also demonstrated how the intersection of politicized religious radicalism in Israel and in America poses a particularly daunting threat not only to women, but to the entire Jewish people. For many pro-feminist Jews across the denominational spectrum the encounter with Israel is often experienced as regressive. Issues such as gender segregation in public spaces, all-male cabinet tables or negotiating teams, and the continued insistence that the only "real" representatives of Judaism are male, Orthodox rabbis combine to create the sense that Israel is taking the Jewish people backwards on issues of gender. The dominant Israeli culture seems profoundly at odds with the growing awareness of gender issues around the world.

This kind of misogynistic religious radicalism—the kind that promotes the erasure and exclusion of women; the limitation of women’s rights in areas such as reproduction, economic equality, and political advancement; and the nonchalant dismissal of sexual violence against women—is also on the rise in America. The Trump administration provides ample evidence of this not only because of how easily 60 million Americans voted for a man who admittedly gropes women, cheats on his wife, and values women based only on their looks. There are also mountains of proposed legislation across the country that would send women’s rights backwards in the areas of reproductive rights, economic rights, and even basic definitions of rape. Mike Pence himself, in fact, before becoming vice president, led some of these frightening battles. In Israel, this backward slide for women comes mostly from the visible impact of religious parties on the government. Municipalities and ministries often fund and even host events that exclude women as speakers or professionals, and sometimes even as participants. The IDF is in the process of a mass integration of ultra-Orthodox soldiers, which entails bowing to pressure to remove women soldiers from certain positions and even, potentially, from an entire base. And the Education Ministry is now in the process of creating a mega-budgeted gender-segregated system exclusively for Haredim, providing massive funding for ideas and practices of religious radicalism on a scale never before seen in organizations dedicated to gender equality.

The imposition of religious radicalism in Israel is particularly dangerous because Israel, unlike America, has no separation of religion and state. Moreover, its parliamentary system favors special-interest parties such as those based on religion. The Haredi parties are particularly powerful because they guarantee a bloc vote. All political leaders have to do to obtain it is accede to a few demands and pay some billions out of the national budget. Female voters, in contrast, are scattered across the political spectrum and cannot deliver a bloc vote—something that in any case is not necessarily in our own interests—and no politician has ever had an interest in appealing to them as a group. The Israeli system gives more power to religious radicals than any other democracy in the world. And although women suffer the most when religious radicalism takes over, it is bad for the entire polis.

The Trump era has further exacerbated the threat of religious radicalism. Prime Minister Netanyahu is taking notes from the Trump playbook on how to act like a despot in a democracy—from attacking the media to undermining the justice system to generating hate and fearmongering. Most of all, Netanyahu, like Trump, is providing a platform

for the most radical voices in his faction, which is scary not only for women, but also for progressive-minded citizens.

We live at a time when a sense of desperation and disillusionment is sweeping over those holding progressive-liberal values. Jews, historically torch-bearers of liberal movements, not only face three more years (or more!) of a Trump America, but we also see an Israel whose leaders mimic the worst aspects of that administration.

To keep Israel from falling down the Trump-Netanyahu rabbit-hole, we must support progressive and especially feminist values across the Jewish people and Israel. Feminist activists have been on the frontlines of this struggle for a long time, without the benefit of the kinds of mega-budgets that religious radicals have at their disposal.

We must support—not only verbally but also financially—the following groups:

- Jewish progressives in Israel and around the world working for liberal education and promoting human rights, gender equality, racial and socioeconomic equality
- Feminist groups promoting the advancement of women in politics, academia, business, hi-tech, the media, and the IDF
- Religious feminists who are working from within the Haredi, religious Zionist, and Muslim communities to fight radicalization from within
- Religious pluralist groups that challenge the ultra-Orthodox monopoly on Jewish religious identity in Israel.

Certainly, there are signs in Israel of positive grass-roots change. Feminist groups are making some inroads in a variety of areas such as women in politics, awareness of sexual violence, and the advancement of women’s leadership in both religious and civic spheres. There may even be some significant parallels between Orthodox feminisms in America and Israel, although in practice, these two worlds are not always as collaborative as one might expect.

There is certainly room for such collaboration, and I hope that those who care about gender equality would also be able to overcome denominational and cultural differences in order to build a common vision and platform. But this requires work and investment. I would like to see the American Jewish community placing gender issues front and center, using this cause as a platform for building a shared vision for the Jewish people.

And one more idea that may be just a dream: I would like to see a strong feminist political party, one that is driven primarily by the platform of

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gender equality, fairness, and compassion. A feminist vision can drive many other issues, based on seeing all members of society as equally valued and deserving of respect and care. The building of such a party can perhaps even include a campaign to promote women in politics that would urge women—some 50% of the population—to vote in our own interests instead of everyone else's. A feminist political party that has widespread support among women would change

the political landscape and give progressive values some real leverage against the spread of religious radicalism.



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UNITING “DAVIDIAN” ISRAELIS AND “ISAIAHAN” AMERICANS THROUGH IDENTITY ZIONISM



A century ago, on April 29, 1918, a New York Times headline proclaimed: “American Jewish Committee Endorses Plan for National Home.” According to the article that followed, this 12-year-old organization “had not heretofore taken any active part in the Zionist movement.” AJC’s shift heralded American



GIL TROY

Jewry’s Zionization—teaching lesson number one regarding laments that “the chasm between Israel and world Jewry has never been greater.” Historians ask the *Love Story* question: “Where do I begin?” American Jews may not be feeling the peak unity of 1967 or 1973, but it certainly ain’t 1918—or 1885, when the Reform Movement’s Pittsburgh Platform rejected Jewish peoplehood and statehood.

On June 25, 2017, after Benjamin Netanyahu’s foolish Kotel double-cross, everyone declared relations between Israel and American Jewry—especially its young liberals—doomed. Yet that very night, my son returned from the Jerusalem *shuk* (market) frustrated. He “couldn’t get in anywhere—the place was crawling with Birthrighters.”

Those Birthrighters are the same liberal Jews Israel supposedly lost. When asked what they think about Israel, most shout: “AWESOME!” So lesson number two: hysterical headlines sell papers but distort reality. Tensions exist between Israel and American Jewry, especially among the leaders and in the headlines. Yet ties between American Jews and Israelis have never been so deep, intimate, and authentic.

Some spouses—not this author, of course—report that greater intimacy and interconnectedness risks greater volatility. Thus, lesson number three: let’s address flashpoints triggering divergence, while doubling-down on Israel trips and other interactions facilitating convergence.

To understand the natural gap between the Israeli majority and American Jewry's liberal majority, think King David and Isaiah. David represents Jewish sovereignty, which sometimes requires tough moves to survive, even as you dream of harp-strumming and Psalm-singing. Isaiah represents Jewish idealism, living on a loftier plane that allows you to imagine fixing the world (*tikun olam*) so lions will frolic with lambs. As a history of a people, not just a religion, Jewish history mixes realpolitik with romantic idealism. Without Davidian politics, how could we have survived this long; without Isaiahan ideals, who would have cared?

Our 18-year-olds live these differences: Israelis get basic training in being Davidian when they begin basic training; American Jews get basic training in being Isaiahan when they begin college and imbibe a postmodern politics that values many multicultural identities—although not quite their Jewish identities, especially if they're Zionists.

If lesson number four warns that we Davidians and Isaiahans are doomed to differ, lessons five, six, and seven advise: let's learn from those differences; let's respect them and appreciate the other dimension of Jewish heritage that the other embodies; and—most important—let's understand these differences as overlapping Jewish identity questions. Framing our challenge as educational is less threatening than all-or-nothing existential questions and less superficial than headline-driven dramas about the Kotel, Bibi, or Palestinians.

Peter Beinart erred when he said that young American Jews are abandoning Zionism because they can't reconcile it with their liberalism. In fact, many already abandoned Judaism first (or, to be brutally frank, many of their parents diluted Jewish peoplehood and solidarity by intermarrying). Those same Jews aren't abandoning America because they can't reconcile Trump's America with their liberal values—instead, they're resisting. Jews truly connected to Israel and the Jewish people, for whom being Zionist is not optional but essential, can't abandon Israel based on who's in power, who prays where, what boundaries are drawn: if we dislike something, we work to change it.

Our challenge is educational and ideological—and so is our failure. Long before anyone reaches Birthright's eligibility age, in homes and schools, synagogues and youth groups, we need a radical shift toward understanding Israel as central to our identity, as the element that explains how so many of us can be non-religious yet still deeply Jewish, as expressing who we are—and who we can be—as a people.

That requires some intellectual infrastructure work. Let's counter the postmodern assault on nationalism directly, and explain the power of peoplehood. And let's engage the broader ideological misfires triggering campus Israel-bashing by defending free speech and truly liberal politics against postmodernist hooliganism.

Also, American Jews should resurrect the study of Hebrew as the key to understanding Jewish civilization's religious and peoplehood pieces. Even more daunting, American Jews must start seeing Israel as a solution to deep questions about meaning and connection. Israel shouldn't be perceived as the Jewish people's central headache, but as a thriving Jewish community offering an alternative to some of the failures in the often-boring, static, cathedral-oriented, too careerist, materialist, rapidly-assimilating American Jewish world.

Israelis also have much identity-building work to do. They must stop seeing Jewish history as a series of disasters teeing up the Zionist revolution and Israeli redemption. Teach about Diaspora Jewry's successes—then and now. Israelis need to appreciate the Jewishness in their identities as Israelis, in their secular peoplehood—transcending the all-or-nothing, in-or-out nature of Israel's Jewish conversation, distorted by extremist rabbis on the one hand and extremist secular rebels on the other. And Israelis need some humility that will allow them to appreciate that American Jewry's participatory, pluralist, personal forms of Judaism can help non-Orthodox Israeli Jews find meaning and community in an increasingly alienating pagan world.

In short, both American Jews and Israeli Jews should start learning from each other. This mutuality often emerges when participants from both countries experience Birthright's "mifgash," encounter. In that spirit, why not celebrate Israel's 70th year by launching Zionist salons worldwide, with people hosting friends to read Zionist texts and discuss "what Israel and Zionism mean to me." A century ago, the Zionist Revolution was a long shot—promising to save a broken, oppressed people through statehood. Yesterday's delusion is today's reality. Yet the Zionist mission is not complete—and we again face steep odds. We must address an increasingly comfortable, complacent people on both sides of the Atlantic, and in essence save their souls through peoplehood and statehood, through Identity Zionism. This approach asks, with apologies to John F. Kennedy, not just "what can you do for your country," but what can your country do for you—as a Davidian identity anchor, an idealistic Isaiahan mission, and today's greatest Jewish collective effort, building community, appreciating tradition, and championing freedom.



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RENEWING SPIRITUAL ZIONISM



A century ago when the Zionist movement was in its infancy, many of its leaders believed it had a vital role to play in Diaspora Jewish communities. Zionism, they believed, would nurture a spiritual renewal among Jews across the globe. It would counter assimilation by encouraging resistance against



JACK WERTHEIMER

host societies that overtly or subtly pressured Jews to shed their distinctive Jewish identity; and it would nurture pride and stimulate creativity among younger Jews. These goals reflected the perspective of what once was called “spiritual Zionism,” an ideology designed to foster the cultural regeneration of the Jewish people.

World-shaking events subsequently redirected the emphasis of Zionism away from such Diaspora tasks to nation-building in the land of Israel. Horrific persecution during the 20th century brought home the vital need for a haven of refuge to protect Jewish lives. And so, during the half-century from roughly the 1940s until the 1990s, the Zionist enterprise focused mainly on founding a viable Jewish state, enabling it to integrate Jewish immigrants from far-flung lands into a unified society, and supporting Israel at times of crisis and war.

These efforts, to be sure, reverberated throughout the Diaspora. In the United States, Israel gradually assumed a central place in Jewish communal life, and virtually every American Jewish institution built some connection to Israel. Synagogues served as marshalling grounds for intensive fundraising. Equally important, their routine

activities connected directly with Israeli culture: parts of the liturgy were sung to Israeli melodies, prayers for peace and security in the land of Israel were recited regularly, Israel was the topic of innumerable sermons, the flag of Israel was displayed in synagogue sanctuaries, and key occasions in Israel’s history became holidays on the American Jewish calendar—e.g. *Yom Ha’atzma’ut* (Israel Independence Day) and *Yom Yerushalayim* (the day marking the unification of Jerusalem). Educational programs in day and supplementary schools, summer camps, and youth movements featured aspects of Israeli culture, geography, and history. And for adults there were Israel film festivals, salute to Israel parades, missions to Israel—and a good deal of philanthropic and advocacy work to support the fledgling state.

But mounting evidence now suggests that an expanding sector of the Jewish population has grown distant from Israel, and how to explain this trend is the subject of lively debate. The reality of a weakening relationship, though, is hard to deny—and it goes in both directions: with each successive younger generation, American Jews and their Israeli counterparts are losing interest in one another. Some analysts attribute this drift to sharp differences in political outlook (the sociologist

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Steven M. Cohen has described Israel as “a red state and American Jews are a blue country”)—and as politics has become the religion of educated Americans, those differences translate into powerful emotional responses to every Israeli slight and misstep. Others have pointed to a significant gap in religious practices and belief, contrasting levels of trust in the benign intentions of Gentiles, and attitudes toward Jewish tribal allegiances.

Just as likely, a new era in the relationship has dawned because Israel is no longer a younger sibling dependent on American Jewish support. Seventy years after its founding, it has a thriving economy fueled by exports of technology, military hardware, and gas, an innovative sector that is the envy of much of the world, a powerful military, and a growing confidence in its ability to make friends around the globe. Simply put, for all the talk of American Jews being a “strategic asset,” few Israelis believe that to be true or feel the need to act accordingly.

On the American side, declining proportions affiliate with Jewish institutions of any kind or relate to Israel in a serious fashion. Try as we may to avoid the term, these developments are largely the result of what used to be called assimilation. Indifference to Israel—as opposed to criticism of some of its policies—is part of a more general drift away from Jewish engagement. It’s possible that may reverse somewhat as record numbers of younger Jews travel to Israel on free pilgrimage tours. Positive change may also come if the partisan obsessions in America cool, opening space for Jews and others to think about something other than domestic politics.

Preparing for such a day, educators and communal leaders might revisit the spiritual Zionism of yesteryear. Yes, American and Israeli Jews live in entirely different neighborhoods, experience the non-Jewish world differently, and are influenced by different external circumstances. But they do share a common past and a vast body of thought, literature, and cultural artifacts produced by Jews in their many habitations. Working together, Israeli and Diaspora Jews may draw upon this rich past to spark the next era of cultural creativity.

To a limited extent, the conversation has already begun. Younger American writers are incorporating dimensions of their Israel experiences into their works of fiction, and a bit of American Jewish life has also appeared in Israeli writing. Academic students of Judaica in both environments have engaged in dialogue and research partnerships for decades. Israeli material artists, musicians, dancers, actors, and screenwriters interact with their American counterparts. It also appears that new directions in Israeli Judaism have been influenced by innovative

models first tried in American Jewish communities, sometimes introduced by American *olim*. These cultural exchanges are the beginning of a process worthy of intensification. The great challenges facing Jewish civilization in Israel and Diaspora communities are best addressed through creative partnerships. Admittedly, cultural regeneration does not pack the same emotional wallop as the visceral appeal to Jewish solidarity at times of war and crisis. But in this era of globalization, wouldn’t a partnership of equals—Israeli and Diaspora Jews—working together toward a Jewish spiritual revival make for a compelling cause?

The renewal of Judaism broadly understood is a Zionist ideal no less urgent today than it was a century ago. Best achieved through partnerships involving Jews from across the globe, it offers the prospect of building new bridges between communities that otherwise are drifting apart.



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CHOOSING OUR ALLIES



There has yet to be serious conversation, let alone effective action, on the issue of religious pluralism in Israel, one of the core issues that may determine the future of relations between Jews in Israel and in the United States. Most American Jews argue that the “State of the Jews” is not truly a home to all



EINAT WILF

Jews—specifically, Reform and Conservative ones. But Israeli Jews don't know what they are talking about.

Israelis are under the impression that they live in an incredibly pluralistic society of multiple religions, sects, sub-sects, and various ethnicities within them. Israeli Jews are also remarkably tolerant of various modes of practical ritualistic expression: one can be a devout atheist-shrimp-eating-Shabbat-driving Jew or a fanatical carry-out-all-the-mitzvot Jew, and all are citizens of the state. As a society, Israelis could not care less about how each member expresses his or her Jewish identity. But when it comes to the kind of “pluralism” that American Jews speak of—equal standing in the public sphere for Conservative and Reform streams—Israelis simply do not understand what it is that American Jews want and expect.

Several years ago, I had the honor of speaking at the invitation of Rabbi Cosgrove at the Park Avenue Synagogue, which belongs to the Conservative movement. When the time came for questions, I was asked how it is that I, a self-professed feminist, am not fully mobilized for the cause of the Women of the Wall. I replied that as a feminist in Israel, I am also very much a devout

atheist, and therefore the notion that praying to a god that does not exist next to the ruins of an outer support wall somehow matters more than doing it anywhere else, was entirely alien to me. As a feminist in Israel, I have quite a few priorities on my list, but praying at the Wall is not one of them. The audience was visibly shocked by my response. I was shocked that they were shocked.

I am usually considered a successful “cultural translator” between the two Jewish communities, and this was the second time I found myself speaking at complete crosspurposes from my American Jewish colleagues (the first time was when, as an Israeli youth delegate to the U.S., I responded to the question “what is the best thing we can do for Israel?” with a resounding “make Aliya,” only to receive the follow-up question, “and what is the second best thing we can do for Israel?”). I was truly baffled that American Jews who were supposedly savvy and knowledgeable about Israel were surprised to realize that in Israel, the people who shared their liberal leanings were also the ones most alienated from the religious impulse.

It was my colleague at the Jewish People Policy Institute, Prof. Shlomo Fisher, who helped me

understand this phenomenon in his superb essay, “American Jews are Protestants, Israeli Jews are Catholics.” He explained that due to their disparate histories, the attitude towards religion in the U.S. is very different from that in Europe. This means that American Jews developed their own brand of Judaism in an environment that views religion as compatible with “pluralism, civil rights, and democracy,” whereas Israeli Zionist Jews developed their brand of Judaism in a context where “any change in the direction of democracy, civil liberties or pluralism” required the overthrow of religion. For Israeli Jews, their “Reform Judaism” was Zionism.

Thus on the topic of religion and state, Fisher noted, “American and Israeli Jews were talking past one another,” and could not come together to formulate effective strategies for change. This inability centers on the role of the Rabbinate in Israel. When American Jews think of the Rabbinate, they feel deep hurt and insult about it treats how any form of Jewish practice that is not fully in line with its extreme interpretation of Jewish Orthodoxy. In contrast, most Israelis barely spend a moment thinking about the Rabbinate.

In another superb essay, Shlomo Fisher explained that religion in Israel is based on the global model—to which the U.S. is the exception—whereby “religious identity is not really a matter of individual choice or conviction, rather, it goes along with one’s national, ethnic or political identity.” Fisher makes clear that in that sense, the Chief Rabbinate is not a religious or spiritual authority, but akin to “a public utility, which is supported by taxes and is available to the entire population, like the postal service.” This means that “as a utility, it is not something that one really thinks about nor is it really an object of personal choice or self-expression.”

The implication of this analysis is that if American Jews want to make Israeli religion more “pluralistic” they need to radically change their approach. They must employ the kind of focused, ruthless, cynical thinking one uses in political campaigns or in business. American Jews first have to make sure they have the numbers—no political change is ever possible without them. And second, they have to stop trying to change Israeli attitudes towards their own brand of Jewish life, but rather to sideline the Chief Rabbinate on the issues they care about most.

To get the numbers, American Jews have to determine who their actual potential allies are. Israeli Jews who actually care about religion are likely to be non-liberal Orthodox Jews who will reject their form of practice completely. Israeli Jews who share their values of pluralism, tolerance, feminism, and liberalism are by and large the shrimp-eating-Shabbat-driving Jews whose

attitudes to religion range from revulsion to apathy. If American Conservative and Reform Jews seek partners in Israel who share both their liberal values and positive attitude towards religion, they are limiting themselves to a pool of citizens that will barely get one seat in the Knesset.

Mobilizing secular Israelis for greater pluralism of the American Jewish kind will only be possible if the goal will enhance the lives of secular Israelis. That means mobilizing support for sidelining the Rabbinate on a variety of issues, from kashrut, to burial, to marriage. It is not about theology, but about competition. The Rabbinate is a monopoly, not a place of religious leadership. Monopolies get their power from the state. The Chief Rabbinate, like all monopolistic public utilities—from the electric company to the airport authority—is corrupt, nepotistic, inefficient, and remarkably adept at preserving its power. It can only be cut down to size through sustained political mobilization for the introduction of competition. In their effort to effect change, American Conservative and Reform Jews need to employ not mild-mannered religious figures who seek to convey to Israelis the beauty of their forms of Judaism, but rather cynical political operators adept at building alliances, and ruthless consultants and investment bankers with experience in introducing competition to long-established state monopolies. The future relationship of American and Israeli Jews on the issue of religious pluralism will depend on some cynical thinking and ruthless actions. That may not sound “nice,” “Jewish,” or “religious,” but that is the way to get it done.



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AMERICAN JEWRY AND ISRAEL: TENSION AND PROSPECTS



Tensions between American and Israeli Jewry are approaching crisis levels. The most obvious indication is that the great majority of American Jews are ideologically liberal, vote Democratic, and oppose President Trump and his Administration. But an increasing majority of Israeli Jews is



DOV S. ZAKHEIM

ideologically conservative, distrustful of the U.S. Democratic party, and has a favorable impression of the American president.

Further complicating the American Jewish-Israeli relationship is the reality that no Jewish American under the age of 55—a category that encompasses most of the Jewish community—has any personal recollection of the Six-Day War and the events that led up to it. Indeed, no Jewish American under age 45 can personally recall the tragic opening days of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the last time Israel's existence was seriously threatened. The emotional commitment still found among the older age cohorts is largely absent in the younger generation. Thus AIPAC's continuing ability to flex its muscles by drawing close to 20,000 people to its annual conference does not mean what it once did.

Recent polling demonstrates the growing gap between American Jews and Israel. A 2013 Pew poll found that only 24% of Reform Jews, adherents of America's largest Jewish denomination, and 16% of "nonaffiliated" Jews, a

growing proportion of American Jews, considered themselves "very attached" to Israel. At the same time, 29% of the Reform Jews and 51% of the nonaffiliated considered themselves "not attached at all." Nothing that has taken place over the five years since the survey was conducted would suggest that the picture has changed. Indeed, the emergence of Jewish Voice for Peace, which supports the movement to boycott, divest, and sanction (BDS) Israel and would, if successful, harm Israel's currently vibrant economy, testifies to the likelihood that the percentage of "not attached" may have grown. Perhaps an even more serious indicator of the widening gap between the communities is that not only did 59% of American Jews support President Obama's push for a nuclear agreement with Iran, which the Israeli government bitterly opposed, but 60% supported the deal once it was reached. Finally, less than half of all American Jews have ever visited Israel, and a far smaller percentage speak Hebrew.

Two issues in particular are sharpening the divide between the two communities. One is the ongoing

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Israeli policy of expanding settlements on the West Bank, which many American Jews, like the broader American left, view as a form of creeping annexation. They express frustration with Israel's seeming abandonment of the search for a two-state solution, official statements to the contrary. The other issue is the intensifying ultra-Orthodox domination of Israeli religious life and its belittling of the non-Orthodox religious streams to which the overwhelming majority of American Jews belong.

To provide some context, it is worth recalling that there were always points of friction between American Jews and Israel. A case in point was when Menachem Begin became prime minister after the elections of May 1977. Whereas American Jews overwhelmingly identified with Israel's left-leaning, secular Mapai-led governments that had held power up to then, Begin was a rightist politician, a traditional Jew who often quoted Scriptural passages and who welcomed the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael party into his governing coalition. Indeed, many of Begin's own senior party colleagues were even further to the right than he was.

It is certainly true, however, that American Jewish discomfort with Israeli policies has only grown with time. Its government's right-wing orientation has become ever more pronounced as the settler movement has come to exert a stronger role. Similarly, Israel's burgeoning Haredi population has strengthened its representation in the Knesset to the point that for some time now the Haredi parties have become the nation's kingmakers.

The only sector of American Jewry that is comfortable with these developments is the Orthodox community, which has both grown in numbers and moved to the right on the American political spectrum. Orthodox Jews in general, and the Modern Orthodox in particular, strongly support Israel's settlement policy, in no small part because so many of their relatives live on the West Bank or in an ever-expanding Jerusalem. Not surprisingly, Orthodox Jews visit Israel far more often than their non-Orthodox counterparts. Given President's Trump's appointment of Modern Orthodox Jews as ambassador to Israel and as Middle East negotiator—not to mention his Orthodox Jewish son-in-law who serves as his senior advisor—it is no surprise that roughly 70% of American Orthodox Jews support the president. (Even so, there are signs of a slight weakening of support for Israel among the Modern Orthodox. While 87% of that community over age 55 report a strong emotional attachment to Israel, the figure goes down to 65% for those under age 34, and only 43% attach much importance to activity on behalf of Israel.)

It will take no small feat to close the divide between the Israeli and American Jewish communities. So long as Mr. Trump is in the White House and Benjamin Netanyahu remains prime minister, there will be little prospect of any movement toward reining in settlement expansion, which only the Orthodox overwhelmingly support. And unless the Israeli government can be persuaded to resist the pressure of the Haredi parties, the divide between America's non-Orthodox majority and Israel's leadership will widen even further.

Nevertheless, progress may be possible on the latter front. The government appears—at last—to be open to the compromise that would give non-Orthodox streams separate access to the Western Wall, a matter that is of little consequence to most Israelis but evokes a highly emotional response among non-Orthodox American Jews. Also, more and more Israeli politicians, particularly those representing the important Russian-speaking and Ethiopian communities, are expressing resentment at discrimination on the part of the ultra-Orthodox.



So too are an ever-larger number of other Israelis, including elements within its Orthodox community. Finally, whereas some right-wing political figures, such as Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely, discount the views of non-Orthodox American Jews, most Israeli leaders recognize that they are not about to disappear. They understand that relying solely on American Evangelicals and the country's small Orthodox community—no more than 20% of American Jews—is not in Israel's national security interest either medium- or long-term.

American Jews still have clout. They were able to stop the "Who is a Jew" initiative in the 1980s, which would have ostracized non-Orthodox Jews. Today, they are pressuring the government for progress on the Kotel issue; they have forced the Chief Rabbinate to be more open about its "blacklists" of American rabbis; and they continue to be the chief advocates for Israel's security in the corridors of American power. Israel's leaders know that they continue to need the support of America's Jews—all of them—and will still need them when, as is inevitable, a Democratic Party

that is increasingly lukewarm to Israel wins back the White House.

For all these reasons, American Jews must keep up the pressure on Jerusalem. To focus that pressure, particularly in the religious realm, AJC sponsored the creation of the Jewish Religious Equality Coalition—J-REC—whose membership ranges from the Open Orthodox to the Reconstructionist movements, and includes many prominent American Jews. J-REC, as its name implies, has but one goal: religious equality in the State of Israel. Its success will contribute mightily to a reconciliation between the two largest Jewish communities in the world to the benefit of both, and indeed, to the benefit of Jews everywhere.



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