

Are American and Israeli Jews Drifting Apart?

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Are American and Israeli Jews drifting apart? Unfortunately, the answer is neither obvious nor straightforward. Some evidence suggests that they are more separate than before, some that they are not; other considerations suggest that serious differences have been in the making for a long time and are only now beginning to be felt.

According to one line of reasoning, since the founding of the State of Israel there has never been a time with as many overt signs of strain between American and Israeli Jewries. Since 1977, a date not coincidentally tied to the coming to power of a right-wing Israeli government, several incidents and developments have generated considerable discomfort toward Israel among some American Jews. They include:

- 1) The hard-line foreign and security policies of the Begin government and its successor, especially with regard to Jewish settlements on the West Bank.
- 2) The Israeli instigation of the war in Lebanon, which is the only war Israel has fought that failed to provoke a marked increase in philanthropic support for the United Jewish Appeal and Israel Bonds.
- 3) The election to the Knesset of Meir Kahane, who until his murder in New York in 1990 represented racist and anti-democratic tendencies distasteful, if not abhorrent, to most American Jews.
- 4) The numerous religious-secular conflicts, sometimes graphically violent, over such matters as Sabbath observance or archaeological exploration, and the frequent legislative maneuvers to strengthen Orthodox rabbinic control of matters of personal status.
- 5) The tough nature of Israeli military responses—officially sanctioned or otherwise—to the Intifada.

Accompanying all these developments are vituperative and passionate internal Israeli conflicts. These conflicts themselves may have diminished Israel's standing in the eyes of many American Jews.

The American Jewish Committee-sponsored surveys of American Jews I have conducted almost every year since 1981 have repeatedly measured levels of psychic support and active involvement with Israel. They demonstrate that those most disturbed by the rightward political and religious trends in Israel share certain characteristics. They are politically liberal, religiously less traditional, more remote from organized Jewish life, and highly educated.¹

The available quantitative evidence on Jewish attitudes, however, does not point to any broad trend of alienation (or intensification). In each survey we find that about a third of American Jews are relatively indifferent or even hostile to Israel; about a third claim to feel a strong commitment to Israel; and another third is indeed even more passionately involved with Israel. Among the latter we count the third of American Jews who have been to Israel, who would want their children to spend a year living there, who have relatives or friends in Israel, and who have some minimal knowledge of Israeli society. To be sure, American Jews' ignorance of Israeli affairs is truly startling, even to supposedly "expert" observers such as myself. I was shocked to find that only a third of my nationwide sample of American Jews knew that non-Orthodox rabbis could not officially marry Israelis, and only a third knew that Arab and Israeli schoolchildren generally attend different schools.

One objection to the conclusion that the proportion of American Jews at each level of involvement has remained fairly constant focuses on the fall-off in tourism to Israel in 1988 and the years following. This drop did not reflect political or moral opposition to Israeli policy. It rather pointed to the keen sensitivity of American Jewish travelers to images of terrorism and violence when contemplating international travel. Nor should the protestations of well-known American Jewish public figures be seen as proof of a decline in American Jewish attachment to Israel. Whether these figures represent a large fraction of the American Jewish public is a debatable point. Furthermore, my surveys of the larger public demonstrate only weak to insignificant correlations between caring for Israel and support for Israeli government policy. In other words, criticism of Israeli policies is simply not empirically associated with psychological distance from the Jewish state. In fact, while just under half of those surveyed admit to being disturbed by some Israeli government policies, those who do are more likely to claim strong psychic attachment to Israel than to be apathetic to Israel. Moreover, the vast majority of respondents agreed that "Even when I disagree with the actions of Israel's government, that doesn't change how close I feel toward Israel."

The survey data do point to one significant attitudinal change during periods of heightened hostilities, such as the Lebanon war or the Intifada. In both 1982 and 1988, the surveys uncovered greater anxiety about non-Jewish atti-

tudes toward Israel (and toward Jews by extension). More Jews than in other surveys (1981, 1983, 1984, and 1986) were worried that Gentiles were anti-Israel and anti-Semitic. Though generally supportive of Jews' right to criticize Israel, the minority that demurred from this position jumped between September 1983 and April 1988. Notably, these months followed significant Arab-Israeli violence and public criticism of Israel by Jews and non-Jews alike. To reiterate, the surveys suggest far more stability than decline in measures of American Jewish attachment, involvement, and commitment to Israel during the 1980s.

As constant as American Jews' attitudes appear to be from the survey data, however, such data can often obscure important changes occurring beneath the rhetorical surface. To a certain extent, replies to questions about feelings toward Israel reflect the respondents' sense of what they are expected to say. Not surprisingly, Americans exercise far more regularly and eat more nutritiously on social surveys than they do in real life. Survey answers indicate something, but assuming a one-to-one correspondence between responses and genuine sentiments may not always be prudent. In my 1986 national survey of American Jews, 89 percent of the respondents agreed that "I get just as upset by terrorist attacks upon non-Jews as I do when terrorists attack Jews," and only 8 percent disagreed. On the basis of this evidence, I am not ready to claim that Jews were in fact equally disturbed by the Munich massacre as they were by the car-bombing of the U.S. Marines in Lebanon. I would be ready to take these findings as evidence of American Jews' public commitment to universalism, and their resistance to publicly expressing overt and blatant particularism, even on a confidential survey that promises anonymity.

Similarly, the apparent stability in commitment to Israel as measured by a decade of survey data may mask some distancing occurring beneath the surface. We may need to look at other sorts of evidence before concluding that positive American Jewish feelings to Israel have remained largely unaffected by Israeli-Arab clashes, the rise of right-wing extremism, religious-secular clashes, and all the rest.

One place to look is at pro-Israel philanthropy, a sphere of American Jewish activity that is both significant in its own right and symptomatic of a larger dynamic. Here several potentially meaningful trends bear noting. First, for over a decade, total contributions to the UJA-Federation local campaigns have been nearly flat in aggregate dollar terms; this means that, adjusting for inflation, total campaign contributions have declined since the mid-1970s. The second noteworthy trend derives from the fact that every local fund-raising campaign decides how much of the moneys it collects will be handed over to the United Jewish Appeal for overseas charities (where Israel's needs play a prominent symbolic role) and how much will remain in the community for local and national allocation. For several years, the overseas proportion has been drifting downward, a tendency all the more notable since change in such matters normally assumes a glacial pace. Given that federation allocation patterns move

very slowly, even a small dip over the last few years in the proportions devoted to Israel (and other overseas needs) may well indicate an even more substantial cooling of ardor for Israel on the part of philanthropic decision makers. The positive response to the surge in Russian aliyah embodied in Operation Exodus does not necessarily imply a change in that trend.

In a related area, directors of community relations councils (CRCs) report a lack of enthusiasm and of qualified lay leadership willing to work in their sphere of activity. Prior to 1967, the CRCs were hotbeds of Jewish liberalism. After 1967, for less than a decade the causes of Israeli security and freedom for Soviet Jews came to dominate their agendas. Since the mid-1970s, if the scattered reports of a few informed observers can be trusted, Israel no longer excites the passions of the top (or even middle) rung of Jewish volunteer leadership in the environs of local Jewish federation campaigns.

Another observation worrisome to those interested in strong ties between Israel and Diaspora Jewry is based on even softer, less tangible impressions. Some communal professionals have observed that their prominent lay leaders have chosen to “dis-attend” to Israel-related matters. Dis-attention, as some social scientists use the term, refers to the process whereby people ignore some issues, object, or contradiction that causes them discomfort, rather than deciding to deal with the troublesome matter directly. While prepared to defend Israel’s honor against what they regard as unfair criticism, these lay leaders may be choosing to invest their energies in areas where they find less conflict, less ambivalence, and less complexity.

In short, the available evidence, be it quantitative or impressionistic, provides contradictory answers to the question of whether American and Israeli Jews have been drifting apart. But even if they have been, the ostensibly disturbing events listed at the outset may not deserve all the credit (or blame) for the drift. After the supercharged pro-Israel atmosphere of the period from 1967 to 1976, American Jews have been unable to replicate the enthusiasm that we now understand as peculiar to the very unusual decade that began with the Six-Day War.

From Romanticism to Realism

The cause of Israel took American Jewry by storm in 1967. Prior to the Six-Day War, Israel ranked well below other issues on the American Jewish communal agenda. Before 1967, intellectuals writing about their Jewishness hardly mentioned Israel—or, for that matter, the Holocaust. It is clear in retrospect that the dramatic televised events surrounding the Six-Day War came at a time when American Jews were primed to enter a period of ethnic assertiveness. The old liberal coalition was splintering; blacks had challenged the melting-pot conception and given ethnicity a good name; and a third generation of Jews (grandchildren of East European immigrants), more secure in their American-

ness and anxious to preserve their families' Jewishness, replaced the second generation as the demographic and political center of gravity within the Jewish community. As a result of the 1967 and 1973 wars, pro-Israel sentiment and activity among American Jews shot upward. The UJA and Israel Bonds experienced significant increases in contributions, reaching levels in the year or two after the wars that were dramatically above those of the years just prior to them. On another plane, American aliyah hit its historic climax in the years between the wars (1968–1972). Jewish travel to Israel also climbed dramatically. In 1970 only about 15 percent of American Jews had been to Israel; by the early 1980s, over a third had been there at least once, and about a sixth had visited twice or more.

As concerns shifted from integrating into America to Jewish survival, Israel became the survivalist cause par excellence (along with memorializing the Holocaust and rescuing Soviet Jewry). Israel and related themes came to dominate philanthropic campaigns, community relations work, electoral activity, and political lobbying, at times to the exclusion of all other matters.

Equally significant was the superinflated image most American Jews held of Israelis. Israelis were heroic, industrious, family-oriented, and peace-loving. In short, they were romanticized and idealized, seen as a better version of American Jews.

Blind romance and unfounded idealization can last only so long. As familiarity with Israel grew, as travel increased, as Jewish leaders developed their relationships with counterpart Israeli officials, and as the internal conflicts among Israelis became more visible, a more realistic and down-to-earth image of Israelis took hold. The emergence of divisions between hawks and doves, religious and secular, Sephardi and Ashkenazi, and Arab and Jew within Israel all served to disabuse American Jews of an ill-informed, primitive, one-dimensional and overly flattering image of Israelis. As the years passed, as more American Jews became increasingly familiar with Israel, the romanticized images began to fade. In this context, it is not surprising to learn that those who had been to Israel became more attached to Israel Jewishly and politically, but less enamored of Israelis personally.

Moreover, the American Jewry that was ready to fall in love with Israel in the late 1960s had become somewhat jaded by the late 1970s. The remarkable events of that first decade had served to reinforce the image of Israeli heroes withstanding the onslaught of the Arab villains. Each year brought another dramatic event that further deepened the image of a valiant Israel under siege: the Six-Day War (1967); the first postwar fatalities of Arab terrorism (1968); the War of Attrition with Egypt (1969–1971); the Munich Massacre (1972); the Yom Kippur War (1973); the Rabat Conference in which the Arab world united behind the PLO (1974); the UN's "Zionism is Racism" resolution (1975); and the Entebbe hijacking and rescue (1976). In contrast, the events since 1976 (with the possible exception of the Baghdad nuclear reactor raid) have sent forth far

more ambiguous messages, certainly to non-Jewish Americans and very likely to American Jews as well.

The recent distancing from Israel (to whatever extent it exists) may simply derive from the end of an era of romantic idealism. American Jews could not be expected to sustain permanently an unrealistic romance with Israel. At some point, the glamour had to wear off, the warts begin to appear. With such a perspective, the ostensibly disturbing developments of the last ten years, along with the tension between some American Jews and some Israelis arising from specific issues and disagreements, can be seen as but the evidence of a changing relationship that was bound to become more complicated, ambiguous, and mature, and perhaps more distant as well.

Such a conclusion would, however, underestimate the significance of a series of disturbing events. Although their immediate adverse impact on the pro-Israel sentiments of the American Jewish rank and file may not have been severe, they do bear a deeper import. Even if they have not (yet?) provoked serious and widespread alienation of American Jews from Israel, they may indicate some deeper trends in Israeli society that bear watching. In particular, the troublesome incidents of the 1980s may portend the emergence of a permanently "illiberal" Israel (at a time when American Jews show no signs of retreating from their identity as political and cultural liberals). Perhaps even more ominously, the 1980s may well symbolize a widening gulf between the Judaisms of American and Israeli Jews. The 1990s so far have continued that trend. In other words, Israelis may be acting in ways objectionable to many American Jews not only because of divergences in political values, but because of more fundamental differences over what it means to be Jewish. And it is in these trends, on the deeper level of Judaic beliefs, symbols, and values, that we may find reason to believe that American Jewry and Israeli Jewry really are drifting apart.

Two Judaisms in Two Countries

Since their recent forebears left the quasi-traditional communities of Eastern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, the Jewries of America and Israel have been compelled to interact with their contemporary environments and with their historical cultural traditions to construct Judaisms appropriate to their needs. The American and Israeli Judaic constructions certainly resemble one another, but they are far from identical.²

To be sure, there are many points of overlap between the two communities' understanding of Judaism. Jews in both countries observe many of the same holidays, rituals, and ceremonies; they respond (albeit sometimes differently) to many of the same symbols; they retell many of the same myths; and they share some sense of common origins and common destiny. All of this is not surprising since Israeli and American Jews draw upon a common past, a common religion, and a common civilization.

Fully recognizing these and related commonalities, it is also fair to say that in the reconstruction of Judaism under the impact of highly discrepant contemporary conditions, Israelis and Americans have arrived at varying, even diverging conclusions. This is not merely a matter of saying that more Israelis are Orthodox or more observant (although this is part of the story). Rather, the Judaic differences are so profound and thorough as to separate *dati* Israelis from Orthodox Americans, as well as *chiloni* Israelis from secular or nondenominational Americans. The Judaic gaps between Israel and the United States are not solely or even mostly a function of a religiosity gap. Some differences are truly enormous. Sometimes one community sees as genuinely Jewish that which the other sees as totally irrelevant or even antithetical to Judaism. A few examples of the most glaring differences will suffice to illustrate this point.

In a 1988 *Los Angeles Times* survey, a national sample of American Jews was asked, "As a Jew, which of the following qualities do you consider most important to your Jewish identity: a commitment to social equality, or religious observance, or support for Israel, or what?"³ Half answered "social equality." The rest were equally divided between the other three options. As one might expect, denominational traditionalism was closely associated with the liberal response. The proportions choosing "equality" amounted to only 18 percent for the Orthodox, but 44 percent for the Conservative respondents, 65 percent for the Reform respondents, and 63 percent for the nondenominational. "Social equality," the progressive, moral, and universalist response, dominated the more traditional and particularist answers of "religious observance" or "supporting Israel."

One cannot imagine that most Israelis, even political leftists, would identify the most important element in their Judaism with such a universalist, politically progressive principle as "social equality." The more traditional Israelis would undoubtedly select "religious observance" as the basis for their Judaism, seeing observance as fundamental and preliminary to other aspects of Jewish life; most of the secular would have little trouble seeing the Israeli state or society as central to their Judaism. Indeed, the Israeli component is so strong that some Israelis allege that "Diaspora Jewish life" is an oxymoron, or at least tenuous and inauthentic. Over two-thirds of our national sample survey of Israeli Jews in 1986 claimed that "it is almost impossible for me to think of what it means to be a Jew without thinking about *Medinat Yisrael* (the State of Israel)." Secular Israelis, even as they reject the legitimacy of the Orthodox rabbinate's authority over certain parts of their own lives, nevertheless recognize *Halakhah* as interpreted by Orthodox rabbis as the authoritative definition of Judaism.

Not only are American Jews politically liberal while Israelis are not, American Jews remain well to the left of the national political center in several key areas, regarding liberalism as central to their Judaism. American Jewish liberalism consists of a package of values: support for social welfare programs, sympathy for minorities, commitment to civil rights, support for civil liberties, and

extreme opposition to lowering church-state barriers. Not only do Israelis generally take the opposite points of view on many if not all of these issues; they regard their advocacy as having little bearing on what constitutes a “good Jew.” The following observation by Michael Walzer seems perfectly natural, almost innocuous, in the American context, but would seem bizarre, naive, and/or heretical to many Israelis:

Our ethos is leftist: because we remember that we were slaves in Egypt, because we remember the ghetto, the years of persecution, the pariah years. . . . We have learned, many of us, to part with our money in the name of Justice. . . . It is a simple fact of our experience that . . . radical ideas come naturally.⁴

While the “leftist ethos” may be the essence of Judaism to many American Jews, for many Israelis—especially the more traditional—the same ethos actually has anti-Judaic connotations. In Israel leftist universalism has been associated with movements and parties that advocate curtailing the power of the rabbinate and, more generally, the role of Judaism in the public sphere. But more to the point, not only are Israeli leftists anticlerical, some of them even argue that Judaism by its very nature is antithetical to their progressive, universalist principles. (A few old-line secularists, such as those in the Mapam party, would still argue—to a very skeptical and small Israeli audience—that Judaism and leftist politics are harmonious with one another.)

Not only is a universalist struggle for social equality seen by many American Jews as central to Judaism, but so too have they come to provide universalist connotations regularly to their major rituals, ceremonies, and holidays. Thus, to take some typical examples, Passover is the holiday of liberation for all people, not just Jews; Tishah B’Av is a memorial to utter destruction be it of the Holy Temple or a nuclear Holocaust; and Purim can be shared with merry-makers of all faiths. Philanthropic spokespersons regularly equate the traditional concept of *tzedakah* with the modern liberal concept of social justice. Liberal political activists routinely appropriate Jewish texts and symbols to buttress their claim of the identity of Judaism with a liberal social ethic.

In another departure from tradition and from their Israeli counterparts, Americans have deemphasized the tradition’s understanding of ritual practice as obligatory. Instead, the ethos that pervades non-Orthodox schools and synagogues emphasizes a personalist and voluntarist approach to religious practice. Teachers and rabbis urge the Jewish laity to select those practices they find particularly meaningful, or, alternatively, to work at identifying or creating a personal meaning in religious observance. The commercial success of the volumes of the *Jewish Catalogue*, significantly self-described as kits for do-it-yourself Judaism, bears testimony to the power of the personalist and voluntarist side to American Judaism. To Israelis, this personalist voluntarism is foreign, to say the least. Even secular Israelis understand the religion that they reject as

constituting a mandatory legal system, and it is one within which the lay person surely cannot choose or improvise (except with the consciousness of committing a sin).

Israelis for their part have also moved in directions that most American Jews would find very strange. If American Jews have universalized Jewish thought and practice, significant particularist strains have taken root and flourished in Israel, especially (but not only) among ardent nationalists and the traditional Orthodox.

Telling examples of these trends abound. In a remark that represents the view of many rather than the idiosyncrasy of an isolated individual, a leader of Jewish settlers on the West Bank stated that there is no place in Judaism for “a humanistic attitude in determining responses to hostile behavior of the Arab population.” Another has said, “Jewish national morality is distinct from universal morality. Notions of universal or absolute justice may be good for Finland or Australia but not here, not with us.”⁵ Such particularist statements would be roundly condemned in most American Jewish circles; but in Israel they are part of the landscape, acceptable to a major part of Israeli Jewry, and seen by many as valid expressions of Judaism.

Love of Eretz Yisrael, the land of Israel, is another Judaic concept developed and nurtured among Israeli Jews that has little resonance among American Jews. Few of the latter appreciate the extent to which even secular Israelis attach an intrinsic sacredness to the land of Israel. The widespread fascination with the land’s flora and fauna, the national passion for archaeology, the regular hikes and encampments by schoolchildren and youth movement participants, to say nothing of the political inclinations of most of the Israeli right and even the rural Israeli left, all testify to the supreme value the land holds for most Israelis. In fact, in our survey of Israelis, over two-thirds claimed that “it is almost impossible for me to think of what it means to be a Jew without thinking about Eretz Yisrael.” Below is a passage from Rav Kook, first chief rabbi of the prestate Jewish community in Palestine. It could never have been written by an American Jewish thinker. Yet in Israel, Rav Kook, as interpreted by his followers in Gush Emunim, is treated with great seriousness and reverence:

It is the air of the land of Israel that makes one wise. . . . In the land of Israel, one draws upon the light of Jewish wisdom, upon the quality of spiritual life which is unique to the people of Israel. . . . The impure soil that is everywhere outside the land of Israel is thus suffused with the stench of idolatry, and the Jews there are worshippers of idols in purity. . . . Enlightened wisdom is to be found only in the land of light; there is no Torah like that of the Land of Israel.⁶

If the Israelis’ passion for their land is foreign to American Jews, so too is their understanding of the Israeli state. The distinction goes beyond the simple

fact that the State of Israel and its major policy orientations have become constituent elements in the Judaism of most American Jews. It also extends to the very concept of the relationship of the state to the Jewish people.

The only concept of state with which Americans are familiar is the Western, democratic version. In this well-known model, the state ideally treats all its citizens alike, without regard to race, religion, or ethnicity. Moreover, the state has a corporate interest above and beyond those of the individuals who constitute the country. The Israeli concept, akin to that shared by many Middle Eastern and Asian societies, sees the state as an instrument of a particular people; it is truly a "nation-state," that is, the sovereign expression of an extended clan, tribe, folk, or people.

Two interesting consequences at variance with the Western concept of the state flow from this model. First, the state is seen as truly belonging to one national or ethnic group—in Israel's case, the Jews. Minorities are tolerated but can never legitimately aspire to full political, economic, and cultural equality with the group that constitutes the rightful citizens of the state. Second, the Western model recognizes only individuals; it theoretically ignores the existence of ethnic, religious, or national groups. In contrast, the Israeli state in practice and in theory attends to family-like needs of the Jewish people, to the extent that state interests are often subordinated to the norms of family-like behavior. Personal contacts, special privileges, waivers of rules, never-ending bargaining and bribery without a financial profit motive are rife throughout the operation of the Israeli state. The Anglo-Saxon insistence on clearly stated and fairly applied procedures is certainly an oddity in the Israeli context. Family-like behavior characterizes the Israeli bureaucracy, and family-like concerns often take precedence over state-oriented needs and interests. In short, contrary to what many American Jews may think, Israel is not a state like any other, at least not like any other in the West; rather it has many attributes of the familial (or national) state more prevalent in the Third World. Ben-Gurion's efforts at state building notwithstanding, the signs point in the direction of the long-term ascendancy of familial rather than Western features in the Israeli state.

American and Israeli Jews have developed contrasting, and sometimes conflicting, norms and values of Jewish life. American Jews differ from Israeli Jews in their emphasis on voluntarism, universalism, and liberalism in their Judaism. Similarly, Israeli Judaism is distinguished by unabashed particularism, ritualism, and a deep attachment to the land. The examples described—and there are many others—demonstrate the emergence of some very serious differences between American and Israeli Jews and Judaism at a fundamental level. Are these differences likely to widen? Will the world's two largest and most important Jewish communities continue to produce variant versions of Judaic ideas and values? Only by exploring the reasons these differences have emerged can we begin to imagine whether they will persist or even grow in depth and number.

Israel and American Jewry: The Major Structural Distinctions

Though we can only speculate as to why the Judaisms of Israel and the United States have grown so different, certain factors that appear to be permanent features of Israeli and American Jewish life are most critical.

First, almost all Jews in Israel live in an exclusively Jewish social environment. Most Jews in America have predominantly non-Jewish neighbors and at least some Gentile friends, even though their close friends are usually Jewish. Furthermore, over a third of American Jews who married in recent years married non-Jews.

What Jewish density means for cross-national differences in the understanding of Judaism is not immediately obvious, but the distinctions between American Jews in heavily Jewish social networks and those in less Jewishly dense networks are suggestive. Those with more Jewish friends and neighbors report higher levels of ritual observance, more traditional religious identification, lower levels of political liberalism, greater anxieties about and perceptions of anti-Semitism, greater attachment to Israel, and, most notably, greater commitment to the notion of Jewish family. The causal order here is impossible to disentangle. We can never be sure of the extent to which Jewish density of social networks stimulates these tendencies or the extent to which these tendencies generate greater Jewish exclusivity in choice of spouses, friends, and neighbors. It is reasonable to assume, however, that living among heavily Jewish networks helps maintain, if not stimulate, the Jewish identity phenomena enumerated above.

No comparable data exist for Israelis since nearly all Jewish Israelis confine their social relations to fellow Jews. Closely related to the concept of Jewish friendship, however, is that of cosmopolitanism or parochialism. In America, Jewish friendship may be seen as reflecting one's worldview on a cosmopolitan-parochial spectrum. Using these terms, it is fair to say that Israelis are far more Jewishly parochial than are Americans, and that this parochialism has consequences for Israelis' Jewish identity, undoubtedly feeding their particularistic tendencies.

Not only is Israel more densely Jewish than is American Jewish society; Israel is also a Jewish state. Thus, when the state makes policy, it is Jewish policy; the state's bureaucracy and instruments are by their very nature Jewish; and, as a corollary, Jewish authorities and Jewish ideologies are compelled to take public-policy stands. In Israel, Judaism is a public matter, whereas in America it is more private; some see it as an analog to the model of religious faith provided by liberal Protestantism.

Although both Israeli and American Jews feel threatened by the non-Jews around them, both agree that the threat of Arabs to Israelis is far more palpable and serious than that experienced by American Jews. The perception of threat has greater consequences in Israel. The classic responses of a community under siege and mobilized for defense include heightened levels of solidarity and

greater antagonism to outsiders and dissenters. Undoubtedly, the Israeli-Arab conflict has contributed to feelings of Jewish familism in Israel, Jewish particularism, antagonism toward and fear of non-Jews, and cultural chauvinism. Just as surely, these sentiments have worked their way into the Israelis' understanding of what it means to be a Jew.⁷

While Israelis confront a physical threat primarily from outside their state, American Jews feel the insecurity of a minority living in a multiethnic democracy. American Jews seek protection through combating prejudice and discrimination, advocating strict enforcement of civil rights and liberties, supporting separation of church and state, and improving the situation of the most poverty-stricken to forestall social violence. All of this amounts to the domestic liberal agenda. (But not only has their Jewishness made liberals of many American Jews; it has made conservatives of many Israelis.) Many American Jews are "minoritarian"; Israeli Jews are "majoritarian." As the majority in their society, as the controllers of their government, and as a group faced with physical dangers from belligerent outsiders, Israelis have little reason to adopt a liberal political posture akin to that of American Jews. They have even less reason to incorporate the principles of American-style liberalism into their concept of a "good Jew."

American Jews live in a society of religious voluntarism. Not only can individuals freely choose the religious body with which to affiliate; they can choose not to affiliate at all, or they can choose how to interpret their affiliation. No coercive state power is brought to bear to affect these choices. One consequence for American Judaism has been the emergence of non-Orthodox Jewish denominations headed by rabbis and lay leaders who offer alternative models of Jewish authenticity. Just as pluralism is part of America, so too is it part of American Judaism. In contrast, state power in Israel confers exclusive Jewish legitimacy on the Orthodox rabbinate. Until recently, non-Orthodox religious movements have not only enjoyed little active support, but little respect as representatives of authentic Judaism, even from non-Orthodox Jews.

As a voluntarist religious group, American Jews have needed to construct a thick infrastructure of voluntary organizations operating in a variety of functional areas. Schools, synagogues, philanthropies, defense agencies, periodicals, hospitals, old age homes, camps, and fraternal organizations are only some of the more prominent categories of American Jewish organizational life. The purposes served by these agencies are often served, in Israel, by government agencies or by institutions heavily subsidized by public funds. As a result (or at least as a corollary), American Jews have attached great significance to voluntarism as an important part of adult Jewish life, while Israelis, clearly, see the State of Israel as imbued with Jewish significance for themselves personally and for the destiny of the Jewish people generally.

Another feature unique to Israel as a Jewish state is the pervasiveness of Jewish culture in all its variety. The national language is Hebrew; schoolroom

texts—even for secular students—include the Bible and other Judaically significant material; the most important holidays of the traditional religious calendar are national holidays as well. The diffusion of these and other aspects of Jewish culture means that even the most secular of Israelis are inevitably caught up in the religious tradition, even if they reinterpret it in a secular way. In America, the absence of a taken-for-granted quality to Jewish life can be seen as having two apparently contradictory effects. On the one hand, the voluntary nature of Jewish involvement means that Jews can opt out of participating in religious or communal life if they choose. On the other hand, such participation demands an intentionality that cannot characterize Israelis who partake of Jewish living as a part of their everyday life.

To say that the factors mentioned above are among the most critical is not to deny that society-wide, global factors other than those touched upon here may also be responsible for leading Israeli and American Judaism in different directions. Jewish social density, the state apparatus, state legitimation of Orthodoxy, the Arab threat, and the pervasiveness of Jewish culture all play crucial roles in influencing the nature of Israeli Judaism. Minority status, the voluntarism and pluralism of the larger society, and relative physical security are among the important features that characterize American Jewry.

What of the Future?

The purpose of this essay is to peer into the future, to examine the state of Israeli-American Jewish relations 30 years hence. The discussion above certainly informs speculation about this issue, and may even provide the beginning of an agenda for policy making.

No analysis of current or recent trends can provide an infallible look into the future, however. Even the most accurate, precise, comprehensive, and sophisticated grasp of the present and recent past does relatively little to advance significantly our understanding of the distant future. The most we can say is that if recent trends continue, we will be heading in such and such a direction. Mathematicians have developed “catastrophe theory” to describe and explain sudden changes of events. My own view is that social history develops along the lines of catastrophe theory. We live most of our lives through periods of developmental and gradual change. At certain points that change speeds up rapidly. Wars and social revolutions represent the classic ways of charging up the engines of change. The Jewish community of the United States is still living in a period shaped by the tumultuous American and Jewish history of the years 1967 and 1973. Little has changed since the mid-1970s, but this observation says nothing about the possibility of another period of rapid change lurking around the corner, beyond the horizons of our vision. A Syrian attack against Israel more direct and devastating than the 1991 Iraqi attack, a no-holds-barred Palestinian insurrection, a full-scale economic depression (in the U.S. or Israel), a reemergence of

the Christian right or an anti-Semitic left, and other plausible events beyond our ability to predict could significantly alter the texture of American Jewish life and relations with Israel as well.

Speculating on the Jewish future may be an amusing exercise, but it has no policy-relevant value. Accurate predictions are beyond our ability. So, too, is the formulating of plans. At best, we can make plans that take into account our vision of the world 5 to 10 years from now, not 30 or 40 years.

With this shorter time perspective in mind, we can say that policy makers in American Jewish life and Israel do need to confront the challenge of Israeli-Diaspora relations posed by the long-standing processes described here. Israeli and American Jewry have been parting company politically, culturally, and religiously. This does not mean that they necessarily feel any less allegiance to one another; what it does mean is that the objective basis for that allegiance, the Judaic resemblance of one community to the other, has been diminishing. Further, Israel itself appears more fractured and conflicted, making it difficult to project a unified, neat, and orderly image of Israel. More important, imposing a unified sense of what it means for American Jewry to be pro-Israel is more difficult.

These twin developments (American-Israeli divergence and internal Israeli division) have special implications for those American Jews engaged in education, philanthropy, political activity, and cultural activities.

In the past, educators have presented Israeli Jewish life essentially as a more intensive version of American Judaism. They have used Israel-based travel and study solely as a way of intensifying American Jews' understanding of and commitment to one or another version of American-style Judaism. I would suggest that educators need to place more emphasis on how Israelis differ from their American Jewish counterparts, and how the possibilities for Jewish living in Israel differ from those in the Diaspora. Beyond that, educators need to convey an understanding of the wide variety of Judaic choices within Israel, their rationale, and their consequences.

Philanthropic supporters of Israel need to capitalize on rather than resist the pluralization of American Jewish philanthropic support for Israel. The development of alternatives to the United Jewish Appeal ought to be seen as a healthy and positive sign, one reflecting American Jewish interest in associating with specific pieces of Israel rather than a whole, undifferentiated entity.

There are political implications as well. Some Jews undoubtedly feel most comfortable serving as advocates of official Israel's cause in the United States. But demanding that those who feel closer to the Israeli opposition (whether it be of the right or left) support the policies of the party in power is counterproductive. Rather, the development of passionate American counterparts to the full spectrum of Israeli political opinion will serve not only to strengthen Israel's representation in the United States but also serve to strengthen identification and involvement with Israel.

It is in the cultural arena that the growing divergence between Israeli and American Jews and Judaism poses the greatest challenge. Educators, philanthropists, and political activists can easily adjust to an Israel that is culturally at variance with American Jewry. But the growing gap between what is Jewish in Israel and what is Jewish in the United States poses the possibility that Israel will become Jewishly irrelevant to American Jews, and vice versa. It is already the case that the two Jewries do rather little to enrich each others' internal Jewish life. The most notable and admirable features of American Judaism (for example, denominational pluralism, personalism, innovation, feminism, voluntarism) have had little impact on Israeli Judaism. Similarly, what may be some of the potentially most useful aspects of Israeli Judaism for American Jewry (for example, the emphasis on family; national interpretations of Jewish symbols and holidays; appreciation for the meaning of land; a sense of commandment; Jewish familism) are hardly even recognized in the United States.

The challenge for those concerned with maintaining and enriching the Israeli-American Jewish relationship on many levels, including the cultural and the spiritual, will be to develop mechanisms to put the divergence between these two communities to good use. How to do so is the topic for another essay, if not another analyst.