

WEAKENING TIES: AMERICAN JEWISH BABY-BOOMERS AND ISRAEL

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When one examines the official literature of the three major American Jewish denominations, Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform, it is evident that a number of interesting and significant changes have occurred over the years in the way each relates to the State of Israel. Some of these changes will be briefly indicated.

In contrast to Eastern European Orthodoxy, which was characterized in the prestate era by its anti-Zionism, American Orthodoxy was always highly supportive of the establishment of the Jewish state. Mizrahi, the religious Zionist movement, was one of the major forces in American Orthodoxy, more influential by far than the non-Zionist Agudath Israel¹ During the interwar period, Yeshiva Torah Veda'ath, one of the first higher yeshivahs in the United States, was strongly Zionist.² And as late as 1949, *Hapardes* (the oldest extant Torah journal in the United States) contained regular reports on religious Zionist developments, both within Mizrahi and beyond it. Among the features in the April 1949 issue, for example, was a detailed report on an address delivered by Rabbi David Lifshitz to the annual convention of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the

- 1 Menahem Kaufman, *Lo-ziyonim beamerica bama'avak al hamedinah, 1939-1948* (Non-Zionists in America and the Struggle for Jewish Statehood: 1939-1948) (Jerusalem, 1984), 7; samuel Halperin, *The Political World of American Zionism* (Detroit, 1961), 65-71. For a historical overview, albeit somewhat romanticized, of the Mizrahi in the United States, see Aaron Halevi Pachenik, "Hazyonut hadatit be'arot haberit," (Religious Zionism in the United States) in *Sefer hazyonut hadatit* (The Book of Religious Zionism), ed. Yitzchak Raphael and S. Z. Shragai (Jerusalem, 1977), 2: 226-241.
- 2 Jenna Weissman Joselit, *New York's Jewish Jews: The Orthodox Community in the Interwar Years* (Bloomington, 1990), 17.

United States and Canada (Agudath Harabbanim), in which strong sentiments of religious Zionism were expressed.³

Today, much of that picture has changed dramatically. American Orthodox Judaism is now heavily influenced by Agudath Israel. Religious Zionism, if not loudly condemned, is rarely mentioned in the aforementioned Torah journal; the leadership of Agudath Harabbanim is wholly of the Agudath Israel persuasion; and the *yeshivish velts*, the “world of the yeshiva,” is virtually synonymous with the world of non-Zionism. This is a result, in large measure, of the post World War II immigration to America of the survivors of Eastern European Orthodoxy — including those of the scholarly elite who headed the higher yeshivahs in Russia, Lithuania, and Poland, as well as a number of Hasidic grand rabbis and their followers, most of whom came from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.⁴ Establishing a network of day schools and yeshivahs in America that socialized a new generation in accordance with their non-Zionist version of Orthodoxy, these new arrivals soon took over the ideological leadership of the Agudath Israel of America and provided it with a following from within the rank and file of yeshiva students and Hasidim. By the 1950s, Agudath Israel had grown to be one of the largest and most influential organizations of American Orthodoxy, whereas Mizrachi’s leadership had stagnated and its membership and significance had declined markedly.

Not only within “the world of the yeshiva”⁵ but within much of

- 3 *Hapardes* 23(7) (April 1949): 12–15. See also p. 10, which contains a report of the New York visit of Rabbi Yoseph Kahaneman, “one of the great heads of yeshivahs, of Ponivezh, and now of the State of Israel.” The last phrase, in Hebrew, is *medinat yisrael*, not *eretz yisrael*.
- 4 Somewhat surprisingly, there is still no thorough study of American Orthodoxy, especially since World War II. The monograph by Samuel C. Heilman and Steven M. Cohen, *Cosmopolitans and Parochials: Modern Orthodox Jews in America* (Chicago, 1990), contains virtually nothing on the relationship of American Orthodoxy with Israel and Zionism. For suggestions as to what a study of American Orthodox should encompass, see Charles S. Liebman, “Studying Orthodox Judaism in the United States: A Review Essay,” *American Jewish History* 80(3) (Spring 1991): 415–424.
- 5 William B. Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva* (New York, 1983). This is the “world” known as *haredi*, “black-hat,” “right-wing,” or “ultra-Orthodox.” Helmreich includes Yeshiva University’s Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) in his analysis. However, RIETS is clearly peripheral to the

American Orthodoxy in general, the ideology of religious Zionism is now much less frequently espoused. Indeed, when ArtScroll Publishers, a highly successful publisher of traditional Judaica that caters to the Orthodox public, put out a new edition of the traditional prayer book, it omitted the prayer for the welfare of the State of Israel. Although the organization of modern Orthodox rabbis, the Rabbinical Council of America, issued its own special edition of the ArtScroll *siddur* that included this prayer, it appears that the regular edition has become the standard one for the Orthodox public in the United States. Likewise, there seems to have been a decline in the *religious* celebration of Israel Independence Day within Orthodox congregations across the United States.⁶

world of the yeshiva and not considered part of it by the overwhelming majority of that world. As Helmreich suggests, it "is viewed by many in the other major yeshivahs as not being part of the community because it not only permits secular education but maintains a college on its campus that is a required part of study for all undergraduates" (p. 36). Although Helmreich makes no mention of it, there is every reason to suggest that the religious Zionism espoused in RIETS only confirms its "deviant" status. On the growing influence of the *haredi* perspective within Orthodoxy, see Menachem Friedman, "Life Tradition and Book Tradition in the Development of Ultra-Orthodox Judaism," in *Judaism Viewed from Within and from Without: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Harvey E. Goldberg (Albany, 1987), 235–255; Chaim I. Waxman, "Toward a Sociology of Psak," *Tradition* 25(3) (Spring 1990):12–25.

- 6 It is perhaps even more revealing that ArtScroll Publishers blatantly omitted a phrase implying religious Zionist sentiments from its translation of Rabbi S. Y. Zevin's *Hamo'adim behalakhah* (The Festivals in *halachah*). See Reuven P. Bulka, "Israel and the State of the Religious Mind," *Morasha: A Journal of Religious Zionism* 2(2) (Spring–Summer 1986): 30–34. For another critique of the ArtScroll phenomenon, see B. Barry Levy, "Judge Not a Book by Its Cover," *Tradition* 19(1) (Spring 1981): 89–95, and the response by Emanuel Feldman, *Tradition* 19(2) (Summer 1981), 192. For a more extensive version of Levy's critique, see his article, "Our Torah, Your Torah and Their Torah: An Evaluation of the ArtScroll Phenomenon," in *Truth and Compassion: Essays on Judaism and Religion in Memory of Rabbi Dr. Solomon Frank*, ed. Howard Joseph, Jack N. Lightstone, and Michael D. Oppenheim (Waterloo, Ont., 1983), 137–189. For an analysis of the Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist perspectives, see the article in this volume by David Ellenson, "Envisioning Israel in the Liturgies of North American Liberal Judaism." For a group of essays which deal with a number of issues flowing from the perspective that Israel does have religious significance, see Chaim I. Waxman, ed., *Israel as a Religious*

Such developments, however, do not indicate a decline in support for Israel within American Orthodoxy. Rather, there seems to have been a *transformation* in the role of Israel within American Orthodoxy, although its precise nature is not yet quite clear. It may be that there is a decline in the tendency to define the State of Israel within the context of modern (albeit religious) Zionism and an increasing tendency to define Israel traditionally, as Eretz Israel — a trend that has also manifested itself within Israel, especially since the Begin era.⁷ Alternatively, the transformation may be characterized as the secularization of Israel. Perhaps because Israel has become

Reality (Northvale, N.J., 1994). A recent incident that I personally witnessed reinforced for me the validity of the above assertion. A group of several hundred religiously observant Jews, overwhelmingly modern Orthodox, were gathered together at a hotel for Pesach. When, after several days, the leader of the prayer services was asked why there was no recitation of the prayer for the welfare of the State of Israel (*Tefila lishlom hamedina*), he replied, "We don't have any time for it; we have to be finished at [a specified time]." That individual, and indeed virtually everyone present, was highly supportive of Israel. He simply did not relate to it religiously and thus felt no religious need to include a special prayer for its welfare. One other piece of evidence in support of the argument is from the *Ezras Torah Luach*, the annual Orthodox synagogue ritual calendar published in Hebrew and English by Ezras Torah, a prominent Orthodox relief society established to provide financial assistance to needy individuals who are studying Torah. The calendar has become the closest thing to an "official" calendar of Orthodox synagogues in the United States. Neither its Hebrew nor its English editions contain any reference to either Yom Ha'atzma'ut or Yom Yerushalayim. Lest it be argued that the reason lies solely in Orthodoxy's approach of maintaining the centuries-old synagogue traditions and not incorporating new ones, but has nothing to do with Orthodoxy's perspective on Israel, it should be noted that the *Ezras Torah Luach* does include reference to the *yahrzeit* of both Rabbi Eliyahu Henkin, founder of Ezras Torah, and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, a former president of the society. Moreover, the calendar states that there is an "old custom" of having an appeal for Ezras Torah on Shabbat Shekalim (the Sabbath six weeks before Passover), and that it is forbidden to infringe on the custom of the society. This prohibition is stated in the same linguistic style as all of the other laws and customs included in that synagogue calendar. Obviously, then, at least when it comes to Ezras Torah itself, incorporating new rituals is not an issue.

⁷ See Charles. S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State* (Berkeley, 1983), 123–166.

so modernized, American Orthodox Jews increasingly relate to it as a modern secular society to which, nevertheless, they attach strong allegiance because it is a state in which Jews are sovereign.⁸

In all, religious Zionist ideology that defines Israel in religious terms has lost influence, so much so that today most American Orthodox Jews no longer overtly conceive of Israel in ritualistic-religious terms. They remain strongly attached to Israel as the state of the Jewish people and therefore deserving of high communal priority, but the state per se is not part of the specifically religious realm.⁹ In any event, even the traditional Orthodox can now openly express their attachment to Eretz Israel and the people of Israel without fear of being tainted by secular Zionism.

Founded in the nineteenth century by moderate traditionalists, Conservative Judaism appealed to large numbers of young immigrants, and later, children of immigrants, from Eastern Europe who found Orthodoxy too confining and inhibiting and Reform too lacking in tradition.¹⁰ Given their strong ethnic self-definition and

8 Such an approach is somewhat similar to the religious Zionism espoused by Rabbi Jacob Reines, as opposed to the approach of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. See Michael Zvi Nehorai, "Rav Reines and Rav Kook: Two Approaches to Zionism," in *The World of Rav Kook's Thought*, ed. Benjamin Ish-Shalom and Shalom Rosenberg, tr. Shalom Carmy and Bernard Casper (New York, 1991), 255-267.

9 For evidence that there is a correlation between religiosity and national Jewish identity and identification, see Simon N. Herman, *Israelis and Jews: The Continuity of an Identity* (New York, 1970); John E. Hofman, "Hazehut hayehudit shel no'ar yehudi beyisrael" (The Jewish identity of Jewish youth in Israel) *Megamot* 17(1) (January 1970): 5-14; and Rina Shapira and Eva Etzioni-Halevy, *Mi atah hastudent hayisraeli* (Who is the Israeli student?) (Tel Aviv, 1973). See also a series of surveys conducted in Israel in 1974 by Shlomit Levy and Louis E. Guttman, and published (in Hebrew) in Jerusalem during that year in four parts by the Israel Institute of Applied Social Research (part 4, *Values and Attitudes of Israeli High School Youth*, contains an English summary); Eva Etzioni-Halevy and Rina Shapira, "Jewish Identification of Israeli Students: What Lies Ahead," *Jewish Social Studies* 37(3-4) (July-October 1975): 251-266; Simon N. Herman, *Jewish Identity: A Social Psychological Perspective*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, N.J., 1989); and Eva Etzioni-Halevy and Rina Shapira, *Political Culture in Israel: Cleavage and Integration among Israeli Jews* (New York, 1977), 157-178.

10 See Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement*, aug. ed. (New York, 1972). For a Conservative ideological perspective, see

the fact that many of them were familiar with Zionist groups in Eastern Europe (even if they themselves had not been members), it was natural for many Conservative Jews to join the American Zionist movement that was beginning to take form. Here, too, they opted for the mainstream. Mizrachi was for the religious Zionists and Poalei Zion was for the socialists, but for the majority of recently arrived immigrants who were ethnic rather than ideological Zionists, the much less ideologically sophisticated General Zionism, embodied first in the Federation of American Zionists and later in the Zionist Organization of America, was the logical choice.

These tendencies were reinforced by the fact that the leaders of Conservative Judaism were virtually all self-proclaimed Zionists who defined Zionism as an integral part of Judaism. As Moshe Davis aptly put it,

Zionism was an integral part of the program of thought and action which the Historical School developed in the closing decades of the past century and which it transmitted to the Conservative Movement. Conservative Judaism and Zionism developed separately, but their interaction was constant. As a result, both were stimulated conceptually and organizationally.¹¹

Given the deep interconnections between Conservative Judaism and American Zionism and the explicit definition of Zionism as integral to Judaism, it is not surprising that Conservative Judaism came to be seen as the most Zionist branch of American Judaism.¹² The depth of Conservative Jewry's Zionist commitment was apparent in its staunch support of the Zionist movement as well as the State of Israel.

Officially, it would appear that this commitment to Zionism and Israel remains unattenuated. Indeed, in *Emet Ve-Emunah*, its recent *Statement of Principles*, the movement's leadership extensively

Mordecai Waxman, ed., *Tradition and Change: The Development of Conservative Judaism* (New York, 1958).

11 Moshe Davis, *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism* (Philadelphia, 1963), 268.

12 Naomi W. Cohen, *American Jews and the Zionist Idea* (Hoboken, N.J., 1975), 10.

reiterates its deep — albeit not unequivocal — commitment to Zionism and Israel:

This zealous attachment to *Eretz Yisrael* has persisted throughout our long history as a transnational people in which we transcended borders and lived in virtually every land. Wherever we were permitted, we viewed ourselves as natives or citizens of the country of our residence and were loyal to our host nation. Our religion has been land-centered but never land-bound; it has been a portable religion so that despite our long exile (*Galut*) from our spiritual homeland, we have been able to survive creatively and spiritually in the *tefutzot* (Diaspora)... We staunchly support the Zionist ideal... The Conservative movement is a member of the World Zionist Organization. We have undertaken major efforts in Israel... Increasing numbers of Conservative rabbis and laypersons have gone on *aliyah*, and we cherish and encourage *aliyah* to Israel as a value, goal, and *mitzvah*... Both the State of Israel and Diaspora Jewry have roles to fill; each can and must aid and enrich the other in every possible way; each needs the other. It is our fervent hope that Zion will indeed be the center of Torah, and Jerusalem a beacon lighting the way for the Jewish people and humanity.¹³

The fact that the statement does not endorse the classical Zionist notion of the centrality of Israel is neither surprising nor a deviation. Neither Conservative Judaism nor American Zionism has ever sincerely supported it.¹⁴ More noteworthy is the fact that the statement goes on both to decry existing conditions in Israel and to distance the Conservative movement from Israeli government policies. For example, it emphasizes that “the Conservative movement has not always agreed with Israel’s positions on domestic and foreign affairs.”¹⁵ If such statements are seen as representative of the movement as a whole, a certain subtle shift has in fact taken place among Conservative Jewry.¹⁶

13 *Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism* (New York, 1988), 38–40.

14 Chaim I. Waxman, *American Aliya: Portrait of an Innovative Migration Movement* (Detroit, 1989), 65–76.

15 *Emet Ve-Emunah*, 38.

16 See Steven M. Cohen, *Ties and Tensions: The 1986 Survey of American Jewish*

Of the three major branches of American Judaism, it is unquestionably Reform Judaism that has made the most radical strides in coming to terms with Zionism and Israel, from the early antipathy of classical Reform to Zionism to the movement's acceptance of Israel's statehood on the eve of its creation.¹⁷ It is true that some outposts of classical Reform opposition remained into the 1950s (as Sklare and Greenblum found in the "David Einhorn Temple" in "Lakeville"), but even there most of the community professed a sense of attachment and concern for the Jewish state.¹⁸

By the end of the 1960s, it was already hard to imagine that only a relatively short time earlier there had been such strong opposition to Zionism and Israel within the movement. In 1897, the Reform rabbinic body, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), had issued a declaration stating: "We totally disapprove of any attempt for the establishment of a Jewish state. Such attempts show a misunderstanding of Israel's mission."¹⁹ In 1917, in response to the Balfour Declaration, the CCAR had demurred:

We do not subscribe to the phrase in the declaration which says, 'Palestine is to be a national home-land for the Jewish people.'... We are opposed to the idea that Palestine should be considered the home-land of the Jews.²⁰

Only fifty years later, in June 1967, the CCAR declared its "solidarity with the State and the people of Israel. Their triumphs are our triumphs. Their ordeal is our ordeal. Their fate is our fate."²¹ Some eight years later, in 1975, this new identification with Israel

Attitudes toward Israel and Israelis (New York, 1987), 18–21, in which he notes a growing percentage of low levels of attachment to Israel on the part of Conservative Jews.

17 A good analysis can be found in Howard R. Greenstein, *Turning Point: Zionism and Reform Judaism* (Chico, Calif., 1981).

18 Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum, *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier* (New York, 1967), 214–249.

19 W. Gunther Plaut, *The Growth of Reform Judaism: American and European Sources to 1948* (New York, 1965), 153.

20 *Ibid.*, 154.

21 *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook*, vol. 77 (New York, 1967), 109.

manifested itself officially in the inclusion of prayers for Israel's Independence Day, in the new Reform prayer book, *Gates of Prayer*.

By the 1980s, one could find one of the most prominent Reform theologians, in a book published by Reform Jewry's temple and synagogue organization, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, affirming not only the significance of the State of Israel but also the value of *aliyah*, even if not as an imperative. Thus Eugene Borowitz suggests:

The Covenant, being a collective endeavor, can best be lived as part of a self-governing Jewish community in the Land of Israel. A good Jew will seriously consider the possibility of *aliyah*, immigration.²²

Impressive as all of these statements are, anyone familiar with the sociology of religion knows that one cannot draw any conclusions about people's beliefs from the statements of their religious functionaries, just as one cannot draw conclusions about what the citizens of a country believe from official pronouncements of their leaders. At best, the foregoing reflects the beliefs of the elite with respect to Israel. What about the folk — *amkha*, if you will?

At the outset, it may be stated conclusively that America's Jews are strongly pro-Israel. I have culled the empirical evidence for this and analyzed it elsewhere.²³ Indeed, that should come as no surprise given that the American people as a whole are largely pro-Israel.²⁴ What some may find surprising and others disturbing, however, is the evidence that there have been significant changes in the degree to which America's Jews are attached to Israel.

For the purposes of this paper, I present data on two groups, baby-boomers, that is, those born in the period 1946–1964, and middle-agers, those born in the years 1926–1944. The former group represents those currently ascending to dominance (the election of Bill Clinton as U.S. president was widely seen as symbolic of the

22 Eugene Borowitz, *Liberal Judaism* (New York, 1984), 135.

23 Chaim I. Waxman, "All in the Family: American Jewish Attachments to Israel," in *A New Jewry? American Jewry since World War II*, ed. Peter Y. Medding, *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 8, (1992), 134–149.

24 See, for example, Peter Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America* (New York, 1984).

ascendancy of the “baby-boom” generation to dominance) while the middle-agers are the generation on its way out of dominance. From the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), I have selected all respondents who identified themselves as Jewish by religion. Those who, in 1990, were aged 26–44 are the baby-boomers, and those who were aged 46–64 are the middle-agers. Both samples were weighted, so they represent almost 1,700,000 Jewish baby-boomers and more than 830,000 Jewish middle-agers. What follows is an analysis of their responses to questions relating to Israel and then of their responses to related matters.

Table 1: Number of Times Been to Israel

	Ages 26–44	Ages 46–64
Once	12.8%	19.8%
Twice	4.8	5.0
Three times	1.9	1.5
4–9 times	3.3	3.2
10+ times	2.0	2.0
Born in Israel	1.4	0.3
Never	75.3	68.3
Total	100.0	100.0
<i>Weighted N</i>	1,692,550	836,080

Respondents were asked how many times they had been to Israel. When the responses of the two groups are compared, we see (Table 1) that a higher percentage of the baby-boomers (75.3%) than middle-agers (68.3%) were never in Israel. By itself, this may not be all that significant, since by the time the baby-boomers reach the middle-ager years they may have traveled to Israel at least as frequently as today’s middle-agers. This seems a reasonable assumption because at least toward the end of the 46–64 years age period, children are usually

married and out of the house, allowing their parents greater time and resources for travel, including travel to Israel.

However, the comparative responses with respect to emotional attachment to Israel suggest that something more serious is involved.

Table 2: Emotional Attachment to Israel

	Ages 26-44	Ages 46-64
Not attached	24.2%	15.0%
Somewhat attached	47.0	38.0
Very attached	18.2	33.2
Extremely attached	10.6	13.7
Total	100.0	100.0
<i>Weighted N</i>	1,461,080	123,860

Table 2 indicates that American Jewish middle-agers are significantly more emotionally attached to Israel than are the baby-boomers. A higher percentage of the baby-boomers feels not attached, and lower percentages feel either very or extremely attached to Israel.

Moreover, as Table 3 indicates, emotional attachment to Israel varies considerably with denominational affiliation. Specifically, Reform and unaffiliated Jews, who are the increasing majority of America's Jews, have significantly weaker emotional ties to Israel than do Conservative or Orthodox baby-boomers.

Table 3: Emotional Attachment to Israel of Jewish Baby-Boomers, by Denomination

	Orth.	Cons.	Reform	Unaffil.
Not attached	8.1%	20.1%	24.2%	48.6%
Somewhat attached	18.5	41.4	58.8	44.2
Very attached	28.6	25.6	13.8	7.2
Extremely attached	44.8	12.9	3.3	—
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Weighted N</i>	79,390	362,100	78,926	68,970

In brief, then, the mainstay of America's contemporary Jewish community has significantly weaker ties with Israel than their predecessors. This may be the reason for the apparent readiness of today's American Jews to consent to public criticism of Israel much more than were their predecessors. The Conservative movement's *Statement of Principles* is one striking example. And on the individual denominational level, Gerald Bubis and Steven Cohen, in a survey of American Jewish leaders, found widespread agreement with the statement, "Jews who are severely critical of Israel should nevertheless be allowed to speak in synagogues and Jewish Community Centers." Among the Orthodox, 42 percent of the rabbis and communal workers agreed; among the Conservative, 62 percent of the rabbis and 63 percent of the communal workers; and among the Reform, 82 percent of the rabbis and 74 percent of the communal workers.²⁵ Cohen also found widespread criticism of Israel among American Jewish leaders on a number of specific issues, including Israel's stance toward the PLO, the settlements on the West Bank, and the issue of "Who is a Jew?"²⁶ For example, a clear majority (59%) stated that the Arabs on the West Bank are being treated unfairly, and "As many as 77 percent affirmed that

25 Gerald B. Bubis and Steven M. Cohen, "What Are the Professional Leaders of American Jewry Thinking about Israel?" *Jerusalem Newsletter* 107 (15 March 1989): 6, Table 3.

26 Steven M. Cohen, *Israel-Diaspora Relations: A Survey of American Jewish Leaders* (Ramat-Aviv, 1990): 37, 48-59; Steven M. Cohen, *Ties and Tensions:*

they have privately criticized 'Israel's handling of the Palestinian uprising'.²⁷

Of course one might argue that the Bubis and Cohen survey was conducted when Likud was in power, and American Jewish leaders' acceptance of public criticism of Israel was simply a manifestation of the general degree of discomfort that America's Jews had with the Likud. The political liberalism of American Jewry is well documented,²⁸ and it is thus understandable that the democratic, socialist tradition of the Labor party — even if not its present policies — is much more appealing than the assertive nationalism of Likud.

Be that as it may, comparative responses to other questions in the NJPS suggest that this does not quite explain the growing weakness of American Jewry's emotional attachment to Israel. The NJPS data reveal, for example, that Jewish baby-boomers are somewhat less likely to be active in American Jewish organizational life or even be members of American Jewish organizations. As can be seen in Table 4, slightly fewer baby-boomers volunteered for Jewish organizations during the previous year than did middle-agers.

Table 4: Volunteered for Jewish Organization
in Past 12 Months

	Ages 26-44	Ages 46-64
Yes	21.7%	22.9%
No	78.3	77.1
Total	100.0	100.0
<i>Weighted N</i>	1,692,550	836,080

Here, too, there is a strong relationship between volunteering in

An Update — The 1989 Survey of American Jewish Attitudes toward Israel and Israelis (New York, 1989), 19-32, 47-52.

27 Cohen, *Israel-Diaspora Relations*, 67-70.

28 Chaim I. Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition* (Philadelphia, 1983), 147-151.

Jewish organizations and denominational affiliation, as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5: Baby-Boomers, Who Volunteered for Jewish Organizations in Past 12 Months, by Denomination

	Orth.	Cons.	Reform	Unaffil.
Yes	69.5%	26.1%	16.3%	14.4%
No	30.5	73.9	83.6	85.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Weighted N</i>	81,890	1,416,140	1,638,530	99,060

The difference in volunteering between the baby-boomers and the middle-agers might not in itself be thought very significant, given that percentage wise it is very small and that middle-agers usually have more time and resources and are thus better able to afford to be involved in volunteer organizational work.

However, as Table 6 indicates, a significantly higher percentage of baby-boomers belong to no Jewish organizations all. For a community that is known to be joiners to have such a high percentage of nonmembers starkly reinforces the distinction between the American Jewish population and the American Jewish community.²⁹ Even more, the significant decline in organizational membership appears to fit a pattern, of which the decline in emotional attachment to Israel is another component.

29 Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition*, 139–140.

Table 6: Number of Jewish Organizations Respondent Belongs To

	Ages 26-44	Ages 46-64
0	71.8%	63.5%
1	16.5	19.7
2 or more	11.5	16.8
Total	100.0	100.0
<i>Weighted N</i>	1,692,550	833,550

Since there has, historically, been a correlation between denomination and socioeconomic status among America's Jews, with the Reform being the highest and the Orthodox being the lowest, and since the more religiously traditional Jews pay a higher percentage of their incomes to synagogues and Jewish schools, one might have expected that a larger percentage of traditional Jews would belong to fewer organizations than less traditional Jews, or that there would be no relationship between denomination and number of Jewish organizations to which one belongs. Yet, as Table 7 indicates, the trend seen previously continues here as well.

Table 7: Boomers: Number of Jewish Organizations Respondent Belongs To, by Denomination

	Orth.	Cons.	Reform	Unaffil.
0	53.6%	68.1%	75.0%	83.5%
1	6.2	19.9	14.7	16.5
2 or more	40.3	12.0	10.3	—
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Weighted N</i>	81,890	526,630	824,200	97,580

Lest it be assumed that the decline in affiliation among baby-boomers, as compared to middle-agers, is related only to secular Jewish organizations but not religious ones, Tables 5, 8 and 9 show the comparative rates of synagogue membership.

Table 8: Anyone in Household Currently
Synagogue Member

	Ages 26-44	Ages 46-64
Yes	33.7	43.4
No	66.3	56.6
Total	100.0	100.0
<i>Weighted N</i>	917,180	416,710

Predictably, rates of synagogue membership vary denominationally, with Orthodox having the highest rates and unaffiliated having the lowest.

Table 9: Boomers: Anyone in Household Currently
Synagogue Member (by Denomination)

	Orth.	Cons.	Reform	Unaffil.
Yes	76.2%	41.6%	28.3%	10.5%
No	23.8	58.4	71.7	89.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Weighted N</i>	44,090	296,040	437,420	55,720

The lower rate of synagogue membership among baby-boomers is one more component in the emerging pattern. Similar differences are found when patterns of ritual observance are examined. Nor

are those differences limited to the formal organizational sphere. They manifest themselves in friendship patterns. As can be seen in Table 10, a significantly lower percentage of baby boomers state that all or most of their closest friends are Jewish (33.9%) than do middle-agers, among whom more than half (50.9%) do.

Table 10: Closest Friends Who Are Jewish

	Ages 26-44	Ages 46-64
None Jewish	6.3%	5.2%
Few or some Jewish	60.2	43.6
Most Jewish	24.2	35.1
All Jewish	9.0	16.1
Total	100.0	100.0
<i>Weighted N</i>	1,686,000	831,000

Just as the trend of weaker identificational patterns among baby-boomers, as compared to middle-agers, persists, so too does the trend of a denominational relationship (Table 11). The one unusual manifestation in the denominational pattern is that a higher proportion of the Orthodox said that none of their closest friends are Jewish than did even the unaffiliated. The reason for this is puzzling; but in any case this deviant finding is a minor one. The overall trend remains clear.

Table 11: Boomers: Closest Friends Who Are Jewish,
by Denomination

	Orth.	Cons.	Reform	Unaffil.
None	8.9%	5.2%	6.4%	7.7%
Few or some	9.7	55.1	70.2	68.2
Most	27.3	30.2	19.7	24.1
All	54.1	9.5	3.7	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Weighted N</i>	81,890	526,630	824,200	99,060

In sum, then, it appears that the phenomenon we are dealing with is rather pervasive and is indicative of a decline in both Jewish identity and Jewish identification. Despite the optimistic pronouncements of various “transformationist” social scientists during the 1980s, the NJPS data appear to confirm the deepest fears of the “assimilationists.”³⁰ Although American Jewry as a distinctive group will almost unquestionably survive into the distant future, it seems at least as certain that the group that does survive will be a much reduced one. Nor should this be very surprising to anyone familiar with religious and ethnic group patterns in American society. The data presented indicate that although American Jewry is not about to disappear in the foreseeable future, it is undergoing a process similar to that which a number of researchers have found for American Catholics — namely, a significant decline in their attachment to the church and its doctrines; especially among the young, Catholic identity is increasingly a matter of personal choice entailing rather amorphous “feelings.”³¹

30 Chaim I. Waxman, “Is the Cup Half-Full or Half-Empty? Perspectives on the Future of the American Jewish Community,” in *American Pluralism and the Jewish Community*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset (New Brunswick, N.J., 1990), 71–85.

31 See William D’Antonio, James Davidson, Dean Hoge, and Ruth Wallace, *American Catholic Laity in a Changing Church* (Kansas City, 1989); and Patrick H. McNamara, *Conscience First, Tradition Second: A Study of Young American Catholics* (Albany, 1992).

In terms of the ethnicity as well, the pattern of America's Jews does not appear to be unique. For example, Richard A. Alba found that Italian and other European-Americans are in "the twilight of ethnicity"; and the social significance of ethnicity is becoming increasingly irrelevant — that is, it has less and less significance in terms of socioeconomics, language and mate selection.³² Interestingly, this seems to suggest that when the public ideology in America was the melting pot, the reality was cultural pluralism; and now that the ideology is cultural pluralism, the reality is the melting pot. The NJPS data seem to lend further support to Alba's conclusion:

The general outlines of symbolic ethnicity offer a far better fit to the emerging nature of ethnic identity — essentially in the desire to retain a sense of being ethnic, but without any deep commitment to ethnic social ties or behaviors.³³

Obviously, the findings presented above have very serious implications for the relationship between Israel and the American Jewish community. They do not mean that America's Jews will not continue to be pro-Israel. On the contrary, the available evidence suggests that they will continue to be generally supportive of Israel.³⁴ Americans in general are rather pro-Israel, and America's Jews will probably continue to be even more so. What is at issue here is the nature and intensity of that support. While non-Jewish Americans are pro-Israel,³⁵ Israel is hardly central to their concerns, much less to their identity. They do not, as a rule, lobby on behalf of Israel; nor

32 Richard D. Alba, *Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America* (New Haven, 1990). For an earlier theoretical statement of essentially the same thesis, see Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Culture in America," in *On the Making of Americans: Essays in Honor of David Riesman*, ed. Herbert J. Gans, Nathan Glazer, Joseph R. Gusfield, Christopher Jencks (Philadelphia, 1979), 193–220. About a decade ago, I questioned the validity of Gans's thesis: Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition* (Philadelphia, 1983), 228–236. The 1990 NJPS data indicate, however, that his analysis was right on target. See Chaim I. Waxman, *Jewish Baby Boomers* (Albany, forthcoming).

33 Alba, *Ethnic Identity*, 306.

34 See article in this volume by Steven M. Cohen, "Did American Jews Really Grow More Distant From Israel, 1983–1993? — A Reconsideration."

35 Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America*.

do they personally contribute to Israel-oriented causes. As American Jews continue to “melt” even as they espouse the ideology of cultural pluralism,³⁶ Israel will be an increasingly less significant part of their identity and they will become increasingly less emotionally attached to and involved with Israel.

One of the major consequences of the pattern of American Jewish identity and identification for the relationship with Israel will be a shift in the relative positions of the parties involved. Specifically, despite organizational rhetoric proclaiming the two communities either as one or as brothers with (implicitly) equal standing, America’s Jews have traditionally thought of themselves as the dominant partner in the relationship. This assumption was frequently reinforced by propaganda from Israel that sought to enlist the support of America’s Jews in a variety of activities in Israel’s interests. Some of that changed, especially under Likud leadership; but even the most committed of America’s Jews continue to think of themselves as Israel’s “big brother.” Although this places responsibilities on them to act in behalf of Israel, that activity, in turn, feeds their image of themselves as the dominant partner.

The sociological pattern of America’s Jews is likely to bring that sense of dominance to a halt — for at least two interrelated reasons, one demographic and the other socio-psychological. Demographically, the decline of the American Jewish population as a result of identificational assimilation combined with the continued growth of the Israeli Jewish population will mean Israel becoming, in the foreseeable future, the world’s largest Jewish population center. Simply in terms of size, it might be difficult for America’s Jews to retain their self-image as dominant.³⁷

36 Chaim I. Waxman “America’s Jews: Ideology of Cultural Pluralism/Reality of Melting Pot.” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 12(3) (Spring 1994): 66–79.

37 Of course, when I speak of America’s Jews, I am speaking about the overwhelming majority. Those who are more religio-culturally traditional and/or have visited Israel, especially those who have visited more than once, are likely to remain strongly attached to Israel, perhaps even increasingly so, as Steven Cohen’s paper suggests. It must, however, be remembered that about 75 percent of American Jewish baby-boomers have never been to Israel, and another 13 or so percent have been there only once.

However, as anyone familiar with dominant-minority relations knows, dominance is not dependent on size. There are a number of countries that have dominant minorities. In terms of the relationship between Israel and American Jewry, however, the leadership of the American Jewish community is becoming increasingly aware of its dependence on Israel for continuity. Thus at the 1992 General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations, there were loud calls for increased travel to and experiencing of Israel — not for Israel's sake but for the sake of the American Jewish community. When Charles Bronfman declared: "The Israel experience holds great promise for heightening awareness, strengthening identity and making a significant contribution to contemporary Jewish life, education and Jewish continuity,"³⁸ he was referring to *American* Jewish life and *American* Jewish continuity. Perhaps more than ever before, identified Jews — and they are the ones who are likely to be members of and active in the American Jewish community — realize that they *need* Israel. Whether, in the final analysis, Israel will have the ability to accomplish that which the American Jewish communal leadership hopes for, is another question. Several decades ago, Eugene Borowitz argued that it is preposterous to presume that American Jewry will be able to survive and thrive Jewishly solely by implanting an Israeli-based Jewishness in that community.³⁹ Whether an "Israel experience" can provide what a transplanted Israel-based Jewishness cannot is highly questionable. The denominational evidence presented suggests that "continuity" will be a reality when there is internalization of the UJA Federation slogan of more than a decade ago, "Survival means Sacrifice." The requisite sacrifice appears actually to be espoused by those with very firm and very self-conscious ideological commitments, rather than mere slogans and symbols. Whether, therefore, after all the rhetoric, there actually will be significant increases in those experiencing Israel is an additional important question. For the present, however, it is to that remedy that growing numbers of American Jewish leaders

38 Larry Yudelson, "CRB Foundation Launches Major Effort to Send Every Jewish Teen to Israel," *JTA Daily News Bulletin*, 17 November 1992.

39 Eugene Borowitz, *The Masks Jews Wear: The Self-Deceptions of American Jewry* (New York, 1973).

are looking. This should strengthen Israel in a number of ways, by making it less dependent on both the emotional and the material 'donations' of American Jewry.

There are, indeed, a number of indications that this is the way an increasing number of Israelis now view the Israel-American Jewry relationship. For example, one of the findings of a major study of Israeli Jews is of a shift, between 1975 and 1991, with a significant increase in the percentage who believe that Jews in the Diaspora need Israel for their survival, and a corresponding decrease in those who believe that Israel is dependent on the Jewish people world-wide for its survival.⁴⁰

Another example is the assertion by Yossi Beilin, in his capacity as deputy foreign minister, to American Jewish leaders that Israel is a modern, growing society and no longer needs American Jewish charity.⁴¹ Much as he might have been misunderstood, his statement was an expression of Israel's growing independence and assertion of its position as a full partner in its relationship with the Diaspora, even the American Jewish community.

One final factor that is likely to lead to an increased divide between Israel and American Jewry is the growing secularism and estrangement from tradition of the Israeli government. To the extent that the ideological secularism of many activists in Meretz, such as Shulamit Aloni and Yossi Sarid, comes to reflect the government and its policies, it is likely that the core of the American Jewish community will become increasingly alienated from Israel. As indicated above, it is the more religio-ethnically traditional who have the strongest ties to Israel; and, by definition, it is precisely that segment which is the most estranged from ideological secularism. Nor is there any evidence that such a shift will be successful in winning the

40 Shlomit Levy, Hanna Levinsohn, and Elihu Katz, *Beliefs, Observances and Social Interaction among Israeli Jews* (Jerusalem, 1993). Although this is clearly not the place for an elaborate discussion of this work, it should be noted that there are reasons to suspect that the general picture it conveys — namely, of a basic and deep-rooted amity and unity between the religious and secular segments of the Israeli population — is highly questionable, despite the empirical data presented by its authors.

41 *Long Island Jewish World*, 11–17 February 1994, 2.

deep emotional and material support of those who are now weakly affiliated with Judaism, the Jewish community, and Israel.

Of course, it might be argued that such a development would be a very positive one for Israel as it seeks its own national cultural identity and destiny. Similar views were maintained by such thinkers as Yehezkel Kaufman and Yaacov Klatzkin, among others. But those are not the dominant views either in Israel or in the Diaspora today, and they are certainly not the views of those who are concerned about the future of the relationship between Israel and American Jewry. For them, developments both within American Jewry and in Israel should be cause for concern.

Finally, it should be noted that the relationship with Israel is likely to be affected by shifts and patterns that now appear to be occurring within American Orthodoxy. Specifically, American Orthodoxy, and its religious Zionist sector in particular, appears to have become much more reactionary-nationalist, especially vis-à-vis the Territories (Judea, Samaria, and Gaza Strip/Gush Katif) and the Palestinians. The developing trend, at least as evidenced by statements published in the Orthodox weekly *Jewish Press*, raises the specter of a major rift between that segment of American Orthodoxy which has been the most actively pro-Israel and the government of Israel. Should that rift grow, it will have a major impact both on American Jewish-Israel relations and on the position of the Orthodox within the organized American Jewish community. Although the Orthodox will continue to have the most extensive and intensive ties with Israel, their break with the government and, much more seriously, the encouragement of antigovernment activity, will serve to isolate Orthodoxy from the rest of American Jewry. That, in turn, may also have consequences for the Orthodox in Israel, especially, for secular-Orthodox relations there. At the present juncture, one can but speculate how all of this will eventually unfold.