

# The Peoplehood Papers 22

August 2018 | Elul 5778

## Israel@70: A Peoplehood Perspective



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## From the Editors

The creation of the State of Israel has been, by any measure, a game changer in Peoplehood history. The need to build and develop a sovereign state for a people who'd been spread throughout the globe for 2000 years, provided the Jews a unique opportunity to galvanize and unite around that cause. This joint agenda shared by Jews throughout the world gave the Jewish people a concrete and meaningful goal and purpose which in turn strengthened their collective identity and unity.

As is often the case, political disagreements were also part of the story. Many Zionists in the State's formative decades, held the view that all Jews should immigrate to Israel. This approach often came with a negation of the Diaspora. And yet with time and sensibility, some of those perceptions went away. At the same time, Israel's contribution to the rejuvenation of Jewish Civilization through the revival of the Hebrew language, Israeli culture, literature and the arts has been transformative. Israel became a source of pride for the Jewish People and a place of pilgrimage for Jews engaging with their Judaism and Peoplehood. Israel was embraced by world Jewry as integral to their Judaism and commitment to Peoplehood.

And yet in recent years, we have been seeing a shift in the conversation between Israel and world Jewry, and North American Jewry in particular. It is not just, as many assume, an outcome of specific political disagreement. Significant essential disagreements are rising to the surface. One can't avoid the sense that Israelis are significantly more focused on their national agenda, and are thinking of world Jewry mostly in instrumental terms. All the while, many American Jews are losing patience and interest in an Israel which they don't feel represents their values. The real loser here is the Jewish People. The sense of solidarity, shared destiny and mutual commitment, that can drive the Jewish collective future, has been weakened significantly.

This collection aspires to bring to the forefront diverse, thoughtful and thought-provoking articles that will both celebrate the achievements of the last 70 years and address our current challenges. We hope that they will inspire a meaningful conversation about the Jewish collective ethos and enterprise, and the unique relationship between the State of Israel and world Jewry. This opening offers short introductory paragraphs to all of the articles in the order of their appearance. Enjoy the reading.

According to **Hanan Alexander** “American Jews and Jewish Israelis are heirs to competing ideological responses to the challenges with which modernity confronted premodern Jewish life. The recurring tensions between these communities can in large measure be attributed to the playing out of tensions within and between these ideologies. Addressing these tensions through education requires dialogical pedagogies that can foster ways of living together across deep differences within the Jewish people today.”

**Erica Brown** senses a Peoplehood fatigue among Jews as part of our never-ending focus on our identity questions. She proposes that “now, at seventy, Israel is well enough established on the world stage, its prosperity a source of Jewish pride across the globe, to limit the constant identity questions. Now it is the time to quell a little together, and realize that if we stop asking if we should feel like an extended family and start behaving like one, we just might get there after all.”

The analysis of **Deborah Dash Moore** points to the fact that “Jewish peoplehood today translates neither into most American Jews caring about Israel nor most Israeli Jews caring for American Jews”. The question she poses is: “Where, then, might we locate a Jewish peoplehood for the twenty-first century?” Her proposal is: “Peoplehood would surmount religious rubrics of identity rather than succumbing to them. Jewish legal authority vested in halacha as articulated by state-appointed male rabbis would become subordinate to Jewish moral and spiritual authority vested in the Jewish people. In this way Jewish peoplehood would once again serve to bind together diverse types of Jews: religious and secular, cultural and political, Jews by birth and Jews by choice, fellow-traveling Jews and haredi Jews, straight Jews and LGBTQ Jews.”

**Arnold Eisen** proposes that we agree “... that 20th century Jews developed two and only two viable options for the existence of Jews and Judaism. One: statehood, protected by its army and its allies. Two: strong diaspora communities, protected by the rights afforded all citizens in a democracy. Neither is entirely secure. Both are threatened. They need one another to survive and thrive.” But he does not stop there: “Could we also agree that Jews have never survived in our long history by trying only to survive, but rather because we served a higher cause, the Highest and Most Holy? That we need to guard our lives and our interest, of course – I called this, in Zionist parlance, Normality – but also must serve Covenant, justice, compassion, the Good?”

**Daniel Gordis** calls upon us to “first acknowledge that we face a possibly unprecedented crisis, and that unlike with previous instances of this enmity, there is no guarantee that this time, the dust will settle as we wish it to .... For our tenuous but critical relationship to survive, both sides will need to take a step back from the abyss. It is true that we have weathered conflicts between these two communities before, but this instance might be

different, simply because of the steady march of history. If that is the case, the Jewish state could become just a state with many Jews, and American Jews could lose their tie to what is without question the most inspiring Jewish development of the last two thousand years.”

**Talia Gorodess** from Reut frames the relationship between Israel and Diaspora Jewry as a matter of national security: “... the special relationship between Israel and world Jewry has tremendous instrumental value but more importantly — intrinsic value. Together, this relationship provides Israel with a unique form of soft power, which is essentially unmatched in the international arena. More importantly, it upholds the prosperity and security of both the Jewish people and their nation-state. It is time for the Israeli security community to form a new agenda that will reflect the prominence of this relationship.”

For **Doron Krakow** from the JCC Association, “the conversation about Israel has been disproportionately confined to only two issues: the peace process (geopolitics) and the Kotel (religious politics).” He continues: “We have failed to adequately instill in ourselves a commitment to assuring that the members of our community see Israel in all its breadth and complexity; not just through narrow and altogether too parochial lenses. We’re living in a golden age for the Jewish people. An age defined by the rebirth of a sovereign Jewish homeland. Once we make it possible for more and more of our people to see Israel in ways that bring us together, our very engagement with Israel will become an engine for *building* and *strengthening* Jewish community; rather than an issue that divides us.”

**Noam Pianko** addresses the current tensions between supporting the Israeli government policy and Jewish American democratic values. He concludes: “It would be hard to imagine any conception of Jewish peoplehood that did not recognize the important roles that Israel could play in global Jewry. However, Jewish peoplehood reduced to a “pro-Israel-ism” or “Israel-hood” will fragment the world-wide Jewish community. Sustainable models of Jewish peoplehood should encourage divergent and dissenting political views that reflect the viewpoints of the Jewish people and the multiplicity of historical modes of Jewish collective identification. A peoplehood oriented toward defending Israel by drawing political boundaries within the Jewish community deprives the Jewish people of precisely the diverse access points necessary to nourish global collective ties grounded in interpretations of Judaism, Jewish history, and Jewish values.”

**Shlomi Ravid** seeks a model that can save the Peoplehood conversation from the political grips: “Can we reframe the relationship so it continues to be based on a shared fate and destiny, history, mutual responsibility and familial ties but does not necessarily carry into the policy/political sphere? That’s the Israelis’ prerogative. This would mean that world

Jews are not required to embrace every decision made by Israel because they were made by Israel. They can agree or disagree and even try to influence, based on their values. But they are not bound by, nor responsible for Israel's political decisions by virtue of being members of the Jewish people. Responsible for Israel and its wellbeing? By all means. Involved in shaping the people's and State's ethos? With full force. But let's pull our Peoplehood conversation out of the political mud before it sinks."

**Zohar Raviv** writes about the challenge of addressing Zionism in the "generation Z" context: "We should seek and encourage any form of debate about Zionism in our midst — as should be regarding any topic of worth. Yet in order to move beyond the somewhat superficial desire for "free speech" and toward "the honor of being heard", we should all strive to exercise the humility needed to afford broader context and different — even opposing — viewpoints a seat of honor around the table. Most importantly, however, such important and legitimate debates need not lead toward division and alienation, but rather perceived as opportunities to sharpen our own critical faculties and commit ourselves to a genuine path of inquiry. As is the case with most complex issues, the validity of one argument is not always contingent upon utterly debunking another's view. Unpacking "Zionism" deserves the integrity, attention and depth that treat the fuller scope of its conceptual, ideological and historical evolution — both as an ancient ideal and as a modern political movement."

**Zachary Schaffer** offers a pedagogic practical approach to today's challenges: "... we must affirm an inclusive framework for a 21st century Zionism that American Jewry — especially younger generations — can get behind. Perhaps we can discuss the story of Zionism in two chapters: (1) Zionism the Dream and (2) Zionism the Reality. Zionism the Dream is an articulation of the original aspirations for the Jewish State, grounded in Jewish civilization and Zionist ideology. It is here where we can create connection and understanding across divides. Then, in the discussion of Zionism the Reality, we can analyze Israel against our shared understanding of the ideological background for its existence. In this way, we can begin to address some of the schisms within the pluralistic American Jewish community and engage in a more responsible exchange between the Diaspora and Israel."

**Andres Spokoiny**, in a two-part article, addresses the current challenges and offers a strategic approach. He begins by establishing Peoplehood's constitutive role in establishing the State: "... it's eminently fitting to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Israel with a reflection on peoplehood. Without peoplehood — that is, without defining Judaism as a national identity — there couldn't be Zionism or Israel". Yet this understanding of 70 years ago raises some fundamental questions today: "What makes us today a people? Do we have a purpose as a people beyond our mere survival? What

does our being a people mean for us Jews, and for the world? How do we navigate the unique complexities of peoplehood and statehood when the overlap between them is not complete? How does our conception of peoplehood impact issues of governance and political power in the State and around the Jewish World?”

In the second part, Spokoiny offers ideas and hypotheses to explore: “... rethinking of our collective ethos is needed now. For that, Jewish leaders and funders need to invest the time, the energy, and the resources in studying the philosophy of nationalism, peoplehood, and Zionism. We need to create a context in which these types of debate are incentivized and curated. We need to encourage, morally and financially, our thinkers and scholars to reflect on the nature of Jewish nationalism. We need to do that both in Israel and the Diaspora and we need to make sure that this debate can be done with equal measures of freedom and respect.”

**Josh Weinberg** proposes a change in the nature of the Israel-Diaspora relations: “Rather than Israel looking to the US for financial assistance and North Americans looking to Israel for a shot of a quick Jewish identity booster we now have the opportunity to articulate an actual joint and common destiny. To strive together for that national self-elevation, with conscious direction and the strengthening and deepening of what it means to be a part of the Jewish people.”

**Einat Wilf** reminds us of the reality of the Jewish people’s size in the world and the ramifications: “No matter how much actual power Jews in Israel amass, their miniscule size, in the region and otherwise, means that they would be wise to recognize its limits and refrain from pursuing the corrupting territorial and other ambitions that ignore that basic insight. For Jews in America, no matter how comfortable the current reality appears, it would be wise to resist the temptations of moral purity that comes from powerlessness. Power corrupts, but powerlessness corrupts no less. Our survival as a minuscule Jewish people depends on Jews, both in Israel and outside it, heeding both insights of Jewish history, which has very much not come to an end.”

We want to personally thank our contributors whose opinions may differ but who all share a deep love and concern for the Jewish people and the State of Israel. We sincerely hope that the above articles will inspire a collective soul searching and reflection – be it at the Zionism 3.0 conference or any other Jewish gathering, or at your organization or chevruta. Please share your thoughts with us at [info@jpeoplehood.org](mailto:info@jpeoplehood.org)

Shlomi Ravid and Zack Bodner

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## Education for Jewish Peoplehood Today

**Hanan A. Alexander**

In his classic study *Ideology and Utopia*, sociologist Karl Mannheim argued that ideologies—frameworks of belief and value that govern some aspect of our individual or collective lives—tend to advance until they fall prey to their own internal contradictions. In many respects, American Jews and Jewish Israelis are heirs to competing ideological responses to the challenges with which modernity confronted premodern Jewish life. The recurring tensions between these communities can in large measure be attributed to the playing out of tensions within and between these ideologies. Addressing these tensions through education requires dialogical pedagogies that can foster ways of living together across deep differences within the Jewish people today.

Prior to the modern period, the vast majority of Jews lived in autonomous communities under Greco-Roman, Islamic, and Christian rule, in which religious and political affiliations were intermingled. New forms of scientific thinking arose beginning in the sixteenth century associated with the European Enlightenment that challenged the foundations of religious piety. They rested authority concerning what to believe and how to behave in the reasoning of autonomous individuals, not in divine revelation. By the nineteenth century, the European Emancipation gave rise to liberal nation states that left religious belief and unbelief to individual conscience. This new sort of state enabled people of different faiths to become citizens in a common civil society.

Ultra-Orthodoxy attempted to preserve premodern Jewish life by rejecting the terms of both Enlightenment and Enlightenment. The liberal (religious) response, on the other hand, especially characteristic of mainstream American Jewish life, accepted the terms of Emancipation. Its supporters argued that Jews should become citizens in the liberal state while redefining their religion to meet the rational demands of Enlightenment. Finally, the (secular) Zionist response, expressed today in the lives of most Jewish Israelis, rejected the terms of Emancipation. Its adherents redefined Jewish affiliation primarily in political terms by becoming citizens in a Jewish (and democratic) state, while accepting the Enlightenment critique of religion. When the state of Israel was founded 70 years ago, each of these ideologies sought to solidify its position, in response in part to the traumatic events of the second world war. Seventy years on they remain the primary

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modes of Jewish attachment. However, following Mannheim's trenchant analysis, each is advancing toward its own utopian extremes today, that entail tensions both within and between each alternative.

During the period between the Six Day War in 1967 and the Second Palestinian Uprising in 2000, many people sought common ground among two of these orientations, liberalism and Zionism. Today, these two ideologies appear to be growing steadily apart. According to Peter Beinart and others, this is due to the rise of a dark side to Jewish nationalism in Israel combined with the mounting influence of an intolerant form of ultra-Orthodoxy. These developments have led to the absurd situation that the nation state of the Jewish people may not recognize the Jewish status, rights, or proclivities of many Jews living abroad and an increasing number of those living in Israel. According to this analysis, the rightward turn in Israel may have also contributed to a possible jeopardizing of minority rights by a sovereign Jewish majority, after centuries of being persecuted as a religious minority, and to an inability to settle Israel's differences with its Palestinian neighbors. This disconnect between liberalism and Zionism may also be tied the growing influence of critical social theory among left leaning intellectuals and opinion makers--Marxism, neo-Marxism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and post-Zionism. Some interpretations of these ideas depict Israel as an unjustified colonial implant in the Middle East, or if not the entire state, then Jewish settlements in what some call Judaea and Samaria and others the West Bank or the Occupied Territories.

However, alienation from Zionism, which presupposes Jewish distinctiveness, may also be a product of the very form of liberalism that Beinart and his colleagues

embrace. American liberalism may not be as pluralistic, and hence as accepting of Jewish difference, as it purports to be. It tolerates all views—providing they embrace the principle of liberal pluralism itself. This may explain, at least in part, the current demographic decline among American Jews who embrace this form of liberalism. They experience difficulty in articulating a substantive vision of Jewish life to be transmitted across the generations. Liberal pluralism provides a basis to protect each person's right to choose such a life but no normative vision upon which to base such a choice, save liberal toleration itself. It follows that one must first embrace the principle of pluralism as a price of entry into liberal society, even if it runs contrary to political or faith commitments that one might otherwise embrace. Transmitting a Judaism across the generations that is grounded primarily in the choices of autonomous individuals, without some concomitant basis in values that originate outside the self—in history, or nationality, or God, may not be as feasible as religious liberals have supposed.

This analysis suggests a pressing need for engaging some form of political liberalism in Israel, for renewed attention to Jewish nationalism among American Jews, and for a fresh look at the substantive beliefs and practices of Jewish life on both sides of the Atlantic. To this end, the Jewish people requires a dialogue among rival visions of what it means to be Jewish today, that addresses their weaknesses as well as their strengths, in order to reconstitute some form of common Jewish life. Isaiah Belin offered an alternative political theory to classical versions of both liberalism and nationalism that is well suited to this task. Sometimes known as diversity liberalism, this view seeks a *modus vivendi* for peaceful coexistence across deep differences.

Education for such a dialogue requires attention to two complementary dimensions of teaching and learning: One dimension, called 'pedagogy of the sacred,' entails initiation **in** an intelligent vision of Jewish life prepared to engage competing conceptions of Jewishness in dialogue, from the inside, as it were. The other dimension, known as 'pedagogy of difference,' involves learning **from** or **about** orientations different from one's own, from the outside, so to say. Whereas instruction **in** a tradition aims to initiate into a particular path, to become an insider, instruction **from** a worldview encourages consideration of its wisdom without requiring assent, and instruction **about** an orientation calls for phenomenological understanding, to imagine oneself an insider without actually becoming one, or historical, cultural, or political knowledge, from an outsider's perspective. Advancing educational dialogue of this kind may be among the most important challenges facing the Jewish people today.

**Hanan A. Alexander is Dean of the Faculty of Education and Professor of Philosophy of Education at the University of Haifa**



## Peoplehood Fatigue?

**Erica Brown**

As Israel celebrates its seventy years of existence, some of the language we've used for decades to discuss Jewish identity begins, like the country, to get old. It desiccates and ceases to have the meaning and substance it once had. We become impatient with hackneyed phrases or the repeated attempts at a linguistic identity bridge between the diaspora and Israel that feels tired. Organizational expressions of solidarity are used so often that they become caricatures of themselves. Surely, in the past ten years the word "peoplehood" is one such term. We want to believe that despite geographic distance and a chasm-wide gap when it comes to Jewish self-understanding, we as a people share indelible psychic bonds and that one word can capture it. Yet one word alone, a word that is hard to define despite many, many attempts, will never be able to capture the complexity inherent in what we mean when we say "peoplehood."

Even were we to arrive at some consensus of meaning about these strong, emotional and tribal bonds, it may not matter. We may be suffering from identity fatigue, the dulling sense of despair when we continue to talk about who we are instead of simply existing. The meta-conversations themselves can cause their own small tremor. For example, imagine a married couple who have cycled in and out of intimacy ask themselves every day if they should stay married. Without answering the question, the very asking of it assumes that there *is* a question to be asked. There is a problem. The question itself begins to undermine the relationship.

Perhaps this has been happening for some years, a low-simmering crisis that we have been unable to name that only now, as Israel reaches a fulcrum of national maturity, can we finally stop asking. We are a people, across the globe and with all of our differences. Now what?

One of the most enervating descriptions of this identity fatigue appears in A.B. Yehoshua's novel, *Friendly Fire*. The title alone suggests the maddening phenomenon that any fire is friendly; killing one of our own is still killing. The novel's main character, Yirmiyahu, loses a wife to cancer and a son to friendly fire in the West Bank as a soldier in the IDF and wants nothing more than to relieve himself of Jewish identity. Subsequently, Yirmiyahu moves to an obscure location in Tanzania, the heart of Africa. His sister-in-

law, Daniela, wanting to find out more about her sister's death, travels to Africa to see Yirmiyahu. Visiting during the holiday season, she brings him a box of Hanukah candles and a stack of Israeli newspapers. Yirmiyahu quickly throws the presents, both ancient and living signs of Israeli identity, into the fire. He is not interested, even remotely, in anything to do with Judaism or Israel. Only late in the novel does Yirmiyahu explain his mysterious behavior to Daniela and why he will not be returning to Israel:

Here there are no ancient graves and no floor tiles from a destroyed synagogue; no museum with a fragment of a burnt Torah; no testimonies about pogroms and the Holocaust. There's no exile here, no Diaspora. There was no Golden Age here, no community that contributed to global culture. They don't fuss about assimilation or extinction, self-hatred or pride, uniqueness or chosenness; no old grandmas pop up suddenly aware of their identity. There's no orthodoxy here or secularism or self-indulgent religiosity, and most of all no nostalgia for anything at all. There's no struggle between tradition and revolution. No rebellion against the forefathers and no new interpretations. No one feels compelled to decide if he is a Jew or an Israeli or maybe a Caananite, or if the state is more democratic or more Jewish, if there's hope for it or if it's done for. The people around me are free and clear of that whole exhausting and confusing tangle. But life goes on. I am seventy years old, Daniela, and I am permitted to let go.

It's exhausting to read this passage, let alone to have lived it. Yirmiyahu claims that he wants to be in a place free of identity questions, yet Africa is certainly not free of tribalism or questions of newness versus traditionalism. But Yirmiyahu is free, liberated from those identity questions because they are not *his* identity questions. At seventy, he concludes that decades of debate has not enriched him. He has paid a severe price for his identity and wishes to escape the "exhausting and confusing tangle."

Maybe, like Yirmiyahu, it is time to let go of asking so many questions about Jewish living so that we may live. The strangulating effect of question after question creates an existential quicksand that brooks no emotional freedom. It shackles.

Even as we read Yehoshua's fictional account, bearing in mind his own incendiary views on a compromised Jewish identity in the Diaspora, we wonder if Yirmiyahu can sustain this ruse. After all, wishing one's identity away does not make it so. To be biblical, Jonah boarded a ship to Nineveh to escape God and then was captured by a fish sent by God. We can run, but we cannot hide. Jonah spent agonizing days captive, pondering his purpose, reclaiming his destiny. But Yirmiyahu was a different prophet. The prophet of doom in the Bible, as opposed to the Yirmiyahu of Yehoshua's fiction, actually did tell Jews how to live in exile without an identity crisis. "Build houses and live in them, plant

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gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and have sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there, do not decrease. And seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the Lord in its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper" [Jeremiah 29:5-7]. On other words, live. Simply live.

It is the last line of Jeremiah's advice that rings the most. In Israel's prosperity, we shall prosper. Now, at seventy, Israel is well enough established on the world stage, its prosperity a source of Jewish pride across the globe, to limit the constant identity questions. Now it is the time to qvell a little together, and realize that if we stop asking if we should feel like an extended family and start behaving like one, we just might get there after all.

**Dr. Erica Brown is the director of the Mayberg Center for Jewish Education and Leadership at The George Washington University and associate professor of curriculum and pedagogy at their Graduate School for Education and Human Development. She is the author of twelve books.**



## Where Might We Locate a Jewish Peoplehood for the Twenty-First Century?

**Deborah Dash Moore**

As Noam Pianko has cogently shown in *Jewish Peoplehood: An American Innovation* (2015), the term originated in the twentieth century. Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan, a spiritual Zionist and founder of the Reconstructionist movement in Judaism, proposed the word as an alternative to both nation and nationality. He hoped that peoplehood would bridge debates between those who contended that only Jewish religious ties linked Jews and those who declared that only Jewish national bonds mattered. Peoplehood as an idea also skirted the concept of the nation state. Kaplan argued forcefully and unsuccessfully for transnational or international Jewish forms of political organization to embody Jewish peoplehood. That Jewish Peoplehood now expresses ties of Jews in diaspora with the State of Israel represents an ironic turn of events.

The editors of this collection of essays write: “The creation of the State has been, by any measure, a game changer in Peoplehood history.” They are correct. Peoplehood discussions usually address relations of Israeli Jews with diaspora Jews rather than referring to any alternative to this dichotomy. The change of name of Beit Hatfutsot, or museum of the dispersion, exemplifies this usage. By adding the title, “Museum of the Jewish People—Beit Hatfutsot” the museum defines peoplehood rhetoric in relation to statehood. In this formulation, “the Jewish people” refers to those in dispersion, not Jews living in the State of Israel.

Israeli nationalism has largely supplanted the primacy of Jewish peoplehood for Israeli Jews. Most accurately assume that they no longer need the assistance of diaspora Jews to achieve a prosperous and secure society. Israeli Jews recognize the importance of the United States in providing political and economic support. Increasingly, they also realize that Christian evangelicals’ enthusiasm for Israel generates effective political and economic assistance. This Israeli understanding reduces the political significance of American Jews, the largest group of diaspora Jews.

Yet Israeli Jews and American Jews still consider themselves partners who cooperate on diverse projects. These range widely and reach varied groups of Jews. They include, for

example, twinned cities that connect American Jewish communities with Israeli Jewish towns in order to assist the latter and bolster the former. Varied initiatives sponsored by the Jewish Agency similarly bring Israeli Jews and American Jews together. However, these bonds can be considered second-order relationships. American Jews collectively no longer matter to achieve state political goals as they once did throughout much of the twentieth century.

The perspective from North America also looks different in the twenty-first century. Israel appears not as a new nation, struggling to absorb diverse Jewish immigrants, in desperate need of help from Jews throughout the world. Rather, American Jews celebrate Israel's thriving high-tech economy. Indeed, Israel is so prosperous that it can afford to support a significant population of religious Jews who devote their lives to study of sacred texts. Most American Jews exult in Israel's military strength. They wholeheartedly support Israel in its many brief wars against varied non-state actors who seek to undermine its security and challenge its legitimacy. These constant wars signal a fundamental Jewish vulnerability to American Jews. Unfortunately, war is an integral feature of the Israeli way of life.

Many American Jews consider Israel a great accomplishment, a credit to the Jewish people. Israel offers them vicarious pride. Over forty percent have visited Israel. However, if the Pew Survey of American Jews is accurate, slightly less than half of American Jews agreed that "caring about Israel" is an essential part of what being Jewish means. (In this matter, "caring about Israel" is running neck and neck—43% versus 42%—with "having a good sense of humor" as an essential part of what being Jewish means.)

So Jewish peoplehood today translates neither into most American Jews caring about Israel nor most Israeli Jews caring for American Jews. Where, then, might we locate a Jewish peoplehood for the twenty-first century?

One possibility would be to return to an aspect of peoplehood's original formulation that subsequently was obscured by its political uses. An effort to understand peoplehood as a religious or spiritual concept as well as a national or ethnic one would emphasize its power to unite Jews, women as well as men, across religious differences. Peoplehood would surmount religious rubrics of identity rather than succumbing to them. Jewish legal authority vested in halacha as articulated by state-appointed male rabbis would become subordinate to Jewish moral and spiritual authority vested in the Jewish people. In this way Jewish peoplehood would once again serve to bind together diverse types of Jews: religious and secular, cultural and political, Jews by birth and Jews by choice, fellow-traveling Jews and haredi Jews, straight Jews and LGBTQ Jews.

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In pragmatic terms, a program to foster Jewish peoplehood might involve bringing Israeli Jewish teenagers to visit the U.S. in order to experience Jewish religious pluralism and diversity. Such trips could also introduce Israeli Jews to a living Jewish diaspora history not housed in a museum. Jewish teenagers from across the U.S. might then join them on a visit, for example, to New York City. For many years New York's Jewish population

exceeded that of the Yishuv and even the State of Israel in its first decade. It was the largest Jewish city in the world. Such a trip would encourage Israeli Jews and American Jews to contemplate Jewish religious diversity and consider how many different types of Jews live together. It would demonstrate as well religious and political competition among Jews as features of Jewish peoplehood.

In the final section of his book on Jewish Peoplehood, Noam Pianko argues that the logic of peoplehood should shift from “identifying a characteristic essence shared by all members” to “defining the Jewish collective as that which Jews do out of a sense of connection to the Jewish enterprise.” [129] This approach foregrounds active participation in the project of Jewish peoplehood instead of assumptions of passive identification. Can Israel create such a project that invites all who want to participate to join together? Or is this a task best left to those who don’t have to contend with a state apparatus?

**Deborah Dash Moore is Frederick G. L. Huetwell Professor of History and former Director of the the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan. An historian of American Jews, she focuses on the 20th century urban experience. Her books regularly garner awards, including *G. I. Jews: How World War II Transformed a Generation*, which has recently been made into a documentary.**



## It is Time for Building Together

**Arnold M. Eisen**

It is Tisha B'av, and I am fasting as I write these reflections on the state of conversation about Jewish peoplehood in the summer of 2018. Observance of the holiday attests to my identification with Judaism and the Jews. I am saying that the story told of twice-over exile and destruction in 586 B.C.E. and 70 C.E. is my story, that the Jews who suffered in those events exercise a legitimate claim on me, that the religious tradition connecting Jewish history to divine promise is one I am obligated to honor and transmit. I affirm that I, a contemporary Jew, am shaped by and responsible to forces larger than myself: a history, a people, a faith.

In the very same book in which he set forth the best case I know for understanding Judaism as an “evolving religious civilization” and the Jews as a worldwide people (Judaism as a Civilization, published in 1934) Mordecai Kaplan also identified the forces that would soon work to divide the Jewish people and weaken its resolve to do the work that he – ardent Zionist, committed to building the Land and being built by it – called “reconstruction.”

For one thing, some Jews had dispensed with the “religious” part of their ancestors’ identity and had no interest in restoring it. Kaplan, like Ahad Ha’am before him, wanted to give them reason to identify with Judaism and the Jewish people nonetheless. He faulted Reform and Orthodoxy for defining Judaism in exclusively religious terms, thereby leaving no room for those who wanted nothing to do with Jewish faith or Jewish law. He mourned the fact that in modern diaspora Jewish life was organized around the synagogue, a religious institution, rather than the community center. But Kaplan – a rabbi ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary, a believer -- tried repeatedly to redefine Jewish faith and thus to make his people whole. I think he knew the effort could not succeed.

Kaplan also knew that the situation in which Jews found themselves would decisively shape their conception of Jewish peoplehood. Jews, wherever they lived, would bear hyphenated identifies, the Jewish civilization on one side of the hyphen, the country, language and culture in which they lived, and which lived in them, on the other side.

If you want Judaism to be dominant civilization shaping your identity and that of your children, he pointedly told his readers, go to Palestine. In America, as in France, the gentile civilization would be dominant and the Jewish “subordinate.” The only model of equality in civilizational power that he could identify was entirely theoretical: Simon Dubnow’s notion of ethnic autonomy. I think Kaplan would have understood the chasm that has opened up in our day between the Jews of America, France, and every other community where Jews constitute at best a small but influential minority of the larger population, on the one hand, and the Jews of the State of Israel, where Jews constitute a substantial majority of the population and fully exploit the power that provides to advance their interests as opposed to those of the minority.

Kaplan foreshadowed a further source of tension between Israelis and diaspora Jews when, soon after the state’s creation (*A New Zionism*, 1955), he urged Jews to understand Zionism as a movement to regenerate Jews and Judaism everywhere, charged with helping Jews to find Meaning in Jewish life wherever they lived, inside or outside the Land. This had been a key plank in the Spiritual Zionism embraced by Kaplan’s mentor, Solomon Schechter, and remains the hope of many Zionists around the world to this day. They want Israel to make them proud to be the Jews they are, where they are -- even as they recognize that Israelis have other priorities. The State cannot make anyone proud unless it survives and thrives in the face of enemies who wish to destroy it, and this means taking action that sometimes gets in the way of pride. To my mind, the civil religion of the great majority of the Jewish people in 2018 remains “Am Yisrael Chai.” That explains why most Jews my age and older, who remember the wars of 1948, ’67 and ’73 when Israel’s existence was threatened, continue to bend over backwards to defend the State even when its policies alienate us and our children more and more. Younger Jews, who lack these memories, and know only a less vulnerable Israel, are more inclined to demand more pride in exchange for their loyalty and support. They also find less and less reason to identify with Judaism or their local Jewish community.

All this is worrisome, of course, but it is no surprise, given the larger political and sociological developments that shape Israelis and diaspora Jewish communities alike. But – the key point in my view, as we look at the ever-growing divides among our people – is to do what we can to bridge the gaps, rather than to acquiesce in their inevitability or, worse, exploit them for political gain.

I don’t expect Israelis and diaspora Jews to agree on Zionist fundamentals anytime soon, any more than I expect “religious” and “secular” Jews, or Orthodox and Conservative or Reform Jews, to reach such agreement. (I write days after the passage of the Nation State bill by the Knesset, and the arrest of a Masorti/Conservative rabbi by the police in Haifa at the bidding of the Orthodox rabbinical court – both developments that to my

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**20th century Jews developed two and only two viable options for the existence of Jews and Judaism? One: statehood, protected by its army and its allies. Two: strong diaspora communities, protected by the rights afforded all citizens in a democracy. Neither is entirely secure. Both are threatened. They need one another to survive and thrive.**

**Could we also agree that Jews have never survived in our long history by trying only to survive, but rather because we served a higher cause, the Highest and Most Holy? That we need to guard our lives and our interest, of course – I called this, in Zionist parlance, Normality – but also must serve Covenant, justice, compassion, the Good?**

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mind harm the dignity of Judaism, threaten the unity of the State, and further alienate diaspora Jewry). We will not all agree on these matters anytime soon.

But could we perhaps avoid active insult, find projects in which we can cooperate, strengthen “national institutions,” prefer compromise to the exercise of brute force in our relations, and formulate a shared narrative? These would be major steps forward.

Could we agree – as I learned from my teacher, Professor Eliezer Schweid, at the Hebrew University in 1975 – that 20th century Jews developed two and only two viable options for the existence of Jews and Judaism? One: statehood, protected by its army and its allies. Two: strong diaspora communities, protected by the rights afforded all citizens in a democracy. Neither is entirely secure. Both are threatened. They need one another to survive and thrive.

Could we also agree that Jews have never survived in our long history by trying only to survive, but rather because we served a higher cause, the Highest and Most Holy? That

we need to guard our lives and our interest, of course – I called this, in Zionist parlance, Normality – but also must serve Covenant, justice, compassion, the Good?

And could we cooperate in the two major tasks that we share, but which necessarily take very different forms in the Jewish State and outside it? I refer to the building of new sorts of Jewish communities, rooted in our history but attuned to the needs of here and now, and the ever-new interpretation of Jewish tradition, likewise rooted in what Judaism has been over the centuries but reformulated to suit the unprecedented realities of today?

There is so much for us to do together as Jews, so much for us to teach and learn, to mourn on the 9th of Av, and to celebrate the next day, and the day after that. This is a time for celebration far more than mourning. And, as Zionism has always taught, it is above all a time for building together.

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## Why the Relationship Matters

**Daniel Gordis**

Contrary to what we often prefer to believe, the current dustup between American Jews and Israel is not a new phenomenon. Yet lest that reassure us, it is also important to recognize why this time may be different, and that what we are now witnessing could be the beginning of a very different kind of relationship.

The troubles began even long before the state of Israel was even created. As early as 1901, just four years after he launched political Zionism with the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Theodor Herzl penned a public letter to American Jews. "Today," he said, "the Zionist movement has spread and received approval all across the world. Everyone recognizes that [Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel] is the only solution to the Jewish question. ... The numbers of those formerly distant from us who are now attaching themselves to us is growing most successfully." A few lines later, though, Herzl's tone changed. "Unfortunately," he wrote, "that cannot be said of America. America, with its Jewish population growing day by day thanks to Jewish immigration, has not fulfilled its obligation of participating in the Zionist enterprise to an appropriate degree. Friends, brothers, awaken! We need your support, not merely your enthusiasm that emerges from your mass gatherings but then disappears like a whiff of smoke."

In many ways, European unhappiness with American Zionism only deepened in the decades that followed. When Louis D. Brandeis, then Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, sought to fashion an American Zionism that would not run afoul of the prevailing American ethos that demanded that immigrants leave behind all loyalties to other countries, he spoke of Zionism as the fulfillment of *American* commitments. "Every American Jew who aids in advancing the Jewish settlement in Palestine, though he feels that neither he nor his descendants will ever live there, will likewise be a better man and a better American for doing so," Brandeis wrote.

To Chaim Weizmann, however, Brandeis' formulation constituted virtual treason. What did it mean to be a Zionist who had no interest in living in the country the Zionists wanted to create? Zionism was not about being a better American, believed Weizmann, but about redeeming the Jewish people from the horrors of Diaspora life in Europe and

elsewhere. The simmering tensions between Brandeis and Weizmann finally exploded in 1921; Weizmann won the battle, Brandeis was out, and Weizmann later remarked, "There is no bridge between Pinsk [where he had been raised] and Washington, DC [where Brandeis worked]." Genuine Zionism and American Jewish life, Weizmann believed, were fundamentally incompatible.

There were other dustups, such as the famous conflict between David Ben-Gurion and Jacob Blaustein, then head of the American Jewish Committee, shortly after Israel's creation. Blaustein was infuriated that Ben-Gurion had begun speaking of Israel as the new center of the Jewish world when it constituted a mere 5% of the world's Jewish population, and warned the Israeli Prime Minister that if he did not stop pressing American Jews to immigrate to Israel, American Jews would end all support for the fledgling Jewish state. Ben-Gurion folded, but his resentments did not abate; when he and American Jews had another blowup in 1960 after Israel captured Adolf Eichmann, he said in December 1960 at the 25th Zionist Congress, "Judaism of the United States... is losing all meaning" and "in the free and prosperous countries [Judaism] faces the kiss of death, a slow and imperceptible decline into the abyss of assimilation."

That is *precisely* the view held by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Bibi regularly tells his inner circle that American Jews, most notably the progressives among them, are implacably hostile to Israel, and he will pay them no heed. Nor is there any point in trying to improve the relationship, he feels, because American Jews are going to disappear in a generation or two anyway. When many of us recoil at Netanyahu's cynical callousness, it is worth recalling that David Ben-Gurion said precisely the same thing some sixty years earlier.

Is our current state of affairs, then, unpleasant but not catastrophic? Will we weather this latest round of verbal hostilities just as we have in the past? I believe that there is no reason to have such confidence; the populations on both sides of the divide have changed too much for that. In America, particularly among millennials, the sense of Jewish fragility that once animated their parents and grandparents is long gone. The Holocaust is ancient history to them; it is worth recalling that the beginning of the Holocaust is now just half as long ago as the end of the American Civil War. They feel none of their grandparents' shame at not having spoken out more during the War, and the notion that Israel is a fragile, vulnerable state, still battling for its right to exist is utterly foreign to them.

On the Israeli side, senses of both dependability and dependence have also eroded. Israelis have no longer have the confidence that American administrations will be supportive; too much happened during the Obama administration, particularly

during the 2014 conflict with Hamas (after which American Jews once again voted overwhelmingly for Obama's second term, Israelis note) for Israelis to feel assured the way that they used to. Nor do Israelis feel terribly dependent on the United States. To be sure, \$3B a year in military assistance is a huge benefit, but it is not for naught that Netanyahu is cultivating relationships with China, India, South America and others. Before the US became Israel's prime ally, that role was filled by France and before France, it was Stalin. Stalin is gone, France's alliance is long over, and America's, too, may soon be as well, says Netanyahu. So, he's looking eastward to emerging powers, preparing for what may be the end of the American alliance.

Bibi may be right that American Jews are instinctively hostile to Israel's policies; some of that criticism is justified, and much is not. He may be right that Israel can do without the American political support to which American Jews are key; or he may be right that given that there are more evangelicals in the belt between California and Texas than there are Jews in the entire world, he can have that American support via the evangelicals, even if the Jews no longer back him or his state.

Netanyahu's attitude, though, is a grievously mistaken one. For even if Israel can do without American's military, economic or diplomatic support, what no other country can provide is the world's second largest Jewish population (and the Diaspora's largest). Israel needs American Jews not for their political support, but because a relationship with them is key to Israel's self-perception of Israel as the State of the Jewish people.

Israel has never fit a neat model of citizens and non-citizens. The Law of Return means that every Jew is, if not a citizen, then a citizen-in-potential. American Jews know that they are not citizens of Israel, yet they sing Hatikvah, Israel's national anthem, with passion and deep meaning. What other country can point to millions of people who are not its citizens who nonetheless sing its anthem with love? None, I would venture.

For Israel to be a state solely of its citizens, most of whom happen to be Jews, would be a traumatic and devastating diminution in Israel's sense of self. What makes Israel unique is its devotion and obligation to not just its citizens, but also (in a different way, of course) to the entire Jewish people. The minute that Israel has gone on record that almost half the world's Jews are of no concern to it, Israelis will find themselves living in a Hebrew-speaking, largely Jewish European country, but nothing more than that. It would be the end of Israel's mission as we know it.

Theodor Herzl dreamt of a state that would redeem the Jewish people, and he succeeded in launching the movement that created it. He also believed that once a Jewish state existed, anti-Semitism in the Diaspora would disappear. He was utterly wrong about

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**For our tenuous but critical relationship to survive, both sides will need to take a step back from the abyss. It is true that we have weathered conflicts between these two communities before, but this instance might be different, simply because of the steady march of history. If that is the case, the Jewish state could become just a state with many Jews, and American Jews could lose their tie to what is without question the most inspiring Jewish development of the last two thousand years.**

**Such a scenario would leave both sides deeply wounded, and the future of the Jewish people impoverished, perhaps beyond recognition. Before we can work on the fix, though, we must first acknowledge that we face a possibly unprecedented crisis, and that unlike with previous instances of this enmity, there is no guarantee that this time, the dust will settle as we wish it to.**

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that, but even he could not have seen the way that Israel's successes and its moments of fragility would alter Jewish life everywhere. It was Israel's success in 1967 that led Soviet Jews to begin rattling the bars of the cage in which the USSR had long held them. It was rallying around Israel when it was threatened that once gave American Jews a sense of participation in Jewish history in a way no other cause did or could. For American Jews who spend extended time in Israel, the experience remains profoundly transformative, no matter what their political views.

Are we going to give all this up? Will we (on either side of the ocean) be the first generation of Jews to declare that we simply do not care about the fate of almost half of the world's Jews? Are we so ignorant of Jewish history that we believe we can have any idea which version(s) of Jewish life and in which location(s) will be the one(s) that survive? We dare not succumb to that hubris. Who would have imagined after the

destruction of the Temple in 70 CE that a small group of Pharisees, but one among many sects, would create the rabbinic Judaism from which we are all descended? When Jews in Palestine heard that Hitler planned to wipe out Polish Jewry, they first laughed. The mere idea was absurd, they said. There were three million Polish Jews, and you can't simply wipe out three million people. How horribly wrong they were. None of us can know what history has in store for the Jewish people; we will always need each other, no matter how deep our differences.

Healing this rift will take decades of devoted labor. Israelis rightly take great pride in what they have built, but we need to abandon our triumphalism and airs of superiority, and to learn to listen to Diaspora Jews, fully cognizant of its weaknesses but also deeply appreciative of its great accomplishments. And American Jews must stop believing that Israel can be a small America, embodying American values, when Israel was never intended to be a Jeffersonian liberal democracy.

It would particularly serve American Jewish progressives well to ask themselves why even Israeli liberals and progressives do not agree with them, do not take up their causes (like religious pluralism or an abiding embrace of the idea of a two-state solution), and very rarely seek them out as partners. That would require that American Jewish progressives abandon their own hubris and self-satisfaction, just as Israelis must do on their side of the ocean.

For our tenuous but critical relationship to survive, both sides will need to take a step back from the abyss. It is true that we have weathered conflicts between these two communities before, but this instance might be different, simply because of the steady march of history. If that is the case, the Jewish state could become just a state with many Jews, and American Jews could lose their tie to what is without question the most inspiring Jewish development of the last two thousand years.

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# The Relationship between Israel and Diaspora Jewry as a Matter of National Security

**Talia Gorodess**

Recent events which rattled Israel-Diaspora relations, such as the blacklisting of Rabbis, interrogations of Diaspora Jews at Ben-Gurion Airport and the detention of a Conservative Rabbi by Israeli police are mistakenly considered by many to be merely issues related to Jewish pluralism in Israel or tensions in Israel-Diaspora relations. It is time to recognize these incidents as issues at the nucleus of Israel's national security.

Israel's security is meld with the prosperity of Jewish diaspora communities and thus, with the quality of its relationship with these communities. This relationship has mutual influences in terms of both physical security as well as national security:

1. Guaranteeing the physical survival and well-being of Israel and diaspora communities – the special relationship between Israel and diaspora communities influence the level of protection and ability to address physical and/or political threats;
2. Realizing Israel's historic Zionist vision.

Despite the fact that Israel's national security and that of the Jewish people are intimately linked, historically, the vast majority of attempts to produce a formal national security doctrine in Israel did not include an explicit mention of Diaspora Jewry. In other words, Israel's national security doctrine suffers from a blind-spot vis-à-vis the vital place of its relationship with world Jewry, where many recognize the importance of this issue but no single office or individual has formal responsibility over it.

Meanwhile, a conceptual gap keeps growing between Israel's original mission, which is to serve as the nation-state of the entire Jewish people, and the changing reality, in which this mission is being increasingly depleted of meaning. Left unaddressed, we predict that similar developments to the ones we have witnessed recently will continue to occur, spanning new arenas – be it the Administration of Border Crossings, Population and Immigration, around Jewish ceremonies, or the Ministry of Public Security.

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**The special relationship between Israel and world Jewry has tremendous instrumental value but more importantly – intrinsic value. Together, this relationship provides Israel with a unique form of soft power, which is essentially unmatched in the international arena. More importantly, it upholds the prosperity and security of both the Jewish people and their nation–state. It is time for the Israeli security community to form a new agenda that will reflect the prominence of this relationship.**

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In previous decades, there was a high correlation between the Zionist project known as the establishment of the State of Israel, and the empathy and support expressed by many Jewish communities around the world – so there was no pressing need to revisit the place of Israel-Diaspora relations in general, and in the context of Israel’s national security doctrine in particular.

Today, however, when both Israel and world Jewry are relatively safe and prosperous, and Israel is no longer the “poor nephew” of Diaspora Jewry, time is ripe to grapple with questions surrounding Israel’s purpose as the nation-state of the entire Jewish people. This task will require, among other things, a fresh look at its national security doctrine, both oral and written.

The prevalent mindset of the Israeli security community, to the extent that it devotes time to think about this topic, is that (1) Israel’s job is to provide protection to Jewish communities around the world that are in distress or danger; and that (2) the importance of the relationship with the Jewish people stems from the Jewish community’s ability to influence the world’s biggest power, the United States, in Israel’s favor.

The trouble with this is that reality challenges this mindset. First, Jewish diaspora communities are probably safer than ever before, and in many places are also quite prosperous. The era of distressed Jewish communities that need rescuing is essentially over. Second, current dynamics in arenas mentioned above lend themselves to an emerging reality where Israel’s soft power is eroding, its ‘strategic depth’ in the form of a global

network of committed Jewish communities is being compromised, and its fundamental legitimacy as the state of the Jewish people is eroding. In other words, increasing tensions between Israel and world Jewry wear away Israel's unique, international assets – and with them, the security and prosperity of the entire Jewish people.

The lack of a relevant mindset among Israeli leadership regarding these trends and their implications will continue to lead, in the short term, to additional 'surprises' in the form of collisions in various crossroads between Israel and the Jewish people. These collisions will continue to erode one of the unique assets Israel has: a meaningful relationship with Jewish communities around the world. In the medium-term, present isolated incidents of Diaspora Jews cutting ties with Israel may reach a point of no return, where major institutions, leaders and philanthropists decide to cut their ties with Israel. In the long run, Israel's impressive national security achievements may experience difficult setbacks such as:

1. **The gradual erosion of Israel's fundamental legitimacy may bring about a gradual collapse of the Balfour Declaration** – when Jewish communities turn against Israel itself (as opposed to criticizing its policies), Israel may be perceived as a state which does not legitimately represent the Jewish people's right to self-determination. This may cripple Israel's international standing as a sovereign state in the long run. In this sense, the Balfour Declaration may 'self-collapse' if the legal basis for the state's actions, regardless of the government, will not be perceived as legitimate.
2. **A State of Israel that serves as a source of weakness to major Jewish communities compromises the prosperity of the entire Jewish people** – the Jewish people established the State of Israel in order to serve their security and prosperity; they did not develop and survive throughout history in order to serve the State of Israel, despite its significance to the people's collective identity. Israel's lack of willingness to acknowledge the influence of what it perceives as domestic actions and policies over established and organized Jewish diaspora communities, brings to mind a famous quote by Theodore Herzl: "Entire branches of Judaism may disappear, break away; the tree lives." Israel must acknowledge the fact that it is not the tree, so to speak, but a branch – even if a very meaningful and central one. Historically, the Jewish people have shown they are not afraid of shedding branches they perceived as endangering the tree. Unfortunately, we presently see incidents exemplifying a similar dynamic.

Naturally, the special relationship between Israel and world Jewry has tremendous instrumental value but more importantly — intrinsic value. Together, this relationship provides Israel with a unique form of soft power, which is essentially unmatched in the

international arena. More importantly, it upholds the prosperity and security of both the Jewish people and their nation-state. It is time for the Israeli security community to form a new agenda that will reflect the prominence of this relationship.

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## 70 Faces

by Doron Krakow

Pirke Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) refers to “70 faces of Torah.” It seems that at one time there was a good deal of debate among scholars and rabbis about the precise interpretation of the Tanakh. Hard to imagine. Jewish leaders of disparate opinions about matters of scripture, tradition and law? Jewish communities, or schools of thought, devoted to particularistic interpretations espoused by charismatic, enlightened and powerful figures? An absence of consensus? So unlike us.

In time, it became clear that a *single* interpretation was not only unlikely to prevail, such an interpretation would run counter to the very scope of the material. The Five Books of Moses are so rich and expansive, so broad and diverse, so extraordinary, it became inconceivable that any single analysis, insight or understanding could possibly do it justice. So, the wisest of our people concluded that there are 70 ways to interpret the Torah; each equally worthy, relevant and significant; no single “face” more meritorious than any other. The wisest among us began to view this unique prism through any number of its faces, allowing the Jewish people to evolve an ever increasingly nuanced understanding - as we pursue a perpetual path of discovery and wisdom.

Imagine how limited we would become if we confined ourselves to only a small subset of the faces of Torah. How much would we miss? How little would we see and understand? How much more limited would we become as a people? As a nation?

Not long ago we entered the 70th anniversary year of the miraculous modern State of Israel. The first generations to come into the world since the Zionist Movement brought about its independence in 1948 are privileged to have been born into the greatest moment in nearly 2000 years of Jewish history. What would our forebears have given to have tasted of such a world? A world in which this stiff-necked people is entirely self-reliant; not dependent on the benevolence of others for our very survival. A world in which a liberal, democratic State of Israel has ingathered the exiles and, in an increasing number of ways, become a light unto the nations. A celebration of unprecedented proportions would not be unexpected or unwarranted. And yet...

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**We have failed to adequately instill in ourselves a commitment to assuring that the members of our community see Israel in all its breadth and complexity; not just through narrow and altogether too parochial lenses. We're living in a golden age for the Jewish people. An age defined by the rebirth of a sovereign Jewish homeland. Once we make it possible for more and more of our people to see Israel in ways that bring us together, our very engagement with Israel will become an engine for building and strengthening Jewish community; rather than an issue that divides us.**

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With so much to commend it, how is it possible that for far too many Jews across the diaspora, and in particular in North America (the largest Jewish community outside of the Promised Land), we are somewhat tepid in regard to our "comfort" with the State of Israel? Unsure of the level of our commitment; ambivalent about Israel's place in the world and about how "connected" we are comfortable being.

One reason is that the conversation about Israel has been disproportionately confined to only two issues: the peace process (geopolitics) and the Kotel (religious politics). To be sure, these are two central issues. They are issues that arouse a great deal of passion on the part of virtually every interested member of our community. That there is no consensus on either issue is what makes them so compelling. That we are impassioned by them is an indication of the breadth of our interest and the depth of our commitment.

And yet, the institutions of Jewish life here in the US and Canada are not particularly comfortable with aggressive confrontation, emotional dissent or the prospect of alienating key figures in our community, much less major funders or supporters. So, we have drifted away from working to assure that the foundation upon which such debates take place is a broad, deep and passionate commitment to Israel as our starting point. And now we find ourselves confronting the apparent divisions arising from these

debates and concluding that perhaps it is better to avoid the issue of Israel altogether. After all, we are devoted to community *building*. “If we can’t bridge these differences of opinion, let’s just focus on those things around which we enjoy greater consensus.” Such an approach is incredibly short-sighted and potentially damaging to ourselves and to our future as a community and as a people.

By choosing to avoid the topic of Israel as a means of avoiding confrontation, we perpetuate these divisions through an absence of engaged discussion and debate. In doing so, we give rise to an interpretation, on the part of those who don’t know Israel as well and for whom engagement with Israel is dependent on the very institutions, organizations and leaders that are choosing to avoid the topic, that Israel is, in fact, a source of discord and division.

While our divisions around these two aspects of modern Israel are significant and important, the issues themselves are just two faces of a far more comprehensive reality; the reality of the modern State of Israel. Israel, the center for technology and innovation. Israel, the world leader in medical science and biotechnology. Israel, the water-superpower. Israel, the start-up nation. Israel, the fulfillment of Herzl’s dream; of Ben-Gurion’s vision. Israel, the land of the Bible. Israel, the inclusive. The diverse. The beacon of freedom in the midst of a sea of totalitarianism. Israel, the Eurovision champion, the home of 12 Nobel laureates and 8 Olympic medalists. Israel, home of the heroes of Entebbe; of Operations Moses, Solomon and Magic Carpet. Israel, the first responder in the face of natural and man-made disasters across the globe. I could go on and on and on.

When did we stop making it possible for the members of our community to see these *other* faces of Israel. Are they less relevant? Less worthy? Less significant? If there are 70 faces of Torah, is it such a stretch to see 70 faces of Israel? We have failed to adequately instill in ourselves a commitment to assuring that the members of our community see Israel in all its breadth and complexity; not just through narrow and altogether too parochial lenses. We’re living in a golden age for the Jewish people. An age defined by the rebirth of a sovereign Jewish homeland. Once we make it possible for more and more of our people to see Israel in ways that bring us together, our very engagement with Israel will become an engine for *building* and *strengthening* Jewish community; rather than an issue that divides us.

Yes, the debates will continue. That too is a great Jewish tradition. But they should take place against the backdrop of a common commitment to Israel and to taking part in its continuing evolution; the unfinished work of the Zionist movement. After all, it may well be that what happens in Israel will have more to do with the kind of Jewish lives our

grandchildren will live than anything we do here in our own communities. The more we engage, the more we learn, the more we visit, the more we debate, the more likely we are to be meaningful stakeholders in Israel's future and in the future of the Jewish world.

Seventy faces. We can continue to insist on seeing Israel only by looking at two of them, but we do so at our own peril. Or, we can rise to the occasion and showcase them all. Im tirzu ein zo agada – if you will it, it is no dream. (Theodor Herzl).

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## As Israel Turn 70, A Reminder that Peoplehood is not Israel-hood!

**Noam Pianko**

Earlier this spring, a group of young Jewish activists associated with the organization If Not Now petitioned the National Ramah Commission (the coordinating body overseeing over a dozen summer camps, which many of them had attended as campers), to integrate “honest” Israel education, including discussions of the Israeli occupation from both Israeli and Palestinian perspectives, into the camps’ Israel curriculum. The National Ramah Commission responded that “a variety of positions supporting Israel can be voiced and discussed... we do not however permit the sharing of anti-Israel educational messages at camp.” With this response, Ramah joined many other national and local Jewish organizations which have developed clear guidelines over the last few years about what Jews within their organizations can, and cannot, say about Israel.

What does the trend toward Israel guidelines and communal red-lines have to do with Jewish peoplehood? Perhaps more than any other criteria, strongly enforced boundaries influence and shape communal conceptions of collective identity. As many other boundary markers of Jewish peoplehood have become blurry, one has emerged as the most visible, and perhaps only, broadly-voiced and institutionally-enforced marker of Jewish peoplehood. This is the commitment to Israel advocacy, which has come to largely mean “defending” Israel from biased criticism (whether it comes from non-Jews or from Jews). In other words, one primary contribution of the State of Israel to the sense of Jewish peoplehood is to provide a litmus test to differentiate American Jewish members in “good standing” from marginal and threatening, voices. This paradigm of peoplehood implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) expects American Jews to circle the wagons to protect Israel, rather than encourage open debate about how divergent visions of Jewish values, national priorities, and moral aspirations might shape Israel’s relationship to peoplehood.

This marks a significant shift from historical visions of Israel’s contribution to Jewish peoplehood. Since the emergence of the term “peoplehood” in the early decades of the twentieth century, cultural Zionism has shaped American Jewish notions of the concept.

Cultural Zionists, including early progenitors of the notion of Jewish peoplehood such as Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, believed that the Jewish homeland would serve as the foundation of a global national renaissance of the Jewish people. However, peoplehood in its initial formulation also challenged key aspects of Zionism—especially the emphasis on the state itself, rather than the development of an exportable and globally-applicable Jewish national culture, as the ultimate expression of Jewish nationalism.

American Jewish leaders thus turned to peoplehood to argue that the Jewish homeland could best accomplish the goals of Zionism by developing and exemplifying an ethical nationalism that recognized minority rights and separated the idea of cultivating Jewish national life from the project of building a sovereign state. Following from this peoplehood paradigm, the role that Israel could play in American Jewish life and, more broadly, for the Jewish people, would depend on finding shared ground on political, cultural, and religious/ethical questions with American Jews.

Indeed, in the early years of the State, even the leader of the Zionist Organization of America, Joseph Sternstein, articulated the need for Israel's policies to reflect American Jewish concerns. In 1956, Sternstein wrote "*We* [meaning: American Zionists] will decide, and, if necessary, *we* shall have to tell *them* [meaning: the Israelis] where they are wrong and where they are right." Sternstein recognized, and could publicly insist, that the State of Israel could serve as an engine of Jewish peoplehood only if American Jews demanded that the Jewish state act according to the democratic values held by the majority of American Jews. American Jewish opinions – including voices critical of Israel's policies – were once considered crucial for the success of Zionism and the future of Jewish peoplehood.

A new paradigm defining Israel's place in American Jewish peoplehood emerged in the 1970s. Israel's place in American Jewish life shifted from co-equal partner for invigorating Jewish life around the globe to a unifying object of shared concern for the Jewish people. A number of historical factors—including the Yom Kippur War, the perception that the American radical-left had turned against Israel, and the U.N.'s criticism of "Zionism as racism"—buttressed the perception that American Jews needed to support the State of Israel against efforts to delegitimize the Jewish state by singling it out from among other countries for its actions. Therefore, protecting Israel – rather than demanding that Israel align itself with American Jewish values – emerged as an increasingly important criterion for determining one's commitment to Jewish peoplehood. Because of this paradigm shift, Jewish community leaders today would likely debate whether or not statements like the ones made by the leader of the Zionist Organization of America in 1956 would place him outside "the tent" of the "pro-Israel" Jewish community in 2018, together with the If Not Now activists.

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**It would be hard to imagine any conception of Jewish peoplehood that did not recognize the important roles that Israel could play in global Jewry. However, Jewish peoplehood reduced to a “pro-Israel-ism” or “Israel-hood” will fragment the world-wide Jewish community. Sustainable models of Jewish peoplehood should encourage divergent and dissenting political views that reflect the viewpoints of the Jewish people and the multiplicity of historical modes of Jewish collective identification. A peoplehood oriented toward defending Israel by drawing political boundaries within the Jewish community deprives the Jewish people of precisely the diverse access points necessary to nourish global collective ties grounded in interpretations of Judaism, Jewish history, and Jewish values.**

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A viable and meaningful conception of Jewish peoplehood today requires us to reassess the role Israel plays in defining the boundaries of Jewish peoplehood. The de facto emphasis on Israel advocacy and defense as the key criteria for Jewish peoplehood faces an unprecedented set of challenges. In the current political climate, Israel politics have emerged as an increasingly divisive wedge issue in American politics. If definitions of Jewish peoplehood continue in their current direction, Jewish peoplehood will become a politicized issue and further fragment American Jews along party lines. Whereas once, the American Jewish community was segmented based on religious and denominational affiliation, this new fragmentation based on Israel politics represents a major departure. Unlike the denominational differences, the political divides run the risk of creating far deeper ruptures, with less possibility for meaningful dialogue about Jewish peoplehood across the “boundary” lines of American politics.

The current situation in Israel/Palestine exacerbates the threat of using political support of Israel as the basis for inclusion in the category of Jewish peoplehood. The historical American Jewish consensus on a “pro-Israel” position largely rests on the possibility of a two-state solution, which envisions an Israel which is both “Jewish and Democratic.” However, with the failure of the Oslo peace process, a two-state solution seems increasingly unlikely today. Instead, increased Israeli settlement in occupied territories, and now the possibility of Israel annexing of parts of the West Bank without granting citizenship for West Bank Palestinians, will increasingly challenge the claim that Israel is both a “Jewish and Democratic.” American Jews will find themselves grappling with how to reconcile their commitment to democracy in the U.S. with an undemocratic reality in Israel/Palestine.

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## Re-Focusing Jewish Peoplehood

**Shlomi Ravid**

The Jewish people experienced one of its greatest revolutions at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Out of a globally spread religious ethnicity with communal frameworks linked through a rather thin network, emerged what scholar of nationalism Rogers Brubaker defines, “... a **bounded collectivity with a sense of solidarity, corporate identity and capacity for concerted action**” (Brubaker, 2015). This Jewish revolution while being part of the broader process of nationalism that framed modern world history, had its unique challenges. Not only the need to develop a “bounded collectivity” but also to enable the co-existence and synergy of the global people and that of the nation state, which by design are different.

The initial decades tell a truly ideal story. While not happening over night the idea of the creation of a State for the Jews by the Jews, and one recognized by the family of nations, won the heart of world Jewry. It also cemented the notion of “corporate identity and capacity for concerted action”. Or in the words of the poet Amir Gilboa who captured the spirit of the time: “All of a sudden a man gets up in the morning and he feels he is a people and he begins to walk”. The State became the embodiment of the Jewish People’s “general will”. In its first decades world Jewry was mobilized to support and implement the Zionist project as an expression of both mutual responsibility and collective hope and pride. The State, in return, built the home land, bloomed the desert, gathered the Jews from throughout the globe, revived the Hebrew language, created fresh and cutting-edge Hebrew culture as well as significant achievements in science, high tech and the arts.

Despite potential differences in vision and focus, for most of the second half of the Twentieth Century, the State and the People were acting in symbiosis. The need to rebuild the Jewish people after the Holocaust and ensure its existence and growth overshadowed whatever differences in vision and agenda existed, and led to a harmonious synergy. The State provided the missing component for the Jewish people as a national entity and in the process also contributed to Jewish self-esteem, sense of security, identity and pride. For the Israeli pioneering generations their endeavor was

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**Can we reframe the relationship so it continues to be based on a shared fate and destiny, history, mutual responsibility and familial ties but does not necessarily carry into the policy/political sphere? That's the Israelis' prerogative. This would mean that world Jews are not required to embrace every decision made by Israel because they were made by Israel. They can agree or disagree and even try to influence, based on their values. But they are not bound by nor responsible for Israel's political decisions by virtue of being members of the Jewish people. Responsible for Israel and its wellbeing? By all means. Involved in shaping the people's and State's ethos? With full force. But let's pull our Peoplehood conversation out of the political mud before it sinks.**

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seen as writing the next chapter in Jewish history and fulfilling the dreams of their forefathers.

But this ideal picture could not last forever. Jewish collective identity is comprised of a set of broad general values and beliefs that are meant to jointly constitute an ethos or collective destiny. Israeli collective identity needs to constitute a system for creating policy and legislation for a State. Jewish peoplehood is about developing a meaningful, inspiring and engaging collective destiny for the Jews. Israel needs to create concrete policy to operate both internally and internationally. By design the two are bound to conflict at one point or another.

In recent years growing differences have emerged in particular between North American Jews and Israel. For North American Jews seeking a meaningful Jewish destiny, values such as pursuing social justice, pluralism and Tikkun Olam have been prioritized over

Jewish particularistic goals. Israelis on the other hand, prioritize the wellbeing of Jews and are ready to compromise the above values for pragmatic or alternative value considerations. It is very telling that even the recent National Law that was meant to write in stone the fact that Israel is the Nation State of the Jewish people included some serious issues of contention between the State and significant groups in the Jewish people.

The writing on the wall is that the current framing that treats the two entities, i.e. Israel and World Jewry, as one national entity, is not conducive to Jewish unity and actually endangers the Jewish future. The current “bed of Sodom” alienates world Jewry from Israel and Israelis from world Jewry. Can an alternative framing be considered? Can we maintain our sense of Peoplehood while replacing a monolithic global collective ideology with a more open and pluralistic model?

One way of approaching this topic is to explore if we can take the policy-political layer out of the Peoplehood conversation. Peoplehood focuses on our collective destiny and ethos – our “general will” as Jean-Jacques Rousseau called it. It explores the essence, meaning and purpose of Judaism as a collective enterprise. Policy on the other hand, is part of the “will of all” and decided by majority vote of the citizenship body, etc. The mixing of the two is problematic. Maybe it is time, for the sake of all concerned, to acknowledge that the sovereign in Israel, for policy related questions, is the Israeli people? Yes, they may feel a special bond, sense of solidarity and responsibility for the Jewish people at large, but when they formulate policy they exercise their citizenship rights as Israelis.

Can we reframe the relationship so it continues to be based on a shared fate and destiny, history, mutual responsibility and familial ties but does not necessarily carry into the policy/political sphere? That’s the Israelis’ prerogative. This would mean that world Jews are not required to embrace every decision made by Israel because they were made by Israel. They can agree or disagree and even try to influence, based on their values. But they are not bound by nor responsible for Israel’s political decisions by virtue of being members of the Jewish people. Responsible for Israel and its wellbeing? By all means. Involved in shaping the people’s and State’s ethos? With full force. But let’s pull our Peoplehood conversation out of the political mud before it sinks.

This framing is proposed as a means of freeing the Peoplehood conversation. It has been occupied by the current political bonds. In recent decades the Jewish people has been busy trying to artificially extend the 20th century Peoplehood paradigm, that converged Peoplehood and Statehood. Not only does it not really work anymore but it has become damaging. Take the approach to Jewish pluralism as an example. Israel’s decision of

handing the monopoly on religion to the Orthodoxy, is in obvious contrast to the way most North American Jews view the issue. We could continue to treat each new ruling through the Peoplehood prism and continue damaging our collective unity. We could alternatively see it as Israeli political decisions that should be treated as such (BTW, this is how Israelis view it). In practical terms, efforts to change it can and should continue just as before, but should be kept apart of the Peoplehood conversation.

The Jewish creative forces should be mobilized to develop new and fresh visions of Judaism as a collective enterprise. To expand the Jewish horizon so as to make it meaningful and relevant in the 21st Century. To carve the Jewish future. World Jewry needs it as well as Israel. We can continue agreeing or criticizing Israel's policy, but let's move that to another room. One based on love and responsibility but one designed to discuss Israel's national policies. Let's keep the Peoplehood conversation focused on the future of the Jewish people.

**Dr. Shlomi Ravid is the founding director of the Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education and founding editor of the Peoplehood Papers. He is a research fellow at the Center for Jewish Education at Haifa University**



# The “Z” Word in the “Generation Z” Context

**Zohar Raviv**

In an ever-warming climate of polemics and partisanship (within and outside US campus life), the hyper-politicized arena has become the platform through which almost any debate seeks validity and any value system is measured. As seen, e.g., in the documentary *America Inside Out with Katie Couric: The Age of Outrage*, the principle informing this climate is the valid demand to “express outrage” at whatever issue of contention, against the equally valid demand to exercise the intellectual integrity, tolerance and patience needed to pursue any such issue in fuller context and from myriad viewpoints. Indeed, any attempt to engage complex, sensitive and emotionally charged issues cannot reach fruition without attending to both sides and orchestrating a platform that allows all parties involved not only the freedom to speak, but — and more importantly — the honor of being heard.

Anyone who has a stake in Judaism, Jewish education, Jewish public discourse and/or associations with the State of Israel recognizes that the term “Zionism” falls many a time within the above framework as a point of contention, with moral and political overtones. How is this term often presented within our public spheres and discourse? The Oxford dictionary, for example, offers a definition that arguably encapsulates the popular conception of the term: Zionism is “A movement for (originally) the re-establishment and (now) the development and protection of a Jewish nation in what is now Israel. It was established as a political organization in 1897 under Theodor Herzl [...]”. As many indeed perceive the birth of Zionism as a *late 19th century political movement*, for the Millennial and Post-Millennial generations in the western world (the latter also known as “Generation Z”), the “Z Word” (Zionism) is often entangled with ambiguity and ambivalence, and at times even met with discomfort or outright antagonism.

The debate over Zionism is an important debate to have with both our young Jewish generations and anyone who may have an interest, stake and/or opinion about it. However, in a world whose indifference to *context* far surpasses its accessibility to *content*, such a discussion requires a much broader baseline than the myopic, misleading and even manipulative lens that has been scanning its validity, existence or evolution

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**As once articulated by my longtime colleague and educator Joe Perlov, “Israel is not an ideal society, but rather a society of ideas and ideals”. We should seek and encourage any form of debate about Zionism in our midst – as should be regarding any topic of worth. Yet in order to move beyond the somewhat superficial desire for “free speech” and toward “the honor of being heard”, we should all strive to exercise the humility needed to afford broader context and different – even opposing – viewpoints a seat of honor around the table. Most importantly, however, such important and legitimate debates need not lead toward division and alienation, but rather perceived as opportunities to sharpen our own critical faculties and commit ourselves to a genuine path of inquiry. As is the case with most complex issues, the validity of one argument is not always contingent upon utterly debunking another’s view. Unpacking “Zionism” deserves the integrity, attention and depth that treat the fuller scope of its conceptual, ideological and historical evolution – both as an ancient ideal and as a modern political movement.**

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in our public, educational and oftentimes intellectual spheres. Such a broader baseline requires one to clearly distinguish between a) Zionism as an *ancient idea and ideal*, and b) Zionism as a *modern political movement*.

Theodor (Binyamin Ze'ev) Herzl, who is rightfully mentioned in the Oxford definition as the founder of the Zionist *movement* in 1897, rendered Zionism “An infinite *ideal*”. By doing so, Herzl charted the ancient subsoil upon which he wished to plant the seeds of his modern, 19th century political movement. As shown in Israel’s *Declaration of Independence* (1948), Zionism was, and remains, an ancient idea and ideal, without which the entire backbone of the 19th century political movement and the ensuing state of Israel can be neither fathomed nor imagined: “The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people [...]; impelled by this historic and traditional attachment, Jews strove in every successive generation to re-establish themselves in their ancient homeland [...].”

The Zionist idea and ideal predate the Zionist movement by thousands of years, equally so regarding any modern political rhetoric and/or nation-state configuration in Europe or the Middle East. As an idea and an ideal “Zionism” has been fueled by the Jewish people’s perpetual yearning to re-establish their ancestral homeland, irrespective of the various lands which have become their home since their multiple banishments from that land. The Zionist idea and ideal therefore have no conceptual, ideological, historical or political correspondence (let alone dependency) with the rationale and rhetoric that brought about the emergence of nation-states in late Medieval Europe, nor with the European rhetoric that gave rise to their so-called “colonial aspirations and expansions”. The 19th century Zionist movement was this ancient ideal’s modern and necessary political arm, working within that period’s European *zeit geist* and towards the renewal of Jewish sovereignty in its ancient homeland: The State of Israel.

As once articulated by my longtime colleague and educator Joe Perlov, “Israel is not an ideal society, but rather a society of ideas and ideals”. We should seek and encourage any form of debate about Zionism in our midst — as should be regarding any topic of worth. Yet in order to move beyond the somewhat superficial desire for “free speech” and toward “the honor of being heard”, we should all strive to exercise the humility needed to afford broader context and different – even opposing -- viewpoints a seat of honor around the table. Most importantly, however, such important and legitimate debates need not lead toward division and alienation, but rather perceived as opportunities to sharpen our own critical faculties and commit ourselves to a genuine path of inquiry. As is the case with most complex issues, the validity of one argument is not always contingent upon utterly debunking another’s view. Unpacking “Zionism” deserves the integrity, attention and depth that treat the fuller scope of its conceptual, ideological and historical evolution — both as an ancient ideal and as a modern political movement.

**Dr. Zohar Raviv is the International Vice President of Education of Taglit-Birthright Israel**



## Towards an Inclusive Framing of 21st Century Zionism

**Zachary Schaffer**

*In two divided streams the exiles part  
One rolling homeward to its ancient source,  
One rushing sunward, with fresh will, new heart.  
By each the truth is spread, the law unfurled,  
Each separate soul contains the nation's force,  
And both embrace the world*

-Emma Lazarus, "The New Year" 5643

It is time that we move beyond the dispute over whether Israel is a more authentic expression of Jewish existence than that experienced in the Diaspora. This classic debate deflects our attention and energy from the task at hand in the 21st century—to re-assert a strong global Jewish Peoplehood which draws on the advantages afforded by Jewish sovereignty in Israel coupled with the creative vitality of the pluralistic American Jewish identity.

In 1882, waves of Eastern European Jewry had begun to swell into parting streams of refuge. Some embarked for the United States and others for Palestine. In Lazarus' rendering, both America and Palestine constituted authentic homelands and equally legitimate responses to exile, insularity, and modernity. In accepting the validity of both souls, Lazarus was one of the first thinkers to publicly embody the tension of the competing claims that America and Israel have on Diaspora Jewish existence. At the core of these competing claims are questions that confront every American Jew: are America and Israel unique in the Jewish story, and, if so, what does that mean for me? Lazarus' struggle is emblematic of the struggle we as a people have faced over the past century-and-a-half. She asked then, as we ask now, "Where is the Hebrew's fatherland?" Her answer to this question offers us a paradigm of complementary, rather than competing, Zions.

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**We must affirm an inclusive framework for a 21st century Zionism that American Jewry – especially younger generations – can get behind. Perhaps we can discuss the story of Zionism in two chapters: (1) Zionism the Dream and (2) Zionism the Reality. Zionism the Dream is an articulation of the original aspirations for the Jewish State, grounded in Jewish civilization and Zionist ideology. It is here where we can create connection and understanding across divides. Then, in the discussion of Zionism the Reality, we can analyze Israel against our shared understanding of the ideological background for its existence. In this way, we can begin to address some of the schisms within the pluralistic American Jewish community and engage in a more responsible exchange between the Diaspora and Israel.**

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While she romanticized the rebirth and renewal of the Jewish people's "ancient source," she saw America as an authentic and viable vessel of Jewish life as well. She yearned for a renaissance of the particularistic Jewish homeland in Israel while also celebrating the birth of a universal Jewish homeland alongside it in America. Lazarus elegantly and profoundly wrestled with the conflicting claims on American Jew: How can I make compatible my particular Jewish identity as manifested in Israel and my universal inclinations as realized in America?

The answer for Lazarus was simple: there is nothing to reconcile. The streams extend to both Texas and Tel Aviv and, though they may divide geographically, they remain linked metaphysically. For much of the later part of the 20th century, this conception of homeland endured. Yet today, the cracks are widening. The next generation of American

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Jewry is feeling more at home in America and less connected to Israel than ever before. Many of our families have developed thriving roots and a secular faith in America. Moreover, in the 21st century, many of the socio-historical factors that bound earlier generations to Israel have crumbled.

For many young Jews, the Holocaust and Israel's existential wars are seen as museum relics and not enduring realities. The threats of anti-Semitism and dislocation appear less potent than in previous generations. Young Jews tend to resent what they see as a paternalistic and aloof nation-state looking down at the Diaspora as inferior and impermanent. The romanticism Lazarus held for the dream of a Jewish State is waning among a new generation of Jews unsympathetic to the dream and disappointed with the reality. Confronted with competing Zions, American Jews think they must make a

choice, and, overwhelmingly, they are choosing the one they live in. History has shifted; we must shift along with it.

Here are some propositions that might animate a renewed attempt at open and honest conversations in our synagogues, on our campuses, and in our homes.

First, Israel and the Diaspora must re-affirm Lazarus' supposition that both communities matter and both countries offer authentic expressions of Jewish existence. We need to renew a paradigm of global Peoplehood which legitimizes the values and voices of the Diaspora not because they are seen as endangered or as donors, but because they are Jews.

Second, both sides must abandon their arrogance. The relationship cannot be a vertical one, where Americans see themselves as patrons or where Israelis see themselves as the nucleus. The Jewish community is not unipolar and no one community can claim superiority. We cannot allow the relationship to be one of teacher and student or donor and recipient. We cannot allow any one community to subordinate or instrumentalize the other.

Third, we must find more effective ways to bring the Diaspora and Israel into a global Jewish dialogue. One way to do this is to revive the Hebrew language in America. Imagine the impact if we took just 10% of American Jewish dollars fighting BDS and invested those same resources in Hebrew immersion programs. This would empower American Jews to live more authentically Jewish lives, to embody the legacy of Zionism, and to more immediately connect with Israelis and Israeli society. Another way to do this is to invest more in programs that bring young American Jews and Israelis together, whether in summer camps or service trips. The relationship must be a two-way street. In America, those who wish to practice Judaism must make a conscious choice that requires great effort. Because of this, there are creative models of Jewish engagement in America that simply do not exist in Israel. In Israel, Jewish practice is engrained in the majority culture. Understanding these differences and their implications can enrich our understanding of what it means to be Jewish in the 21st century.

Fourth, we must recognize that our models for Israel engagement today are profoundly misconceived. We fail to meaningfully engage most young Jews between their bar/bat Mitzvahs and college. We spend more time rebutting negative connotations of Israel rather than developing positive ones grounded in Jewish self-understanding. When we do discuss positive images of Israel, we typically promote one so flawless that it is ultimately untenable, rendering youth distrustful of Jewish institutions. Our engagement is grounded in a reductive model of advocacy which operates out of a prism of fear.

We must develop a multidimensional model of education-oriented engagement which operates out of a prism of complex love.

Finally, we must affirm an inclusive framework for a 21st century Zionism that American Jewry – especially younger generations – can get behind. Perhaps we can discuss the story of Zionism in two chapters: (1) Zionism the Dream and (2) Zionism the Reality. Zionism the Dream is an articulation of the original aspirations for the Jewish State, grounded in Jewish civilization and Zionist ideology. It is here where we can create connection and understanding across divides. Then, in the discussion of Zionism the Reality, we can analyze Israel against our shared understanding of the ideological background for its existence. In this way, we can begin to address some of the schisms within the pluralistic American Jewish community and engage in a more responsible exchange between the Diaspora and Israel.

Zionism has succeeded marvelously in creating a state. Now, the next challenge is for American and Israeli Jews to imbue Zionism with new meaning by developing a dynamic and mutually reinforcing relationship under the banner of our common destiny. Though the streams have parted, our source and our salvation remain shared. We are still one people. It's time we act like it.

**Zachary Schaffer is an Israel Action Network's Community Strategy Associate, at JFNA.**



# “Together, Tribes of Israel?”

**Andrés Spokoiny**

## **Part 1: How Zionism challenges the Jewish peoplehood that created it**

Here is the story of how Zionism began, according to Mora Chava, my 6th grade elementary day school teacher: Theodor Herzl was a Viennese Jewish journalist covering the Dreyfuss trials in Paris. Dreyfuss, a decorated Jewish officer in the French army, had been falsely accused of espionage and condemned to prison. Herzl was shocked at the antisemitism that the trials exhibited and triggered, even in the country most known for equality. Jews in France had been given equal rights before Jews in any other European country, but even there they couldn't find true freedom. Of course, Jews had always longed for the Land of Israel. So, Mora Chava explained, put both of these things into a cocktail shaker—two parts longing for the Land, two parts antisemitism—and voila! Herzl has an idea and the Jewish people has Zionism.

But with all due respect to Mora Chava, that doesn't really add up. Both ingredients had already been agitating in the cocktail shaker for two thousand years without ever before sparking an active political movement of return to Israel. Longing for the land had been a constant, at least in theory. And as to antisemitism, there's nothing unique about the time in which Zionism emerged. There had been many times in which hatred of Jews was more intense and bloody: the Crusades, which killed thousands; the expulsions from France, England, and Spain; the Chmielnitzky massacres of the 17th century, in which nearly 300,000 Jews were murdered. By comparison, the 19th century was a golden age for the Jews. Yes, there was Dreyfuss, and the pogroms of Kishinev and Gomel, but in most European countries Jews had been emancipated and had equality under the law for the first time in history. Jews had access to business and academic life and were achieving enormous success in both. The very existence of a Dreyfuss — a Jewish army officer— was an unprecedented phenomenon. What's more, and unlike in many previous cases of antisemitic accusations, Dreyfuss was eventually acquitted due to public outcry. The French people rallied around a maligned Jew.

So why did the relatively mild antisemitism of the 19th century result in the Zionist movement when the much more virulent hate of previous centuries didn't?

The answer is peoplehood.

In fact, Zionism wasn't a response to antisemitism, but to modernity. The traditional world was organized mostly along religious lines. If one would ask a Jew, a Christian, or a Muslim what differentiated Jews from the rest of the world, they'd answer in terms of religious belief and practice. Jews were different because they had a different religion. But the French Revolution and the Emancipation did away with religion as the main organizing principle of society and that opened a host of new opportunities for Jews. Yet the primacy of religion was replaced not by some universalist brotherhood but by the emergence of nations. In fact, modern liberal democracy is a conjoined twin with nationalism. One was not anymore, a member of a grand religious polity—Christendom, Dar al-Islam, Jewry—but a citizen of the nation, with rights equal to those of all other citizens.

The nation was the necessary framework for the exercise of the newly acquired individual rights. The average Frenchman, for example, was now defined by his belonging and loyalty to the French Nation, and the rights he enjoyed were French rights. The French People had a particular spirit and was the product of a historic continuum, real or imagined, that ran from the ancient Gauls to Napoleon to Clemenceau. The German idealists, mainly Herder and Hegel, created a conceptual landscape in which peoples had a unique spirit (*Volkgeist*) that included a shared origin and history, a set of values, a unique language, and cultural artifacts and traditions. In a religious era, it was clear for Jews and Gentiles that Jews were a religious group, but in a national era, who were they? There were not *really* part of the French People; they couldn't trace their ancestors to the Gauls or Clovis. Jews received equal rights in Germany, but were they really part of the *Deustcher Volk*?

Antisemites started to see Jews in a different light too. In the middle ages, the hatred for the Jews was justified and expressed in religious terms. A Jew could escape antisemitism by simply converting to Christianity. In modern times, however, Felix Mendelssohn, Gustav Mahler, and Heinrich Heine converted. Yet they were still viewed as Jews. Both Jews and antisemites started to see an "essentialism" in the Jewish condition, something that can't be erased by conversion or drowned in the melting pot of modern citizenship.

The era of nationalism created in the newly emancipated Jews a new set of identity dilemmas. The traditional world of the ghetto was rough, but it didn't present the Jews with identity challenges; it was clear who they were and who they were not. Slowly, Jews steeped in the ideas of the 19th century (especially the secular among them) started to

see themselves not as a religious community but as a nation. The Jews were not defined or held together just (or at all) by religious beliefs. After all, religion was now a private matter, if it was even relevant. Jews were now a *Volk*, a nation, held together by a culture, a common language, a shared origin, and a commonality of fate if not faith.

Hebrew was thus revived as a colloquial language, because if Jews are a nation, they need to go back to their “original” national language instead of “hybrid” concoctions of their exile. And if Jews were a people, their history can be told like the history of any other people. Nowadays, we take the study of Jewish history as a given, but Jewish history as a discipline is a 19th century phenomenon. In yeshivot nobody studies history as such. There’s ritualized collective memory linked to the religious calendar, and some history is gleaned in between the lines of the liturgy. Now, however, for Jews and Gentiles, history as such is a vital element for the self-awareness of the people. The national future is now anchored in a rediscovery of its historical past — and sometimes in a radical reinterpretation of it.

For Zionism then, Heinrich Graetz — the first “modern” Jewish historian — was as important as Herzl. Without Graetz, and others who crystalized the self-image of the Jews as a nation, the Zionist idea would have been as ludicrous as trying to build a national home for Christendom.

So, it’s eminently fitting to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Israel with a reflection on peoplehood. Without peoplehood — that is, without defining Judaism as a national identity — there couldn’t be Zionism or Israel.

Peoplehood and Zionism, then, built a codependent relationship. Peoplehood created Zionism, but the tribulations and glories of the State of Israel, especially after the trauma of the Shoah, reinforced the commonality of destiny between all Jews. It provided peoplehood with texture and passion and gave us a secular mythology that could replace the ancient religious one.

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But 70 years later, the State that was created by peoplehood presents new and unprecedented challenges to that foundational idea. First, although Jewish nationalism evolved on the model of 19th century European nationalism, it doesn't really fit that mold so neatly. Providing a national consciousness to the inhabitants of France was one thing; creating a state for a people dispersed around the world is quite another. The dynamics of the relationship between the nation-state and the people are, in our case, unique, for no national movement has done what ours did. The French national movement, for example, wasn't created by French Canadians seeking to return to France.

In the codependent relation between people and state, there were tensions, contradictions, and ambiguities. The trauma of the Shoah, the miracle of Israel's creation and survival, and the wars and achievements of the State somehow dulled those contradictions. They were there, lurking, but we had more urgent things to attend to. There was, from the onset, a less-than-perfect overlap between peoplehood and statehood, and the tensions between these ideas grew while we weren't looking. For decades, the story of the Jews of Israel has run on a path that is essentially different from that of Diaspora Jews. 1948 was a fork in the road and the two branches started to travel on bifurcating paths. True, before Israel, a Jew from Morocco was extremely different from a German Jew, but they both shared their condition as a minority deprived of collective political sovereignty.

Can we talk about a single Jewish People or is the Israeli experience of Jewish political sovereignty so different from the Diasporic ethos that we are already, in fact, two different peoples? Is there an Israeli people that is different from the Jewish people? Are Arab Israelis a part of the *Israeli* people? And are they then, by extension, members of the Jewish People? And didn't Zionism try to create a "new Jew" in opposition to the Jew of the Diaspora? Did they succeed?

The idea of the "Jewish People" has always included a degree of ambiguity. The concept of peoplehood borrowed from the notion of "klal Israel", the Jewish Collective, which emerged organically and, in the absence of political power, functioned perfectly well without clear boundaries. With a state, however, even minor ambiguities about peoplehood and citizenship become a problem. The state, any state, needs to determine clearly who is a citizen and, in our case, that necessitates determining who is a Jew. For the first time, we have the power of the state to define the parameters of peoplehood, and that's a recipe for tensions and confrontations.

Thus, we reach today's paradox: the magnificent success of the Zionist enterprise — based on peoplehood — may threaten the idea that Jews are one people at all.

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**What makes us today a people? Do we have a purpose as a people beyond our mere survival? What does our being a people mean for us Jews, and for the world? How do we navigate the unique complexities of peoplehood and statehood when the overlap between them is not complete? How does our conception of peoplehood impact issues of governance and political power in the State and around the Jewish World?**

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Of course, that is not a foregone conclusion. Israel has, in the past, reinforced the notion of peoplehood and can do so in the future. But for that to happen, those of us who believe in Jewish peoplehood and Zionism need to radically reinterpret the concepts of Jewish nation and Jewish state. What makes us today a people? Do we have a purpose as a people beyond our mere survival? What does our being a people mean for us Jews, and for the world? How do we navigate the unique complexities of peoplehood and statehood when the overlap between them is not complete? How does our conception of peoplehood impact issues of governance and political power in the State and around the Jewish World?

Discrete programs of exchange between Diaspora and Israeli Jews to “bridge the gap”; educational programs to teach Israelis about Diaspora Judaism; Birthright and “Mifgash”, etc., are all useful, but they can’t replace an in-depth — and difficult — process to answer these questions.

## **Part 2: Building a new relationship for Zionism and Jewish peoplehood**

To keep Zionism and Jewish peoplehood from coming into greater and greater conflict, the Jewish world needs to rethink our old ideas about how Israel and the Jewish world fit together.

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**Rethinking of our collective ethos is needed now. For that, Jewish leaders and funders need to invest the time, the energy, and the resources in studying the philosophy of nationalism, peoplehood, and Zionism. We need to create a context in which these types of debate are incentivized and curated. We need to encourage, morally and financially, our thinkers and scholars to reflect on the nature of Jewish nationalism. We need to do that both in Israel and the Diaspora and we need to make sure that this debate can be done with equal measures of freedom and respect.**

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That rethinking needs to be steeped both in our particular Jewish experience and in the specific challenges of the 21st century, which are also upending our traditional ideas of states and nations. The ideas of the 19th century forged the ideas of Jewish peoplehood and nationalism. Jews keenly identified the changes in their context and proposed nationalism as a response to them. In the 21st century, however, the idea of the nation-state is undergoing profound transformations; the notion of collective identity is pulled by multi-cultural impulses and by neo-tribalism; a society centered on the individual experience instead of the collective one poses unprecedented challenges to every and any collective project.

So, to begin this process, here are a few ideas and hypotheses:

**1. A collective project.** Israel was born as a collective project of the Jewish People. It still is. Both Israeli and Diaspora Jews need to realize this basic fact. What happens in Israel reflects and represents all of us—all Israelis, including non-Jews, but also all Jews, even non-Israelis. Israel isn't and shouldn't be just another country, only serving its formal citizens. For good or ill, Israel was born with a mission and with a mandate. The Jewish People everywhere can't shake its responsibility for Israel and, in the same way, Israel can't write off the Diaspora. The connection between Israel and the Jewish People is critical for the State's *raison d'être*. The connection can't be seen only in transactional

terms but in essential ones. For Jews — both in Israel and the Diaspora — the stakes are very high: Judaism as we know it is mainly a diasporic invention; the values and practices we cherish, reflect, to a great extent, our experience in exile. We need to prove that they are relevant in a context of national sovereignty. The values of a powerless people need to show their resilience in a context of power.

2. **Mutual responsibility means mutual influence.** As a Jewish collective that cannot help having mutual influence on one another's fate and well-being, Diaspora Jews and Israeli Jews can and must try to influence each other's decisions, and neither side should tell the other to simply back off (as often happens now). Israel needs to consider the opinion of Diaspora Jews regarding issues like the occupation and religious pluralism; Diaspora Jews also need to consider Israeli opinions in relation to how they live their Judaism and their role in the collective Jewish endeavor: intermarriage, Hebrew language, assimilation, and other issues. Neither side owes deference to the other, but we owe each other listening and taking the other's perspective seriously.
3. **A strong center and a vibrant periphery.** Zionism postulated that the Jewish People needed to regain agency over its own history, and only a people with a state — and sovereign power — can truly be free and own its story. That implies, then, that Israel is now the main stage of Jewish history. There Jews are performing a story that, for good and for ill, is truly theirs. Diaspora Jews need to recognize the centrality of that stage — but not its exclusivity. The classic Zionist narrative would say Diaspora Jews are now merely the audience for that stage, supporting the actors with their applause. In fact, the Diaspora remains important in its own right, in ways that don't negate the centrality of Israel. The Jewish world is less like a single play and more like a theater festival in which many groups mount simultaneous productions. Israel is one and Jews in the Diaspora are others. They, too, are writing important pieces of our collective story. For example, the Jewish role in the U.S. civil rights movement is a key piece of our history as a people; so is the collective effort to free Soviet Jewry. The role of everyone present at the festival—and each person may be an audience member in one play and actor in another—is to connect all the different plays, the major ones and the minor ones, and make sure that they form part of a single narrative.
4. **Nationhood with purpose.** Not every people needs to have a mission, but for Jews, the idea of having a purpose beyond our mere existence is anchored in our ideological DNA. From Abraham onwards, we are called to fulfill a mission in the world and bear witness to certain values. The existence of a State and the fact that we have now 'conventional' power gives us a unique opportunity to fulfill that purpose and transform it from an ethereal idea to a specific program. We may disagree and fight over it, but Jews always reflected and wondered about their *raison d'être*. That

reflection is now more important than ever. We will disagree on what that mission needs be but I will suggest a few ideas: a) an articulation of Jewish values of justice, equality, and dignity in a national setting. In other words, making Israel the living proof that our values do create a better and fairer society; b) Model a healthy relationship between modern society and nature, different from the exploitative modern paradigm and from the Luddite fantasies of radical conservationists. c) Take Israel's technological prowess and Jewish wisdom to articulate an applied ethics of technology; d) in a time of globalization and fear of the other, propose a new relationship between particular identities and universalism.

**5. A model for what nationhood can mean.** In the 21st century context, in which the traditional notion of peoplehood is assailed by multicultural assimilationism, consumerist individualism, and neo-tribalism, Jews can and should produce another way: one in which the collective experience is an avenue for personal realization; one in which a strong identity serves as a platform for connecting with others rather than closing ourselves. Zionism was about losing our fear of the world and relating to the family of nations as equals. The goal was never to replace one ghetto with another. The siege mentality of the tribalists among us will not only disconnect more Jews from Israel, but it will betray a key aspect of the Zionist national idea. Those who promote a vision of no countries and no religions, on the other hand, would do well to remember that democracy and human rights [have only existed in the context of strong national identities](#). The excesses of nationalism don't mean that nationalism as such is *treif*. One doesn't completely stop eating when the doctor says that we should watch our weight a little.

Some may think that the challenges I'm outlining are mere philosophical speculations, but what these lines try to prove is that Zionism wasn't a mere program, an "action plan" to create a state, but a radical reinvention of the notion of Jewishness that took place in the ideological and conceptual realms before moving to drain the swamps of the Jezreel Valley and make the desert green. A similar rethinking of our collective ethos is needed now. For that, Jewish leaders and funders need to invest the time, the energy, and the resources in studying the philosophy of nationalism, peoplehood, and Zionism. We need to create a context in which these types of debate are incentivized and curated. We need to encourage, morally and financially, our thinkers and scholars to reflect on the nature of Jewish nationalism. We need to do that both in Israel and the Diaspora and we need to make sure that this debate can be done with equal measures of freedom and respect.

Israel at 70 is a time to count our blessings; it's a time for collective pride and rejoicing. Yet, this can't blind us to the challenges that our collective identity is facing. We don't want Zionism to be yet another revolution that devoured itself. Israel at 70 presents with the need and the opportunity to reinvent the Jewish collective dimension.

Somebody said that the Jews taught the world the art of being a people. I believe that's true, but we didn't inscribe that wisdom on a stone tablet; rather, we looked at it as an ever-evolving adventure guided by love, responsibility and passion.

It is now time to write a new chapter in that adventure.

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## From Strength to Strength

Josh Weinberg

I would often end a tour of Israel's national cemetery Mt. Herzl at the grave of the mountain's namesake, Theodor Herzl. Standing on the mountain's top, Herzl sits beneath a large black marble slab which once a year becomes the focal point for the official state ceremony celebrating Israel's independence. It is there that after having toured Israel and woven our way through the memories of Israel's fallen heroes, I would pose the reflective question: "If Herzl were alive today to see the State of Israel, what do you think he would say about it?"

Now, I would ask a different question: if Herzl were alive today and visited contemporary *North America* would he still deem a Jewish State necessary? Seeing the Jewish community in contemporary North America, would Herzl have arrived at the same solution for the Jewish problem – namely political Zionism? Or, would he internalize the general acceptance of American Jews and say that unlike Western Europe, the dream of acceptance was indeed fulfilled? Would he maintain that American Jews are not facing serious persecution and therefore have no need for a refuge?

In September 1899, at the height of his role as Zionism's chief organizer and spokesman, Herzl wrote of Alfred Dreyfus, the Jewish army captain whose 1895 conviction and later acquittal for espionage set France ablaze, that he was "nothing more than an abstract symbol."

Dreyfus, he wrote, "is the Jew in modern society, who tried to adapt to his surroundings, speak its language, think its thoughts, sews its ranks on his coat – and here they come and tear those ranks off by force. Dreyfus is a stance that many have fought for, and continue to fight for, and which is – let us not fool ourselves – a lost cause!"

However, the proverbial Dreyfus' of today's North America are quite the opposite. We have adapted to our surroundings, speak the language, think its thoughts, and have the status that Herzl so desperately sought.

Many Israelis recognize the success achieved by American Jews and see it as a strategic opportunity for political and financial gain. However, few see the Diaspora as a source of Jewish cultural and religious inspiration to be played out on the Israeli scene. When religion is separate from State it's possible to create a model of general tolerance or at worst indifference to one another, creating the opportunity for genuine partnerships across denominational lines. Diaspora Judaism has been a source of creativity and achievement. In today's reality Diaspora Jews are figuratively Jews by choice, constantly seeking to adapt the challenges of modernity.

The Israel-Diaspora relationship has been experiencing a slow but massive shift away from a joint approach as Israel and the major Diaspora communities still do not really understand one another. We see thousands upon thousands of visitors to Israel and hundreds of Israeli emissaries, 'American-Friends-of' organizations, and hundreds of thousands of Israelis living abroad, but nonetheless there is a noticeable disconnect.

Rather than Israel looking to the US for financial assistance and North Americans looking to Israel for a shot of a quick Jewish identity booster we now have the opportunity to articulate an actual joint and common destiny. To strive together for that national self-elevation, with conscious direction and the strengthening and deepening of what it means to be a part of the Jewish people.

In his book, [Kol Dodi Dofek](#), a classic text of Religious Zionist philosophy, Rav Joseph Soloveitchik establishes what he calls the Covenant of Destiny:

"Destiny manifests itself as an active experience full of purposeful, movement, ascension, aspirations, and fulfillment. The nation is enmeshed in its destiny because of its longing for an enhanced state of being, an existence replete with substance and direction."

Do we as a Jewish people share a joint destiny, and if not, how could we instill a joint vision of destiny with both substance and direction? Herzl's ideological rival Ahad Ha'am, gave us the answer over a century ago.

"Zionism," he wrote, demands the return to Judaism before the return to the Jewish State.

Zionism is actually the answer to create a stronger sense of a true exchange between Israel and the Diaspora communities. Rather than a continuation of the old model, today's reality calls on us to offer one another from our strengths and successes, and to suggest models from our experience that could work to enhance the experience of the other.

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#### **What does North American Jewry have to offer?**

Diaspora Jews have figured out how to build vibrant religious communities in a privatized economy. In North America, each institution, structure, building and organization (with minimal exception) has been built and developed without governmental support (except for tax exemption). Every single Diaspora-based institution must be self-sustainable, which is exactly the model that we should export to Israel.

What kind of a cultural transformation or modification would have to occur for Israeli Jews to not be dependent on the GOI for Jewish community or ritual life? Many Diaspora Jews see religion as a conduit of liberal values and progress and believe that the Judaism should play a different role in Israel, where it is more than a technocracy of ‘permissible’ vs. ‘forbidden’, and actually be about how we as a society should behave which does not require the rejection of religion.

What kind of seed funding would have to come from abroad in order to set in motion a self-sustaining system? This would offer a richness and a fostering of Jewish life that would encourage and respect a difference in practice and tradition and would act as an equalizer among the various streams.

#### **What does Israeli Jewry have to offer?**

Many in the liberal Diaspora Jewish circles often lament the fact that Israel does not “reflect their Jewish values” due to any number of critical issues whether it is the ongoing Occupation, the monopoly of the ultra-Orthodox over religious life, the treatment of

African asylum seekers, and so on. These are indeed valid criticisms, yet, rarely included in the conversation on Jewish values are the foundations of Jewish culture, text, the Jewish calendar, and the Hebrew language. Put plainly, the commitment to social justice and ethics derived from our tradition are essential but there is also great worth in preserving the cultural, historical, and traditional context from which they are derived.

Israel has revived the Hebrew language and now we have music, movies, literature, etc. Israel allows Jews to see and touch our past, to make our history come alive. Israel has prominent Jewish thinkers in all realms of art, sciences, religious studies, etc.

120 years ago, Ahad Ha'am expressed this fundamental insight of what the Jewish world would have to gain from the establishment of a Jewish society.

*"This Jewish settlement, which will be a gradual growth, will become in course of time the centre of the nation, wherein its spirit will find pure expression and develop in all its aspects up to the highest degree of perfection of which it is capable. Then from this centre the spirit of Judaism will go forth to the great circumference, to all the communities of the Diaspora, and will breathe new life into them and preserve their unity; and when our national culture in Palestine has attained that level, we may be confident that it will produce men in the country who will be able, on a favourable opportunity, to establish a State which will be a Jewish State, and not merely a State of Jews."*<sup>1</sup>

Now, the Herzlian question should be asked, but of Ahad Ha'am. How does today's State measure up to the expectations of being a "Jewish State"? One measure of Ahad Ha'amian success is that many Diaspora Jews and organizations look to Israel and Israelis to be the beacon of Jewish culture through which they will enhance the identities of their constituents.

For instance, "Birthright Israel seeks to ensure the future of the Jewish people by strengthening Jewish identity, Jewish communities, and connection with Israel via a trip to Israel for the majority of Jewish young adults from around the world."<sup>2</sup> The Jewish State as a cultural and religious center is already the tool being used to strengthen identity and ensure a future connection. Israel already exports thousands of *shlichim* to communities, camps, and youth movements attempting to turn the trend towards language, culture, and peoplehood.

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1 Ibid.

2 [https://www.birthrightisrael.com/about\\_us](https://www.birthrightisrael.com/about_us)

What would it look like for Diaspora Jewry to adapt a sense of peoplehood beyond a religious definition of Judaism? An infusion of more substance to their Jewish lives: not just Jewish religious services and discussion of “values,” but distinctly Jewish cultural manifestations. Israel must cease to be only or even primarily a political cause for American Jews, but become what it is in fact a vital, living, breathing Hebrew-speaking culture in which we, too, are invited to play a part.<sup>3</sup>

David Hazony writes: “Israel, not as a political cause but as a civilizational one, might offer an opportunity to disrupt Jewish identity in America. . . [This would] mean rediscovering Israel as a country, not just a cause, and yourself as someone searching rather than acting out of certainty. . . . Developing a new spiritual infrastructure. Having the confidence of who you are that is required to expand who you are — to see the Israeli other not as a threat but as a resource for your own journey.”

At one point it was apt to describe relations between Israel, the United States, and the American Jewish community as a strategic triangle whereby the three sides to the triangle provided sustenance for the other two.

This was not an equilateral triangle: Israel has now replaced U.S. Jewry as the global center of Jewish life, and the United States is still the world’s dominant power. But a vibrant and involved American Jewish community was nevertheless a vital player.

Each needed the other and each gave something to the other. In today’s reality Israel will always continue to see the U.S. as a vital ally politically and militarily, but will it be able to learn and benefit from the Jewish community’s achievements and models?

Will American Jewry be able to reverse the trends of the past century and come to see themselves as National Jews who have a shared collective narrative, common symbols and a joint destiny?

I hope so.

**Rabbi Josh Weinberg is the President of ARZA, the Association of Reform Zionists of America. He was ordained from the HUC-JIR Israeli Rabbinic Program in Jerusalem and is currently living in New York.**

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<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Joe Schwartz, Foudner of “IDRA: Beit Café-Beit Midrash”



## Jewish Power and Powerlessness

**Einat Wilf**

Power corrupts. That is an ancient insight. Shared by biblical writers, no less than Greek, Roman, Hindu and Chinese ones. But the insight of Zionism, which perhaps only the Jews, as a literate and continuously powerless people, could contribute, was that powerlessness corrupts no less.

Zionism emerged, in no small measure, due to the observation that a people, whose very survival depended on the good will of others (which was generally lacking), is corrupted by the need to ingratiate itself with those in power. Zionist thinkers observed that the constant need to appease those in power in an effort to prevent them unleashing their wrath against the Jews, has taken a heavy toll on the Jewish soul. Zionism sought to correct this corruption of Jewish existence by making Jews masters of their fate, powerful once again, normalized political actors among the nations.

It has taken several generations, but in that sense, Zionism has been a complete triumph. The current generation growing up in Israel appears entirely disconnected from the experience of powerlessness. It conducts itself with the kind of confidence that would have probably made early Zionist leaders kvetch with pride.

Yet, herein lies the problem. After centuries and nearly millennia of being isolated from the corrupting effects of power, by their forced powerlessness, Jews are now experiencing it in full force. In that sense, Jews have indeed become politically normalized.

For Jews living outside of Israel, and even for many in Israel, this might be too much too soon. Many experience and express deep unease with the speed with which Jews have become normalized. In many ways, this is one of the greatest challenges that present-day Zionism and Israel to Jews. One could even describe it as the theological challenge of Zionism to Judaism: it demonstrates that when possessing power, Jews are no better (and no worse, it should be emphasized) than all other people with power.

The idea that Jews are somehow a uniquely moral people, capable of managing power differently than all other members of the human species, should have been summarily dismissed by even a cursory reading of the Hebrew bible. After all, if there is one

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**No matter how much actual power Jews in Israel amass, their miniscule size, in the region and otherwise, means that they would be wise to recognize its limits and refrain from pursuing the corrupting territorial and other ambitions that ignore that basic insight. For Jews in America, no matter how comfortable the current reality appears, it would be wise to resist the temptations of moral purity that comes from powerlessness. Power corrupts, but powerlessness corrupts no less. Our survival as a minuscule Jewish people depends on Jews, both in Israel and outside it, heeding both insights of Jewish history, which has very much not come to an end.**

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overarching theme of the Hebrew bible it is that of a people constantly corrupted, despite repeated exhortations by a series of prophets.

Yet, for Jews living outside of Israel, it has been a comforting thought to consider themselves heirs to a uniquely moral tradition. Many have conflated powerlessness with morality, forgetting that the supposed moral behavior of Jews over the centuries was the simple outcome of facing none of the moral dilemmas faced by those exercising power.

This has led some to mistakenly believe that it is Israel that is “ruining” the moral standing of the Jews. Worse, this has led some Jews, still at the margins, to promote Jewish powerlessness once again, in an effort to restore the apparent moral purity of a Jewish powerless existence. A generation that has never known what it is to be truly powerless, a generation that has come to believe that the last, truly unprecedented, five decades of Jewish existence in the US and Canada, during which there was always a sovereign state of Israel, seems to believe it has reached a Jewish “end of history”. Some Jews, especially younger ones, have come to take it so much for granted, that they consider the tradeoff of power for moral purity a worthwhile one.

But neither the confidence of Israeli Jews that they have reached an “end of history” of Jewish power nor the American Jewish notion that Jews in America have reached an “end of history” of Jewish integration, equality and comfort don’t stand up to scrutiny.

The one incontrovertible fact of Jewish existence, one that has remained unchanged, is size. Jews are, and always have been, a miniscule people. This has remained unchanged despite substantial procreation efforts. The relative size of the Jewish people is such, that even in the absence of a premediated industrial genocide, we cannot procreate our way out of it.

As a result, the Jewish doctrine, certainly in the modern era, whether in Israel or outside it, has been essentially the same, that of a blowfish. Whether through Nobel prizes, Hollywood movies, technology start-ups and a nuclear arsenal, the Jewish people have been engaged in a sustained effort to make sure that no-one in the world be clued in to the fact that the actual number of Jews in the world is a meager 15 million, give or take. It is the reason that we speak of a Judeo-Christian civilization when we are among Christians, or of a fellow proud ancient civilization when we meet with Hindu and Chinese leaders. We cannot afford to be alone. We must, as a matter of survival, punch way, way above our weight.

The unfortunate reality, as we repeatedly experience in the United Nations, where the nations seem to only be united when it is against Israel, is that our size makes us all too easy to gang up on. Despite decades of Jewish achievement and relative power, our miniscule size means that always lurking underneath is the very distinct possibility that the current realities of relative Jewish power and equality would be reversed.

The current leadership of the Jewish people whether in Israel or in the United States, having still experienced the price of Jewish powerlessness and inequality, while effectively engaging in the blowfish strategy, and enjoying the fruits of the current era of Jewish power, is still very much keenly aware of the actual size of the Jewish people and of how reversible the current reality is.

Unfortunately, this awareness is becoming less typical of the confident generation of young Jews in Israel or of the comfortable generation of young Jews in America. Young Jews in Israel and young Jews in America are both under the illusion that they have been luckily disconnected from Jewish history. This is at the source of their so-called distancing. Young Jews in Israel increasingly seem oblivious to the limits of their power, and young Jews in America seem to question the need for power at all. Both are wrong.

No matter how much actual power Jews in Israel amass, their miniscule size, in the region and otherwise, means that they would be wise to recognize its limits and refrain from

pursuing the corrupting territorial and other ambitions that ignore that basic insight. For Jews in America, no matter how comfortable the current reality appears, it would be wise to resist the temptations of moral purity that comes from powerlessness. Power corrupts, but powerlessness corrupts no less. Our survival as a minuscule Jewish people depends on Jews, both in Israel and outside it, heeding both insights of Jewish history, which has very much not come to an end.

**Dr. Einat Wilf is a former member of the Israeli Knesset. She is the author of six books, most recently "Telling Our Story: Essays on Zionism, the Middle East, and the Path to Peace" and "The War of Return".**



**The Peoplehood Papers** provide a platform for Jews to discuss their common agenda and key issues related to their collective identity. The journal appears three times a year, with each issue addressing a specific theme. The editors invite you to share your thoughts on the ideas and discussions in the Papers, as well as all matters pertinent to Jewish Peoplehood: [publications@jpeoplehood.org](mailto:publications@jpeoplehood.org).

Past issues can be accessed at [www.jpeoplehood.org/library](http://www.jpeoplehood.org/library)

**The Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education (CJPE)** is a "one stop" resource center for institutions and individuals seeking to build collective Jewish life, with a focus on Jewish Peoplehood and Israel education. It provides professional and leadership training, content and programmatic development or general Peoplehood conceptual and educational consulting. [www.jpeoplehood.org](http://www.jpeoplehood.org)

The vision of **the Oshman Family JCC** in Palo Alto, California is to be the Architects of the Jewish Future®. The OFJCC is an incubator for new expressions of Jewish identity, creating innovative Jewish learning opportunities and celebrations, as well as programs that connect the Jewish world. Each day, the OFJCC serves the San Francisco Bay Area through a variety of educational, social, cultural, fitness, sports and other programs that enrich lives, build community and inspire Jewish journeys. **Zionism 3.0** is a national initiative launched by the OFJCC to bridge the gaps between American Jewry and Israel at a challenging moment in the Jewish Peoplehood story. [www.paloaltojcc.org](http://www.paloaltojcc.org)

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