

CONTRA CASSANDRA: DEBUNKING THE MYTH OF JEWISH DISUNITY

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INTRODUCTION

Much has been heard lately about the question of "Jewish unity," or more precisely Jewish disunity. Conferences have been held, resolutions have been passed, articles and letters have appeared in the press, the beginnings of a more serious, scholarly literature on the subject are even beginning to emerge.

All this frenetic activity notwithstanding, the hypothesis of this article is that our current preoccupation with Jewish disunity is misplaced. Seen from the perspective of Jewish tradition and Jewish history, it is an exaggeration and/or an exacerbation of normal tensions within the community at best, a form of hype or hoax at worst. (The latter characterization would apply only in such instances where individuals or groups within the Jewish community would exploit the "issue" principally for their own aims in terms of its publicity, fundraising or institution-building value).

In fact, historically speaking, it is our view that—at least in modern times—Jews have never been more unified on major issues than they are now. This hypothesis will be illustrated with concrete historical examples.

Furthermore, based on our reading of

traditional Jewish texts and contexts, the very push for an all-embracing "Jewish unity" is somewhat artificial, even un-Jewish in character, and emanates from some increasingly disturbing trends and developments within the American Jewish community, which will similarly be elaborated upon below. Let us, then, first explore the various notions of "Jewish unity" in the Jewish political tradition, both in theory and in practice.

CONCEPTS OF JEWISH UNITY IN JEWISH POLITICAL THEORY

If we were to translate the phrase "Jewish unity" directly into Hebrew it would come out something like *abdut Yisrael*, a term unknown in the Jewish political lexicon. There is, of course, the classical Jewish concept of *ahavat Yisrael*, the love of the people of Israel or the love of one's fellow Jews. *Ahavat Yisrael* has many applications and implications in terms of aiding and assisting fellow Jews as operationalized in the related concept of *tzedakah*, concern, compassion and responsibility for those in the Jewish community, locally and worldwide, that need our help.

However, *ahavat Yisrael* does not imply any type of uniformity or conformity of opinion. Quite the contrary, *ahavat Yisrael* and *tzedakah* are most frequently applied in situations where the recipients of our concern and compassion are *davka*, those Jews with whom we ostensibly have the least in common, for example, be they

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Soviet, Ethiopian or Iranian Jews. Indeed Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the late Chief Rabbi of Palestine, frequently evoked the concept *ahavat Yisrael* in response to Orthodox critics of secular Zionists. He urged greater love for one's fellow Jews in appreciation for their commitment to the *mitzvah* of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*, the building of the land, despite the fact that they were otherwise non-observant of *mitzvot*.¹

There are two other relevant traditional Jewish political concepts: *klal Yisrael*, which could be translated as the entirety or collectivity of the Jewish people, and *am Yisrael*, the people or the nation of Israel. These are more explicitly political, rather than religious concepts, implying a national entity, unity, or sovereignty of some type, a peoplehood. These notions are generally applied *klapei hutz*, *vis-à-vis* external political forces and threats, the nations of the world, the *goyim*. It is for this reason they have become staples of Zionist political ideology. However, these concepts of national sovereignty do not and have never implied any absolute internal unity or conformity. Indeed, "Liberty was always given to the great teachers of every generation to make modifications and innovations in harmony with the spirit of existing institutions."²

Jewish political theory has always recognized a separation of powers, or a division of labor, within the Jewish people and the Jewish community, a kind of early system of checks and balances, and has taken cognizance of the inevitable tensions between these different spheres of responsibility. Daniel Elazar and Stuart Cohen articulate this early constitutional separation of powers (though with some overlap

and interdependence) as the "three crowns" mentioned in the Jewish tradition: *keter Torah*, the crown of the Torah, more or less the legislative branch and usually the province of the rabbis; *keter kehunah*, the crown of the priesthood, approximating the judicial branch of government; and *keter malhut*, the crown of kingship, similar to the executive branch.³ We should add the fourth crown referred to in rabbinic literature, *keter shem tov*, the crown of a good name, to this typology. It implies a recognition of the rights of an individual, of a citizen, as being equal in weight to those of any branch of government, adding a kind of civil libertarian element to the Jewish political tradition. Implicit in this three- or four-part model of how traditional Judaism views the proper relationship between government and the governed are the notions of pluralism and diversity.

Jewish tradition recognizes only one absolute unity, that of God. In Biblical literature, it is clear that unity resides only in God, *Shma Yisrael* . . . "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." In a later time Maimonides, the great medieval Jewish philosopher, in enunciating his thirteen principles of faith (subsequently embodied in the popular hymn, *Yigdal*), reiterates this notion of unity as residing only in the Divine: *Ehad v'ein yahid keyihudo*, roughly translated, "There is only one and there is no oneness like his oneness." Of course, one must place Maimonides' writings in the context of his polemics against Christian trinitarianism, on the one hand, and his presence in the midst of a militantly unitarian Islamic cultural milieu, on the other.

While there is unity in the Divine, in human affairs Jewish tradition has always had great respect for the diversity of opinion and the division (hence limitation) of

1. See, for example, Abraham Isaac Kook, *The Lights of Penitence, The Moral Principles, Lights of Holiness, Essays, Letters and Poems*, trans. Ben Zion Bokser. New York: Paulist Press, 1978, p. 333.

2. Philip Birnbaum, *A Book of Jewish Concepts*. New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1964, p. 291; "Kelal Yisrael."

3. Daniel J. Elazar and Stuart A. Cohen, *The Jewish Polity: Jewish Political Organization from Biblical Times to the Present*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, pp. 16-20.

the authority of the government or community. As referred to above, the Bible clearly recognizes not only an implicit separation of powers between branches or functions of government, but also a sort of an early federalism in the tribal representation system. Likewise, Maimonides, in his political writings, such as "Laws Concerning Kings and Wars" in his classic *halakhhic* work, *Mishneh Torah*, portrays the King of Israel as a constitutional monarch, bound by and not above the law.⁴

Normative rabbinic Judaism, whose heirs we all are in one form or another, clearly reflects this tradition of diversity. Anyone who has studied Talmud knows this to be true. The seemingly endless debates between Ravina and Rav Ashi, Rava and Abbaye, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon, Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai typify the ongoing tension between different, yet equally legitimate interpretations of the Jewish tradition.

The discrepancy between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai is particularly egregious and consistent throughout Talmudic literature. For example, in response to the taunter who challenges each of these sages to teach him the entire Torah *al regel abah*, standing on one leg, Hillel replies *ve'abavta lereiakha kamokha*, love thy neighbor as thyself, whereas Shammai strikes the scoffer with his cane, treating the questioner with disdain. Likewise, the difference in approach to fulfilling the *mitzvah* of lighting the Chanukah candles between the two schools is equally telling. Beit Hillel's method, which we follow to this day, of adding one candle each night, contrasts sharply with Beit Shammai's approach of starting with a full menorah and removing one candle each night.

These differences are not mere disputes over textual exegesis or linguistic nuances and are not mere examples of pilpulistic hairsplitting. On the contrary they manifest a profound dichotomy between the philosophies of life and the understanding of human nature and behavior that separated these two schools: one believing in the ability of man (or woman) to improve and perfect him(her)self in imitation of the Divine, the other viewing man as an inherently imperfect, flawed species that can only pale in the shadow of the Divine.

Otherwise put, this is a debate over whether human nature is fundamentally good or evil, perfectible or imperfectible. Indeed, our tradition comes to no definitive conclusion whether *yetzer ha'adam ra o tov mineurav*, whether human nature is fundamentally good or evil. As a behaviorally oriented religion, Judaism has remarkable tolerance for ambiguity on such profound philosophical questions, at times answering them, if at all, with quizical reply, *teiku*, an acronym for *tishbi yitaretz kushyot veibaayot*, that only the Messiah will answer these unfathomable questions. (Unfortunately the term has been corrupted in modern day Hebrew to refer to a tie score between sports teams!)

UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN JEWISH HISTORY

Not only does Jewish political theory reflect an inherent capacity to accept and tolerate diversity, but so does the sweep of Jewish history. There have always been deep divisions—Babylonian Jewry and Palestinian Jewry, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, Hasidim and Mitnagdim—and similar profound cleavages within the Jewish people. Again each of these divisions reflects the inherent diversity of our community as shaped by its respective environment. These differences are often manifested *halakhhically* as well.

Thus, for example, whether a particular food, such as rice or beans, is permissible

4. See Maimonides, *The Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)*, Book 14, The Book of Judges, Treatise V, "Laws Concerning Kings and Wars," trans. Abraham M. Hershman. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949, especially Chapters I-IV, pp. 207-216.

on Passover, a seemingly purely technical *halakhic* question, is determined in the respective Ashkenazi and Sephardic traditions as least as much by the socio-economic environment in which they developed as by a *halakhic* interpretation. Thus, Ashkenazi or European Jewry, for whom rice was a virtually unknown commodity, could easily forbid that foodstuff on Passover, whereas the Sephardi Jews of the Middle East, where rice is a staple of the diet, would find such a prohibition much more onerous, and therefore permit it.

Even more far reaching *halakhic* questions, such as those dealing with personal status, have led to very different practices among various communities of Jews, dichotomies with which we have managed to live for centuries. Thus, for example, Jews living in medieval Christian Europe found it necessary to ban polygamy, whereas Sephardi Jewry, living in a polygamous Islamic culture, found no such pressures being brought to bear upon them. Indeed, the institution of polygamy persisted among Sephardim up until contemporary times.

Another deep chasm beginning in the 18th century and lasting up until contemporary times was that between Hasidim and Mitnagdim, both of whom were Orthodox, yet each having vastly different approaches to that Orthodoxy. These cleavages at times led to vicious polemics and violent conflicts, even to the point of invoking the sanction of non-Jewish authorities, in clear violation of Jewish law.

All these diverse trends within Jewish history were intensified by the Jewish community's confrontation with modernity, beginning with the Emancipation in the 18th and more intensely in the 19th centuries. This multi-faceted process of breaking down Jewish isolation from the general community resulted in fundamental issues being broached that had not been openly debated before: questions of religiosity *vs.* secularism, Orthodoxy *vs.* Reform; maintenance of a separate Jewish society *vs.* some form of accommodation

to, if not assimilation with, the general society; modernity *vs.* tradition; the role of women within the family and the community; modern education and science; political participation.

Nowhere were these conflicts more sharply focused than in relation to the Zionist movement. Zionism more than any issue served as a catalyst for the crystallization of all these diverse forces and movements within the Jewish community. Zionism embodied all the other questions and then some, but added a new urgency and imperative to them all.

Zionism, it must be recognized, was itself a minority movement with the Jewish people. At its height in the mid-1930's, it had only 1.2 million formal, shekel paying members, representing less than ten percent of the pre-war world Jewish population.⁵ Nevertheless, within Zionism itself virtually every nuance of ideology was represented: the left, with all its variations on socialism; the right, with all its different middle-class, conservative, nationalist, often secularist, groupings; and the religious Zionists, themselves highly diverse.⁶

At the same time opposition to Zionism came from many different quarters within the Jewish community: from the secular socialist left (the Bund) to the Orthodox religious right (Agudat Yisrael); from territorialists, assimilationists and Yiddishists to liberals and local nationalists of various types.⁷ Up to and through World War II, and even after the establishment of the state, there were powerful non-Zionist Jewish organizations (such as the Amer-

5. *Memorandum Submitted to the Palestine Royal Commission on Behalf of the Jewish Agency for Palestine*, reprint of 1936 ed. published by The Agency, London, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975, p. 100.

6. Gary S. Schiff, *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1977.

7. See Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972, Chapter 8, "Zionism and Its Critics," pp. 384-437.

ican Jewish Committee), as well as virulently anti-Zionist organizations both on the Reform left (such as the American Council for Judaism) and on the religious right (Agudat Yisrael and points further out).⁸ Even within the Zionist movement itself there was a vocal minority opposed to the idea of a separate Jewish state and favoring some kind of bi-national solution.⁹ One only has to read the writings and polemics of such groups to fathom the depths of their profound and resolute opposition to what now seems the inexorable processes of Jewish history.

These differences between Zionists, non-Zionists and anti-Zionists, on the one hand, and among Zionists themselves, on the other, represented infinitely more profound cleavages than prevail in the Jewish community at the present time. Yet all this diversity was accommodated, for better or worse, under the tattered, leaky but nevertheless intact umbrella of the Jewish people.

RECENT HISTORIC EVENTS LEADING TO UNPRECEDENTED JEWISH UNITY

That the Jewish community, on basic issues, is more united now than it has ever been in modern times is attributable to three seminal events in contemporary Jewish history:

1. *The Holocaust*

The Holocaust is the backdrop against which all contemporary Jewish political

behavior is played.¹⁰ It proved that Jews are ultimately united, if only as the objects of genocide. It made all previous distinctions—religious *vs.* secular, Zionist *vs.* anti-Zionist, Sephardi *vs.* Ashkenazi—seem piddling. As far as hostile non-Jews were concerned, it would seem all Jews are the same. They were put in the same cattle cars and gas chambers, whether they were patrilineally or matrilineally Jewish.

The underlying awareness of the Holocaust and the concomitant vulnerability of the Jewish people has resulted in a heightened sense of interdependence among its various and sundry components. It is a profound source of unity that was virtually impossible before the Holocaust. One reads with incredulousness, for example, how Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky was literally laughed out of court on his peregrinations around pre-Holocaust Europe urging Jews to pack up and leave.

By extension this awareness now applies to all situations of Jewish persecution, whether Soviet Jewry, the Jews of Arab lands or elsewhere. And Jews of all types—Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, secular, Zionist, non-Zionist, "affiliated" and "non-affiliated"—are all involved in rescuing Soviet Jewry and related activities in large measure as a result of lessons learned in the Holocaust.

2. *The Rise of the State of Israel*

The rise of the State of Israel is directly related to the events of the Holocaust in a causal fashion. There is now, as there was not before the Holocaust, a broad and deep consensus in the Jewish community (with limited exceptions on the right and left fringes) on the premise of the safety, security, well being and perhaps the centrality of the State of Israel in the Jewish cosmos, not only for the sake of its current

8. J. C. Hurewitz, *The Struggle for Palestine*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1950, pp. 208-209. For an interesting discussion of the famous Ben-Gurion-Blaustein "Exchange of Views" between the Prime Minister of Israel and the President of the American Jewish Committee in 1950, see Charles S. Liebman, *Pressure Without Sanctions: The Influence of World Jewry on Israeli Policy*. Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1977, pp. 118-131.

9. Hurewitz, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-164.

10. See Nora Levin, "Postwar Reflections of the Holocaust from a Jewish Point of View," in *Movements and Issues in World Religions*, ed., Charles W. H. Fu and Gerhard E. Spiegler. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1987, pp. 465-513.

inhabitants but for the Jewish people as a whole. Indeed, some like Charles Liebman argue that, "American Jews continue to define Judaism as a religion but that Israel increasingly defines the content of that religion. Concomitantly, support for Israel becomes not merely support for a state thousands of miles away or for its inhabitants; rather support for Israel is the symbol of one's Jewish identity."¹¹ No other issue brings Jews of every stripe together so totally. Israel is the lowest and at the same time the highest common denominator in world Jewry.

While Zionism has been somewhat redefined as a generalized, pro-Israel attitude and behavior, with specific manifestations such as *aliyah* being reserved to the most committed, nevertheless overt anti-Zionism has in effect become a pariah ideology in the Jewish community today. It is virtually inconceivable for a rabbi, a Jewish educator, a federation staff member or any other Jewish communal professional to espouse an openly anti-Zionist position within the Jewish community. Even in those instances where Jewish communal professionals (and lay people) might have raised questions not about the basic commitment to Israel but about specific policies it may or may not have adopted, they have often incurred the wrath of the organized American Jewish community, as witnessed by the rapid rise and quicker fall of such organizations as Breira.

It appears that the long standing principle of tolerance of diversity of views within the Jewish community may be under new strains, at least when it comes to key questions like Israel, although recent events like the Pollard Affair may be giving new impetus to critical voices. Nevertheless, a recent study of American Jewish attitudes towards Israel finds little change

in the overwhelming support it enjoys among American Jews; and that precisely those who are most critical are also among those who are most attached to Israel.¹² The roots of this phenomenon of overarching unity may well lie in the third major development in contemporary Jewish history:

3. *The Rise of American Jewry*

The rise of American Jewry to unprecedented wealth, social status and political influence is also a key factor in what is the seemingly compulsive drive towards greater Jewish unity (and fear of disunity) manifest today. The impact of the Holocaust (and to a lesser extent Soviet Jewry) and Israel as key Jewish identity experiences are so widely, if only superficially, shared among American Jews that some observers are now arguing that there is a gradual homogenization of that community to the point where (with the possible exception of the newly militant Orthodox) ideological, denominational and other distinctions are effectively disappearing.

Jewish identity is becoming a kind of watered down pattern of commonly recognized symbols, what Liebman and others have termed, in the Israeli context, a "civil religion."¹³ Thus, everybody supports and goes to Israel; every major Jewish institution or organization now has a presence there. Similarly everybody now pays at least lip service to Jewish education and traditional rituals; major Jewish organizations, including the Conference of Jewish Communal Service itself, now perform *ha-motzi* and *birkat ha-mazon*, at their (recently kashered) public functions,

11. Charles S. Liebman, *The Ambivalent American Jew: Politics, Religion and Family in American Jewish Life*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973, p. 102.

12. See Steven M. Cohen, *Ties and Tensions: The 1986 Survey of American Jewish Attitudes Toward Israel and Israelis*. New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1987.

13. Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

something that would have been unthinkable a generation ago.

To illustrate how "in" it is to be "Jewish," a recent article in the Sunday *New York Times* business section reported on the massive explosion of the kosher foods industry that has accompanied the trend towards the acceptance and observance of traditional practices in the community. Likewise, virtually all rabbis—including many Reform rabbis—now wear *kipot*, and often *kipot serugot*, the crocheted skullcaps once the distinctive badge of the Orthodox Zionist Mizrahi or National Religious Party.

It is out of this centripetal force in the American Jewish community towards homogenization and consensus at the lowest common denominator of Jewish symbols that its Establishment—particularly its fundraising Establishment—tends to view any signs of disagreement as serious breaches of that consensus that "threaten to split the Jewish people." Differences which in an earlier generation would have been taken for granted and/or accommodated now loom as fundamental challenges to the continuity of Jewish history and the Jewish people. Thus, some communal umbrella organizations seem eager to contract out (or "privatize") such controversial issues to third parties, often for a fee, in order to keep such potentially divisive questions off the general community agenda.

SOME KEY ISSUES: HOW DIVISIVE?

What are some of these issues? How new are they, how profound, how insoluble? Without demeaning their significance, let us put them in some historical perspective.

Take, for example, the broad issue of religious pluralism in Israel, or the lack thereof. This is by no means a new issue. Its roots go back at least to the late nineteenth century.¹⁴ Thus, it is at least as old

as the Zionist movement itself, with Mizrahi, the Orthodox Zionist party, being the first discrete political party to be formed within the Zionist movement, having been founded in 1902. It is neither more nor less than the latest chapter in the saga of traditional Jewry having to confront modernity as embodied by Zionism, with all its ramifications: secularism, tolerance, pluralism, democracy, modern education, science, the role of women, political participation, etc. It may be more intense now because of the militancy of Orthodoxy of late (which in turn may be related to the general phenomenon of the militancy of religious extremism in general and in the Middle East in particular), coupled with the growing strength of non-Orthodox religious movements in Israel.

There are many specific derivative questions involved, be they matters of personal status (marriage, divorce, matrilineal *vs.* patrilineal descent, etc.), of the lack of recognition of non-Orthodox rabbis to perform such rites, of government funding for (certain) religious institutions (and not others), etc. Indeed some Orthodox Zionists might secretly view the discomfiture of these non-Orthodox (particularly the Reform) movements as some form of divine retribution for their having either been opposed to or not having actively participated in the Zionist movement from the outset, as did Orthodoxy, or at least Zionist Orthodoxy. Divine retribution notwithstanding, there is a grain of truth here, nevertheless. It does take time, effort and patience to build an effective political structure.

And that is precisely the point. These are essentially political questions in the most positive sense of the word, questions which require political—not *halakhic*—solutions, particularly on the ground in Israel. While influence from abroad (i.e., via the Conservative and Reform Zionist movements, the Jewish Agency, UJA and otherwise) is of some import and impact, Israeli politicians, like politicians elsewhere, are more concerned about

14. Schiff, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-85.

voters. Most Israeli voters are either accepting, or at least tolerant, of the current religion and state situation in most instances, and/or have other, more salient political priorities, be they nationalistic, economic or otherwise. If things are to change there is need to build coalitions with other like-minded Israelis, precisely as the Orthodox parties have historically done with non-Orthodox political parties in order to achieve their particular aims. As Liebman puts it, "In the long run, Conservative and Reform political demands can only be met by the depoliticization of religion in Israel. Their problem is that to depoliticize religion in Israel requires a *political* decision [emphasis supplied]. Only a group willing to become a virtually one-issue party could manage this fight successfully."¹⁵ And there are no obvious candidates on the horizon.

Artificial solutions, like the tinkering with the electoral or voting systems, are of limited utility and doomed to failure in the long run. The proposal of raising the percentage of the popular vote required to participate in the sharing of Knesset seats from one percent, for example, to five or even ten percent would most likely only result in the formation of larger religious blocs, much as took place in the first Israeli elections in 1949. Alternatively, chopping Israel up into many electoral districts and applying a proportional representation of those districts would not only not reduce the strength of Orthodoxy, but might even enhance it, given the high concentration of Orthodox population in certain political districts.¹⁶ In any event, electoral gerrymandering or other forms of manipulation of the technical rules of the game are the answer neither to the problems of Israeli politics nor to the unity of the Jewish people.

Such controversial questions of personal status as non-Orthodox conversions, patrilineal descent and *get* or Jewish divorce,¹⁷ the absence of which produces the indelible status of *mamzer* in children of second marriages, while important questions, are not quite as cataclysmic as portrayed by some doomsayers. As demonstrated recently by sociologist Steven Cohen,¹⁸ these issues are of little concern to, and do not affect, the large majority of American Jews or Jews anywhere—let alone in Israel—as statistics on inter-marriage, inter-dating and other indexes of assimilation would tend to corroborate. Rather, they are of prime concern only within the ten percent or so who consider themselves Orthodox, and not even to all of them. Indeed ultra-Orthodox Jews have always been concerned with *yichus*, questions of family lineage, and always carefully checked family trees of potential in-laws, allowing marriages only within certain approved circles.

17. The "patrilineal/matrilineal" debate is a particularly illuminating one in the context of the discussions on unity. Historically, Reform Jews have long used a father's religion to define Jewishness for various purposes, be it synagogue membership, marriage or otherwise. The movement's recent pronouncement on the subject was thus no innovation but was issued more for its "shock value." Sociologically, too, the issue is of limited practical significance, in that Reform Jews and Orthodox Jews do not by and large socialize, let alone "inter-marry," in any great numbers, the latter preferring a much more closed, insular, controlled environment of home, synagogue, yeshiva and even work place. And *halakhically* as well, the question of patrilineal descent pales in significance beside the much more significant issues of *get* and *mamzerut*. That is, the patrilineally descended child of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother could easily be made *halakhically* Jewish by conversion, whereas the descendants of a *get*-less remarriage are indelibly marked as *mamzerim* through the tenth generation. The fact that Reform Judaism has accepted a civil divorce in lieu of a *get* for over a century, and therefore potentially has among its multi-generational members thousands of *mamzerim*, is a far more serious *halakhic* issue than that of patrilineal descent.

18. Steven M. Cohen, "The One in 2,000 Controversy," *Moment*, March, 1987, pp. 11-17.

15. Liebman, *Pressure Without Sanctions*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

16. Schiff, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-146.

Others within the Jewish community have not been so preoccupied. Jews have been involved in large scale migrations before, to the U.S. from Eastern Europe in the latter part of the previous century and the early part of this century, to Israel and elsewhere from the Soviet Union in more recent years. Yet no one systematically checked the *tzitzit* of all marriages and divorces in those instances. The Jewish community has historically had a live and let live attitude of benign neglect on these matters, an attitude which is not without its roots in *halakhab* itself, which can be far more flexible than most people realize. It behooves the critics of *halakhab* to become more knowledgeable and conversant in its ways, just as it behooves *halakhabists* to seek the creative approaches to and applications of *halakhab* that have enabled it to survive as a living legal system. Acceptable personal status arrangements can be worked out, at least in the U.S., via such vehicles as joint conversion boards, among all moderate parties. Arrangements with extremists on both sides have never been and will never be possible. In Israel, it is again largely a political question and will take time and a certain amount of coalition building.

In sum, while the Jewish community worldwide does have profound issues and problems facing it, they are not necessarily

those that some alarmists would have us believe. They are at least as much those of a qualitative, substantive nature related to the improvement and strengthening of the quality of Jewish life, the expanding of the scope and depth of Jewish education, and the upgrading of the standards of Jewish identity beyond those L.C.D.'s currently in vogue.

Besides, we Jews have never been preoccupied with questions of size. We have known from early on that we are destined to be a small, if stiff-necked, yet chosen people, *a kleiner folk, ober a sheiner*, a small people but a beautiful one, one that is destined to have profound impact on humanity by virtue of its moral, not material nor numerical, message. At the time of the Roman Empire it is said that there were some 20 million Jews and 20 million Chinese. One need not be a demographer to assess the quantitative differential between those two groups over the last 2,000 years. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that by any measure our small and embattled people has made at least as great an impact upon world civilization as the Chinese or any other people. Let us concentrate on the positives and let us not be preoccupied with distracting divisiveness. There is too much to be learned, too much to be accomplished.