



**ARE AMERICAN AND ISRAELI JEWS  
DRIFTING APART?**

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## **Disturbing Developments: 1977 and Beyond**

Are American and Israeli Jews drifting apart? The answer is neither obvious nor straightforward.

Never in the history of the State of Israel have there been so many overt signs of strain between American and Israeli Jewries than in the period since 1977. Beginning in that year, when Israel for the first time elected a right-wing government, several developments have made some American Jews considerably uncomfortable about Israel:

1) The hard-line foreign and security policies of the Begin government, especially with regard to Jewish settlements on the West Bank;

2) The War in Lebanon (1982), which is the only conflict 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 (1984), to both Israeli and American Jews a symbol of racist and anti-democratic tendencies that most American Jews find distasteful, if not abhorrent;

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 over matters of personal status;

5) Very tough Israeli military responses to the *intifada* (1987-9);

6) The electoral success of rigorously Orthodox religious parties in November 1988, and the subsequent furor among American Jews over the prospect that Israel would change its "Who is a Jew?" law to exclude conversions by non-Orthodox rabbis.

All these developments provoked vituperative and passionate conflicts within Israel. Indeed, these conflicts themselves may have had the effect of further diminishing Israel's standing in the eyes of many American Jews.

How have these developments affected American Jews' attitudes toward Israel? Part of the answer is found in the American Jewish Committee-sponsored surveys of American Jews that I have conducted almost every year since 1981. The surveys demonstrate that not all Jews are equally upset with the developments outlined above. Rather, those most disturbed by the rightward political and religious trends in Israel share certain characteristics. They are

politically liberal, religiously less traditional, relatively remote from organized Jewish life, and highly educated (i.e., holders of graduate degrees).

However, despite some disaffection among these subgroups over Israel's rightward tendencies, there seems to be no broad trend of alienation from Israel, or, for that matter, intensification of support. Each survey has reported that about a third of American Jews are relatively indifferent or hostile to Israel; about a third claim to feel a strong commitment to Israel, although without displaying signs of active involvement; and another third is indeed passionately attached to and actively involved with Israel. Among the latter are the American Jews who have been to Israel, those who would want their children to spend a year living there, those who have relatives in Israel, those who have friends in Israel, those who have been in touch with Israeli friends or family in the last year, and those who have at least some minimal knowledge of Israeli society.

One can point to evidence that seems to contradict the thesis that the overall levels of involvement or attachment to Israel have remained relatively constant. First, there was the fall-off in American Jewish tourism to Israel in 1988. But this drop did not signify widespread political or moral opposition to Israeli policy; it rather reflected the fact that potential American Jewish travelers are keenly sensitive to images of terrorism and violence when contemplating international travel. Neither should the protestations of well-known American Jewish public figures be seen as proof of a decline in American Jewish attachment to Israel. Even if, for the sake of argument, we assume that these figures represented the views of a large fraction of the American Jewish public (a debatable point), 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. The contrary may be the case: those American Jews who admit to being disturbed by some Israeli government policies tend to be the people who also claim strong psychic attachment to Israel, while those who are not disturbed by these policies tend to be apathetic to Israel. Moreover, 82 percent of respondents in 1988 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. In both 1982 (the Lebanon War) and 1988 (the *intifada*), the surveys detected greater anxiety about non-Jewish attitudes toward Israel, and, by extension, toward Jews. More respondents than in other surveys (1981, 1983, 1984 and 1986) were worried that Gentiles were anti-Israel and anti-Semitic. While generally supportive of Jews' right to criticize Israel, the minority that demurred from this position jumped -- relative to earlier surveys -- in September 1982 and April 1988, months that followed significant Arab-Israeli violence and public criticism of Israel by Jews and non-Jews alike. But these temporary variations notwithstanding, the surveys suggest far more stability than decline in measures of American Jewish attachment and commitment to Israel.

With that said, as constant as American Jews' attitudes appear to be, survey 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' perception of what they are expected to say, just as, in social surveys, far more Americans exercise regularly and eat nutritious food than do so in real life. To take a case in point, in the 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." On the basis of this evidence, I am not ready to claim that Jews were in fact no more disturbed by the

Munich massacre of Israeli Olympic athletes than they were by the car-bombing of the U.S. Marines in Lebanon. However I would be ready to take these findings as evidence of American Jews' public commitment to universalism, and of their reluctance to express overt and blatant particularism. Similarly, the apparent stability in commitment to Israel as measured by almost a decade of survey data may mask some distancing from Israel. We need to look at other sorts of evidence before concluding that positive American Jewish feelings toward Israel have remained largely unaffected by post-1977 events.

One place to look is at pro-Israel philanthropy, a sphere of American Jewish activity which is both significant in its own right and symptomatic of broader attitudes. For over a decade, growth in total contributions to the UJA-Federation local campaigns has been sluggish, barely keeping pace with inflation. And since 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 and how much will remain in the community for local and national allocation, it is important to note the downward trend in the overseas proportion, from 55 percent in 1976 to 45 percent in 1986. This tendency is all the more notable since any change in allocation patterns normally takes place at a glacial pace. Such a dip in the proportion devoted to Israel -- and other overseas needs -- may well indicate substantial cooling of ardor for Israel on the part of philanthropic decision-makers.

Similarly, directors of local Jewish community relations councils (CRCs), groups that focus mainly on defense of Israeli security and freedom for Soviet Jews, report a lack of enthusiasm and of qualified lay leadership willing to work in their sphere of activity. And also -- if the scattered reports of a few informed observers can be trusted -- Israel and Soviet Jewry no longer excite the passions of the top or even middle-rung Jewish volunteer leadership in the local Jewish federation campaigns. Accordings to some communal professionals, their prominent lay leaders have chosen to "dis-attend" to Israel-related matters. Dis-attention, as social scientists use the term, refers to the process whereby people ignore some subject that causes them discomfort, rather than deciding to deal with the troublesome matter directly. While remaining prepared to defend Israel's honor against what they regard as unfair criticism, these lay leaders may be choosing to invest their energies in other areas where they find less conflict, less ambivalence and less complexity.

In short, the available evidence, quantitative or impressionistic, provides contradictory answers to the question of whether American and Israeli Jews have been drifting apart. But we must also consider the possibility that, even if they have been drifting apart, the disturbing events listed at the outset may not deserve all the credit (or blame) for the drift. Perhaps we have been observing an inevitable retreat from the supercharged pro-Israel atmosphere of the period from 1967 to 1976. It may well be that American Jews could not be expected to sustain the enthusiasm that we can now understand as peculiar to the very unusual decade which 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. 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--

less insecure in their Americanness and more anxious about preserving their families' Jewishness, replaced the second generation as the demographic and political center of gravity within the Jewish community.

Pro-Israel sentiment and activity among American Jews shot upward as a result of both the 1967 War and the Yom Kippur War of 1973. The UJA and Israel Bonds experienced significant increases in contributions, reaching levels in the year after each war that were dramatically above those of the years just prior to the wars. American aliyah hit its historic high 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 American Jewish concerns shifted from integration 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 super-inflated image most American Jews held of Israelis. Israelis were heroic, industrious, family-oriented, and peace-loving. Romanticized and idealized, Israelis were seen as better versions of American Jews.

Blind romance and unfounded idealization can last only so long. As familiarity with Israel grew, as travel increased, as American Jewish leaders thickened their relationships with counterpart Israeli officials, and, especially, as the internal conflicts among Israelis became more visible, a more realistic image of Israelis took hold. The emergence of divisions between Israeli hawks and doves, religious and secular, Sephardi and Ashkenazi, and Arab and Jew disabused American Jews of their earlier ill-informed, one-dimensional and overly flattering image of Israelis. As the years passed, the process accelerated. It is not surprising to learn that American Jews who have been to Israel are more attached to Israel Jewishly and politically, but less enamored of Israelis personally.

We must also recall the remarkable events of the 1967-76 decade that served to establish and sustain the image of Israeli heroes withstanding the onslaught of the Arab villains, as a largely neutral-to-hostile world stood by. Each year brought another dramatic event that further deepened the image of a valiant Israel under siege: the Six-Day War (1967); the first post-war fatalities from 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 stark contrast, events since 1976--with the possible exception of the Baghdad nuclear reactor raid -- have sent forth far more ambiguous messages, certainly to American non-Jews, and very likely to American Jews as well.

So the recent distancing from Israel -- to whatever extent it exists -- may simply derive from the end of an era of romantic idealism. American Jews cannot be expected to permanently sustain an unrealistic romance with Israel; at some point, the glamor wears off, the warts appear. Seen in such a perspective, the ostensibly disturbing developments of the last ten years or so, along with the tension between some American Jews and some Israelis arising from specific issues and disagreements, indicate a changing relationship that was bound to become more complicated, ambiguous, mature, and perhaps more distant as well.

Yet such a conclusion, even if accurate, should not obscure the significance of the last ten years' disturbing events. For while their immediate adverse impact on the pro-Israel sentiments of the American Jewish rank-and-file may be minimal, these events may bear a deeper import. That is, even if the recent developments have not (yet?) provoked serious and widespread alienation of American Jews from Israel, they are evidence of some deeper currents in Israeli society that bear watching. In particular, the last decade may portend the emergence of a profoundly "illiberal" Israel at a time when American Jews maintain their identity as political and cultural liberals. This contrast between the two Jewish communities may, in time, open a wide gulf between American and Israeli Jews. Indeed, Israelis may be acting in ways objectionable to many American Jews not merely because of divergences in political values, but because of more fundamental differences over the very meaning of being Jewish. And it is this possibility, a profound cleavage over Judaic beliefs, symbols, and values, that may be the key to the future of American Jewish-Israeli relations.

### 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 adapted their cultural traditions to their contemporary environments and constructed alternate versions of Judaism. The American and Israeli Judaic constructions resemble one another, but they are far from identical. [This section and the next are drawn from Charles S. Liebman and Steven M. Cohen, *Two Worlds of Judaism: The Israeli and American Experiences* (tentative title), Yale University Press, forthcoming.]

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. Israeli and American Jews do draw upon a common past, a common religion, and a common civilization.

But having reconstructed Judaism under highly discrepant contemporary conditions, Israelis and Americans have arrived at varying, even divergent conclusions. It is not merely that more Israelis are Orthodox or observant, although this is part of the story. Rather, the Judaic differences between the two communities are so profound and thorough as to separate *dati* (observant) Israelis from Orthodox American Jews, as well as *hiloni* (non-observant) Israelis from secular or non-denominational American Jews. The Judaic gaps between Israel and the United States, then, are not solely or even mostly a function of a religiosity gap between the two societies.

Some differences are truly enormous. Sometimes one community (American or Israeli) sees as genuinely Jewish that which the other sees as totally irrelevant or even antithetical to Judaism. A few examples of the most egregious differences make this point.

In a recent *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?" [*Los Angeles Times*, "Los Angeles Times Poll Number 149: Israel and Palestinians, March 25-31, April 4-7, 1988."] Half answered "social equality." The rest were equally divided

between the other three options. "Social equality" -- the progressive, moral, and universalist response -- won out over the more traditional and particularist answers of religious observance or supporting Israel. As one might expect, denominational traditionalism was inversely associated with the liberal response: that is, the more traditional, the less liberal. The proportions choosing "equality" amounted to only 18 percent for the Orthodox, but 44 percent for the Conservatives, 65 percent for the Reform, and 63 percent for the non-denominational.

Most Israelis -- even political leftists -- would not 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 state or society of Israel as central to their Judaism. Over two-thirds of the respondents in a random sample survey of Israeli Jews in 1986 claimed, "It is almost impossible for me to think of what it means to be a Jew without thinking about *Medinat Yisrael*." And secular Israelis, even as they object to the Orthodox rabbinate's authority over certain parts of their own lives, would nevertheless agree with their Orthodox neighbors and disagree with American Jews in recognizing halakha as interpreted by Orthodox rabbis as the authoritative definition of Judaism. The Judaism they reject is halakhic.

The point is that not only are American Jews politically liberal while Israelis are not liberal (in the American sense of the term). Rather, it is that American Jews regard liberalism as central to their Judaism. American Jewish liberalism consists of support for social welfare programs, sympathy for minorities, commitment to civil rights, support for civil liberties, and extreme opposition to lowering church-state barriers. Israelis generally take the opposite points of view on many of these issues and they certainly 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. (*Commentary*, January 1980, p. 77).

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 secularist movements and parties that advocate curtailing the power of the rabbinate, and more generally, limiting the role of Judaism in the public sphere. And Israeli leftists are not only anticlerical, but some of them even argue that Judaism by its very nature is antithetical to their progressive, universalist principles. Only a few old-line secularists, such as those in Mapam, would still argue -- to a very skeptical and small Israeli audience -- that Judaism and leftist politics are potentially harmonious with one another.

American Judaic universalism is pervasive, affecting all the major Jewish rituals, ceremonies and holidays. Thus, to take some typical examples, Passover celebrates liberation for all oppressed people, not just Jews; Tisha B'Av warns of utter destruction, be it of the Holy Temple or a nuclear Holocaust; and Purim can be shared with merry-makers of all faiths.



Philanthropic orators regularly equate the traditional concept of tzedakah with the modern liberal concept of social justice. Liberal political activists routinely appropriate Jewish texts and symbols in their rhetoric to buttress their claim that Judaism requires a liberal social ethic.

In another departure from their traditional ancestors and from their Israeli counterparts, American Jews have also de-emphasized the tradition's obligatory understanding of ritual practice. Instead, the ethos pervading 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. To Israelis, this entire approach is foreign, to say the least. Even secular Israelis understand the religion that they reject as constituting a mandatory legal system within which the laity cannot choose or improvise, except with the consciousness that one is 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. There is some degree of truth in Meir Kahane's claim to the Israeli public that, "I say what you think."

Telling examples of these trends abound. In remarks that represent the views of many, and not the idiosyncrasy of an isolated individual, a leader of Jewish settlers on the West Bank recently declared 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." [Quoted in Charles Liebman, "Jewish Ultra-Nationalism in Israel: Converging Strands," in William Frankel (ed.), *Survey of Jewish Affairs, 1985* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985), pp. 28-50.] 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 school children 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 which the land holds for most Israelis. In fact, in the 1986 survey of Israelis cited earlier, 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 by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, first chief rabbi of the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine. It is one which could never have been written by an American Jewish thinker. Yet in Israel, Rabbi Kook, as interpreted by his followers in Gush Emunim, is treated by many with all seriousness and great 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 that 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 worshipers 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. [Quoted in Eliezer Schweid, *The Land of Israel* (Rutherford, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1985), pp. 171-2.]

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 Israelis, while such features play far smaller roles 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 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 the 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 flow from this non-Western model. First, the state is seen as truly belonging to one national or ethnic group, in Israel's case, the Jews. Minorities, while tolerated, can never legitimately aspire to full political, economic and cultural equality with the group constituting 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 such an 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 -- even 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 an oddity in the Israeli context. Contrary to what many American Jews may think, Israel is not a state similar to other states in the West; rather it has many attributes of a third-world state. 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, then, have developed contrasting, if not sometimes conflicting, norms and values of Jewish life. 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 why these differences have emerged can we hope to arrive at an answer.

### **Israel and American Jewry: The Major Structural Distinctions**

There are several factors, which appear to be permanent features of Israeli and American Jewish life, that help explain why the Judaisms of Israel and the United States have diverged so widely.

First, almost all Jews in Israel live in an exclusively Jewish social environment.

Although most American Jews have mostly Jewish close friends, and a significant minority has only Jewish friends, most of them have predominantly non-Jewish neighbors and at least some Gentile friends. In addition, roughly a third of American Jews who married in recent years married non-Jewish spouses.

What does this difference mean for cross-national distinctions in the understanding of Judaism? Survey data comparing 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 familism. Of course, the causal order here is impossible to disentangle; we can never be sure of the extent to which the Jewish density of social networks stimulates these tendencies, or the extent to which these tendencies generate greater Jewish exclusivity in the choice of spouses, friends, and neighbors. But it certainly is reasonable to assume that living within heavily Jewish networks helps maintain, if not stimulate, the sorts of Jewish identity phenomena enumerated above. No comparable data exist for Israelis for a very simple reason: the variation in the number of Jewish friends and neighbors is infinitesimal; nearly all Jewish Israelis confine their social relations to fellow Jews. It is fair to assume that Israelis are far more Jewishly parochial than are most American Jews, and that that parochialism has consequences for Israelis' Jewish identity, 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 thing. In America, Judaism is much more a private matter analogous to the model of personal religious faith provided by liberal Protestantism.

Although both Israelis and American Jews feel threatened by their local non-Jews, 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, then, has far greater consequences for Israelis than for Americans. The classic responses of a community under siege and mobilized to defend itself include heightened levels of solidarity and greater antagonism to outsiders and dissenters. Undoubtedly, the Israeli-Arab conflict has contributed to Israeli feelings of Jewish familism, Jewish particularism, antagonism toward and fear of non-Jews, and cultural chauvinism. And just as surely, these sentiments have worked their way into the Israelis' understanding of what it means to be a Jew. The Jewish tradition does contain elements that are consonant with these sentiments, as well as elements that are antagonistic to them. Meir Kahane's racist, anti-democratic and theocratic views may constitute one intellectually reasonable, albeit morally detestable, interpretation of traditional Jewish sources.

Unlike Israelis, who confront a physical threat primarily from outside their state, American Jews feel the insecurity of a minority living in a multiethnic democracy, and see their protection deriving from combating prejudice and discrimination generally in their society, strict enforcement of civil rights and civil liberties legislation, strict separation of church and state, and ameliorating the condition of the most poverty-stricken so as to forestall social violence. All of this amounts to the domestic liberal agenda which has become incorporated into the American Jewish definition of what a good Jew ought to feel and believe. But Israeli Jews are the majority in their society, in effect, "the rightful owners" of the state apparatus. As a group faced with physical dangers from belligerent outsiders, they

have little reason to adopt such a political posture, and even less reason to incorporate the principles of American-style liberalism into their conception 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 freely 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. Non-Orthodox religious movements, until recently, have enjoyed not only little active support, but little respect even from non-Orthodox Jews as representatives of authentic Judaism.

As a voluntarist religious group, American Jews have, of necessity, constructed a thick infrastructure of voluntary organizations performing a variety of functions. Schools, synagogues, philanthropies, defense agencies, periodicals, hospitals, old-age homes, camps, 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. American Jews attach great significance to voluntarism as an element in Jewish life, while Israelis see the State of Israel, instead, 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 pervasive character of Jewish culture, in all its variety. The national language is Hebrew; school curricula -- even for the secular students -- include the Bible and other Judaic material. And not least, the most important holidays on 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 Israelis are inevitably caught up with the religious tradition, even if they reinterpret it in a secular fashion. In America, the absence of a taken-for-granted quality to Jewish life has two sorts of apparently contradictory effects. On the one hand, the voluntary nature of Jewish involvement means that Jews can opt out of participation in religious or communal life if they so choose. On the other hand, to the extent that American Jews participate in Jewish life, their participation demands an intentionality that cannot characterize Israelis who partake of Jewish living as a part of their everyday life.

There may be other factors responsible for leading Israeli and American Judaism in different directions. But the factors mentioned above are surely the most critical. Jewish social density, the state apparatus, state legitimation of Orthodoxy, the Arab threat, and the pervasive character of Jewish culture all play crucial roles in influencing the nature of Israeli Judaism. Just as clearly, the minority status of American Jews, the voluntarism and pluralism of the larger society, and their relative physical security are among the important features that distinguish the conditions of American Jews from those of their Israeli counterparts.

### **What of the Future?**

Policy makers in American Jewish life and Israel need to confront the challenge to Israel-Diaspora relations posed by long-standing processes: the fact that Israeli and American Jewry have been parting company politically, culturally and religiously, and the fractured and

more conflicted situation in Israel which makes it more difficult to project a unified, neat, and orderly image of the Jewish state. These twin developments have special implications for those American Jews engaged in education, philanthropy, politics and cultural activities.

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

Philanthropic supporters of Israel must capitalize upon 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 with a whole, undifferentiated entity.

There are parallels in the political world as well. Some Jews undoubtedly will feel most comfortable serving as advocates of official Israel's cause in the United States. But for those who feel closer to the Israeli opposition (whether it be of the Right or Left), demanding that they adhere to the line of the party in power is counter-productive. Rather, the development of passionate American counterparts of the full spectrum of Israeli political opinion will strengthen Israel's representation in the United States and also intensify identification and involvement with Israel.

It is in the cultural area that the growing divergence between Israeli and American Jews and Judaism poses the greatest challenge. 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 -- denominational pluralism, personalism, innovation, feminism, voluntarism -- have had little impact on Israeli Judaism; what may be some of the potentially most useful aspects of Israeli Judaism for American Jewry -- the emphasis on family; national interpretations of Jewish symbols and holidays, appreciation for the meaning of the land; a sense of commandment -- are hardly even recognized in the United States.

The challenge for those who are concerned with maintaining and enriching the Israel-American Jewish relationship in the years ahead will be to develop mechanisms to put the divergence between American and Israeli Judaism to good use. Gifted policymakers in Jewish life should try to turn this seeming obstacle into an opportunity for ties between American Jews and their like-minded counterparts in Israel.

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