

Identities, Pluralism, and Israel-Diaspora Relations: A Pragmatic Perspective on the Jewish Public Square

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Strengthening Jewish identity in Israel and the diaspora are different challenges, requiring dissimilar approaches. In the diaspora, the continued development of a category of "sociological" Jews alongside halakhic Jews seems unavoidable. Increasing mixed marriages are the dominant factor at its base.

Fostering a multitude of Jewish identities is most relevant in retaining as many Jews as possible for the Jewish people in the diaspora. This "buffet" approach, with a large menu of Jewish activities, is not only a matter of values but also a pragmatic one: in order to stand up to the enemies of the Jewish people, not only quality but also numbers count.

In an individualistic society, it is the consolidated core which provides the individualists with the opportunity to be both individualistic and - when in psychological need - to be able to "belong." The average Israeli Jew will have much more influence on the future of the Jewish people than the average diaspora Jew. The attitude of the Orthodox, traditional and Zionist Jews in Israel toward the diaspora will be much more determinant in Israel's policies than that of indifferent or post-Zionist Israelis.

Western society implicitly assumes that most major problems have solutions. That is a false axiom. Hegel claimed that out of thesis and antithesis, synthesis will be born. Reality is different: usually one misconception is opposed by another. In trying to synthesize them one creates confusion.

One such unsolved issue is poverty, which is a millennia-old problem even in rich societies. So are drugs and crime. Regarding Jewish issues: various categories of anti-Judaism and assimilation have accompanied us for centuries. They may have partially changed in character, but they will remain with us for a long time to come. Once the focus of the attacks was on the Jewish religion, thereafter it was on race, now it is on Jewish nationalism.

A second introductory observation is that the nineteenth century rediscovery of the Jews as a people was a brilliant idea. Zionism has made this partially true. It is very

approximate, however, to describe Israel and the diaspora together as "the Jewish people." While world Jewry does have some of the characteristics of a people, it lacks many others.

The third introductory remark concerns the so-called Middle East peace process. The facts on the ground make peace look improbable in the foreseeable future. A better description of what is in process is that we are searching, in an unstable situation, for a new labile equilibrium. Thus external threats will continue to be important in Israel's future. Here, too, the future seems one of mutations of problems rather than solving them.

A Future of Accommodations

These observations support the argument that the position of religion in the Israeli public square is unlikely to change radically in the near future. Neither will a national consensus be reached on its role. There will mainly be small shifts, accommodations, *ad hoc* approaches and patchwork. *Status quo* is not a dirty word, but probably reflects an equilibrium close to the point of lowest friction in Israel's heterogeneous society.

Shakespeare put into Hamlet's mouth the famous question: "to be or not to be?" The French philosopher Descartes apparently found the answer when he said "*cogito ergo sum*," I think therefore I am; and Feuerbach took Descartes one stage further by saying: "*Der Mensch ist was er isst*," man is what he eats. At the same time, there was the powerful reality that most individuals "existed" by belonging to a community.

Thinkers in previous centuries seem to have had clear questions and answers. Present realities are both fragmented and chaotic. Thus identities are confused. When there are many identities - clear or opaque - pluralism is required. Where there is pluralism even within one religion, the role of religion in the public square becomes controversial.

The discussions of the last years over the proposed Israeli conversion law have produced many confusing statements on Israel-diaspora relations. The interaction between the Jews in Israel and those abroad has important value and emotional aspects. Looking pragmatically at such issues often gives a new perspective. Pragmatic analysis can also shed additional light on another confused subject, that of pluralism in Jewish identities.

Two Radically Different Challenges

Strengthening Jewish identity in Israel and the diaspora are different challenges, thus requiring dissimilar approaches. Fostering a multitude of Jewish identities is most

relevant in order to retain as many Jews as possible for the Jewish people in the diaspora. It is less so in Israel where there is little mixed marriage. In the Holy Land one can hardly escape "the Jewish condition."

Rapid change, differences in mentality, individualism and interest fragmentation are key characteristics of modern society. Israel is subject to many social developments. Some of these, such as Americanization, are impossible to control, let alone stop. Still it is difficult for any Jewish Israeli to escape confrontation with Judaism. It is impossible for him to remain totally indifferent to the question of Jewish identity, even if he does not take an explicit position.

"Israelis are the most genuine Jews there are, regardless of whether they practice religion or not. Only Israelis are total Jews," says the writer Abraham B. Yehoshua. For him diaspora Jews are partial Jews only. He adds: "I live in Israel in a reality which is entirely Jewish and which is being constructed and developed by Jews. All of its major components are Jewish." While he has no doubt that he is a Jewish writer he does not consider Kafka to be one. ¹

Religion in the Public Square

Religion is very much present in Israel's public square. It permeates and affects so many aspects of society that many people no longer perceive it explicitly, and only notice a few of its manifestations. The position of religion has gradually changed over the past decades. One example: nowadays it is common practice for Israel's president or prime minister not to take a car on Shabbat for carrying out a public duty or making a private trip. Ben Gurion did not have these constraints. The Jewish religion even extends Israel's public square closer to heaven. One finds a *minyan* filling aisles not only on El Al flights, but also on other airlines flying to and from Israel.

One cannot avoid being confronted with Judaism in Israel. The country's national symbol, the menorah, is a Jewish one. One sees many more rabbis or Orthodox politicians on the TV news than anywhere else, including New York. One almost intuitively takes a view on what they say. This involves identity.

One recent example stressed this very powerfully once more. When Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai left the Likud in early 1999 to become the new Center Party's prime ministerial candidate, he explained this step in the cabinet meeting by quoting biblical texts. Thereafter he went to the Wailing Wall, and visited former Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ovadia Joseph, the spiritual patron of many Moroccan Jews. Almost every Israeli heard about it and a large number, if not most, must have had an opinion about it.

However void of Jewish content the Shabbat of many Israelis may be, it has a special character. Television on Friday night is different from other days of the week. When

greeting people on Friday several of them may say "*Shabbat shalom*." When one visits an Israeli hotel one is asked not to smoke in the dining room on Shabbat.

Former minister Aryeh Deri's secular lawyer says that, since he became his defender, he has become used to saying "*shavua tov*" at the end of Shabbat, and finds himself using phrases like "with God's help," even though he has not stopped eating shrimps.

National holidays are mainly Jewish feasts. Shabbat is on Saturday and not on Sunday. Disputes on what is closed on Shabbat receive a lot of attention. Friday papers publish on the first page the time that Shabbat starts in different locations around the country. One may systematically ignore it, as I ignore the horoscopes, but everybody knows that it is there.

Driving along the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway in the late afternoon, one passes people saying the afternoon prayer at the side of the road. On Hanukkah, *menorot* are lighted in public places. Many secular citizens cannot escape knowing that it is Tisha b'Av because the Stock Exchange is closed. I once heard a visiting American Conservative rabbi say that when he put on the radio early in the morning he heard *Shema*. The next day he set his alarm clock early because it appealed so much to him: in the United States all he heard at that time were the sport results and the weather forecast. And a big truck sporting the name "Isaiah Movers" is likely to call up associations with the prophets for many.

Religion in the public square is demonstrated not only by its presence, but also by what is absent. There are no statues of politicians, generals, writers, etc., in squares; no graves in ancient synagogues. No meat is served with breakfast in the large hotels, which are almost all under rabbinical supervision.

Many non-religious Israelis consider some elements of Jewish religion in the public sphere as normal. The political scientist Shlomo Avineri writes: "One of the mistaken assumptions of many secular Israelis is that religion is solely an individual affair. The secular public must understand that this is not so. Clearly, as regards conviction, religion is an individual matter; one may or may not believe in God, or observe the laws of *kashrut*, Shabbat, etc. However, basically, every religion has a public aspect as well, and religion and state have been battling over this public domain for centuries." ²

No Escape Possible?

Much has been written about the present generation of Israeli youth with a non-religious school education. They grow up with a limited knowledge of Jewish history and religion. Even they cannot escape frequent confrontation with Judaism. Most dwellings in Israel inhabited by Jews have a *mezuzah* on the door post, which one cannot avoid seeing people kiss.

Nowadays in the army, Israel's classic melting pot, the secular youngster meets religious soldiers in all units. He is frequently confronted with their way of life, particularly in the elite units where there is more camaraderie between soldiers. Our synagogue community - one among many - has had boys in the most selective army units. Each secular Israeli soldier meets and talks to the soldiers who wear knitted skullcaps, and learns about their way of life. With the neighbors which this state has, the Israeli reality confronts almost every soldier with funerals according to the Jewish tradition.

Where we best saw how difficult it is to escape Jewish identity was after Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's assassination. There was no established secular ritual for such mourning. The mourners had to invent rites on the spot. What resulted was a mixture of Jewish symbolism, neo-paganism and Hollywood mysticism. Secular people hung up posters with Rabin's picture as if he were the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Some posters carried the text which ends *Kaddish*, referring to Rabin, however, as: "he who makes peace in high places." In Tanach that text refers to God.

Ham and Eggs on Shabbat, Pork on Yom Kippur

As Jewish identity and Israeli identity nowadays are often difficult to define, I shall resort to some vignettes to support my argumentation. Jewish identities come in many, sometimes strange guises. Negation of identity also reflects identity. The historian Isaac Deutscher, who called himself a "non-Jewish Jew," understood this well.

The political scientist Dan Segre reported how an Israeli journalist of Dutch extraction came to interview Rav Steinsalz, winner of the Israel Prize for his Hebrew Talmud translation. He casually told the rabbi that he always had ham and eggs for breakfast on Shabbat. The rabbi asked whether it was only on Shabbat. The journalist confirmed this. Upon which Rav Steinsalz said: "Well, this is not my approach, but it does give Shabbat a special character."

On a plane a few years ago, I talked to a non-Jewish Italian woman who lived abroad with an Israeli. She said that in Tel Aviv she had met a well-known Israeli economist who invited his friends on Yom Kippur for a festive meal of pork. It is clear that only people with some kind of Jewish identity can host such a meal on that specific day.

The Israeli Identity

There is much discussion as to whether there is an Israeli identity and how to define its specific characteristics. The more there is written about it, the less clear that identity seems to become. In an individualistic environment, one may be able to live very

happily without defining oneself. However, the issue of identity seems of great interest to Israelis. Secular people seem to be struggling with it the most.

Quoting A.B. Yehoshua once again: "Whenever I am abroad, I am always amazed that I can identify Israelis from afar, based on their body movement and the way they are dressed. That proves to me that there is an Israeli identity, even if I cannot define its components very well." ³

I can confirm that there is a distinct, recognizable Israeli identity. Once I was in a big supermarket in Zurich. From far away I saw a middle-aged woman with a young girl, presumably her daughter. The mother took some nuts from the open bin and tasted them. No Swiss in his right mind would do such a thing. Out of curiosity I went close to them to hear what language they spoke. It was Hebrew, of course.

Some time ago the weekend edition of *Ma'ariv* regularly published definitions of what is typical of Israelis. One reader wrote: "An Israeli is somebody who touches two loaves of bread when he intends to buy one." ⁴

There are many other proofs of Israeli identities. In the diaspora, *yordim* (former Israelis) often may not mix with the Jewish community, but rather stick together. However, that is a weak identity. Many complain that their children no longer feel themselves to be Israelis.

Usually, when discussing Israeli identity, no mention is made of religion. I think that this is something to be looked into. The people who dominate the media may be marketing a falsified image of the Israeli.

Multiple Loyalties

The social environment of diaspora Jews is very different from that in Israel. Even in the diamond ghettos of New York or Antwerp, one is faced with strong alien influences. Most other Jews are even more conditioned by outside circumstances and events. This is particularly true for those scattered in small numbers among non-Jews.

Identity and - closely related to it - loyalty are increasingly expressed in a multitude of modes. When Nachum Goldman and others claimed in the 1960s that diaspora Jews could have double loyalty to the democracies they lived in, as well as to Israel, this was a new message. It has gradually become accepted, even if it occasionally causes discomfort. To a certain extent, the exception makes us understand the norm. Jonathan Pollard made American Jews uneasy because he transgressed American law in serving Israel. American Jews, however, have no hesitation in lobbying on behalf of Israel.

Today, the range in the gentile world extends from multiple loyalties to people who are not even loyal to themselves. Western attitudes to multi-culturalism have changed

radically. The following quotation would have sounded entirely acceptable a few decades ago: "A real Frenchman is somebody by the right of blood who behaves like a Frenchman, who loves his fatherland, and carries out his military service when he is young." Today this quote sounds odd, to say the least, to a large part of the French people, one of the most nationalistic democratic nations. It is taken from an interview with the neo-fascist National Front mayor of the town of Vitrolles, Catherine Megret. ⁵

The Emergence of Sociological Jews

In the diaspora, the continued development of a category of sociological Jews next to *halakhic* Jews seems unavoidable. Increasing instances of mixed marriage are at its base. The American Jewish community gets the most attention because it is the largest in the world. The Reform Movement, a major Jewish religious grouping, accepts people of patrilineal descent as Jews. Non-orthodox converts to Judaism are not recognized as such by Orthodoxy.

Thus there is a significant number of people who see themselves as Jews and are accepted as such by one big group. However, they are not seen as such by the Orthodox group and its many traditional sympathizers. In this way two types of Jews have been created: those who are universally recognized and those who are only partly so.

The first category are *halakhic* Jews. The second we might consider "sociological" Jews. It is often put in other terms: "Jews according to a legal definition" and "Jews by experience." Let us have no illusions: in such a situation there is a hierarchical difference between those who are recognized by all and those who are not.

How will *halakhic* Jews and sociological Jews live side by side in Israel? With ongoing frictions. What solution will this struggle lead to? As indicated in the introductory statement, democratic societies do not solve such issues. There is a *status quo* and many citizens continue to disagree with some of its aspects. Decisions are usually dragged out. In the meantime the *status quo* lasts or is slightly modified. That is pragmatism. So religion in the Israeli public square is likely to remain more or less as it is now.

Sociological Jews are not an American reality only: they come in many types. One can also be a sociological Jew mainly because society considers one as such. I once saw Gregor Geisy, the East German neo-Communist leader, on television explaining which of his grandparents were Jewish. According to *halakhah* he is not a Jew, but a large part of German society considers him one. As far as I could make out from the interview, Geisy does not know whether he is a Jew or not and does not feel bad about it either way.

Many non-Jews in Italy think there are at least half a million Jews in the country, while there are in fact only about thirty thousand identified Jews. Perhaps "perception is reality" however, because in a society with several generations of assimilation, the number of people with some "Jewish blood" - or, if one wishes, some Jewish genes - must be much higher.

There are quite a few people in many countries who neither bother to confirm nor deny their being Jewish. It is said that the non-Jewish Polish Solidarity leader Jacek Kuron never denied that he was a Jew under the Communist regime out of principle, as the regime was anti-Jewish.

Fragmented Identities

Identities come in many increasingly odd forms, as well as sometimes changing periodically. In modern society anything goes. Some people know very well that they are Jews but deny it during part of their lives and later suddenly affirm it. For instance, the late Armand Hammer, chief executive of Occidental Petroleum, decided to have a bar mitzvah when he was over ninety.

The British media tycoon Robert Maxwell claimed for a long time that he was an Anglican. Many Jews probably would have preferred that he had stuck to his original story rather than making a spectacular return to the Jewish people shortly before his crooked acts were discovered.

Neither are we proud of the Jews who were fascists under Mussolini before the war, or of those Jews who, in recent decades, had to show their loyalty to Italian Communism by attacking Israel more vehemently than their non-Jewish "comrades."⁶

Gray Areas

The division between *halakhic* and sociological Jews does not cover all Jewish identities, however. Gray areas of Jewish identity are continuously expanding as many individuals feel little need to define themselves. Some deny belonging to the Jewish people but retain evident elements of Jewish identity. Others claim to be Jews while it is difficult to discover any explicit elements of Jewish identity.

After Ceaucescu's fall, Corneliu Bogdan, a Communist diplomat of Jewish origin, became deputy foreign minister. While in the Rumanian foreign service he had never been identified with the Jewish community. Shortly before his death he said to a journalist: "As long as there are anti-Semites in this world, it is my duty to remain a Jew."⁷

The same interview reports the following remarks by Bogdan: "I am typical for a man of my generation. I believed in the communist ideal and it is crumbling before my eyes. But it's too late to start believing in the Zionist ideal that I rejected all through my youth. I lost both worlds." ⁸

The Dutch film-maker and writer, Philo Bregstein, whose Jewish father was a well-known law professor while his mother was Christian, writes: "My parents had my brother and me baptized early in the war in the Dutch Reform church - out of safety considerations as we were half-Jews. We consciously kept the Christian holidays and my father accompanied the Christmas carols on the piano. He called himself an agnostic. Did he want to lose the stigma of the Jewish immigrant's family by becoming an assimilated 'real Dutchman'? The fact that he never took the trouble to tell my brother and myself what Shabbat, Pesach, Rosh HaShana or Yom Kippur meant, I held against him for many years after his death." ⁹

Where does American Secretary of State Madeleine Albright belong, who was suddenly told that she was born Jewish? In Poland there is even a Jewish hot-line to help people cope who have suddenly discovered that they may be Jewish. ¹⁰

There are also other individuals whom most Jews would not consider as being part of the Jewish people, but are perceived by themselves and part of society as being Jewish. These may include the Jews for Jesus, who are beyond the limit in the eyes of organized Jewry. Occasionally identity oddities reach extremes, as with the Parisian Cardinal Lustiger who, despite his conversion, claims to be a Jew. Few Jews see him as such. In private conversations Jewish leaders occasionally express the hope that he will not be elected as next pope, which would add an extra dimension to this embarrassment.

The best caricature of Jewish assimilation, or better said virtual identity, is a character in the cinema: Woody Allen's Zelig. He turns yellow in a Chinese environment and black among Afro-Americans.

Market Realities

Pragmatism can also teach us something about outreach approaches. In such a multifaceted context, any outreach policy of organized Jewry has to be based on "market realities": peripheral Jews need help in strengthening their Jewish identity in order to pass something of it on to their children. From a statistical point of view, however, much of such weak Jewish identity may not be transferable to the next generation.

As the Chief Rabbi of France, Joseph Sitruk put it: "I am very much afraid of what a very vague, very pale Jewish identity represents which is incapable of defining itself,

because in the long run, it is rapidly becoming infinitely easier for man to melt away in the masses rather than remain specific." ¹¹

This is borne out in its tragic-ironic form by a story the American Jewish actor Kirk Douglas told about his grandson Cameron. One day he asked his father Michael, "Pappy [Grandpa] is Jewish, right Dad?" 'That's right, Cameron.' 'But what are you, Dad?' 'I guess people would say that I'm half-Jewish.' 'Oh, and what am I?' 'Well, you're a quarter-Jewish.' Upon which Cameron reflected and said: 'Daddy, I wanna be half-Jewish.'"¹²

In light of this one may define the core of the Jewish people today most practically by saying that this core-group consists of those who have a Jewish identity which can be transferred to the next generation.

Habad versus Reform

The Jewish people must muddle through. Our combined efforts may be good enough to slightly increase the numbers of those who remain Jewish in one way or another. That is the best we can do.

Some try harder than others. This becomes clear when we compare two groups in Israel that are outside the mainstream. On the average, Habad Hassidim invest much more of themselves in the promotion of their ideas and in Judaism and Jewish outreach than adherents of the Reform. The same goes for their political efforts.

The difference in results is evident. Like Habad, Israeli Reform Jewry has important foreign backers. However, could we imagine Reform Jews making the effort to stand on the highways - in significant numbers - before the elections to convince voters to swing their vote to Shimon Peres, as Habad adherents did in the 1996 elections for Benjamin Netanyahu? (That they now regret this is another issue.)

The Buffet Approach

The assumption that one type - or even a few types - of Jewish identity will suit all diaspora Jews is a messianic concept and not pragmatic. There are no miraculous solutions for retaining the large number of peripheral Jews for the Jewish people; nor will such solutions emerge.

If the small Jewish people wishes to retain as many of its members as possible, it has to provide a very broad product range in the diaspora. Where there is a mosaic of psychological needs, a variety of answers must be developed. We might call this variety

generation a "buffet" approach. Offer a large menu of Jewish activities and everybody chooses what they like.

When Jewish organizations from abroad tried to stimulate renewed Jewish life in the former Soviet Union after the fall of Communism, they followed this approach. They proposed a broad gamut of Jewish activities. The successful activities multiplied; some of the others faded away.

In each country the specific local reality prescribes some of the activities. In the U.S., where protection of the environment is a major national concern, there are Jewish environmentalist organizations. Jewish meditation groups in the U.S. mainly consist of Jews who, before the establishment of these groups, would have retreated to Eastern Asia. Other identities are on the decline, such as the one based on speaking Yiddish and interest in its culture.

Trying to keep as many Jews as Jewish as possible is not only a matter of values but also one of pragmatism. Jews have many enemies. They will not go away. In order to stand up to them, not only quality but also numbers count.

New Technology to Serve a Differentiated Market

In order to serve such a differentiated "market" well, one needs not only "product diversity" but also multiple packaging and marketing methods, including new technologies and modern communication. Technology will impact in various ways on our subject. Daniel Elazar forecasts that we will have a different constituency abroad due to Jews who take a multi-centered approach to life.

Elazar says: "We may have a couple of hundred thousand diaspora Jews and *yordim* who come to Israel a number of times a year." Another trend he foresees is: "many diaspora families may settle in Israel and let the breadwinner commute. There will be closer interpersonal communication, by fax and view-phone. This will also involve many non-Jews, because the families in the diaspora will include non-Jews in close relationships."¹³

Since Elazar said this, the cost of international telephone calls from Israel has drastically decreased. If the same happens in the coming years for calls to Israel, one may speak daily with an Israeli relative for a few tens of dollars per month.

Speculating on a few more facets of technology: Judaism in various forms will go on the Internet. The non-Orthodox communities will increasingly offer virtual synagogues where the individual can join a geographically remote, but tangible, *minyan*, and perhaps even say *kaddish* there.

Some people on the border of Orthodoxy may ask themselves whether it is better to go by car to synagogue or join in through virtual reality, perhaps having a special clock which starts the screen at the time the synagogue service initiates. New communications opportunities and greater social fragmentation thus must lead to an even more pluralistic outreach approach, with different strategies and tactics. Within each outreach mode there can again be a range of niche products.

Not Everything is Fragmented

But while fragmentation increases, this does not mean that everything is fragmented. All indications are that Israeli Jews, Orthodoxy and some smaller parts of other groups abroad are nuclei of the Jewish people. While, thirty years ago, one may have thought that Orthodoxy, and with it the very relevance of religion, was dwindling in Israel, all other identities have since become so diluted that Orthodoxy - in all its diversity - has remained the main consolidated player in the Jewish state.

Is this true abroad as well? A.B. Yehoshua thinks it is. He says that a Reform rabbi may marry a mixed pair of homosexuals jointly with a Christian priest. While he does so he will, however, look over his shoulder to ascertain what other Jews think about it and try to have a dialogue with them. For Yehoshua that is a sign of the unity of the Jewish people.¹⁴

It is not certain that the Jewish people is one, but if it is, then this may be concluded from the negative: there are not two Jewish people, but one ill-defined one. There is great diversity within Judaism. Not only is this unavoidable, but it is also increasing. As this is equally unavoidable we may as well make the best of it. However, pluralism does not mean that all collective or individual Jewish identities are equivalent, and why should they be?

I argue that, in an individualistic society, those who are organized in communities constitute the core which provides the individualists with the opportunity to be both individualistic and - when in psychological need - to be able to belong to something. In Israel this gives Orthodoxy a substantial influence over the public square.

Habad's Lego Approach

Habad's approach to religious outreach is the most far-reaching. Besides providing a high content product for those who want to affiliate with it, Habad also markets Judaism according to a "Lego building block" principle to any Jew willing to identify with Judaism.

One example: providing departing passengers at Ben-Gurion airport with the opportunity to say a blessing and lay *tefillin*. Another one: the organization of a Seder -

with *kosher lepesach* products - in Katmandu for travelers who will not eat kosher for the rest of the holiday. Thus the same organization is dealing with religious identity and practice in very different ways, according to what market it serves.

Charity

A second approach to maintaining identity is involvement in Jewish charity. For diaspora organizations, besides the economic value of the funds received, fund-raising is important because it keeps both fund-raisers and donors affiliated with the Jewish people.

Israel has both economic and political interests in the Israel-oriented segment of this charity. A few decades ago, a major decline in charity would have greatly diminished the standard of living of the average Israeli. Today, he would not be greatly affected.

Some segments of Israeli society, however, would be hit very hard. One example is Jerusalem, one of the country's poorest towns, which receives significant amounts of donated funds. (The Jewish Agency, Keren Yerushalayim, the Hebrew University, the Israel Museum, and the *yeshivot* community are all major fund-raisers.) Though it may well be partly illegal also under Israeli law, Israeli political parties and individual politicians collect significant funds from abroad.

For Israel, diaspora funding is evidently of political importance. As a beleaguered nation Israel has an interest in organizing and mobilizing all the resources it can. Maintaining fundraising efforts - which will fragment further in the future - will remain an important instrument for strengthening Israel's contact with certain categories of diaspora Jews.

Not surprisingly, some diaspora organizations and individuals try, partly using the money they supply as leverage, to exercise influence on Israeli affairs. This is yet another manifestation of Jewish identity.

Memory and Identity Overlap

A third mode of Jewish identity centers on the Holocaust, and is evident both in Israel and abroad. In Israel, for example, this is demonstrated by organized trips for schoolchildren to Auschwitz and other concentration camps. What other nations send their children on their first trip abroad to a place where their people have been massacred? It is a typically Israeli way of building the younger generation's identity, both Jewish and Israeli.

For some Jews in the diaspora, this catastrophe-oriented approach represents their only Jewish identification. Whereas most Jewish identities have strong memory elements in

them, here memory and identity often entirely overlap. One might even say: memory has become identity. Belonging to organizations of concentration camp survivors and supporting Holocaust museums are sometimes the only ways of expressing one's Jewish identity, however diluted that may be.

Some experts explain Holocaust-related activities as often being a last convenient step of peripheral Jews before final assimilation. This includes the people who finance them. As this interest in the Holocaust is so dominant for a substantial number of individuals, organized Jewish policy should aim to strengthen it, the more so as many of those identifying in this way often are not interested in any Jewish alternatives.

Memory of the Holocaust is perhaps transferable to the next generation to some extent. In 1994, the then Minister of the Interior of The Netherlands, Ed Van Thijn, came to inaugurate the memorial for the Dutch Jewish communities in the Valley of Communities at Yad Vashem. Before that, he and his daughter visited the children's monument. He writes: "I am inclined to wait and wait until they call my name." In his official speech he commented that we will pass this on to the next generation, but then writes in his diary: "what a pity that I have made so little of my Judaism with all my individualism." ¹⁵

This aspect of diaspora identity has been observed from a different perspective by Leon Wieseltier.

We live our lives exercised by evil. We fight its manifestations in the present, we study its manifestations in the past. But who among us - I mean among the Jews of America - who among us, really, has experienced evil? We have brilliantly insulated our lives in America from its eruption in our midst. We have accomplished this with our prosperity and we have accomplished this with our democracy...by the standards of our history we are living at a time of almost outrageous good fortune. Have Jews ever had fewer grounds for fear? Indeed, some of the confusions of Jewish identity in recent years have been owed to the delightful fact that the place of fear in our identity has diminished. We do not yet know quite what to put in fear's place. ¹⁶

There are also reactions to the emphasis laid on the Holocaust. Laurence Sigal, the head of the new Museum of Jewish Art and History in Paris, said in an interview: "This is not a *shoah* museum. It is about the culture and life of the Jews through the ages and not about their destruction." ¹⁷

A similar approach was taken by Rivka Weiss-Blok when she was appointed as the new director of the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam: "We want to show first and foremost the positive aspects of Jewish society and also that Jewish life after the war has been reconstructed and continued...we are a museum of Jewish history and culture and not a museum of the Holocaust." ¹⁸

Transferring Nostalgia

The Germans wonder whether one can transfer guilt - through one's genes - to the next generation. The Jewish people has another problem: how does one transfer nostalgia to the next generation? A few years ago my wife and I met a mixed married couple in The Netherlands. We went to their home and my wife asked the lady how she would recognize her on the station. She said: "I am the only Jew in town." There were a few other people at the station, but we immediately identified her. We talked through the afternoon into the evening. But later, when I tried to note down how her Jewishness was expressed, I found very little.

A few Jewish words returned in our conversation, the main one being *meshugge*. She owned a new edition of a prewar book on Jewish rites and symbols. Another book she bought describes the history of the nearest Jewish community. She does not eat certain types of pig meat. From Israel she brought a menorah as souvenir, which is put together with souvenirs from many other countries visited.

Together with the chairman of the nearest Jewish community, she tried to convince a local farmer to make white cheese. This experiment failed badly because the product had the wrong taste. When her non-Jewish husband retired, his colleagues at work gave him a book on Israel. That is the Jewish identity which emerged from eight hours of conversation. She and her husband have no children, but if they had had, what could she have transferred to them, even if she is *halakhically* Jewish?

One additional outreach approach attempts to maintain some Jewish identity by involving Jews together in sport. The world Maccabi organization is the most typical example of this old-established mode of outreach. The last Maccabiah games proved that once again. In pre-war Vienna, the Hakoah soccer club - which once was even champion of Austria - had a large following. Sometimes a similar approach is included in a broader multi-purpose organization, such as the Jewish clubs in Latin America.

The Quest for Continuity

In today's fashionable search for roots, we look backwards for continuity. Continuity forwards should interest us more. That leads to a variety of outreach programs.

Maintaining fundraising efforts - which is likely to fragment further in the future - will remain an important instrument in strengthening Israel's contact with certain categories of diaspora Jews.

At the same time we must review the existing modes of outreach. Is Yehuda Reinharz, the president of Brandeis University, right when he accuses organized Jewry in the United States of pushing people out rather than bringing them in? He mentions the high cost of admission to Jewish day schools and the fact that, on High Holy Days, Jews can only get into synagogues with tickets. ¹⁹

There seems to be a lot in what he says, which boils down to: focus in your outreach on those who have an interest but not the money. This may be more pragmatic but is certainly less exotic than seeking out non-Jews, convincing them that Judaism is open to them and that, if they wish, they should convert. The same goes for the rush after various possible "lost tribes" in the Third World.

Israel's Centrality

Israel's experience is central to the Jewish people. So is its role, both because of its numbers and its structure as a state. The average Israeli Jew has much more influence on the future of the Jewish people than the average diaspora Jew. One can even claim that - as any vote can swing an Israeli election - the influence the average Israeli Arab has on the future of the Jewish people far exceeds that of the average diaspora Jew.

As time passes and Israel consolidates further, while organized Jewry abroad gets weaker, increasing responsibility for fostering Jewish identity in the diaspora will also fall upon Israel. This challenge cannot be escaped, for many reasons.

Israel is ahead of other nations in understanding that one's diaspora is a multifaceted resource in the "global village." This has not only economic and political, but also religious and educational aspects. The aim of not making the non-Orthodox denominations in the U.S. too angry has an influence on the way religion is revealed in the Israeli public square. Furthermore, on a variety of issues concerning diaspora Jews, third parties deal with Israel as representative of the Jewish people because they understand its central role in the Jewish world.

A typical example is the 1993 agreement between Israel and the Holy See. It includes fighting anti-Semitism in the world. Often, because of the lack of other recognized representatives, Israel is also supposed to speak for the Jewish religion. This is another expression of religion in the public square. In the theological sphere, however, the State of Israel is not a very good partner for the Vatican; but is there anybody else who can speak on religious subjects on behalf of the Jewish people?

Another example of this phenomenon: in 1997, the Swiss government looked to Prime Minister Netanyahu to make a statement about the dispute between Switzerland and Jewish organizations regarding Jewish money which disappeared into or from the Swiss banks after World War II.

The Challenge of the *Yordim*

There is another, very challenging, diaspora that Israel has to deal with: the large community of *yordim*. An indication that more intense discussion is needed on this issue

was the 1997 debate on Knesset member Rivlin's proposal to grant voting rights to Israelis living abroad. Besides the moral and political aspects of Israel's outreach to *yordim*, their growing status and wealth also makes this economically worthwhile. Before the 1999 elections, Israeli politicians started to approach Israelis abroad in their fund-raising campaigns.

Israel's official policy toward *yordim* has changed over the years. In recent years Israeli diplomatic representations have helped them to organize, whereas previously they were ignored as much as possible. Efforts are now made to inform them of job vacancies in Israel so that they might consider returning. Maintaining the identification of the Israelis in the diaspora is likely to become an increasingly important task for Israel.

Though the Israeli diaspora and the Jewish diaspora do not overlap much, they mutually strengthen the opportunities of Israeli and Jewish organizations to address the diaspora issue. One minor example: in 1996 the Dutch Jewish weekly *NIW* started to publish a supplement in Hebrew, which was not successful, however.

In the 1960s, I visited former Jewish communities in The Netherlands to record their history. In many places, only the gravestones in the cemetery reminded one of a Jewish presence. Now there is often a sign of Israeli identity, even in small cities: the *shwarmare* restaurant with an Israeli name, sometimes written in Hebrew letters. The food of "Shwarma Galil" or "Shwarma Eilat" may contain pork and there is unlikely to be a *mezuzah* on the door-post, but the Israeli, i.e., Jewish, identification is there nevertheless.

Our Internal Adversaries

Those in Israel and abroad who are active in the promotion of Jewish identity in the diaspora also have internal adversaries: the Israeli proponents of post-Zionism. These people want Israel to be a "normal" state. This category includes the Israeli politicians who tell diaspora Jews that their fund-raising is not needed.

The Jewish people has always lived with adversaries in its midst. In the Middle Ages, there were the converted Jews who helped its enemies. Before World War II, Jewish self-hatred was at its height. Theodor Lessing, now forgotten, devoted a book to this in the 1930s. Had he lived today he might have added a sizable chapter on Jewish Communists in Eastern Europe and the problems they caused other Jews.

Arthur Hertzberg writes about the attitude of Jews of the New Left in 1967 at the time of the Six-Day War, when Israel was in existential danger: "the Jews of the New Left were on the whole sufficiently Jewish to care, but...this concern was neutralized by their sympathy for Nasser as a 'progressive' Third World leader."²⁰

Normalcy is a Pipe-Dream

A remote relative of self-hatred is the idea of Israel as a "normal" state. Like the self-haters and the assimilationists, the normalists want to be something different than they are. The "normal" State of Israel is a pipe-dream, if only for the simple reason that "normal" nations do not exist. Furthermore, the Israeli historical and political reality is so different from that of other democracies that Israel cannot be "normal."

Dan Segre characterized it more than twenty years ago saying: "The people of Israel is by nature alone and non-conformist. It does not belong to a family of nations - culturally, historically, linguistically - like for instance Arab Algeria or Latin Italy. Its non-conformism is innate, produced as much by circumstances as by its consciousness of its religious, cultural, historical and sociopolitical uniqueness." ²¹

While the post-Zionists and "normalists" are very vocal, their numbers are not big, though they are much more numerous than the equally vocal Canaanites in earlier decades. The fact that they had several followers in the second Rabin government, which could not survive without the Arab vote, gave much publicity to this minority position.

There is indeed a larger number of Israelis who vaguely consider themselves Israelis rather than Jews. These people are unorganized, and as the issue has no practical consequence for them, they are also largely indifferent to it.

The numerical weight of the unorganized in an ideological struggle counts for little. The attitude of the Orthodox, traditional and Zionist Jews in Israel toward the diaspora will thus be much more determinant in Israel's policies than that of indifferent Israelis.

The splintering of Jewish identity in the diaspora, the desire of a significant part of Israel's population that the country maintains a Zionist - albeit diluted - religious or moderately traditional identity and the country's political need - as well as the economic sense - to promote organization of its adherents abroad, will be decisive factors in ensuring that Israel will not lose interest in the diaspora.

This is especially the case as the so-called peace process, whatever its progress, will not lead to the disappearance of the hatred and violence of part of the much more numerous Arab nations toward Israel and the Jews. External threats, combined with internal force, will maintain an Israel-diaspora relationship in which Israel will become more dominant as time passes. A threat to these relations could come from the inevitable *Kulturkampf* in Israel.

The Kulturkampf in Israel

However, outside pressure from Israel's enemies will keep the *Kulturkampf* within the country in check for many years to come, even though it is continually present and potentially violent. Although it manifests itself in many ways, there is no clue as to how and when it will erupt in a more severe form. Nor does one know which issue will trigger it.

The role of religion in Israeli society, but even more the attitudes of the ultra-Orthodox, are matters of continual friction. However, they are not the only sources of the latter. The "activist" policy of the Supreme Court is another major "contributor" to the tension. All societies live with frictions. Part of a society's identity is its unique mix of frictions. The Netherlands have frictions of a partly Calvinist typology, the Italians of a partly Catholic typology.

Some of the Israeli frictions are well-publicized. If, in 1997, one mentioned religion in the public square, the first association for many people was stones being thrown on Shabbat in Jerusalem's Bar-Ilan Street. These frictions are local; despite the publicity surrounding them, these are marginal issues and affect only a limited number of people. The same is true for the disputes regarding archaeological sites, and the struggle of the Conservative and Reform communities to be represented on religious councils. These are demarcation issues: their outcome will not change the character of Israeli society.

Though the February 1999 ultra-Orthodox demonstration and that of its opponents far exceeded the numbers of earlier public protests in Jerusalem, it did not change the parameters of the mutual tension. The ultra-Orthodox press prudently defined it as a prayer meeting.

The Ultra-Orthodox and Society: Structural Problems

There are much more fundamental problems in the relationship between some parts of the Orthodox community and the remainder of Israeli society. One much-publicized issue concerns the fact that most haredi youth avoid army service. This conflict surfaces frequently. When two helicopters collided in February 1997 with more than 70 dead, there was no haredi among them. Statistically, there should have been three or four. The army avoidance issue may or may not lead to an explosive conflict, but it is felt as a serious problem by a sizable part of Israeli society.

In Jerusalem the secular preoccupation with respect to the ultra-Orthodox borders on paranoia. Many people think that the haredim will soon be a majority of the city's population. Demographic projections do not support this. The percentage of secular Jews in Jerusalem is on the decline. They probably have fewer children than average, and a larger percentage of them moves away from the city than is the case with ultra-Orthodox, Orthodox or traditional Jews.

If one asks these secular Jews to what extent they are more constrained in the city than they were twenty years ago, mainly psychological factors are mentioned. From a factual point of view there are more restaurants and other places of entertainment open on Friday night and *shabbat* than was the case a few decades ago. Thus the *Kulturkamp* develops in many directions with widely differing results.

There is also a structural problem with respect to another segment of the religious community. There are politically right-wing rabbis who say that it is against *halakhah* to give up parts of the Land of Israel, and that Israelis soldiers should refuse orders from their superiors if told to withdraw from areas to be handed over to the Palestinian Authority.

A much more severe problem, however, concerns the attitude of the haredi community to the law of the country. There are sectors of this community that do not agree to collaborate with justice. This is one reason why the trial of Aryeh Deri - the political leader of the ultra-Orthodox Shas party - has taken so many years.

A different aspect of the same problem complex emerged when rumors began to circulate in the media, in 1997, that the police wanted to interrogate the former Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef in the Hebron/Baron affair. It led to verbal haredi violence. This haredi lack of acceptance of Israeli juridical authority is a fundamental problem which is untenable in Israeli society. This issue will not go away. One day it will have to be confronted and may explode.

Evolution of Israel's Attitudes

The subject of Israel-diaspora relations will also change, due in part to the changing realities in democratic societies abroad. In a world in continuous flux, outside factors will create serious, unforeseen challenges to Jewish identity.

So, for instance, the increasing resistance of significant parts of the European population against multi-culturalism is likely to strengthen the interest of diaspora Jews in Israel. This may occur even if the emergence of extreme rightist movements, such as the French National Front, focuses its attacks mainly on other ethnic groups, such as Arab and African immigrants in France.

All of the above does not exclude the possibility that there will be changes in some of Israel's attitudes toward the diaspora. In an international context where - in many democratic countries - positions against immigration have hardened in recent years, it is likely that the conditions of Israel's extremely generous Law of Return will be narrowed.

There is no reason why the State of Israel which, for fifty years, has given Jews abroad the occasion to immigrate, should be ready to receive all of them at the specific moment they wish to. Under some circumstances, when major waves of olim occur - where there

is no immediate physical danger - waiting periods may be introduced. On the other hand, it is clear to most Israelis that an effort should be made to bring additional Russian Jews to Israel, as public anti-Semitism has been on the increase in Russia since the collapse of the Russian economy.

Reading the Future

In today's rapidly changing society, there is no way that one can limit oneself to projecting fixed scenarios. Assessments must be frequently updated. One must read weak signs and, because they are weak, follow them closely and frequently, to see whether they become stronger or disappear. We are dealing with complex processes which involve many variables. This requires defining one's approaches in a pragmatic way.

The conversion debate has shown that there are equilibria in Israel-diaspora relations which simply cannot be changed beyond certain limits. For economists this issue is simple: one cannot easily offend people who have given you billions of dollars.

World Jewry's main challenge is clear. We would like to see as many Jews as possible maintain a Jewish identity. The best we can hope for is partial success. To achieve this organized Jewry must have a flexible approach. Nobody may be happy with it as it means ongoing tensions and *ad hoc* compromises. When the frictions and accommodations end, that will be a sign that the *Mashiach* has come.

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Notes

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