Eretz Acheret

A Different Place ארץ אחרת

Our Unity as a People

Invitation to a Conversation

COME LET US REASON TOGETHER

לכו־נא ונוכחה

ישעיה א: יח׳

Isaiah 1:18

Dear Reader,

The world we live in at the start of the twenty-first century is interconnected globally, yet we grow apart. In a paradox of our era, we have immediate access to each other, but are less of a community. The smaller the world gets, the less our particular identities seem to matter, and the feeling that the Jewish people always had of being an extended, but well-defined family, seems to be fading.

The Jewish people, like the rest of the world, is in a state of flux, and this presents new challenges regarding the mutual responsibilities that have always bound us as a nation whose members are geographically dispersed yet committed to one another. Israel finds itself compelled to respond to the plight of Jewish communities in Europe, many of which are under increasing demographic and security pressures. But in our dialogue with many sectors of North American Jewry, not beset by a crisis imposed by outside forces, we experience a distancing that is both troubling and calls for a response.

The Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs has sponsored this edition of *Eretz Acheret* based on our belief that maintaining the solidarity of the Jewish people requires active nurturing. Deep reflection and a better understanding of each other by Israel and Jewish communities everywhere are the key to sustaining the caring discussion that joins us as a family among nations.

Sincerely yours,

Yuval Rotem
Director of Public Diplomacy
Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Readers are invited to share their reflections on this edition of *Eretz Acheret* by emailing us at office@acheret.co.il.

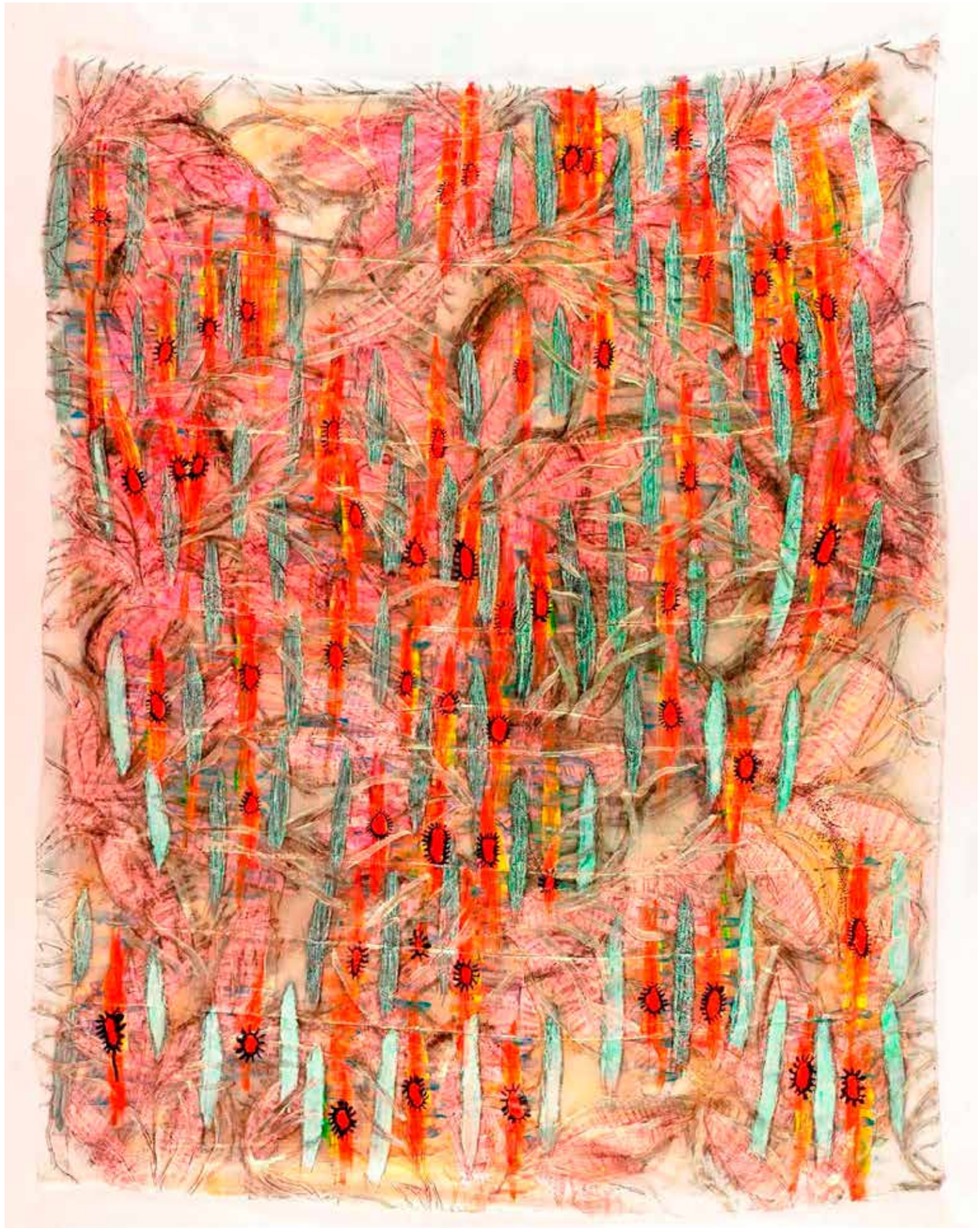
היום נִכנף הבוהק באילן
מעל ראשינו הנטויים. קולן
נותנות הצפורים שמעודי
לא שמעתין. התשמעי
את שיר גופנו קם מאדמה?
סגורים כבחומה ואין חומה
איש לא מצאָנו. השומרים
עלינו הרוחות הסובבים? ארים
פנייך וארָאה עלים קטנים
פורחים מתוך מצחך. כמה שנים
אנחנו כאן? לאן נלך?
הבולבולים קולם כמו קולך
עולה כמו אורות לבין בדיו
של הרקיע הירוק. כה ארוגים יחדיו
אנחנו כמו אור וצל, מוקדם ומאוחר.
אתמול לא ידעתיך. האדעך מחר?

טוביה ריבנר

Today the brightness surrenders
to the tree above our bent heads. Birds
I have never before heard
are singing. Can you hear
our bodies' song rising from the earth?
Enclosed as in a wall where there's no wall
no one has found us. Are the winds
that swirl around safeguarding us? I'll lift
your face and see small leaves blossoming
from your forehead. How many years
have we been here? Where will we go from here?
The voices of the larks like your voice
rise like light from between the green
heaven's cloths. So interwoven are we
like early and late, like shadow and light.
Yesterday I did not know you. Shall I know you tomorrow?

By Tuvia Ruebner

Translation: Rachel Tzvia Back



Riva Pinsky Awadish, 2014

Editor's Introduction

This issue of Eretz Acheret deals with the question of mutual responsibility between the Diaspora and Israel. In the twenty-first century, what is the significance of the powerful and ancient dictum "Kol Yisrael arevim zeh la-zeh," that all Jews are responsible for one another?

The crises facing Jews around the world today, including anti-Semitism, Jewish continuity, and internal and external controversies over Israel are the contexts in which contributors to this issue consider the nature of the mutual responsibility that binds us.

Becoming aware of our need for other Jewish communities to ensure continuity is one of the topics addressed in an interview with author and journalist Yossi Klein Halevi. "The problem," says Klein Halevi, referring to American and Israeli Jewries, "is that these two communities don't know each other. And each has developed a different kind of Jewish life that the other desperately needs." He adds, regarding spiritual transformation, "We can't do it alone. . . American Jews are our partners in that revolution."

Journalist and editor Shmuel Rosner and New Israel Fund CEO Daniel Sokatch consider points of ideological clash between Israelis and American Jews. Both warn against slipping into mutual apathy. Zachary Braiterman, a professor of Judaic Studies at Syracuse University and Israeli journalist Ben Dror Yemini reflect on how the relationship between Jews around the world is affected by postmodern technology and the spread of globalization.

Economic analyst Pinchas Landau, in one of the issue's articles addressing the solidarity in light of the challenges facing some of Europe's Jewish communities, warns that world Jewry must "be prepared to respond firmly, speedily and effectively" to help Jews who wish to emigrate, particularly now that "many countries, notably the U.S., are closing the gates to immigrants."

Considering how to maintain solidarity and remain in a conversation that helps us grow nearer, Akiva Tor of the Israel Foreign Ministry suggests creating an international Jewish peace corps. IDF Deputy Chief of Staff Yair Golan elucidates why Jewish and Israeli values are so suitable to such an initiative, and Ophelie Namiech, who grew up in Paris, reports from her perspective from IsraAID, Sudan, that international development is a Zionist value.

Yehudah Mirsky tackles the "complicated and thorny" endeavor of exploring the parameters of the "meaningful belonging" that is a prerequisite to mutual Jewish responsibility. Naama Shaked and Rebecca Lillian write about identity from beneath the roof of the alternative beit midrash.

One message that rings clear from the present collection is that it is delusional and untenable to maintain that one group holds a monopoly on mutual Jewish responsibility, i.e., on the "real" Judaism.

The literal sense of the word "arvut," which has been translated as responsibility, is perhaps closer to the modern Hebrew meaning of "guarantee." Embodied in this concept is the idea of testimony. A guarantor is a person who makes a public commitment, sometimes before a court, testifying on behalf of a fellow human being, often when freedom or even life are at stake; when necessary, this person is even prepared to pay a price for his commitment. The guarantor is the linchpin – a base, a crucial source both for the individual and for an affected stake. In Tractate Sanhedrin's dictum that "all Jews are responsible for one another," the guarantor is the Jewish collective; no single individual – no matter how important, wise, righteous, or wealthy – can testify for and be the guarantor of the rest of the Jews.

The idea that "a single human fabric" that binds all is the guarantee for all the others is a position that undermines the prevalent liberal, individualist view. Looking out onto a landscape of conflicts and rifts, this issue of Eretz Acheret suggests that it would be beneficial for the Jews of Europe, Israel, and the United States to recognize the fact that they are inseparable tiles in a living Jewish mosaic. Only the sense of mutual responsibility, acting as mutual guarantors, has the chance of giving rise to productive responses to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Reflection, reading, and writing, study and debate are the Jewish way befitting us, the People of the Book, to deal with questions whose answers will determine the character of the Jewish collective in generations to come. The articles appearing in this volume are an invitation to conversation: "Come, let us reason together."

Naama Cifrony

ארץ אחרת

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Naama Cifrony Interviews Yossi Klein Halevi

Israeli and American Jewry: Are We Going to Miss Each Other Again?

Israelis have changed: they no longer have an existential need to define themselves as cut off from Jewish civilization in the Diaspora, and they no longer divide clearly along a left-right fault line. Yossi Klein Halevi points out that the present Jewish communities in Israel and the United States would have been viewed as miraculous a hundred years ago. He explains why the potential in this period following the bursting of illusions cannot be realized until these two Jewries achieve a more accurate understanding and deeper appreciation of one another.

"What we don't know about them is at least as much as what they don't know about us." | Photo: Ilir Bajraktari/The Tower

Yossi Klein Halevi was born in Brooklyn in 1953. As a child, he used to imagine himself inhabiting a hole like the one in which his father survived in a Hungarian forest during World War II. As a teenager, he was active in the Soviet Jewry movement (including a sit-in at the Moscow emigration office during Pesach of 1973, followed by arrest and detention that was brief, thanks to the visit of a group of American senators in Moscow at the time), after which he graduated ("or devolved," in his own words) to the Jewish Defense League. He writes about this period in his recently re-released book, *Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist* (1995), whose unfortunate publication date, two days after the Rabin assassination, "ensured its quick death, even though the book documented a complete recovery from the extremist mentality."

In 1982, Yossi and his wife Sarah moved to Israel, where he continued writing for the *Village Voice* and *Moment Magazine.* By 2000, he had become a devoted analyst of post-'67 Israeli society. His pursuit for over a decade of the characters who participated in the conquest of the Temple Mount and their spiritual and social worlds, culminated in *Like Dreamers*, which won the 2013 National Jewish Book Award. The book's heroes – including Hanan Porat, founder of Gush Emunim, and Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, the movement's dissident, poet and songwriter Meir Ariel of Kibbutz Mishmarot, artist Avital Geva, one of the founders of Peace Now, and Arik Achmon, CEO of Arkia Airlines, represent the right- and left-wing sides of the contemporary post-'67 Israeli political debate.

During his years researching the biographies of these archetypal Israeli protagonists, Yossi lectured widely on Israel in various U.S. communities. His back-and-forth between the Israeli and American Jewish scenes has afforded him a unique angle for examining the relationship between these Jewries.

Naama Cifrony of *Eretz Acheret* interviews Yossi Klein Halevi about what the American and Israeli Jewish communities can – and must – learn from and about one another.

* * *

What does American Jewry look like to you, and what do its members want to know about Israel?

Maybe I'll take it a step back and first speak a little personally about my complicated relationship with American Jewry. I grew up on the fringes of the American Jewish community. I was in the right-wing Beitar Zionist youth movement as a kid, and of the entire American Jewish community, there were maybe 100 of us in Beitar. After that, I joined the Jewish Defense League, which was really the fringe of the fringe. I always saw myself in opposition to the mainstream American Jewish community, both as a militant Zionist and son of a survivor. My father was a very angry survivor, angry especially at American Jewry. He blamed the American Jewish community for betraying the Jews of Europe for not pressuring President Roosevelt to try to save them. So I grew up with all of that baggage, and when I made *aliyah* in 1982, it really was with the feeling that I'm not going back . . . that emotionally, I'm really cutting off my ties.

But things didn't quite work out that way for me, for several reasons. For one, I realized that my audience is primarily American Jews. When I came here I was still writing for the *Village Voice* and *Moment Magazine*, two publications identified with the left, and later, for *The Jerusalem Report*, and I took upon myself the mission of explaining to liberal American Jews about the "new" Israel created by Menachem Begin's coalition with Mizrachim, settlers, and Haredim.

Klein Halevi: "The left-right schism that dominated Israeli public opinion until the year 2000 no longer works. For Israelis who identify as centrists – and I think we're the majority of the country – the left-right schism is no longer the dividing line between rival camps; it is the fault line that runs straight through each and every one of us"

The books that I've written have also been primarily for an American Jewish readership. And so I found myself deepening my relationship with American Jewry, and I've come to love the American Jewish community with its creative powers, and to deeply appreciate its pluralism and its openness to other Jews and to the surrounding non-Jewish environment. There's something paradoxical about my having developed a relationship with the gamut of the Jewish community – its varied elements and diverse positions – only after I left.

In the year 2000, with the outbreak of the Second Intifada, I began lecturing to American Jews about Israel, and it was very frustrating. Until Sept. 11, 2001, when terror landed on American soil, it seemed that many

American Jews didn't have a clue as to what was happening here. Suicide bombers were blowing themselves up in Jerusalem, and many American Jews related to it as a slight delay on the way to the signing of a peace agreement.

During that same period, we were going through a historic turning point here in Israel. Our faith in the other side's willingness to accept us in the region was broken. The events of 2000 reshaped how most Israelis feel about the Middle East and our relationship to the Palestinians. Much of the American Jewish community didn't get it. I would speak in different communities and the questions I was asked made me realize that we're not conveying the reality of what we're going through here. I remember that Yankele Rothblit, who wrote "Shir La-Shalom," the song whose lyrics sheet was stained with the blood of

My father was a very angry survivor, angry especially against American Jewry. He blamed the American Jewish community for betraying the Jews of Europe for not pressuring President Roosevelt to try to save them. So I grew up with all of that baggage, and when I made aliyah in 1982, it really was with the feeling that I'm not going back . . . that emotionally, I'm really cutting off my ties

Yitzhak Rabin and became the symbol of the Israeli peace camp in the 1990s – this same Yankele Rothblit gave an interview to one of the Israeli papers saying he saw no chance for peace. It was an abrupt, historic change in Israeli consciousness.

Eretz Acheret published its second issue, entitled "The Messiah Isn't Coming," to which I contributed a piece explaining that this is the moment when both right and left are exposed as failures. I tried to explain this to American Jews; I felt compelled to act as a simultaneous translator between Israeliness and American Jewishness.

In some ways, this lack of understanding continues. When I speak to American Jewish communities, I often feel that I'm living in a time warp. When I speak to right-wing Orthodox communities, I feel it's the 1970s and the 1980s: Menachem Begin or Yitzhak Shamir are still the prime minister and it's the good old days of *Eretz Yisrael Ha-shleymah* (Greater Israel) and all we need is the determination to claim what's ours. I try to explain to these communities that the First Intifada of the late 1980s was the moment when many realized that there is no such thing as an enlightened occupation, and if you have a civilian population that is in revolt against occupation, you will have to be brutal to suppress them. And I explain that most Israelis came out of the First Intifada convinced that the price for a "Greater Israel" is too high.

When I speak to liberal Jewish communities I find myself in the 1990s, and it's the optimistic years of Oslo, and all we need to do is to stop building in the settlements and sign a peace agreement. It's as if the Second Intifada never happened, which was when a majority of Israelis realized that Peace Now is no less of an illusion than Greater Israel. So I try to explain to American Jews that the majority of Israelis today are neither left nor right – we're a mixture of both, of both "lessons" of both Intifadas.

That was indeed the meaning of "The Messiah Isn't Coming" issue, the title that we of course borrowed from Shalom Hanoch's song "Mashiach Lo Ba."

Precisely. What was conventional wisdom here in Israel 15 years ago, for many American Jews is still a big revelation. It's very frustrating for me to explain to them years later that the left-right schism that dominated Israeli public opinion until the year 2000 no longer works. For Israelis who identify as centrists – and I think we're the majority of the country – the left-right schism is no longer the dividing line between rival camps; it is the fault line that runs straight through each and every one of us.

I have a friend who used to say, already in the 1980s: "Every day, for five minutes, I think like Yitzhak Shamir."

That's exactly what I say to them. There are mornings when I wake up and it's a left-wing morning. And I say to myself, "All we have to do is to just get out! We have a fence, and we'll manage somehow with the missiles that will land on Tel Aviv." And there are other days when I wake up and it's a right-wing, Shamir morning. I say to myself: "Are you *crazy?* Look at what's happening in the Middle East! Look at our borders!" That's where most of us are at. And it also explains the mystery of Netanyahu's success as the second-longest serving prime minister in Israel's history after Ben Gurion. It's unbelievable – a prime minister whom nobody likes – not even the people who vote for him. And I think the reason is that Netanyahu reflects what most of us want in a prime minister today. We apparently want an Israeli prime minister who agrees to a two-state solution but is in no hurry to carry it out.

And what don't we know about American Jews?

What we don't know about them is at least as much as what they don't know about us. Let's look at the big picture. The situation of the Jewish people today is unprecedented in its success. We have two extraordinary communities. We have a sovereign Jewish state whose public space we're responsible for shaping. And in the United States, we have the most successful and accepted Diaspora community in Jewish history, which is welcome by the non-Jewish majority to help shape the public conversation and to bring Jewish values into the non-Jewish public space. Either one of these two success stories would have been seen by Jews a hundred years ago as miraculous. And the fact that these two communities emerged more or less simultaneously makes this time the most exciting and most potentially rich period in Jewish history. The problem is that these

Transformative feminism: Women are the rabbis, the cantors and presidents of many synagogues. Rabbi Alina Treiger, first female rabbi ordained in Germany since WW II, reading Torah in Oldenberg, Germany | photo Getty Images

two communities don't know each other. And each has developed a different kind of Jewish life that the other desperately needs. What we've developed here is a Jewish culture of a majority that does not suffer from a "minority complex." And that is creating new expressions that are unique in the Jewish world.

How is this reflected in music, for example?

One senses layers of influence in the music being created today in Israel. You especially feel it in the new Jewish spiritual music – Medieval Spain, merged with Hebrew rock. This is music that can only be created here, in a kind of hothouse of poetic and musical motifs, where Bratslav meets *piyyut* [liturgical poetry]. This music mixes Jewish cultures from many Diasporas and periods, and then merges this rich diversity into new, Israeli directions. The music created here during the classical Zionist period was meant for Israelis only. There was no room around the campfire for Diaspora Jews. It wasn't their music. In contrast, the music of Berry Sakharof and Ehud Banai, of Maureen Nehedar, who is merging Persian *piyyut* with her own compositions, or of Peretz and Mark Eliyahu, who brought the music of the Mountain Jews from Dagestan to contemporary Israeli music – all of this is essentially world Jewish music that belongs to every Jew. We are absorbing thousands of years of Jewish culture and transforming it into contemporary expression.

Let's return to my earlier question: what do we have to learn from American Jewry?

American Jewry has been able to experiment with new forms of religious life – for example, feminism, which has transformed American Jewry in ways that Israelis can't even begin to imagine. Increasing numbers of congregations are women-led. Women are the rabbis, the cantors and the presidents of many synagogues there.

The Jewish scholar Ari Elon once told of a conversation among his children that he overheard shortly after they'd returned from several years at the

Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia. After visiting a Jerusalem synagogue, perhaps the Orthodox synagogue of Elon's childhood, one child turned to his brother and said: "But he's a man. A man can't be a rabbi!" In contrast, an Orthodox rabbi from the US told me that the reason that women aren't counted in a minyan or included in religious ritual is that if this were permitted, men wouldn't have any reason to regularly attend synagogue.

What's happened is that the feminist revolution has saved liberal Judaism in America – because many Ashkenazi males reached the end of the road of their Jewish vitality. The feminist revolution has given half of the Jewish people, which never had a chance to express itself fully as Jews, the opportunity to act. Something else we can learn from American Jews is to take responsibility for shaping our Judaism: that each individual can create a Jewish and religious identity that suits him or her.

We have two extraordinary communities. We have a sovereign Jewish state whose public space we're responsible for shaping. And in the United States, we have the most successful and accepted Diaspora community in Jewish history, which is welcomed by the non-Jewish majority to help shape the public conversation and to bring Jewish values into the non-Jewish public space. Either one of these two success stories would have been seen by Jews a hundred years ago as miraculous

Here in Israel we have the depth of Jewish history, while they have the expanse. Each has an advantage and a disadvantage. The disadvantage of depth is that it can be very narrow. The image that I have of Judaism in Israel is a well – a deep well of living water that is sometimes also narrow and dark. And the disadvantage of expanse is that it can be very thin, very superficial. Our challenge here is to widen our Judaism. Deepening is the challenge of American Judaism.

How do you perceive the anti-Zionism brewing on America's campuses?

It's really quite dismaying to see a strong strain of anti-Zionism emerge among Jewish-identified young American Jews. While it's still marginal, the margins are vocal. When I was growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, the New Left in America was heavily Jewish, but most did not identify actively with their Judaism. The anti-Zionism was usually part of an assimilation process. What's happening today is that some young American Jews see no contradiction between anti-Zionism and a positive Jewish identity. In fact, the opposite – they see anti-Zionism as an expression of their Jewish identity and their anger at Israel is because they perceive us as sullying Jewish ethics.

Would you say it's because of a glorification of the Diaspora?

I think there are a few reasons for it. One is that the State of Israel has helped American Jews feel proud and secure in their Jewishness. My generation knows that the reason American Jews feel secure is because of Israel. Younger American Jews today don't know that – they take that sense of Jewish security for granted. They don't remember a time when Jews were stigmatized as cowards. Growing up, I used to read books with titles like, "Jews Fight Too." Can you imagine publishing a book like that today? The problem today is that the world thinks that we fight too well. No Jew has to prove that Jews can fight. In the Soviet Union – so my friends have told me – until the Six-Day War, the stigma was that the Jews purportedly all fled from the front during World War II.

With all the generals and the medallions?

Right, with all the medallions. Jews were generals in the Red Army. Hundreds of thousands of Jews fought in the front ranks of the Russian army, yet the stigma was that all the Jews were hiding in Tashkent during World War II. The Six-Day War was the moment when Diaspora Jews overcame their inferiority complex. Young American Jews today don't know that, and I feel that they are guilty – often involuntarily out of ignorance, but guilty – of a deep ingratitude to Israel, which changed the image of the Diaspora Jew. In effect, it is Israel that has made it possible for American Jews to feel American, to feel fully accepted in America. The irony is that the reason that anti-Zionism disappeared after the Shoah is that the anti-Zionist world was literally destroyed. There's something ahistorical, a kind of amnesia quality in this new wave of Jewish anti-Zionism.

Before I ask you what we need to do about this, I want to tell you about my recent experience reading *Days of Ziklag* by S. Yizhar. My daughter was studying for her college entrance exams, and suggested that rather than memorize vocabulary from the practice book, we read *Days of Ziklag* together. We had to look up three words on every page. Reading the descriptions of the heroes and heroism in the book, which represents the ethos of the War of Independence, I got the impression that left-wing Israelis, like the paratroopers you describe in your book, are no longer able to bear the demand for sacrifice – what we mockingly call the "silver platter" – and the injustice inflicted on those who lose; and on the other hand, the Haredim and other anti-Zionists can't stand – perhaps because they are jealous – the powerful vitality of the first generations of Zionists. How can we navigate between the mythos of sacrifice and its attendant injustice, and the power of vitality?

As a young American Jew I was jealous of Israeli vitality, and my solution was to join Israel. But before I answer your question, I'll say that my generation of American Jews fell in love with an Israel that we didn't understand. We had some idealized image of Israel in its early years, but Labor Israel of the 50s and 60s was much less democratic and pluralistic than Israel of today (I'm of course referring to Israel within the Green Line). My fear is therefore that American Jews are falling out of love with an Israel that they don't understand. You talked about vitality. Israel today is one of the most vital places on earth. I once interviewed the writer David Grossman, and he said that he gets all kinds of offers for sabbaticals abroad, and he refuses to take them because he doesn't want to deprive his children of a year of vitality in Israel. Now, of course, when we know that one of his sons fell in Lebanon, it takes on a particular poignancy. But I never forgot that. And somehow we're not conveying that spiritual vitality to American Jewry.

I'm told: "There's no pluralism in Israel," and I answer, "It depends how you look at it." It's a different kind of pluralism than in American Jewry. In American Jewry you have religious pluralism. Here, we have ethnic pluralism. We have Jews from dozens of countries. We have such extraordinary Jewish diversity. And I believe that we are beginning to develop religious pluralism here as well – Israeli Judaism. For me, the promise that "Ki mitzion tetze Torah," Torah will go forth from Zion, means that we will be creating forms of spiritual renewal with deep roots. Israeli Judaism reads our sources in their original language and creates a culture in response to the needs of a Jewish majority with self-confidence in a sovereign nation. I chose to live in Israel because this is where I believe ultimately the Jewish story is going to be determined. But we can't do it alone. We can't do it without American Jewry. Especially if we're talking about a spiritual transformation. American Jews are our partners in that revolution.

Peretz and Mark Eliyahu brought the music of the Mountain Jews from Dagestan to contemporary Israeli music: World Jewish music that belongs to every Jew. | Photo: Rebecca Eliyahu

This may be the first time we have an opportunity to create an authentic and mature relationship between American Jews and Israelis. In the past we were committed to a project that excluded the Diaspora. In fact, that was in direct opposition to the Diaspora. The Zionist cultural project very much saw itself as creating a new Jew who was meant to be cut off from the Diaspora.

And now we need to create the new "new Jew"?

We're done with this notion of cutting ourselves off from Jewish civilization in the Diaspora. We now see ourselves as the continuation – not just of Biblical Judaism but of uninterrupted Jewish history, including Jewish life in the Diaspora. My worry is that interest in Israel among American Jews is declining. Are we going to miss each other again? I'm concerned that without a close relationship with the State of Israel and Israelis, American Jewry also will not reach its full potential. For the first time we can create a real relationship. What an amazing, extraordinary moment. But we need partners for that – serious partners. ■

Daniel Sokatch

WORK IN PROGRESS

To build a “genuine” sense of solidarity, we should give American Jews a reason to care about Israel beyond “they’re all out to get us.” For many American Jews, the Israel debate often seems to come down to a choice between “Israel can do no wrong” and “Israel is always wrong.” This is especially the case for young people on college campuses. But most of them are too smart for that. Daniel Sokatch, CEO of the New Israel Fund, describes the tensions between Jewish solidarity and the State of Israel, and how they can be addressed wisely.

The invitation to contribute an article about Jewish solidarity to this journal came at a very interesting time for . . . well, Jewish solidarity. A few months ago Jews around the world felt united – in shock, horror and support – on behalf of our brothers and sisters who were attacked in a kosher market near Paris. Together we prayed for their safety, mourned the loss of those who were so brutally murdered, and rejoiced at the salvation of the survivors. This was an example of elemental, pure solidarity: Jews were targeted, just for being Jews, and in our hearts and our shuls we stood with them: Je suis juif.

But only a few weeks later, in a breach of protocol that was seen as an intentional insult to the White House, the Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives invited the Prime Minister of Israel to address the US Congress. The latter accepted, and the bitter debate over the wisdom and appropriateness of this decision has divided Jews in both America and Israel. Indeed, the state of the Jewish world, as it relates to the Prime Minister’s decision to come to Washington, can be described as the very antithesis of solidarity.

When It Comes to Israel

So danger tends to unite us, and Israel often divides us. It is ironic, and rather sad, that the state created to bring the Jews together and to bring them home is so often the cause of such disagreement between them. But it isn’t a surprise. The fact is, when it comes to Israel, we Jews really often disagree.

From its earliest days, the Zionist project was a matter of great debate and disagreement in the Diaspora. And while that changed significantly after the Shoah and with the founding of the State, Israel’s role as a rallying point for Jewish solidarity has eroded. Increasingly, Jews outside Israel on one side of the political spectrum or the other find themselves in disagreement with policies pursued by a given government of the State of Israel.

This is understandable. It is part of the essence of Jewish peoplehood that Jews stand together when Jews are persecuted and threatened. But a modern state is not a people, and the Israeli government is not the elected representation of the Jewish people. This, by the way, is why the proposed “Jewish nation-state” bill is so divisive: the state is supposed to be the arbiter of all its citizens’ interests, not an ethnic ruling body.

Daniel Sokatch: Growing vector of drift and disaffiliation

Meydad Eliyahu: Untitled, From “The Wandering Series,” Ink on paper, 42X29 cm, 2012

So what happens to “Jewish solidarity” when an Israeli government pursues policies with which the majority of American Jews disagree? Policies they think may actually be “bad for the Jews,” let alone Israel? What happens to Jewish solidarity when the elected leader of the Israeli government claims to represent the interests not only of the State of Israel, but also of the Jewish people?

From where I sit, on the American side of the ocean, nothing good. Most American Jews are liberal no matter how you ask the polling question. When liberal American Jews are told – by their community institutions, by representatives from Israel – that “Jewish solidarity” means standing with Israel, and that “standing with Israel” means supporting not just the people of Israel or the right of Israel to exist, but rather whatever it is the government of Israel decides to do, well, a lot of American Jews, especially young ones, are going to walk away.

We’ve seen this begin to happen. We can pretend that the results of the 2013 Pew Study don’t tend to confirm the growing vector of drift and disaffiliation that increasingly characterizes the relationship of young American Jews to Israel, but pretending won’t solve our problem. One day, in the not-too-distant future, we may be nostalgic for the current debates. American Jews may simply not care enough about Israel to get agitated over what the Israeli prime minister does or does not do.

It is long past time to reframe what constitutes Jewish solidarity when it comes to Israel. We should stop pushing an artificial notion of solidarity based on jingoistic calls to rally round the policies and actions of a particular Israeli government, particularly when that government runs roughshod over critique and dissent. That is a recipe for failure.

Those Israelis who work for social justice, human rights and religious freedom are a powerful argument for why Americans should care. They are the face of the Israel most American Jews can and want to connect with

To build a genuine sense of solidarity, we should give American Jews a reason to care about Israel beyond “they’re all out to get us.” For many American Jews, the Israel debate often seems to come down to a choice between “Israel can do no wrong” and “Israel is always wrong.” This is especially the case for young people on college campuses. But most of them are too smart for that. They know a false dichotomy when they see one. They know that in Israel, as in America, there is a third way, and that is to work for an Israel that is just, one that lives up to the best of both the Jewish and liberal-democratic traditions that informed its founding.

When I speak with American Jews about Israel, I tell them that Israel is far from perfect and is a work in progress, just like our own country. I remind them that there are tens of thousands of Israelis who, every day, are working to fulfill the vision Israel’s founders enshrined in its Declaration of Independence, of a state that is both a Jewish homeland and also a fair, open and equal society for *all* of its inhabitants. Those Israelis who work for social justice, human rights and religious freedom may not be the face of Israel that the current government of Israel wants to show the world. But they are a powerful argument for why Americans should care. They are the face of the Israel most American Jews can and want to connect with. They are the face of a dream worth fighting for. ■

Shmuel Rosner

Scenes from a Marriage

"Like other people, Jews prefer to think that they have more than one option for how to live their lives. They can be in contact with one another or they can cut themselves off; they can care for one another or not care; they can live with other Jews or they can simply be Jews, alone or in communities." Shmuel Rosner responds to the implied ultimatum in the critique of liberal American Jews: If you fail to live up to standards befitting the Jewish state . . .

Tamar Odenheimer
Homage to Ingmar Bergman

In the seventeenth century, there were about one million Jews in the world. It wasn't that long ago. Afterwards, there were more Jews – almost 17 million – and then there were fewer. For many generations now, there haven't been a lot Jews in the world.

Anyone who asks himself why we need other Jews, in other places, should start from this basic fact, and from the fundamental natural need not to feel alone. Anyone who asks himself why Jews who don't live in Israel should take an interest in Israel should study the graphs of Hebrew University demographer Professor Sergio DellaPergola and note Israel's growing slice of the Jewish population pie. Anyone who asks himself why Jews who live in Israel should take an interest in Jews who don't should also study these graphs: more than half of the Jews in the world do *not* live in Israel.

In the seventeenth century, the first signs of the crisis became evident: The decline of religion and attrition of the religious-halachic behavioral code led to the collapse of what had been the central pillar of Jewish life for many generations. With the onset of modernity, most of the Jews in the world ceased speaking a common language of Torah and commandments, laws and rules. Most Jews do not put on tefillin every morning, most do not eat only kosher food, and most do not immerse themselves in the mikvah. Anyone who asks himself why Jews need other Jews in another place should also consider this basic fact: In a world in which there are more Jews who "have no religion" (this was one of the most striking features to emerge from the Pew and Brandeis surveys of American Jews conducted last year), there is a need for an alternative that makes it possible to define Jews as a group. Some like to call this alternative "peoplehood." But peoplehood is a pale substitute for the real thing, which is Jewish nationalism. This is nationalism in its simplest sense: Jews belonging not only to the same religion, but to the same nationality, too.

Like other people, Jews prefer to think that they have more than one option for how to live their lives. They can be in contact with one another or they can cut themselves off; they can care for one another or not care; they can live with other Jews or they can simply be Jews, alone or in communities, but without the "with." Recent years have seen a new trend involving forecasts that put the second option in question in that it tends towards foregoing the nation in favor of the local community. Jews have begun to say to one another: If you do this or that, we'll cut our ties; if you don't do this or that, we'll distance ourselves. If you are Jews of this type, we'll talk; if you're Jews of another type, we don't want a relationship. More specifically, threats of this kind are mostly directed towards Israel, and they are voiced more often than not by Jews who mean well, who love their people, who want no more than for Israel to be more successful, to meet the standards of a Jewish state – that is to say, *their* standards. If not, they'll be forced – not happily, of course – to penalize it with indifference, estrangement, or alienation.

Jews, like all human beings, do indeed have more than one option. However, unlike what they may think, every option comes not only with advantages, but also with a price tag. When Jews choose to maintain their ties with Israel, it certainly comes with a price: It often means that they have to accept the fact that the Jewish

Here is the choice that you – we – face: You can choose a volatile, turbulent, angry, loving, tense, reciprocally beneficial, difficult, wonderful relationship – or you can give it up. In that case, Israel will lose, and so will the Jews of the world

state will act in accordance with the standards determined by its conscience, just like all other democratic countries, and that these standards come as part of a somewhat chaotic and necessarily flawed electoral system. In other words, anyone who wishes to maintain those ties must become accustomed to living with a partner upon whom one has little influence. You want the partner to end the "occupation," and the partner believes that it should be continued for one reason or another, for better or for worse. You want the partner not to deport Sudanese illegals, but the partner nevertheless does so. You want to cause the partner to change, but meet with recalcitrance.

You threaten that if this goes on, there will be no choice but to get divorced. The partner panics for a moment . . . *Divorce*? After all, he has no option for a relationship other than with the rest of the Jews – but once again he reverts to his evil ways. That's his nature. He is driven by social dynamics, and, anyway, what kind of threat is divorce? If

you get divorced, not only he will lose out – you won't have a family, either.

The world decides for the Jews

The Jews, just like everyone else, want to believe that they are special and that they alone determine their fate. The truth is that Jews contend with problems that are very similar to those that other nations and groups have to grapple with, problems of loss of authority and hierarchy, secularization and globalization, that threaten particular identities.

Very often, the ones who decide how the Jews will deal with problems are not the Jews, but the rest of the world. The world is changing and the Jews must make choices. Sometimes they respond well and at other times less so. In any event, the Jews are a product of what is happening around them. For example, when there is more interreligious and interethnic marriage in America on the whole, Jews intermarry, too.

It so happens that the world is changing in a way that makes it difficult for Jews to feel close to one another. That's what happened when the Enlightenment posed new challenges that certain groups responded to in different, and often contradictory, ways, to the point of almost causing a rift in the Jewish world. Why only "almost" rather than an actual rift? Once again, it wasn't the Jews who decided, it wasn't they who chose unity over discord. The world decided for them. An Israel Prize Laureate in Jewish philosophy, Eliezer Schweid, put it this way: "The most abject failure of the Emancipation after its brilliant success in terms of the Jews' integration into their European surroundings was that it forced the movements within the Jewish people to return to the roots of their unity, identify with the foundations of their fate, and cooperate with one another in the cruel struggle for survival as individuals and as a group."

There is a built-in, inherent difficulty in the relationship between Israel and the Jews of the Diaspora, and this difficulty is not new. Reform Judaism identified it in the earliest days of Zionism when it understood that national reawakening painted all the Jews of the world in the colors of national identity, an identity that not all were interested in. Ultra-Orthodox Judaism also identified it in the early days of Zionism when it realized that national reawakening blunts and diminishes the exclusivity of religious commitment. American Jewry identified it soon after the establishment of the State of Israel, and in the early 1950s forced Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to publicly recognize the fact that the Jews of the United States "owe no political allegiance to Israel."

The difficulty was identified – but never resolved – because there is no way to resolve it. Israel will not dismantle itself in order to refrain from offending the sensibilities or beliefs of anyone, even a cherished co-religionist. The Jews of the world will not all come to Israel for the mere convenience of no longer having to maneuver between their indeterminate ties to a distant rogue state in the Middle East and the place that they consider "home."

Lose-lose?

Here is the choice that you – we – face: You can choose a volatile, turbulent, angry, loving, tense, reciprocally beneficial, difficult, wonderful relationship – or you can give it up. In that case, Israel will lose its first circle of supporters along with the concern, the participation in its joys and sorrows, and the contributions it makes, both material and in spirit. The Jews of the world – those who choose to distance themselves from Israel – will also lose, and accordingly deprive themselves of the concern, the participation in joys and sorrow, and the contributions both material and in spirit.

Jews, just like everyone else, are not immune to making foolish choices. Nevertheless, one may hope that they will not choose to distance and alienate themselves from one another.

Yes, there is evidence and there are signs that Jews in certain positions, in certain communities – let's tell it like it is: mainly Jews from the liberal left, mainly in the United States – have lost their patience with Israel. Our politics kills their love. The complaints by these Jews are worth listening to and it's worth talking to them, and one can also try to persuade them or be persuaded by what they have to say. There are things that some of them don't understand very well. And there are other things that they do understand and, nevertheless, they remain unhappy. There are things that some of them propose that make sense and would be beneficial for Israel to adopt. And there are things that they want but that Israel, with all due respect, cannot or does not want to fix.

Israel has no alternative to these Jews. As flawed as their philosophies may be (in the eyes of most Jews in Israel), as distant as they may be from the experience of the Middle East and its constraints, as naïve, annoying or sanctimonious as they may be, they represent half of the Jews of the world – the other half. If anyone in Israel thinks that we'd be better off without their irritating faultfinding, they would do well to reconsider. They'd miss them.

Those Jews have no alternative to Israel either. There will never be another Jewish state. They won't find relatives anywhere else in the world. Only in Israel do people speak Hebrew fluently, only in Israel does life screech to a halt on Yom Kippur Eve, only in Israel is Hanukkah celebrated in winter not as an afterthought – albeit a charming one – in the shadow of another holiday, but rather as the real thing. I have a feeling that most Jews, even those who are angry at or embarrassed by Israel, are too wise to forego that.

Zachary Braiterman

Visual and Virtual Solidarity: Israel in the American-Jewish Gaze

Israel has always been a horizon on which American Jews have rested their gaze. The media revolution has radically changed the nature of the view across the ocean. Abundant and accessible information and images have been complemented by shifts in content – Israel in a global age is much more difficult to idealize. Zachary Braiterman traces patterns of looking at Israel and considers their impact on solidarity.

Collage: Miriam Chapman and Flash 90

Is it possible to understand anything without pictures? An image of an object or a person might include mental pictures, poetic figures, or paintings. Traditionally, these were the realm of art history and the history of human perception, but the modern age is different. With the spread of photographic – and now digital – technologies in the modern and postmodern age, these pictures tend to be graphic and even visceral. Photographs, movies, and digital technologies mediate the way we look at things and the way we look at each other. Whether it has to do with life, death, sex, or politics, what we know is almost always formed on the basis of an image. This includes social identity, social bonds, and the social solidarity between Jews in the Diaspora and their Israeli cousins.

Inter-group solidarity was always a cardinal virtue (ikkar ha'ikkarim) in Judaism. The rabbis eternalized it visually in the midrash when they imagined the four species (arba'at ha-minim*)* waved together on the holiday of Sukkot. The etrog, the lulav, the hadas, and the arava each symbolized a different kind of Jew. What mattered for the rabbis was to distinguish between those who learn Torah, those who practice mitzvot, and those who perform good deeds or various combinations of the three. The lesson of the parable (mashal) is that all these different kinds of Jews are bundled together. According to the rabbis in *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers), it is a primary injunction not to separate oneself from the community.

A Shared Sense of Fate

Writing in a secular age, the American Jewish thinker Mordecai Kaplan understood two things about Judaism and modern Judaism already in 1934. The first is that Judaism is based more on social identity than on religious belief or the practice of mitzvot. As a sociologist, Kaplan understood that Jews are Jews because they stick with other Jews. As a student of Ahad Ha'Am, the second thing he understood was about Israel and the Diaspora. Like Ahad Ha'Am, Kaplan realized that Israel would be a central pillar of modern Jewish life, that there would always be a Diaspora, and that modern Jewish life would thrive from interdependence and interaction between the two.

Jewish solidarity became especially pronounced as the Holocaust came to preoccupy American Jewish life. In the 1970s, solidarity with other Jews was the common core behind the struggle to free Soviet Jewry as well as the appeals to support Israel, suddenly seen as vulnerable after the Yom Kippur War. Jewish institutional life was organized under the banner-slogans of "Jewish unity" and "Never again!"

This form of collective solidarity was based on a shared sense of fate. The American Jewish thinker Joseph Soloveitchik called it a *brit goral* (covenant of destiny) to signify the sense that all Jews, no matter where and when, were bound up together, no matter what. The upshot was a solidarity with Israel and a special interest in it.

In truth, what drew American Jews to Israel was probably not so much a shared sense of destiny; even at their most anxious, American Jews always felt better off than their fellow Jews in Israel. It had more to do with eros. In relation to Israel, American Jewish solidarity was always bound up with a gaze. The inter-Jewish social relation was constituted through the act of looking.

Looking at Israel, American Jews saw in it a different image of themselves. Whether in the movie *Exodus*, adapted from the novel by Leon Uris, or in Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, American Jews always knew that Jews in Israel were stronger and "sexier" than American Jews, and that they lived more exciting lives. Beginning in 1967, American Jews started to look at Israel a lot, and they liked what they saw.

Globalization has changed everything. As the Israeli economy has integrated into the world market, Israeli society has become more privatized and less ideological. In the process, the actual differences between Israeli Jews and American Jews became less pronounced. We are all bourgeois now – or at least that's what most American Jews see. And with the collapse of distance, the mixed sense of superiority and inferiority has lessened. "You" are not so different than "us."

Obsession with Israel

The gaze, as it began to develop in the 1980s, and up until today, is completely different. What American Jews began to see on television and other older media formats such as print journalism was the First Lebanon War and the First Intifada, and what they saw made them very uncomfortable.

The Internet has intensified this process and makes it possible to follow events in Israel on a granular scale. Especially for younger American Jews, the sharp sense of solidarity with Israel after the Second Intifada has already begun to give way to pictures of walls, anti-Arab racism and ethnic discrimination, anti-democratic legislation, religious extremism over the Temple Mount, the unending Occupation, incessant settlement construction, and a Prime Minster hell-bent on ruining Israeli-American relations. What liberal, progressive, and even centrist Jews "see" now is simply unbelievable.

The peculiar thing is that most American Jews stopped looking a long time ago. The obsession with Israel on the part of American Jews is confined to "professional" Jews, to the ideological right, and the anti-Zionist Jewish left. For an American Jew, following Israeli politics and culture so closely and intimately, it begins to resemble voyeurism, watching other people go about their business, watching other people and their problems.

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"What the American Jews saw made them very uncomfortable." Media photographers, 2005 | Photo: Hamad Almakt/Flash90

Speaking from memory, I can say that it used to be in the 1970s and 1980s that people interested in Israel would wait for the *International Jerusalem Post* each Friday. At the time, the paper was center-left and reflected the liberal sensibilities of most American Jews. For those who wanted to follow the news, the *Jerusalem Post* gave American Jews a taste of the burning issues and debates raging in the country, and it gave its readers a sense of who was who on the Israeli political scene. This created the imaginary sense of solidarity.

Today one can simply surf the Web and get the news on an hourly basis. This intense exposure on the Internet has allowed self-important left-wing and right-wing busybodies to claim an "insider's" view of all things Israel – politics, culture, and society. It's a smutty version of what Jacob Neusner called "vicarious Judaism."

The voyeurism is especially blatant on Facebook. One can watch other people watching Israel with the obsession of a pornography addict. Every little incident, any bit of racist legislation, or every little pedestrian human rights abuse all goes right up on Facebook the minute it is reported from Israel. We are worse than solidarity voyeurs; we dress it up as "politics" and share it with others.

It is not my purpose to dismiss the Internet and new media platforms as shallow and superficial supplements to "real life"; quite the contrary. For American Jews, these Web and social platforms both narrow and broaden one's access to Israel. They make it possible to attend to events in Israel almost exclusively according to a fixed ideological spectrum. At the same time, these platforms expand social bonds. They create more and more points of contact between Jews in Israel and Jews across the globe. They link Jewish life in the U.S. with Jewish life in Israel and in Europe. While liberal and progressive Jews may not like what they see, they bind themselves more and more to Israel as soon as they turn on their computers or mobile devices.

In truth, what drew American Jews to Israel was probably not so much a shared sense of destiny; even at their most anxious, American Jews always felt better off than their fellow Jews in Israel. It had more to do with eros

An old-new media hybrid such as the *Haaretz* online English edition provides an interesting example. Among liberal Jews who follow the news from Israel, the online-newspaper remains *the* unparalleled platform – and not just for Israeli news and politics, as it's also a source for news and reviews relating to Diaspora affairs, Jewish history and Jewish culture, and also, if only occasionally, Middle Eastern culture and politics. Jewish professionals, politically committed people, and professors of Jewish Studies rely on *Haaretz* in ways that prove the point made by Ahad Ha'Am over a century ago. Like it or not, Israel remains a cultural center of the world Jewish community, thanks in large part to globalization and to the Internet.

But what happens to solidarity in the digital age? It's not automatic, and it's not generic; it forms in ways not unlike the ways niche markets are formed. Digital media make it easier to sustain inter-group solidarity even as it subjects those connections to strain and stress. Liberal Jews still constitute the great majority of the American Jewish public; from Israel, they want movies, musicians, artists, dancers, writers, and critics. (They don't even have to be Jewish; Sayed Kashua, an Israeli-Arab columnist, screenwriter and novelist who writes in Hebrew, is now beginning to make a small mark on the American Jewish community.) And they want peace. Liberal American Jews tend to shy away from bellicose language. It's reasonable to assume that they are increasingly losing focus, no longer content to gaze up at or on Israel when what they see is tired and tiring hasbara and unflattering politics that continue to abuse and test the stretching point of the bonds of solidarity. ■

Akiva Tor

Building a Bridge Over Troubled Waters

Israel and the Diaspora are in critical need of each other, but increasingly drift apart due to cultural divide and the dilution of Jewish identity. Akiva Tor presents a strategic plan for maintaining Jewish solidarity. Required is a project of grand vision: a Peace Corps of the Jewish People that will unite us with each other, and with the world.

World people or a nation-state?

The current security crisis of Jewish communities in Europe has reawakened ideological questions that we had long stopped asking. How should Israel respond to the renewed threats on Jewish life in Western Europe? Should it press European governments to better protect their Jewish populations, or should it simply tell the Jews to come home? Does Zionism believe in Jewish communal existence outside of the Land of Israel? Are the Jews meant to be a world people, or is their proper identity only as a nation-state?

For Israel, the answer has been clear. In every instance of perceived threat against the Jews, we petitioned the governments to protect their communities and did what we could to help them. We view the defeat of anti-Semitism as a mission of state, not an instrument of *aliyah*. And we have acted to make Israel part of the solution for the dialogue with Islam in Europe, rather than part of the problem. Regarding the threat to Jewish communal life from the parties of the European far right, Israel has taken a principled and uncompromising stance against their repeated attempts at political engagement. Despite their growing electoral strength, in lockstep with the Jewish communities of Europe, we have shunned all contact with neo-fascist parties, and we will continue to do so.

In sum, rather than pursuing a misplaced Zionist orthodoxy that might seek to negate the Diaspora, the Israeli state and its institutions have acted out of deep intuitions of Jewish solidarity. The worn Talmudic instruction still guides us: **כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה** (The entire Jewish people are responsible for each other, Sanhedrin 27b); and through history, Israel has displayed willingness to act contrary to its political self-interest on behalf of Jewry – from the capture of Eichmann to the demand for freedom for Soviet Jewry.

The Diaspora is of our flesh, and therefore the State of Israel will act at all times, with all means of state, to protect and secure the safety of Jewish communities everywhere. When Diaspora communities are in distress, Israel will not look away.

Zionism grows up

This moral reality reflects the maturation of Israel and its founding movement. The Zionist ideology was formulated when the Yishuv was a backwater of world Jewry and the achievement of Jewish political sovereignty but a distant, utopian dream. Even after its establishment, Israel for many decades was one of the smaller communities of the Jewish people. On the eve of the Six-Day War, Israel's population was one fifth that of world Jewry combined. But in 2015, Israel is the largest Jewish community and will soon, or may already be, the home of the majority of Jews, as Diaspora communities suffer demographic decline. After many decades of economic struggle, Israel today enjoys strong growth and remarkable cultural vitality. At the historical moment when the pendulum has swung this far in the direction of Hebrew culture, the negation of the Diaspora is wrongheaded and becomes inappropriate triumphalism.

Yet despite my belief in these convictions, at gut level they leave me conflicted. I care for the Diaspora, but believe in Israel, and in the primacy of its claim on the love of the Jewish people. In my belief, Israel is the greatest Jewish achievement in two millennia, and it still dumbfounds me when young American Jews (and young Israelis) don't fathom this. *Yeridah* from Israel breaks my heart, and it would be a personal failure if my children chose not to live here. In religious terms, I view life in Israel as a mitzvah. The incredible success of Israel, the robustness of its reborn language, and the naturalness of being at home on this once barren land, are for me undeniable arguments for the Zionist view that the Jews are meant to live as a sovereign nation. In brief, I believe in *aliyah* - that the choice to build one's life in Israel means to ascend.

And yet, Jewish history and all my personal experience of the Jewish people makes me know that we are also a world people. Every Israeli diplomat feels this, whether in Copenhagen, Hong Kong, Montevideo, San Francisco, or Kiev. In the furthest reaches of the Exile, the connection with the local Jewish community is always intimate, a coming home. Israel feels the love of the Jewish people everywhere, and this is a source of comfort and strength in trying times.

Zion and the Diaspora as vital needs of Jewishness

If "We Are One" in such a profound sense, why are we are pulling apart? The connecting fabric between Israel and North American Jewry is fraying, and has been for many years. Two dynamic processes drive this crisis.

Challenging field experiences and text study: In Search of the Tribal Fire joins young Jews from Israel and abroad
Hillel Israel Photo: Boris Chernykov

The Diaspora is of our flesh, and therefore the State of Israel will act at all times, with all means of state, to protect and secure the safety of Jewish communities everywhere

The dilution of Jewish identity in America is the primary cause of the widening distance between us. It is absurd to expect a young American Jew to feel a greater connection to Israel than to his or her own internal Jewishness. The reality of American life and the assimilatory response of the greater mass of American Jewry is an inescapable fact that Israel and the American Jewish leadership need to ponder without evasion and with unsparing clarity if we mean to address it in any meaningful way.

The cultural divide between Israel and the core of affiliated American Jewry is the secondary challenge to our unity. Increasingly we miscommunicate and fail to intuit each other, even inside the family discourse. The parents quarrel and fume, and the children – the future generations of Jewry – are victim. In some ways this is a deeper tragedy than assimilation, because it can be prevented, if we can only stop forgetting how much we need each other.

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Contemporary Jewish society grows along two disparate tracks. Broadly speaking, these are the Hebrew culture being created in Israel, and the American Jewish culture which creates in the general language of humanity.

The Hebrew playground is potent, political, radical, retrograde, high culture and trash, enmeshed in tradition but irreverent, spiritual and often vulgar, east and west, cosmopolitan and deeply parochial, liberal and benighted, rooted and brashly new, and driven by creative contradiction at every Jerusalem and Tel Aviv street corner. Israeli culture is jostled by the Mayflower participation of Jews of every ethnicity, economic class, religious and ideological stripe, from the Samaria hilltops to the software castles of Herzliya.

But Israeli society, for all its multicolor, suffers from structural insularity. Israeli identity is becoming thicker, more familial, and internally connected. The Hebrew language is spoken only by us, a minority people in a small demarcated region. Hence, Israeli culture is introspective and self-involved, and at times not adequately equipped to encounter the broader world. More critically, it is one with which American Jewry is not conversant – primarily because American Jews lack mastery of Hebrew and sufficient knowledge of Israel, and are not physically present, but also because Hebrew culture is not engaging them or granting access.

American Jewish culture is the complementary opposite. It creates in the lingua franca of general human society. At one time this was the Jewish contribution to world culture in Philo's Greek, Maimonides' Arabic, Spinoza's Latin and Buber's German. Today it is the unprecedented Jewish cultural achievement in the English language. Jewish creativity in American culture is Nobel-Prize caliber, cutting edge, capable of universal humor, progressive, assimilatory and uniquely attuned to the American scene. Some fear that American Jewish creativity is aging and lacks resources for renewal. For the time being at least, it communicates with the entire world in a way that Hebrew culture by its essential nature cannot.

Every Israeli diplomat feels this, whether in Copenhagen, Hong Kong, Montevideo, San Francisco or Kiev. In the furthest reaches of the Exile, the connection with the local Jewish community is always intimate, a coming home

Hence, what it is actually a cultural divide between the Jewish communities of Israel and America is misinterpreted as a values argument. When Israeli society acts as a caring family, displays a forward-minded liberalism by speaking with empathy to its ultra-Orthodox population, making room for them in the cultural landscape and trying to welcome them in, American Jews misread this as a sign of Israel going backwards, another example of what used to be called Israel's "Levantinism."

When Israel deals high-handedly with minorities and illegal immigrants, it displays moral amnesia, forgetting that we were slaves in Egypt and the Diaspora experience of being outside. American Jewish critics at times neglect the fact that Israel is an actual country and the harshness required of states, but Israelis too quickly dismiss the critique, not fathoming its essential Jewishness. The Israeli educational curriculum would do well to include Philip Roth's "Eli the Fanatic" as required reading, and it is common trope to hear an Israeli say "I learned how to be a Jew during my stay abroad."

As both a nation-state and a world people, Jews need both Zion and Diaspora, and we will be impoverished as a people if we do not maintain both of these divergent spheres of creation. Were it not for the American Jewish component, the Jewish cultural achievement would suffer diminished brilliance and lack global significance. Lacking the dynamic texture of Israeli Hebrew culture, it is uncertain whether Jewry possesses sufficient energies to maintain itself. Without Israel, American Jewry would doubt its future. Without a vibrant American Jewish community, Israel would feel very lonely in the world.

Zion and the Diaspora are the necessary polarities of the Jewish people. We complement and require each other to create significant meaning and to maintain ourselves. But increasingly we drift apart, with no strategy for correction.

A Strategic Plan for the Jewish People

The State of Israel is less wealthy than the Diaspora, but it is sovereign and capable of mobilization. Hence it is incumbent upon the Israeli government and its institutions to be proactive, by reaching out to Jewish leadership in the Diaspora so that together we can formulate and realize a plan for maintaining the Jewish people and our unity. The following are suggestions for how we might progress.

Renew the conversation on Jewish continuity

American Jewry responded to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey report on Jewish demographic decline and the rising rate of intermarriage with a cry of "*gevalt*" and a decade of mobilization. When the follow-up survey in 2001 showed equally dire findings, talk of Jewish continuity shut down and became taboo. Instead of a search for new strategies, the survey methodology was attacked, and there was an unstated agreement by leadership that American Jewry would never again count itself. The present mode of response to rising intermarriage and shrinking numbers is patchy and dependent on local initiatives. For the most part, organized American Jewry approaches the Jewish demographic crisis with a fatalistic complaisance. It is time to renew the conversation on Jewish continuity.

This could be done under the auspices of the President of Israel who would convene a summit of the Jewish People in Jerusalem. By presidential invitation, the communal, spiritual, cultural, and philanthropic leadership and best minds of Jewry would gather for a directed, well-prepared conversation on stemming numeric decline, advancing Jewish literacy, bridging the perceived values gap between Israel and the Diaspora, and adopting a bold and imaginative plan of action for maintaining the Jewish people. This conversation should include the following:


photo | FLASH90

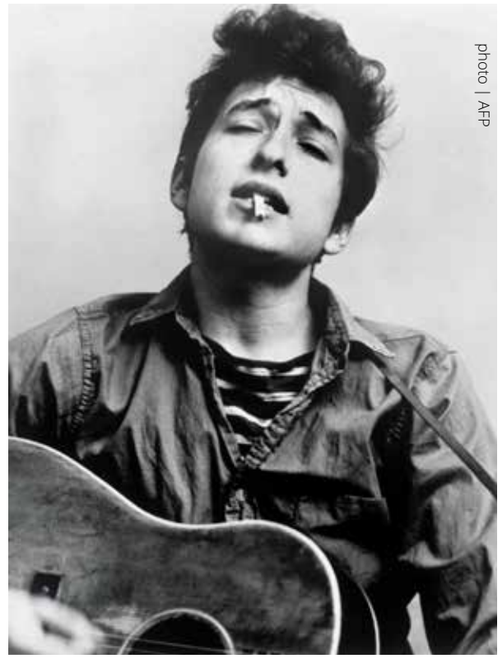
photo | AFP

Zion and Diaspora as complementary creative spheres: Ehud Banai and Bob Dylan - Masters of Hebrew *piyyut* and American folk ballad.

Zion and the Diaspora are the necessary polarities of the Jewish people. We complement and require each other to create significant meaning and to maintain ourselves. But increasingly we drift apart, with no strategy for correction

A financial plan for Jewish education

The crushing cost of Jewish education in the United States is self-selecting of only the most committed Jews. What strategy is required to increase the accessibility of Jewish education, and what steps would enable doubling, or tripling enrollment in Jewish day schools and summer camps in the next ten years? We are in need of a financial plan for the Jewish people to radically deflate the cost of Jewish education, through innovative fiscal instruments and tapping of the vast resources of American Jewry. Why is no one in Jewry trying to even imagine the possibility of universal free Jewish education? Without deep rethinking, the current model of Jewish schooling cannot widen the circle of participants, and may at best maintain the current trajectory of decline.

Beyond Birthright

Birthright is the one truly strategic program in Jewish life aimed at the majority of Jews, i.e. the non-affiliated. As such, Birthright waiting lists should not be tolerated by Jewish communities or the Israeli government, and failing philanthropic funding, Israel should prevent this scandal and foot the bill itself. Currently, more than half of Birthright applicants are waitlisted, and most will never reapply. The full cost of the annual North American cohort is approximately 200 million dollars, most of which would be spent in Israel. We should be long past budgeting the waiting list, and thinking about how to expand Birthright to include new demographics, not only the formative young, but Jews of all ages. Two-thirds of American Jews have never visited Israel, and we need to institute structures to ensure that the greater part of American Jews engage in a meaningful encounter with Israel and its people at least once in their lives.

Advancing the Hebrew language and Jewish literacy

Despite its brilliant success as the reborn language of Israel, Hebrew has fared poorly as the language of the Jewish people, and has yet to play the uniting role once filled by Yiddish as the binding glue of Ashkenazic Jewry. We require a renewed effort for teaching the Hebrew language to the Jewish people, so that they can gain access to our foundational texts and an affiliation with Israeli culture.

A women's empowerment program in Nepal run by Tevel B'Tzedek, an Israeli-based NGO devoted to global development.

Greater Hebrew literacy will increase our intimacy as a people and deepen Jewish identity in new directions. We will learn again to use an evocative vocabulary, so that we will be able to say **כלל ישראל**, *the entirety and fullness of the Jewish people at present and in history*, rather than its pale shadow, "Jewish peoplehood."

Israel has to do its part to improve the knowledge of young Israelis about Jewish culture. Hebrew eases our access to Jewish texts, but does not mitigate the embarrassing ignorance of Israel's young secular generation. Israel needs to correct how its education system managed to wreck the teaching of the greatest literary creation of all times, the Hebrew Bible. Investing more in Jewish education will make us not more religious, but more Jewish. It will strengthen the State of Israel and increase the affinity of Israel's youth to the wider Jewish collective. We will become more authentic, cultured and moral, and a better Jewish democratic state.

Addressing religious pluralism with *derech eretz*

The Israeli state needs to overcome internal politics in its relationship with the liberal streams of Judaism in order to show greater respect and extend formal recognition to the rabbinic leadership of the large majority of American Jewry. The Reform and Conservative movements need to understand the limits of elasticity in Israeli society and show greater sophistication and empathy towards Israel's traditionalism, in particular with regard to the legal definition of Jewish identity. We need to return to initiatives like the Ne'eman Commission, which gathered religious leadership from all the streams of Judaism and forged agreement on mutually accepted standards for conversion inside Israel.

The Reform and Conservative movements, if they wish to achieve a more profound influence in Israel, need to build communities and commit resources that will make them thrive in an Israeli Hebrew environment; but Israel also has to level the playing field by enabling access to public funds.

Until such time, Israel must find a way to lessen the offense experienced by the liberal movements. Even when we cannot find fully satisfactory solutions, the dialogue needs to be handled by professional officials, and delinked from Israel's tumultuous politics. No matter one's conviction regarding innovation in religion, our present behavior as a state is lacking in *derech eretz,* which precedes Torah.

Protecting the legitimacy of Israel

The attempts to boycott and delegitimize Israel once seemed like a caricature of radical politics. But these have reached levels of clamor that impair reasoned discourse and have made inroads among well-meaning progressives, many of whom are uninformed on the Middle East, but hire their opinions from iconic figures fixated on demonizing Israel. This occurs without appropriate pushback from the academic and business communities, or even the more progressive corners of the Democratic Party. A bizarre situation has ensued in which Israeli speakers alone are denied free speech on respectable college campuses, and one can feel a palpable anti-Israel McCarthyism taking root in many parts of the academy.

A.B. Yehoshua, writing fifteen years ago in the magazine *Azure* on the 50th anniversary of Israel, gave expression to this vision:

Our being a normal country, however, does not mean that Israel cannot have a special message that it seeks to give to the world. Israel must be a light unto the nations, which I interpret to mean that it must make a substantial contribution [...] *to the narrowing of the divide between the first world and the third.*

This must be a shared Jewish project led by Israel, with the aim of establishing an expeditionary corps composed of Israelis (Jews and Arabs) and Diaspora Jews that will offer to needy [...] *countries teachers in various fields* [...] *in which the Jewish world and Israel are blessed with experience and abundance.*

The expeditionary corps will be an especially appropriate contribution for Israel, since its creation will bestow upon us a mix of honor and duty: Honor, that after the terrible, bloody century we have endured, we have not despaired, and instead have chosen to spread progress and hope throughout the world; duty, that after having rehabilitated ourselves, thanks in no small measure to the help we received from the rest of the world, we will now begin to give to others.

It has become increasingly clear that the selective attack on Israel is blatantly anti-Semitic, and not less so when pursued by Jews and Jewish groups. Like anti-Semitism itself, the demonization of Israel is an illness of Western civilization. Israel and the Jewish communities need to garner resources and achieve greater clarity in order to quell this new incarnation of an ancient hatred before it gets out of hand.

The Peace Corps of the Jewish People

Beyond a strategy for renewal, beyond Iran's nuclear quest, anti-Semitism in Europe and all the woes that befall the Jews – we suffer most from our own failed imagination. Israel and the Jewish world need a project of compelling scope and ambition that can inspire the next generation of young Jews and Israelis.

A Peace Corps of the Jewish People, in which young Israelis and Jews carry out the humanitarian development program of the Jewish people, is a structure missing from Jewish life that can revitalize the idealism inherent in Judaism and in the founding of the State of Israel. It would enable Israelis and Jews to join together in realizing Judaism's fundamental values of *chesed* and the advancement of human dignity. A Jewish peace corps would attract our best and brightest college graduates, IDF veterans and young professionals to Jewish life, and create reservoirs of qualitative devoted leadership for Israel, the Jewish people and the world-at-large.

The Peace Corps of the Jewish people would operate along the following principles:

Development plan of the Jewish people

The Peace Corps of the Jewish people will not engage in aid tourism or in random donor projects, but will carry out the global development plan formally adopted by the Israeli government and the Jewish people, representing our best capacities and crafted by development experts in Israel and the Diaspora in coordination with the sustainable development goals of the United Nations.

Joint volunteerism of Israelis and Diaspora Jews

Projects will be staffed jointly by Israelis (Jewish and non-Jewish) and non-Israeli Jews between the ages of 22-35. Participants will commit to 12-36 months of service in separate tracks for professionals (doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, social workers, financial planners) and lay volunteers. All volunteers will participate in an initial period of training and study at the School for Development to be established in Israel, perhaps in the Negev Desert.

Israel-Diaspora Force for Emergency Humanitarian Response - future IDF field hospitals in places like Haiti and Nepal would be staffed not only by Israeli doctors and nurses, but by Jewish health and social service professionals who have committed to periodic training exercises in Israel and call-up availability. The Jewish Peace Corps will develop a substantive emergency response ability capable of rapid deployment to meet humanitarian crises around the world.

A Mission that Unites

Many have envisioned a Jewish national project of this sort, and a number of exceptional Jewish service organizations have emerged in response. But to date, Israeli and Jewish leadership have not committed to the vision and dedication of resources necessary for realizing a Peace Corps of the Jewish People on the scale and at the level of seriousness required for making our mark in the developing world, and attracting our best people to this endeavor.

A Peace Corps of the Jewish People is a project for our time, and it is within our reach if only we decide to do it. It will help us to unite as a people, and recommit us to our ideals, to the world, and to each other.

Major General Yair Golan

“Cast Your Bread Upon the Waters“

During February 2013, the IDF erected a field hospital at Outpost 105 in the northern Golan Heights, near the Syrian border, where hundreds of wounded civilians and rebels received treatment. Deputy Chief of Staff Maj.-Gen. Yair Golan, who was at the time the commanding officer of the Northern Command, describes to *Eretz Acheret* the actions and the values behind Israel's provision of help in worldwide disaster zones, missions in which he took part as head of the Home Front Command, and most recently, in the IDF's efforts to administer medical care to Syrians wounded in the civil war.

IDF Deputy Chief of Staff Yair Golan. Photo: IDF Spokesperson's Office

In everything that we do, I would like to believe that there is an ethical as well as a practical dimension, and that the two need to be integrated. The ethical dimension is, in my eyes, the principal guideline, and everything we do at the practical level – which should be followed through to the greatest extent possible – must be in keeping with our ethical values.

From the earthquake in Mexico City in 1985, to the flooding in the Philippines this year, for 30 years the State of Israel has been sending relief delegations abroad. What is amazing regarding the Israeli phenomenon is that almost everywhere we go, we are the first to arrive, and in most cases, our contribution is the greatest in the period closest to when the disaster occurs. We cannot bring the rebuilding force of the United States, but we excel at arriving quickly and offering the necessary help in an efficient manner.

This applies to the wounded Syrians as well. We look over the border and see indescribable human suffering and ask ourselves: What might help? We ask whether we should sit by idly or whether it is possible to do something.

It is easy to ask these questions when you work in an organization like the army. We are a solid organization, one that is prepared for colossal emergencies, such as natural disasters, and for responding to events that require mobilization beyond the routine. Only afterwards do we ask: What lesson is there to be learned from this, or, What’s in it for the State of Israel?

Already three decades ago we recognized that we had accumulated sufficient knowledge and capabilities to contribute to dealing with disasters. It’s not a matter of genius – it’s our reality. We understood that the Israeli temperament, with all its advantages and disadvantages, is well suited to functioning in disaster areas: we reach a site that is in complete chaos, and we know how to manage pretty well. We are able to handle authority, we know how to improvise, and we are good problem-solvers. I’m not saying that this is a timeless trait that we inherited from our forefathers, or one that has been part of the Jewish people for generations, but we Israelis get organized quickly and respond more accurately than others everywhere we go.

In Haiti there was an earthquake that caused extensive damage. The earthquake itself was not particularly serious, but since the infrastructure there is so unstable (for years they built with concrete without using steel supports) that the earthquake turned the capital to dust. We said: We’ll come to their aid.

We understood that we had to dispatch a mixed convoy: an evacuation and rescue team, and medical staff – not just an infirmary – since everything had collapsed, which meant that we also had to arrive with a hospital. All we had was people’s experience; we didn’t even have a plane to get there. It takes three days for our Air Force Hercules planes to arrive.

We called El Al, and they said, “We don’t have any planes for you.” So I called Eliezer Shkedi, then CEO of El Al, who had been the Air Force Commander-in-Chief. He immediately replied, “What do you need, and when?”

We organized staff very quickly, and immunized everyone. We swarmed the baggage unit of Ben Gurion Airport, and I went from one shipping pallet to another to sift through what was going onto the plane and what wasn’t, because a Boeing 777 can only hold 14 tons of equipment in addition to the passengers. We organized a jumbo cargo plane that had come from India and would take off after the Boeing; all this happened within a few hours.

When the Boeing was ready, the captain told me, “We don’t have approval for landing. I can’t take off without approval for landing.” I told him, “Go.” We agreed that he’d fly to Port-au-Prince and that he had enough fuel so that if something went wrong, he could land nearby, in a field, in the Dominican Republic, or in Florida . . . we’d work it out.

Such things are unheard of. Only to an Israeli Air Force pilot who has become an El Al captain can you say, “Buddy, this is an emergency. Take off, now!”

We understood that the Israeli temperament, with all its advantages and disadvantages, is well suited to functioning in disaster areas: we reach a site that is in complete chaos, and we know how to manage pretty well. We are able to handle authority, we know how to improvise, and we are good problem-solvers

Meanwhile, from my years of service on the Home Front Command, I have ties with the United States National Guard; its chief is Craig McKinley, a giant Irish fellow, and a lovely man. I phoned him and said, “General, give me a sliver that I can land on.” The entire terminal at Port-au-Prince had collapsed, and only one lane remained on the runway. Only the US National Guard can get access to the single surviving runway and erect an air control tower next to it.

I called him at home. He answered, “Hold on, please.” A half-hour later, he phoned to confirm: “You’ve got it.” After the plane had been in the air for an hour, I told the captain, “Authorization for landing has been received.”

We had no understanding of what was going on there, no contact person; ultimately, we found an Israeli, of course. We landed and mobilized quickly. Within

Wounded Syrians are transported by Israeli soldiers after crossing from Syria into the Golan Heights, near the Syrian village of Jubata al-Khashab, September 23, 2014 | Photo: AFP

If, one day, there will be a government there, and on both sides of the border there will be people who say to themselves, "We know from the past that we can gain from these mutual ties," that will be our reward

12 hours we'd taken in our first patient. It was the only hospital operating on the entire island for the first 14 days following the disaster.

Our staff numbered 240, two-thirds of them medical staff and the rest evacuation and rescue personnel. It included nurses who had left their children behind at home, doctors, hospital department heads. Their readiness to help – to just drop everything and come work under difficult conditions was amazing, e.g., living in tents, treating patients in intense heat and humidity, and with earthquake aftershocks all the time. One night, I felt as if the tent was sailing over the ground. It's an inconceivable sensation. We did take with us an excellent chef from the Home Front Command; he gathered food from here and there, and together with the food he brought from Israel, he assembled meals. There is no doubt that satisfying meals preserve morale and provide the strength to continue despite the helplessness and the shocking sights.

Now I ask: All this in order to glorify Israel's reputation? No one convinced the staff members to come – no one preached to them about going on a mission for the sake of Israel.

Two weeks later, we passed the torch to the U.S. Army. They brought a hospital-ship with 1,000 beds, like a floating Tel Hashomer. But it took them two weeks. We were there after 48 hours. The combination of Israel and America is a good one. Haste and improvisation go very well in combination with the immense American capabilities.

Japan, unlike Haiti, is a nation unrivaled in its preparedness for natural disasters, but the 2011 tsunami was a blow from which it was hard to recover: 32,000 people killed within a few moments, and, in addition, the collapse of the nuclear reactor in Fukushima. The magnitude of destruction was difficult to grasp until you witnessed it. Villages and towns looked like someone had taken a knife and shaved the ground clean. We found ships and fishing boats five miles inland and on mountaintops.

But the Japanese are descendants of a proud nation and they were not prepared to let in a single rescue mission. They received some help from the Australian and American navies in their search for survivors at sea and logistical assistance offered from the water, but they did not let any foreign aid onto Japanese soil. They did, however, let in our delegation. It turns out that the head of the district where the disaster occurred had volunteered in Israel in 1968. A year or two before the tsunami, there had been a severe tsunami in the Miyagi Prefecture. The Israeli ambassador went there, met with the district head, and asked what kind of help was needed; he asked for mobile water-purifying machines. The ambassador arranged for the dispatch of three such machines manufactured in Israel.

After the more recent disaster, the ambassador again phoned the district head and asked if we could bring an envoy from Israel. He was interested, but it didn't go smoothly and took three weeks of appealing to the Minister of the Interior; three weeks after the approval went through, we finally opened an infirmary in a public facility in the town of Minamisanriku. At first, the patients refused to accept medical treatment that did not follow Japanese protocol, and we therefore arranged for a Japanese medical professional to be present in the room. But afterwards, the trust grew, and there was no longer a need to adhere to this procedure.

On a visit to Tokyo, I went to the Japanese government's Institute for Disaster Area Response Training. There they practice how to find shelter during a typhoon, or what to do during an earthquake. After the tour, the director asked me to speak to the staff. I said that indeed we see that nature is unpredictable, that it is difficult to deal with disaster, and that we will do everything we can to help. The Japanese, who are known to be very reserved, stood opposite me, crying. When you touch people on a personal level, cultural differences fall away. I believe that they were moved by our identification with them.

Regarding the bloody situation on the Syrian border, I can say, yes, the television images were good and Israel received positive publicity. But when you look at the humanitarian effort of the people who are actually administering the help, you know that it's not for the public relations. Providing help makes us feel human. We've had our own disasters throughout history, and we were not always offered help. It is our responsibility, therefore, to be a "light unto the nations." We're talking about realizing a human obligation.

Our offering help to those wounded in the civil war that is taking place across the border on the territory of a bitter enemy came about by chance. It's sometimes hard to believe to what extent things depend on the hand of chance. The commander of the Golani Reconnaissance Unit, Kobi Heller, was patrolling the border and saw rebel soldiers on the other side. They had conquered villages nearby, and were moving eastward, towards the fighting, and had gathered their wounded near the fence because the area was secure. I received this information as head of the Northern Command, and I said, "We have to help them."

We decided to open a field hospital for them in the northern Golan Heights, and determined that when more help was needed than what we could provide on-site, we would refer patients to hospitals in Israel. Ultimately, it went like clockwork. They bring the most severely wounded, and we evacuate them to our hospitals. We open the field hospital only under extraordinary circumstances.

Our message to our soldiers is that this is proper humanitarian behavior. The soldiers, the personnel of the battalion's aid station, are those who administer the initial care. It's not simple; the sights are difficult and therefore it speaks for itself.

We say, "We save lives. We are not indifferent to suffering." Yes, they come from an enemy country, and we do not give them a pre-test to find out what they think about Israel, even while the hospitalizations cost us millions.

And if you ask, "What's the gain?" we know that it doesn't change Israel's image in the world. Headlines change and newspapers are thrown away. But at the national level we are creating ties with the enemy that are of a different nature. We are saying to them: you can live alongside us without fighting.

Would I say that it makes a difference? Maybe not. But I believe in "Cast your bread upon the waters." If, one day, there will be a government there, and on both sides of the border there will be people who will say to themselves, "We know from the past that we can gain from these mutual ties," that will be our reward.

We must take practical steps and get involved, in the hope that the day will come when we have a different

"We cannot bring the rebuilding force of the US, but we excel at arriving quickly and offering the necessary help in an efficient manner"
IDF clinic in Kathmandu, Nepal. April, 2015 | Photo: IDF Spokesperson's Office

relationship with the massive Arab world surrounding us. We must not abandon that vision. Life without hope is barren. Life that has spirit beyond material gain is the only way to live, in my eyes. Otherwise, life is merely technical. We, the Jewish people, must seek out the added value in life. It is this sense of purpose that arose, grew stronger and strengthened the Jewish people throughout history, and it was the Zionist vision that insisted on revival through building. The Zionist perspective chose not to wallow in tragedy and in playing the victim. The highest expression of this value is the ability to help. We've been through it, we understand it, and we know how to help.

That's the thread that connects Haiti to Damascus.

Ophelie Namiech

Where to Go Next? A European Zionist in Sudan

Following the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that put an end to the Second Sudanese War in January, 2011, the mainly Christian, southern part of Sudan voted to secede from the Muslim north. Ophelie Namiech describes her journey from the Paris of her childhood to her position as IsraAID South Sudan Country Director, and makes a compelling case for greater Israeli investment in international development.

A few months before my graduation from Columbia University, where I was enrolled as a master's student in international affairs, I had to face a troubling yet stimulating dilemma: where to go next?

Two seemingly incompatible answers were taking root in my mind: Israel and . . . the Sudan. This striking, paradoxical and rather unusual predicament laid the foundations of my current position as IsraAID's Country Director in South Sudan – a solution that enabled me to live and work in the two countries I feel most passionate about: Israel and South Sudan. I grew up in France until age 20, in a mixed family with a Jewish father born and raised in Morocco and a Christian mother with Marrano ancestry. Living in the suburbs of Paris from the mid-1990s until the early 2000s, the exploration of my Jewish identity was often punctuated by jarring exposure to the rampant anti-Semitism of the period. Sometimes I even preferred to hide my origins to avoid painful confrontations and preserve a semblance of being at peace with my surroundings.

Destination: Sudan

At a very young age, I developed a profound connection to Israel, with many of my father's family members living there. It did not take me long to reach a solid understanding that, for me, "being Jewish" meant something more than an affiliation with the Jewish religion. I associated "being Jewish" with the feeling of belonging, and in my early childhood, I already felt a strong attachment to the Jewish nation.

The far reach of my Zionist ties encouraged me to consider Israel – a place where my future children would not have to hide their identities – as a possible next step following my completion of graduate school in December 2010. But at the same time, my professional path was pointing towards development/diplomacy in Africa, and it was not clear that "Destination: Israel" was compatible with Africa.

Although my professional path led me to Africa, it began, interestingly, in the Middle East. Throughout my studies and work, I specialized in Middle East politics and security, and, more particularly, in Israeli-Arab relations. In December 2008, during Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, I was a political adviser, monitoring the work of the UN Security Council on Middle East Affairs. After several months, I felt deep frustration with the failures of diplomacy to adequately address the Gaza war, and the highly politicized manner in which the conflict was handled in the UN, where loyalties took precedence over the pursuit of a workable solution. I thus sought to explore other conflicts and expand my horizons in order to understand more about peace and security around the world. I was then given the case of the Sudan.

Although I knew little about the conflict in that country, I rapidly became fascinated by the political, ethnic and security dilemmas at stake in this part of the world and the particular strategic and historic connection the region has with Israel.

By the time I graduated in December 2010, the southern part of Sudan was about to vote for its independence. One month later, in January 2011, the South voted – by a margin of 99% – in favor of secession from the North. This referendum was the result of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that put an end to the Second Sudanese War, after 22 years of conflict between the mainly Christian south and the Muslim north. This second war – which was largely a continuation of the First Sudanese War (1955-1972) – was one of the longest and deadliest civil wars in history, leaving more than two million people dead, four million refugees, and an entire nation physically and psychologically devastated. The January 2011 referendum was to lead to South Sudan's independence, planned for July 9, 2011.

Israel has so much to give to the world. Registration of displaced persons, South Sudan, February 2015 | Photo: AFP

Hence, when the time came to decide on where to go next, one possibility was to work in Sudan, and gain a field understanding of conflict dynamics in a region that was to witness the birth of the world's newest country – an irresistible opportunity for a recent graduate of international affairs with a specific interest and expertise in nation-building/state-building in post-conflict environments.

Destination: Israel

On the other hand, I was also driven by a profound desire to become Israeli. I strongly believe in Israel as a home for the Jewish people, in accordance with the internationally recognized principles of national self-determination. Despite some questionable directions Israel has been taking over the past few years, especially internationally, I still want to believe in an Israel that embodies the original and essential values on which the country was founded: altruism, humanism, international cooperation, and tikkun olam. "By these will the State be judged," wrote David Ben Gurion in *Rebirth and Destiny of Israel* (1954). "By the moral character it imparts to its citizens, by the human values determining its inner and outward relations." My desire to make aliyah was inextricably bound up with the strong need to contribute to building an altruistic and humanist Israel that, among other things, plays a strong international role diplomatically and in humanitarian response and development. This is the Israel I want to believe in, defend and promote, for myself, my future children, for my people – the Jewish people – and for the rest of the world.

I was well aware that making aliyah might jeopardize the investments I had made over the past few years: my graduate studies, and working at the United Nations. Like most of my fellow graduate students at Columbia, I was promised a successful career in international diplomacy within the UN system or in an international think tank or NGO, with a decent salary and a solid anchorage in the international development and diplomatic world. I barely spoke Hebrew, and, needless to say, job opportunities for Israelis in diplomacy and international development do not abound. I therefore felt that I had to choose between my two core ideals: to either embrace my international humanistic aspirations and work in diplomacy or international development, or to follow my identity-related aspirations and make aliyah.

> If we combine Israel's unique nation-building experience, exceptional expertise and impactful methodology of "thinking and doing development" that promotes local ownership and sustainability, I believe that all the ingredients are in place for a revolutionary approach to international development

So, after sleepless nights in New York, unable to decide, I resolved to do both: I would make aliyah and find a way to also work in what would soon become South Sudan, to accompany the world's youngest nation in its efforts to transition towards peace and stability, and, at the same time, to strengthen the relations between Israel and South Sudan and promote the role of Israel in international development.

Israel has so much to give to the world: advanced technology, life-saving medical innovations, revolutionary agriculture and water management technologies, post-trauma treatment training for service providers, and high-level expertise and experience in disaster preparedness and response – to name just a few. And yet, Israeli involvement in international diplomacy, development, and

humanitarian activities today, as opposed to its solid policy of international cooperation until the mid-1970s, remains far below its capacity and potential. Many will argue that international aid does not respond to Israel's primary interests and needs, given the configuration of current geopolitics in the Middle East, and considering the threats posed by actors such as Hezbollah, Hamas, ISIS, and Iran. Indeed, the role of any state is precisely to defend its citizens against external threats. This said, international aid or development are not intended to replace the vital efforts of Israel to preserve its national and territorial integrity; more importantly, they are a crucial responsibility for any country of the world, and of particular importance for Israel for the following three main reasons:

Expertise and experience

First, Israel not only hosts capabilities in many fields that could assist post-conflict or fragile nations in their efforts to strengthen their economic and social foundations; it also embraces a very unique approach to dealing with international aid. I have witnessed it myself in the few such countries I visited where Israelis were operating, such as Haiti, South Sudan, Congo, and Kenya. In emergencies, Israelis have the expertise and experience to effectively respond to large-scale crises. In long-term development, Israelis apply a sustainable and locally-owned methodology based on participatory partnerships that create strong relationships of trust with the local populations and institutions. This approach enables Israel to develop sustainable programs with long-term visible impact. Israeli programming is flexible and adaptable. Initiatives are often supported by Jewish/Israeli donors who, contrary to many international donors, do not follow a donor-based approach to development but rather allow the Israeli aid organizations to assess, understand the realities and needs on the ground, choose the right partners to implement programs, and exercise a considerable degree of freedom in the implementation. In sum, if we combine Israel's own unique nation-building experience, exceptional technical expertise and impactful methodology of "thinking and doing development" that promotes local ownership and sustainability, I believe that all the ingredients are in place for a revolutionary approach to international development. Such a model should be promoted in international circles and lead to solid international partnerships between Israeli actors and international agencies.

Strategic interest

Secondly, yes, Israel does have a strategic interest in international involvement. Israel would benefit from developing strategic partnerships and allies – in Eastern Africa, for example – who could counter threats, thus bolstering security and stability in and outside its borders.

Responsibility and privilege

Finally, it is Israel and the Jewish community's responsibility and privilege to assist other nascent countries in their nation-building process in developing areas where Israel and the Jewish world have contributed, including – but not limited to – agriculture, water management, and disaster preparedness, within the overarching value of tikkun olam. This is an integral component of Zionism.

When I finally made aliyah, I had only one idea in mind: finding the right vehicle to promote an "international Israel," so that the world would come to know Israel in a different way, and Israel, in turn, would grow to know the world in a different way as well, and understand the importance of reinforcing its integration into the international networks that bring the world closer together.

I found the answer in IsraAID, one of the few Israeli humanitarian and development organizations, which gave me the opportunity to establish programs in South Sudan – the first Israeli programs in the newly-founded state.

South Sudan and Israel have a lot in common. Beyond the fact that both countries share common enemies, they also share a strong desire for freedom, security, stability, recognition and identity. Southern Sudan fought for decades to defend these principles, and finally achieved independence after years of war, trauma and displacement. In fact, the relationship between Israel and South Sudan goes back to 1955, when Ben-Gurion identified the southern part of Sudan as a strategic region for Israeli cooperation, long before oil was even discovered there in 1979.

Today, almost four years since we began, we have programs in four sectors: psychosocial (including gender-based violence and post-trauma assistance), health, security (primarily to enhance police effectiveness) and education. We accompany our local partners, both from the government and the civil society, in their efforts to establish their own programs and reinforce service delivery. Our strategy includes training from Israeli experts, and technical support from our Israeli team on the ground who work with our local partners throughout the implementation phase of the programs. This "training-plus-implementation model" has proven very successful in that it allows our partners to take full responsibility for their programs and continue without us.

When I work in South Sudan, I feel honored to represent Israel, the Israel I am proud to belong to, an Israel I want to promote, the Israel that I chose as my home. Israel seeks international acceptance and recognition; this comes with rights and responsibilities. Let us play our part by strengthening international cooperation and reiterating our commitments in response to international needs.

It is time for Israel to become aware of the weight of its own capacity, and the positive and flourishing influence it can play in the world, in order to effectively act internationally as a leader among the community of nations. ■

Asi Kaniel

The Memory of Grandmother's Latkes: Encounters with Jewish Life in the Former Soviet Union

Like any good Russian story, those of the Jews scattered throughout the countries of the FSU are suffused with drama, pain and tragedy. Asi Kaniel, an emissary of the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), recounts some of the stories of full-fledged and half-Jews to whom other Jews have attached themselves, creating support communities founded on fragments of the memory of Jewish identity

A swift gulp of 200 milliliters of vodka scorches the throat and quickly alters one's state of mind. When garlic-flavored Samagon (Russian moonshine) is involved, the impact is twice as powerful.

A Cossack pub on the Don River. Standing on the massive wooden tables are bottles of vodka alongside eels and slabs of *salo* (lard). Regina Rabskiya reverently withdraws a plastic bag from her purse containing a tattered copy of Shalom Aleichem's "Oyf Ṿos Badarfn Yidn a Land." No, she doesn't understand Yiddish, does not know what the time-worn pamphlet is about and is unable to read Hebrew letters, but just touching the yellowing pages moves her. This is the only memento she has of the village where her father David was born. He had held onto this treatise – in which Shalom Aleichem discusses why the Jews need a national home – for many decades.

David's story is typical of an entire generation of Jews. He was born after the First World War in a small Jewish village in Ukraine, studied in a traditional Jewish cheder school, and like many young people in the generation after the revolution, moved to the big city and began his studies as an engineer. When the war broke out between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, David arrived in Siberia as part of the "evakuacia," in the context of which millions of Soviet citizens, including many Jews, were evacuated or fled into the Soviet hinterland and to Central Asia (Kazakhstan and its neighbors). At some point, he enlisted in the Red Army, fought on German soil, and was fortunate enough to return safe and sound to the Soviet Union. David then decided to settle in the Caucasus, where he got married and Regina was born. Like in other peripheral areas of the Soviet Union, in the Caucasus, too, the authorities invested little effort in suppressing religion. This, in addition to the fact that the members of the mountainous Jewish community living in the area were inclined toward tradition, made it possible to preserve a certain measure of traditional life, which included communal prayers on Shabbat and observance of some of the kosher dietary laws.

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Matzah with lard

Regina's Jewish story is entirely different and is typical of the generation of those born after the war. For her, Jewish identity is expressed in the drive to acquire a broad education, excel in her research, and work and establish a stable family. It is also expressed in her pride at belonging to a people with a glorious history, known for its ingenuity, and in eating matzah once a year (she likes hers spread with lard). At the same time, unlike many other Soviet and post-Soviet Jews, Regina devotes her energies to the development of the Jewish community,

something that she attributes to the Jewish pride that her father instilled in her.

About a year ago, she began to run the Jewish community center in her hometown, Rostov (with a Jewish population of about 12,000), where she labors tirelessly to expand its activities. The center offers welfare services for the elderly and children, and also holds Jewish folklore

Ilya Kreines: "Round-trip," 2014, On the eve of their departure to Israel.

ya Stenov teaches mathematics at a Moscow university, is an ccomplished flautist, and participates in workshops for the nest musicians who play at various Jewish music festivals. ow did he end up becoming involved in Jewish music and asidic niggunim? "Some of my ancestors were Jews," he says, "although at most, it has influenced my subconscious."

events, such as a performance of a klezmer band in honor of Hanukkah, a concert of Yiddish songs and so on, in addition to providing a wide range of classes and activities for children, teenagers and families. The activities of the center, which is visited annually by about a thousand people, are funded entirely by the JDC, and Regina's main task is to set up a board of trustees that will enable the center to achieve financial independence. She explains that the activities of the local Chabad synagogue, where Rabbi Sholom Ber of Lubavitch is buried, are almost entirely funded by Jewish businesspeople. In addition to these businesspeople, there are many others who feel a connection to Judaism but are not affiliated with the Jewish community, and she hopes that appealing to their Jewish nostalgia, along with the promise of being able to have an influence on the life of the community, will encourage them to lend a helping hand.

What really concerns Regina? Today, after the waves of aliyah and emigration, it is difficult to find a shidduch – a Jewish match – for the younger generation. Nevertheless, few others appear to share this concern. Almost all those who turn up at the community center belong to second- and third-generation mixed families, which does not prevent them from identifying as Jews, but definitely poses a threat to the Jewish community of Rostov, as well as to those of other FSU localities.

The clubber and the memory of Grandma's latkes

About three hundred young men and women, carefully garbed in accordance with the strict dress code set by the organizers of the event, are crowded into a nightclub of minimal design. On the stage stands a young man with long chestnut-colored hair, wearing skinny pink trousers and a light-blue scarf. He announces the name of the Jewish community's volunteer of the year. Meet Kolya (Nikolai) Railan, founder of the youth club and director of the Volunteer Center of the Kishinev Jewish Community. Kishinev is apparently a lot more than just a pogrom.

As has happened to more than a few people, here, too, Grandma's kitchen has played a key role in their first connection to Judaism. Kolya was born to a family with Jewish and Moldovan roots, and until the age of fifteen he did not ascribe any particular importance to his Jewish origins. And then, when he was fifteen, he happened to see an announcement inviting the public to a Hanukkah party at the community center. Something about it jogged his memory of the latkes that his grandmother used to make, bringing him to the festive event. Although no potato pancakes were served at that party, in the decade since, he has spent as much time as he can in the community center. The youth club that he founded has some 700 young members, and about 250 of them visit it on a weekly basis. At the club, located just a few hundred meters from the remnants of the local ghetto, where the Jews of Kishinev were gathered before their extermination during the Holocaust, they learn folk dancing and krav maga (Israeli martial arts), engage in athletic activities and sports, discuss Jewish cinema, play musical instruments, participate in beit midrash workshops, and hold Kabbalat Shabbat and Havdalah ceremonies at the start and end of the Sabbath.

A nocturnal tour with Kolya of Kishinev's entertainment centers – surprising in their vitality on the faded background of the capital of one of Europe's poorest cities – clearly demonstrates that he is a well-known figure in the city's nightlife. Everywhere we go, we are given the treatment usually reserved for the local oligarchs, and it's difficult to find a shift manager in a restaurant or nightclub who doesn't come over to ask how we are. This apparently is what is known as "club life." Kolya explains to me that he is proud of his Jewish identity and the values of Jewish

Ilya Kreines: "Round-trip," 2014, part of a series based on a nostalgic visit to Russia.

culture, and that he enjoys combining his production and management skills with activities having social value. Most of the young people who attend the club's activities, he explains, do so in order to find a safe, warm environment where they can be who they are without feeling uncomfortable. While it is true that like in many other FSU countries, there is no overt anti-Semitism in Kishinev, in many social circles, the fact that one is Jewish can arouse unease, or even veiled hostility.

Discussions with some young people show that they are drawn to the Jewish community activities because to them, the Jewish community represents an advanced world of values and serves as a bridge to the bigger world outside. This year, a national volunteer center was established there, the first of its kind in Moldova, for a hundred and fifty volunteers. The volunteers, most of whom are young, participate in activities geared mainly for the Jewish community, but also extend assistance to the general population. As part of their activities, they mentor at-risk children, help the elderly and orphaned, promote ecological awareness and more. Given the complete absence of a functioning civil society and the almost absolute abandonment of the weaker socioeconomic elements of society by the state institutions (this year a number of Moldovan orphanages were closed down, leaving their inhabitants in the street), it is easy to

Members of the Jewish youth club in Kishinev eagerly join in singing the Kabbalat Shabbat prayers. More than adhering to Jewish customs, they are influenced by the general atmosphere of the strengthening of religion and its institutions – something that is prevalent in many FSU countries and is encouraged by the authorities for political-nationalist reasons

understand just how innovative and revolutionary this activity is in the eyes of the younger generation.

Unlike their parents, many of the younger Jews who participate in the community activities have no problem with the ritual elements. While the number of those who observe tradition among the hundreds that visit the youth club in Kishinev can be counted on one hand, most eagerly join in singing the Kabbalat Shabbat prayers, enjoy making the blessing over the challah and are especially fond of looking at their fingernails in the light of the Havdalah candle, as they rub their pockets and forehead with wine to symbolize memory and livelihood. More than adhering to Jewish customs, they are influenced by the general atmosphere of the strengthening of religion and its institutions – something that is prevalent in many

FSU countries and is encouraged by the authorities for political-nationalist reasons. In any event, this has led to a paradoxical situation, in which the younger Jewish generation is trying to teach its parents' generation the forgotten Jewish traditions that the latter never had the opportunity to get to know.

Subconscious Judaism

It is a cool Friday night late in the Russian summer. A young man with a beard and wild curls sits leading a few dozen young people in passionate hasidic singing. From

Kolya Rilan: Most of the you people who come to the cl activities do so in order to f a safe, warm environment.

Regina Rabskiya: A tattered copy of Shalom Aleichem pamphlet is the only meme she has of the village where her father was born.

time to time, a glass is raised to cries of "L'chaim!" and one of the young people gets up and breaks into hasidic dance. If not for the violin playing on the Sabbath and the lively participation of young women in the singing and dancing, one could easily think that this was a group of genuine hasidim, devoted to their tsaddik.

Ilya Stenov is wickedly talented. He teaches mathematics at a Moscow university and works as a statistician at a think tank. He is also an accomplished flautist and participates in workshops for the finest musicians who play at various Jewish music festivals. How did he end up becoming involved in Jewish music and hasidic niggunim? "Some of my ancestors were Jews," he says, "although at most, it has influenced my subconscious."

Ilya fell in love with Jewish music during a klezmer festival he participated in, and his strong connection to the melodies was born at another festival he visited. He especially loves the wordless melodies, because they enable even those who don't speak the language to fully identify with the music. Ilya teaches hasidic melodies at workshops in various frameworks throughout Russia, Ukraine and Poland, and together with Polish musicians is involved in a project to collect melodies from the villages and towns of the Lublin area in order to understand what Jewish and Polish folk culture share and how they differ. He sometimes performs together with his musical ensemble at Jewish celebrations and events held among the hasidic communities in Russia.

Ilya feels that hasidic melodies enable him to express his feelings, but the hasidic idea that really appeals to him is the understanding that a person can pray by means of any action, from fixing a wagon wheel to playing a melody. His great dream is to give new life to lovely and forgotten melodies, preserved by Jewish ethnographers who were active in the Soviet Union in the first half of the twentieth century, but which are almost completely unknown to the public. He hopes that his work and that of his colleagues will help to place the traditional melodies at the center of the Jewish community's musical life, and that these melodies will replace what he calls "the popular pan-European repertoire known today as Jewish music." In Ilya, the Jewish-Russian "rebbe," we find a conjoining of the quasi-religious reverence that the Russian intelligentsia feels for culture and the popular Jewish culture of Eastern Europe, producing fascinating results.

A Scroll of Esther lying among the ruins

Abandoned factories line both sides of the streets, with huge rusted machines stippling their yards. Like many other cities, the Ukrainian city of Konotop was once a one-factory town. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the factory's closure, leaving the residents of the town largely unemployed. Today, most of the men work in Moscow and Kiev, coming home only from time to time. The children are raised by the women, who eke out a living on the pittances their husbands send them.

The bleak impression left by the neglected streets immediately fades when one enters Hessed Esther, the center of Jewish life in Konotop. Figures who seem to have emerged from stories by Mendele Mocher Sforim warmly welcome us, led by Yuri Globkov. Yuri is a large-bodied, bearded Jewish man in his fifties, whose black peaked cap is reminiscent of a traditional Jewish head covering. One's eye is immediately caught by a memorial wall bearing the names of hundreds of soldiers from the

Yuri Globkov, Judaica objects from wood. Globkov is the soloist in "Shtetl," a vocal ensemble that performs renditions of classical Jewish music. He also teaches Judaism to young people and families, is responsible for the community vegetable garden that feeds the elderly for free, and established its neighboring chicken farm.

community – "the sons of the Maccabees" – who fought against the Nazis in the ranks of the Red Army and did not return. Many of their family members were murdered after the city was occupied by the Germans and very few of those who survived returned to the city after the war. They renovated the building in which we stand, says Yuri, with their own hands in the 1990s after receiving financial support from the JDC and the Claims Conference, which supports Holocaust survivors. One morning they found a Scroll of Esther lying among the ruins – a Ukrainian neighbor apparently realized that the Jews were gathering once again and decided to return the scroll to its owners – which is why they decided to call the place "*Hesed Esther*," the Grace of Esther.

Yuri is a community "superhero." He is a master carpenter who creates a wide variety of Judaica objects from wood; he serves as the prayer leader and reads the Torah during the Sabbath prayers; he is responsible for preparing the wine kept in the nearby cellar, made from the grapes of a vineyard planted by members of the community; he is the soloist in the "Shtetl" vocal ensemble, which offers outstanding, moving renditions of classical Jewish music; he teaches Judaism to young people and families; he is responsible for the community vegetable garden, the produce of which is mostly sent to the kitchen that feeds the elderly for free. Yuri also established a startup in the local spirit: Due to the financial hardship, he initiated the establishment of a chicken farm next to the vegetable garden. And because this is not enough for a man like Yuri, once a week he changes from his work clothes into something more presentable, checks in at the local television station and moderates a program devoted entirely to telling Jewish jokes.

Yuri is not alone. In the early 1990s, a few thousand Jews lived in the city; today, only a few hundred remain. A professional welfare team works at Hessed Esther, aided by a group of highly motivated volunteers. A resident of the city, who had lived in Israel for a few years and decided to return, teaches Jewish history to adults; a colleague of his teaches arts and crafts and dance; and a Sunday school provides basic Jewish education for the children. In the summer, the community sets up a tent camp on the banks of the nearby lake, where many of its members spend time fishing and engaging in various social activities.

Yuri has never been to Israel. His daughter lives there with her children, but for now, he does not want to visit her. Using tongue-in-cheek circuitous Talmudic logic, he explains that any way you look at it, the end result of such a visit will be distressing: If he likes Israel, he will remain and be forced to abandon his friends; if the opposite happens, he would be rejecting the Promised Land. Nevertheless, "On the day we no longer have a prayer quorum in Konotop," he admits half-heartedly, "I, too, will apparently no longer remain here."

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Over the past twenty-two years, I've spent a considerable portion of my time in various areas of the former Soviet Union, in many capacities – initially on short-term missions, and presently, in the context of my work at the JDC. Over the years, I've met hundreds of people, whose stories (like all good Russian tales) are suffused with drama, pain and tragedy. These include impressive academics that engage in Jewish studies, Jewish people of culture, and journalists who enjoy great success, oligarchs who have figured on the lists of the wealthy for two decades, rabbis scattered throughout the FSU and, especially, people who have not yet joined the Jewish story. Always present are strength of mind and spirit, hope and creativity, thanks to which individuals and groups have managed to not only arise from the dust but to engage other individuals to join them in fostering their culture and community. ■

Pinchas Landau

Europe in Crisis: Implications for European Jewry and Israel

"Precisely because Israel is a European country, the demise of Europe, European culture and, as a by-product of this process, European Jewry, is a traumatic event for Israel – both as a country and as a society, as well as for individual Israelis of every stripe." Pinchas Landau provides an analysis of the current social and economic crisis in Europe, and how it poses the greatest challenge confronting Israel in the first half of the 21st century.

Israel is a European country.

This basic fact is the essential starting point for any analysis of the current crisis of European Jewry and of its impact on Israel, yet many Israelis do not consciously recognize it. It is such a part of their mindset and cultural milieu that many never stop to think about where the roots of their country and society lie.

Similarly, the overwhelming majority of American Jews have no understanding, let alone appreciation, of this basic characteristic of the Jewish state. Consequently, their ability to understand Israel and most aspects of Israeli society is severely impaired, and the gulf between Israeli and American Jews widens inexorably.

Israel's European-ness is almost all-encompassing. The people who invented political Zionism, founded and led the Zionist movement and, eventually, created and built the Zionist state, were overwhelmingly of Central and East European origin.

More importantly, the cultural roots and ethos of Israel and of almost all Israeli institutions is European. A short and very incomplete list of Israeli institutions built on European lines would include the entire political system, including the electoral system; the party system; the parliament; the governmental system; the health system; the financial system, including banks, insurance companies, bourse and pensions; the educational framework, i.e., kindergartens, schools, universities, yeshivot; the armed forces; the cultural complex, from opera to popular music to television . . . in short – everything that matters.

The argument that over half the population is not European, because they (or their parents or grandparents) hail from North African or Middle Eastern countries, may be geographically correct but is otherwise invalid. The Sephardic or Mizrahi Jews come, almost without exception, from countries that had been conquered/occupied/annexed by European imperial powers. More importantly, many of the Jews in these countries – from Morocco to Iran – were intent, even when they lived there, on "becoming European," by adopting European (e.g., French, English, etc.) culture, language, or mores; they brought this aspiration with them to Israel and sought to realize it here. The Europeanness of Israel is testimony to their success, no less than to that of their Ashkenazi-European brethren.

Precisely because Israel is a European country, the demise of Europe, European culture and, as a by-product of this process, European Jewry, is a traumatic event for Israel – both as a country and as a society, as well as for individual Israelis of every stripe. The greatest challenge facing Israel in the first half of the twenty-first century is how to survive the collapse of Europe and continue to thrive in a very different global environment.

The roadmap of crisis

Europe – or to be precise, the European culture that dominated the world for half a millennium – is in terminal decline. But of far more pressing concern is the process of decline that is clearly much more rapid in the twenty-first century than it was in the twentieth.

Observing and analyzing long-range historical processes that stretch over decades and centuries is usually an academic exercise. However, at critical points along the way, the process telescopes and is observable in real time, becoming an immediate issue for everyone, everywhere.

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This is what has happened in Europe over the past five years. Trends that had been developing for decades, above all in demographics, but also in finance, economics, politics and much else, burst into the open in late 2009, and, having surfaced, have been intensifying rapidly ever since.

The singular event that triggered this new and overt stage in the European crisis was when a new Greek government, elected in September 2009, admitted that Greece was effectively bankrupt. This technical event in a peripheral and marginal country, coming immediately after a severe global financial crisis, served to blow the cover off the façade of European economic success and financial stability.

The continent-wide crisis that began in Greece and rapidly spread to other, much larger countries, is still under way. Ironically, it is also Greece that, in its January 2015 general election, has shown that five years of belated and partial responses on the part of the European political elite have failed to resolve any of the underlying problems and that the time has come to try radical political, social, and economic change.

The development of the European crisis can be most easily tracked using a simple roadmap, in which each stage is clearly identifiable:

- **Financial.** The initial stage is a financial collapse – because the financial system and markets, by their very nature, are the most sensitive to developing societal changes and thus the most volatile. The "revelation" that many sovereign states within the European Union were at or near the point of financial bankruptcy – although the evidence for this had long been available for anyone wishing to look – therefore triggered a massive and prolonged financial crisis.
- **Economic.** This was no mere "technical" financial problem that could be solved by financial sleight of hand – although that has been the response, in a vain attempt to force the destructive genie back into the bottle. Rather, Europe's shattered finances reflect decades of damage inflicted by adherence to bad economic policies that rendered most European economies uncompetitive and hence not viable in a global economy.
- **Social.** The economic issues could and should have been addressed long ago, but the structure of European society has prevented meaningful reforms and thus exacerbated the problems rather than ameliorating them. The financial and economic crises translated themselves into a social crisis via the labor market: the business sector and, at least in the openly bankrupt countries, the public sector, too, were finally obliged to shed huge numbers of employees, resulting in mass unemployment. In particular, because of the structure of most European labor markets, young people were unable to find jobs and youth unemployment soared to previously unimaginable levels. In 2013, the unemployment rate for the 18-25 age group in every significant Western European country (except Germany) exceeded 20%, while in some it was above 50%.
- **Political.** The crumbling of the social fabric and the aggravation of social tensions – between rich and poor, old and young, ethnic and religious groups, and between different regions within a country and various countries within the EU – has generated a systemic political crisis. The mainstream "establishment" parties of the center-left and center-right, which have dominated European politics and monopolized governments since World War II, have been serially rejected by voters. Protest parties with, in the best of cases, populist platforms or, in the worst of cases, extremist views, have sprung up across Europe and are rapidly gaining momentum in almost every country.

Underlying the escalation of Europe's decline is a demographic collapse that encompasses most European countries and has presented these countries and their societies with an existential "Catch-22": either block immigration and tread rapidly down the path of financial and economic collapse, or allow immigration – which will come either from Africa or the Maghreb/Middle Eastern Muslim countries – and suffer social dislocation, tensions and unrest, culminating in irreversible cultural, ethnic and religious transformations.

Precisely because Israel is a European country, the demise of Europe, European culture and, as a by-product of this process, European Jewry, is a traumatic event for Israel – both as a country and as a society

The Jews lose

One thousand years of Jewish history in Europe have taught several vital lessons. One is that whenever there is a prolonged socioeconomic crisis in a European country – let alone in Europe as a whole – the latent anti-Semitism that is a constant feature of European society is unleashed and becomes overt.

Anyone who believed that "this time is different" and that for some reason the twenty-first century would witness a different scenario with regard to the Jews, has been sorely disappointed. The current crisis has followed the classic historical configuration in almost every respect.

Thus the upsurge in anti-Semitism that has taken place across Europe has been closely linked to the length and depth of the economic crisis and its primary social manifestation: unemployment. Research conducted by this writer has shown that the level of political extremism, as measured by support for extremist political parties in elections, is highly correlated to the level of unemployment, and usually tracks the direction of unemployment with a lag of 12-18 months.

Where the current European situation has departed from historic precedent is not with respect to the emergence of overt anti-Semitism or its intensity, but with regard to its sources. There are now three distinct "fronts" in the fight for Jewish survival in Europe.

The first and most prominent is actually the newest from a historical standpoint: Muslim anti-Semitism, aided and abetted by the radical left, despite the inherent contradiction of secular self-proclaimed socialists marching arm-in-arm with Islamists who openly espouse homophobic, sexist, and racist beliefs.

The claim that this alliance is merely opposed to Israel and not to Jews per se – and even that Arab Muslims, as Semites, cannot be "anti-Semites" – has long since been exhaustively debunked by scholars and investigative journalists. For our purposes, it suffices to say that this idea died in Paris on July 13, 2014, when an anti-Israel demonstration protesting Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza metamorphosed into a pogrom aimed at the Abarbanel Synagogue in the 11th arrondissement and the Jews sheltered inside it, against whom the mob shouted "Death to the Jews."

However, although most of the successful and attempted murders, arson and street attacks against Jews and Jewish property in recent years that have made it into the Israeli and global media were perpetrated by radical Muslims, this has created a grossly distorted picture of the anti-Semitic reality in Europe. In many countries, many or most of the increasing number of anti-Semitic incidents are perpetrated by "classic" anti-Semites, i.e., native Europeans (as opposed to immigrants), who are Christians or neo-Nazis (as opposed to Muslim/Islamist), and are "domestic," with no ties to Israel and the Middle East.

Indeed, in some countries in Central and Eastern Europe – notably Hungary – anti-Semitism thrives even in the absence of a significant Muslim population, as it has for many hundreds of years. This type of Jew-hatred is labeled "extreme right," to distinguish it from the "extreme left" "Israel-driven" type.

Finally, and potentially most worrisome, there is a growing strand of a "liberal" or "establishment" brand of anti-Semitism, emerging from the political center, rather than the extreme wings. In country after country across Europe, "liberals" are leading efforts to outlaw central elements of Jewish life, primarily circumcision and ritual slaughter, often under spurious grounds of protecting the rights of babies or animals.

In some cases, the proponents of these initiatives will privately acknowledge that they are in fact aimed at immigrant Muslim communities, so that the Jews are "collateral damage." The "explanation" that the discrimination is actually aimed at a non-Jewish population is hardly a reassuring sign regarding freedom of worship in Western democracies; furthermore, whether or not such proposed legislation is aimed at Jews, this does not change the fact that were these efforts to succeed, Jewish

Bullet-holes in the storefront of the Hypercacher following the terror attack. Paris, January, 2015 | Photo: AFP

Armed security patrol outside a Jewish School in the Marais district. Paris, January 2015 | Photo: AFP

A potentially most worrisome, growing strand of a "liberal" or "establishment" brand of anti-Semitism emerging from the political center rather than the extreme wings, are efforts to outlaw central elements of Jewish life, primarily circumcision and ritual slaughter, often under spurious grounds of protecting the rights of babies or animals

communal life would be seriously constrained – and the way would be clear for further measures.

Fortunately, the governments of the key European countries – and of most of the smaller ones – have prevented most of the "liberal" anti-Semites from achieving their legislative goals. These governments, formed from the mainstream political parties, have also spoken and acted firmly against "classic" or extreme-right anti-Semitism. They speak and act much less firmly against that of the extreme left-Islamist alliance, but this may be changing in the wake of the most recent terrorist outrages in France and Belgium.

However, the failure of European governments and the EU as a whole to effectively address the socio-economic crisis that has gripped Europe makes the survival of the "European project" – first of the euro and, eventually, of the EU itself – increasingly unlikely. Once again, Greece is playing the role of "canary in the coal mine," by sweeping the failed Establishment centrist parties from office and replacing them with extremist, fundamentally illiberal, and hence anti-European parties.

Survival routes

This process has long since led European Jews to the conclusion that they are faced with an existential threat, not merely a period of tension that will eventually fade away. Their response patterns to the gathering crisis have also been "textbook," confirming that the underlying patterns of Jewish life in Europe are fundamentally unchanged from earlier periods.

In essence, Jews have developed three distinct responses to anti-Semitic surges in the society in which they live. One is to submerge themselves into the wider society, by cutting religious, cultural and social links with Judaism, the Jewish community and even, in some cases, with family and friends. This route has always been used, but in today's much more open society, where intermarriage between Jews and gentiles is commonplace and at least some degree of acculturation is almost universal among Jews, it is readily accessible and far less traumatic than in the age of ghettos and overt discrimination.

The second response has been to leave. The historical record shows that this was not a popular response among Jews and was only adopted under severe pressure – or, as all too frequently occurred – under the direct duress of forced expulsion.

Today, forced expulsion of a European Jewish community still seems unthinkable, but on the other hand, voluntary emigration is much more acceptable than in the past. Several factors explain this change, beginning with the fact that emigration to a new country or continent is now far more commonplace and practicable than it used to be. Especially for young, well-educated professionals, globalization has smoothed the way to "relocation," even if it is intended to be permanent.

Furthermore, the existence of the State of Israel provides all Jews – especially European Jews, who have much closer ties to Israel than do American Jews – with a ready destination for immigration. Israel, for its part, stands prepared to receive all Jewish immigrants and to provide assistance in the immigration and absorption process. It is particularly keen to attract the young, educated elite from France and elsewhere, and seeks to compete with other popular destinations, such as London, New York, Miami, Canada, and Australia, for this group.

The third response has been to hunker down, grit one's teeth, and try and survive the dark period until better days come. Not surprisingly, this has been the preferred response of most Jews in most places, at most times – but today, this approach is tarred by the knowledge that it doesn't always work. Every European Jew is aware of the tragic failure of this strategy in the 1930s and 1940s, when neither submersion nor hunkering down helped. That knowledge pushes them toward emigration.

However, emigration is not for everyone. Underneath the glitz of globalization and freedom of movement lies a much grimmer reality. Many countries, notably the US, are closing the gates to immigrants, or at least being far more selective about whom they let in. Young, educated and wealthy people are generally still welcome – and, as noted, fiercely competed for.

But what about the old, the poor and the sick? It is much more difficult for them to detach themselves from their homes, communities and cultures – and they lack the monetary and emotional means to resettle in a new country and begin from scratch.

The current debate about emigration from Europe and immigration to Israel is therefore skewed and hence misleading. It focuses on those who have already moved, who are planning to do so, and who want to do so. Almost by definition, these are people with either financial capital or human capital in the form of degrees, professional qualifications and experience.

As the level of anti-Semitic rhetoric and activity continues to rise – as it assuredly will – it is essential that the debate expand to encompass the silent majority of European Jews, the ones who lack the resources to extricate themselves from an increasingly hostile environment.

The challenge facing Israel and the American Jewish community is to identify this aspect of the crisis enveloping European Jewry – and to be prepared to respond firmly, speedily and effectively, if and when it becomes imperative to do so.

Laurent Cohen

Contemporary Judeophobia: What Are We Up Against?

Beginning in the early 1990s, French political discussion was enriched by a surprising and even intellectually troubling term: the "Red-Brown Alliance." This concept referred to an encounter that at first glance is "unnatural," between radical left-wing thought (Marxism, anarcho-communism, Maoism, anti-globalism, etc.) signified by the color red, and the fascist tradition, associated with the color brown. A few years down the line, the color green – i.e., the Islamist-Jihadist dimension – became associated with the new concept. Laurent Cohen returns to the ideological roots of the acts of butchery that France witnessed in January 2015, and the worldwide shockwaves that followed.

The first conclusion reached by anyone considering the history of anti-Semitism – both in the West and in the East – is that throughout history, hatred directed at the Jews has assumed countless forms and has been spoken in many tongues, sometimes contradictory. These range from the *mythological* (which characterizes pre-Christian Judeophobia) to the language of the *Church* (which controlled the anti-Semitic discourse for hundreds of years) and the *Islamic* (rooted in the Koran itself and in the Sunnah), and the *pseudo-scientific* and *political* languages on the left (the writings of the young Marx) and from the right (fascism, Nazism). We face a phenomenon that has never known doctrinal, stylistic, linguistic or geographical boundaries.

What is unique about contemporary anti-Jewish polemics lies precisely in the fact that it comprises elements and content taken from across the entire "anti-Semitic spectrum" known to date. Indeed, these polemics integrate Catholic, Nazi, left-wing extremist, jihadist, and other influences. The main representatives of this discourse speak wholeheartedly about the "urgent need" to establish a united front, to erase the various perspectives that separate the ideological families, and, in so doing, to create a united block, one that is as extreme as possible, against the "Talmudo-Zionist" regime – a relatively new concept in the Judeophobic lexicon, formulated a few years ago and disseminated with fervor by the French "Marxist-Nazi" propagandist Alain Soral.

Laurent Cohen is an author and translator.

In order to sketch the progression by which the most divergent streams coincided, blended together, and merged in a short period into a highly organized and well-outfitted camp, in this article we will focus on the example provided by France in the winter of 2015.

France's Jewish community is important not merely because of its sheer size, second only to those of Israel and the United States, but because of its importance from an intellectual, artistic and cultural perspective; both the state of this community, then, and its decisions, will have a direct effect on the destiny of all European Jewry.

The anti-Jewish violence in France has become so severe and at the same time so routine, beyond the bloody terror attack carried out on January 9 in the Jewish supermarket, that already last December Minister of the Interior Bernard Cazeneuve declared his intention to turn the struggle against anti-Semitism into a *cause nationale*. In this same speech, the minister also did not hesitate to define the new Judeophobia as a "true social pathology" and recalled that during the first ten months of 2014, "anti-Semitic acts and threats rose by 100%."

If so, the question must be asked as to how anti-Semitism, which had been primarily "virtual," textual and "closed" until the 1990s, became so destructive and multi-dimensional at the beginning of the twenty-first century. One must ask how we arrived at what the President of France himself, François Hollande, condemned at the beginning of December 2014 as "intolerable riots" after an anti-Semitic attack on a young couple, during which a 19-year-old girl was raped in the suburb of Créteil. "When such tragedies occur," continued the President, "all of France finds itself wounded, degraded." This additional anti-Semitic act only demonstrated, in Hollande's words, that "the worst indeed does exist," and that "evil is again sweeping through our society." Therefore, in the context of the struggle against anti-Jewish hatred, "we cannot remain silent in the face of any event, and we cannot proceed as if we have not seen; the reverse is true: we must take note of every event, know exactly what is going on, in order that nothing be 'considered acceptable,'" concluded the President. Since then, instead of the promised quiet, Jews have been murdered, and the French army has been dispatched to protect Jewish schools and other sites considered to be threatened.

How did the "anti-Semitic taboo explode?" asked Julian Dray, one of the leaders of the French Socialist Party, following the December incident in the suburb of Créteil – "Images of the Magen David on mailboxes, daily harassment, men wearing kippas attacked often or showered with curses – all of these constitute the banal, daily anti-Semitism experienced by a portion of the Jewish community in France."

How did the "anti-Semitic taboo explode?" asked Julian Dray, one of the leaders of the French Socialist Party, after the December incident in the suburb of Créteil. The explosion includes, in Dray's recounting, "images of the Magen David on mailboxes, daily harassment, men wearing kippas attacked often or showered with curses," all part of the "banal, daily anti-Semitism experienced by a portion of the Jewish community in France"

Moreover, one must wonder about the connection between the extreme Judeophobia that exists in the suburbs of the large metropolises, populated largely by Arab and African immigrants – and "anti-white racism" (racisme anti-blanc), an expression that has simply become commonplace in the national discourse and that refers to racism directed against the "native" French (termed, derisively, "whites" or "Galles," in certain sectors of the suburbs that are perceived by the authorities, on their part, as "sensitive" or even "lawless zones" – *zones de non-droit*).

One man holds a pineapple while the other performs a "quenelle" during a demonstration called the "Collective Day of Anger," January 26, 2014, in Paris. The "quenelle," which involves holding the right arm straight while pointing it towards the ground and touching the right bicep with the left hand, has been described as a disguised Nazi salute. The pineapple is in reference to the term "Shoananas" (a mix of "ananas" [pineapple] and "Shoah") coined by French performer Dieudonné M'bala M'bala, in order to circumvent French law against Holocaust denial.
Photo | AFP

The "new alliance"

Beginning in the early 1990s, French political discussion was enriched by a new term that was surprising and even intellectually troubling, since it completely blurred the boundaries once considered to be extremely "secured" between two great ideological blocs that have been active since the dawn of modernity, joined in "L'alliance Rouge-Brun," or the "Red-Brown Alliance." This concept referred to an encounter that at first glance is "unnatural," between radical left-wing thought (Marxism, anarcho-communism, Maoism, anti-globalism, etc.) signified by the color **red**, and the fascist tradition, associated with the color **brown**. A few years down the line, the color **green** – i.e. the Islamist-Jihadist dimension – became associated with the new concept, and ever since, the movement, whose heroes are Adolph Hitler, Che Guevara, Khomeini, Marx, Mussolini, Nasrallah, Chavez, Khadafi, Assad, etc., has been termed the "Red-Brown-Green Alliance."

For the supporters of this colorful coalition, it is clear that the Holocaust is a legend, an invention fabricated in 1942 by Zionist circles, and that the "Zionist entity" must be erased from the map. It should be noted that in its anti-Semitic eclecticism, this stream bases itself in part on Israeli authors, such as the well-publicized Shlomo Sand, and Gilad Atzmon, an Israeli-born musician who lives in London and deals obsessively with what he terms "Jewish-identity politics," to which he attributes the root of every crisis, suffering and lie.

An additional point that should be emphasized in brief: the Red-Brown-Green Alliance did not arise out of nowhere. Quite to the contrary: it has its own history; the circumstances of its emergence and formative stages are well documented in many studies, through the publication of various documents and testimonies, including the spine-chilling testimony of Hans-Joachim Klein, an active member of the German anarcho-Communist movement Revolutionäre Zellen (The Revolutionary Cells), who parted ways with terrorism in May 1977, after sending *Der Spiegel* his personal weapon and fingerprints, along with details of a plot to assassinate two Jewish community leaders from Berlin and Frankfurt.

In his book and in the films devoted to his political path (including *My Life as a Terrorist: The Story of Hans-Joachim Klein*, 2006, by Alexander Oey), Klein relates how the Palestinian training camps, first in Jordan and later in "Black September," in Lebanon, were the cradle of the ideological activity that a number of years later led to contemporary Judeophobia. For example, in *We Loved It So Much, the Revolution*, the classic television series of Daniel Cohn-Bendit (leader of the May '68 Revolution, known as "Dany le Rouge" – Danny the Red), Klein describes the musical strains arising from the tents after a day of practice together under the watchful eyes of the Palestinian commanders, the songs of the European fascist groups mingling with those of his "Red" comrades. It is also interesting to note that two of the founders of the German Revolutionary Cells, Wilfried Böse and Brigitte Kuhlmann, were killed by the Israeli rescue force in Operation Entebbe on July 4, 1976, together with the members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. A few years later, during the First Lebanon War, which broke out in June 1982, much more evidence would be revealed, indicating that under the auspices of the Palestinian organizations, a new reality was created: Spanish, Belgian and Italian Neo-Nazi groups began collaborating directly and intensively with movements that saw themselves as successors to the most revolutionary and left-wing tradition.

Loneliness, paradox, and "special" status

Some forty years later, there is no choice but to acknowledge the fact that the horrific merger succeeded, and that its leaders can even claim that today they symbolize the "conciliatory" camp (a keyword in anti-Semitic "newspeak"), unity and progress. This is a tremendously important point: the old anti-Semitism that existed after World War II (1945-1990) was violent and crude, but barely operated in the actual spaces of cities and suburbs, whereas the "new Judeophobia" (an expression that is the title of a famous work by the philosopher Pierre-André Taguieff) encourages violence that borders on outright calls for murder, but at the same time talks about "reconciliation," "brotherhood," and in the ultimate distortion and manipulation – "anti-racism."

"Since the end of World War II," writes Taguieff, "the accusatory generalizations against the Jews have never been disseminated among so many different social groups. For the new anti-Jews, Israel is the explanation for all the world's troubles, also enabling them to redirect the accusation of racism against the Jews themselves!" A new ideological monster arises: "anti-Jewish anti-racism."

During the last decade, anti-Semitic violence in France has assumed two clear forms, and according to experts, this two-dimensional nature will only become more extreme in the coming years. One type is banal, daily anti-Jewish violence, comprising curses, beatings, spitting, arson, and threats. It is on account of this violence that the suburbs of the large cities have become almost entirely emptied of Jews, and that the Chief Rabbi of France, already in November 2003, just days after the Jewish school in the suburb of Gagny was set on fire by arsonists, called on members of the community to completely cease wearing a kippa in public places.

The alternate form rears its head every few years, when this violence surges with an intensity that leads to murders, largely perpetrated by Islamic extremists: In January 2006, Ilan Halimi, a 24-year-old Jewish man, was kidnapped and tortured to death over the course of three weeks. In March 2012, a rabbi, two of his sons, and an 8-year-old girl, were murdered in the city of Toulouse, and at the beginning of 2015, a kosher supermarket became a battlefield on which four Jews were killed. It should of course be noted that the French government sought – and is still trying – to invest resources, including time and legal means, to restrain and limit the phenomenon to the extent possible. At the same time, the level of anti-Semitic violence is rising steadily, since despite the good will and genuine efforts of the authorities, no entity – including the army – that is today directly involved in guarding France's 717 Jewish schools – is logistically/strategically capable of protecting all sectors of community life. Herein lies the paradox: French Jewry's sense that living in a place where the law and the security services are indeed protecting them (and all other minorities), does not arise from self-delusion or self-imposed blindness. And yet, their deep worries are soundly based in clear fact, and hardly a day goes by without an additional reason to cast the future of French Jewry into question.

There is thus a certain sense of loneliness, or, more precisely, the sense of being a more vulnerable human collective, one that is exposed to a greater threat than the rest of the communities that comprise the national fabric – a collective that in effect has earned a "special" status in terms of both the heavy protection it requires, and the extraordinary violence directed against it and the dangers that lie yet ahead.

In light of these facts, which give rise to a troubling unease at both the civil and psychological levels, a significant slice of the Jewish community has already chosen the Zionist option. Every age is represented in this cohort; it includes the completely secular, the traditional, and the religious. Some of them received a Zionist education, and know Hebrew at various levels; some studied history, literature and Jewish philosophy, while others don't know much about Israel beyond the fact that despite the security and economic problems, Israel is "that place where no one will call you a dirty Jew." Some of them have already moved to Israel; others have registered with the Jewish Agency or at least have begun speaking about it seriously.

At the same time, the severity of the anti-Semitism has propelled some members of the Jewish community to develop its own defensive measures – from the SPCJ (Jewish Community Protection Services), to countless Facebook and Internet sites, to private initiatives that sometimes are most daring and original. For example, beginning in late 2013, the struggle against the Red-Brown-Green Alliance migrated to a great extent to the computerized world. Very experienced hackers – whose experience was matched by their determination – worked against the main hotbeds of anti-Jewish propaganda. They carried out destructive electronic attacks that debilitated them for some time, causing them significant financial losses and even damaging their reputations. In addition to wreaking havoc, they stole and publicized lists, plans, photographs, and internal correspondence laden with intelligence information. Many of the secret documents accessed exposed methods for recruiting new members and financing sources, as well as other facets that together comprise a picture of the ideology, economic functioning, and cult-like spirit of the new anti-Semitic planet.

One of the stages in the struggle was when in November-December 2013, the hackers published lists of supporters and fans photographed with their hands raised in an inverse "heil" (the infamous "quenelle"), with various Jewish sites in the background: synagogues, Jewish cemeteries, beneath street signs from Jewish quarters (such as, "Street of the Jews"), next to the school in Toulouse where the murder of Jews took place, alongside the Western Wall with soldiers, in the backdrop of the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, and elsewhere. Such pictures would be streamed by fans at the request of Dieudonné, the anti-Semitic entertainer born in Cameroon. Exposing the extent to which Dieudonné's request was heeded received media attention, leading to a further recognition of the proportions of the new anti-Semitism.

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An additional Jewish struggle has targeted Dieudonné's performances, as a result of which numerous shows were cancelled last year. This year, his performances are subject to many constraints, such as the prohibition against certain words, such as "Jew," "Holocaust," "concentration camp," "Auschwitz-Birkenau," as well as the name of the journalist "Patrick Cohen," of whom he used to say in performances, "Ah, Patrick Cohen, when I hear about Patrick Cohen, I say to myself: You see, the gas chambers. . . it's a shame." Alain Finkielkraut has said wryly of this phenomenon, "They deny the Holocaust and at the same time praise it."

This, then, is the heavy atmosphere in which important discussions about the future of French Jewry that the media, the streets, and, truth be told, the future of the ideal of the French Republic itself, are taking place. But beyond the explanations, the analysis, and the attempts to come up with partial answers to a crisis that is so grave that it strikes at the essence of France's humanist, egalitarian tradition, one thing is clear: It has once again become hazardous to be a Jew in the land of Descartes. ■

Ben-Dror Yemini

Dilemmas of Nationalism and Shared Ethos in the Age of Globalization

The question of solidarity in the age of immigration and globalization is a conundrum for every modern nation-state. Solidarity, claims journalist Ben-Dror Yemini, is based on a shared ethos, while multiculturalism – the illusion of many left-wing intellectuals – leads not to tolerance but to alienation.

Israel is a place like no other. Jews ingathered from 70 diasporas established a state. There is no other national project like it. It would not have happened without a common denominator – and no, not just religion. The shared basis is in fact much broader. When Jews were expelled or persecuted, which happened often over the last 2,000 years, there were always other Jewish communities that took them in. That's part of the Jewish DNA. It's not a genetic matter, but one of history and heritage that created a shared ethos. The Zionist vision would not have materialized without it.

The process of blending and integrating was unbearably difficult. It included countless displays of superiority, discrimination, and even racism. During these early stages, the Sephardic Jews of the host community refused to treat the Ashkenazim as equals. Later, the Ashkenazim were patronizing to the Mizrachim. To this day, Israel suffers from residual integration difficulties and discrimination.

And despite everything, it is a success story. Intermarriage between descendants of Jews from Arab countries and Jews from Europe is around 35-40%. Is there any other society or country in the world that can boast such a model of integration? For the sake of comparison, in the United States, intermarriage between blacks and whites is still less than 5%.

The shared ethos creates solidarity. But what happens with those who are not part of the shared ethos? Israel, by definition, is the nation-state of the Jewish People, yet nearly 20% of its citizens are not Jewish. What is their place? And how is solidarity cultivated between majority and minority? It is not only Israel that is grappling with this problem. Most modern states arose on some shared basis of culture, religion, language, heritage, and history. And some believe that this shared basis comprises imagined nationalism. Over the past several decades, joining the long-time minorities who find themselves in modern countries are enormous communities of immigrants. Some of them blend into the ethos of the host countries, and some maintain cultural isolation.

The question of solidarity in the first half of the twenty-first century is therefore not a question of interest only to the Jewish People in Israel and the Diaspora, but also a lens through which to view a pressing international issue.

The "progressive dilemma"

Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy established the Bureau of Immigration and National Identity. The appointed minister, Éric Besson, known for crossing party lines, asked to hold a discussion about the "republican idea of the enlightened, rational citizen, who bears the heritage of the Republic and has a connection to three fundamental values: freedom, equality, brotherhood." The intellectual elites, together with the Socialist Party, responded with rage. Large portions of these elites are not fond of the concept of "nationalism." The public at large, even if suspicious of Sarkozy's motives, actually sided with the idea.

On the other side of the Channel, Britain initiated a similar discussion of "Britishness." The discussion focused on a common denominator that included symbols, values and leaders. As in France, the discussion is really about belonging in the context of national identity, and, at least in part, is positioned as a counter-movement to the multicultural tradition that has characterized it in recent decades.

A woman walks by a graffiti painted wall in Tel Aviv, 2014 | Photo flash90

On occasion, international measures are published about at-risk vs. stable countries. The countries ranked as the most stable are Finland, Norway, Sweden, Ireland and Japan. One of the key characteristics of these countries is ethnic and/or cultural homogeneity. There is no minority undermining the hegemony. There is no group that wants to wave a different religious or national flag in some part of the country. One of the only countries that succeeds in integrating heterogeneity with stability is the United States, but, in contrast to the other countries mentioned, there is no solidarity there.

In 2004, David Goodhardt, editor of *Prospect Magazine,* published an article entitled "Discomfort of Strangers." The article generated much public discussion, since Goodhardt is considered alternately a demagogue, fascist, or racist. In fact, he is a liberal intellectual, and it is difficult to dismiss his ideas offhand. His main claim is that there is tension, or, in essence, a contradiction, between solidarity and difference. The more a particular community or society takes in foreigners who are not part of the shared ethos, the more the value of community or national solidarity is eroded. Diversity does not create a multicultural society based on mutual respect and brotherhood, but rather increases alienation and separatism. Goodhardt borrowed David Willet's term "the progressive dilemma," and posed it to the members of his camp as a simple question: "Welfare state, or cultural diversity?" They cannot coexist, because, according to Goodhardt's logic, "If values become more diverse . . . it becomes more difficult to sustain the legitimacy of a universal risk-pooling welfare state. People ask: 'Why should I pay for them when they are doing things that I wouldn't do?'"

Is this xenophobia? Racism? An article by Professor David Laitin of Stanford, examined this question within the context of French society. Laitin sent employers applications from three candidates. The name of the first was Aurélie Ménard, a name that was patently native French. The second was Marie Diouf, whose surname is identified with Senegalese immigrants, while the first name suggests that the applicant is Christian. The third was Khadija Diouf, again Senegalese, but with a Muslim

first name. The results established that between Aurélie and Marie there is no discrimination. Khadija, on the other hand, was clearly discriminated against. The employers simply did not want her. In other words, the discrimination was not based on ethnicity, color or nationality. Rather, it stemmed from hostility to Muslims. This is the same hostility that manifests in European surveys, as in a 2013 survey conducted at Bielefeld University in Germany,

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revealing that 70% of Germans believe that Islamic values clash with Western values; there were studies with similar results in France and Britain around the same time, prior to the attack at *Charlie Hebdo*. And this hostility continues to escalate. The French, if I may, are not racists – perhaps even the opposite. They have no problem with foreigners, or with color; they have a problem with foreigners who refuse to integrate, or at least those whom they perceive in this manner.

"Buts" brigade

Does discrimination perpetuate the low status of minorities, or is it members of the minority communities who are guilty of the alienation that excludes them? The automatic answer, even after the terrorist attacks in France, points an accusing finger at the strong societies. Even the President of the United States, Barack Obama, stated a few days after the attacks in Paris that the Europeans need to learn from the Americans how to integrate the Muslims. Needless to say, a random check of European media sources reveals that this is the position that dominates over 80% of the public discourse. "Terrorism must be condemned," was the slogan repeatedly voiced by liberal interviewees on European television, "but we cannot forget that poverty and neglect and discrimination and alienation are pushing frustrated young people with no futures towards radicalization." Author Salman Rushdie, whose patience for such comments has expired, called them "the 'buts' brigade." They condemn terrorism and then add the "but," which essentially rationalizes radicalism.

The problem of most of these intellectuals, who are usually sworn adherents of solidarity, and harsh critics of the idea of national sovereignty and identity, is that the facts have almost no effect on them. After all, the immigrants to Britain, France and Germany include not only Muslims, but also Chinese and Hindus, many of whom are extremely poor. And yet, after less than two generations, not one of these minorities has undergone any kind of radicalization. On the contrary, their absorption is astounding. If the data are correct, the Hindus in Britain, for example, built themselves up through education. Today they have achievements to show for it. They have surpassed not only the Whites, the "original" Brits, but also the Jews. Their skin color is similar to that of the Muslims. They also faced discrimination. But they did not make casting blame their preoccupation, or get bogged down in post-colonialist theories of racism and exclusion, and they overcame.

To what extent is the national majority prepared to include foreigners who oppose the shared ethos? These questions are the foundation of the discussion of "Britishness" in Britain, national identity in France, and the Zionist ideal in Israel. Willet's "progressive dilemma" is essentially a national dilemma. A Conservative British politician and intellectual, Willets claimed already a decade ago that "the basis on which you can extract large sums of money in taxes and pay it out in benefits is that most people think the recipients are people like themselves, facing difficulties that they themselves could face. If values become more diverse . . . then it becomes more difficult to sustain the legitimacy of a universal risk-pooling welfare state . . . This is America vs. Sweden."

By extension, in the case of Israel, for how long will the middle class agree to bear the tax burden for the ultra-Orthodox and Arab sectors, who live in a completely different world of values? The minority that stands out in Israel is the Arab minority. Here, as well, it is worth noting that there is a difference between Christians, Druze and Muslims in all that pertains to integration. The first, despite discrimination – which does exist – reach impressive achievements. In certain areas, they exceed the Jewish average. The Druze and Muslims are still lagging behind, to an almost equal extent, even though the former belong, at least in terms of military service, to the shared ethos, and the latter usually insist on refusing, and actively object, even if non-violently, to the shared ethos.

The answer lies, to a great extent, in cultural affairs. The Christians, for example, on the topic of women's status, are usually closer to the liberal Jewish position, while no small percentage of the ultra-Orthodox sector, which in many senses resembles the Muslim and Druze sectors, maintains a distance from the shared ethos.

In another article, Goodhardt points out that London is being emptied of its veteran residents. The old-time Whites are not thrilled with the diversity and are running away. Welcoming strangers is nice for theorists and non-

African migrants in Lampedusa island harbor, Italy, enroute to Sicily, May 2015 | Photo: AFP

profits concerned with the rights of aliens. The reality on the ground is another story. Social capital, a concept associated with Robert Putnam, is dwindling, since diverse, multicultural, multiethnic communities enjoy much less solidarity. One can assume that it is no coincidence that British multiculturalism burgeoned under the Thatcher government. Apparently there is a connection between capitalism and a split society without a common ethos.

In the case of Israel, these problems are much greater than those of Europe, both externally and internally, and they are interconnected. Not only Europe and its minorities, but also the neighboring countries intensify the dilemma. Syria has fallen apart, politically as well as ethnically. The same can certainly be said for Iraq. The immediate conclusion is that without clear Jewish sovereignty – that is, a Jewish majority – Israel will also disintegrate.

And so, how can one maintain a democratic, liberal, egalitarian society while preserving a Jewish national identity? How can full equality be maintained for Israeli Arabs? How should we treat asylum-seekers? Professor John Mearsheimer claimed, writing about the Balkans, that "ethnically homogeneous states must be created . . . [which] would require drawing new borders and transferring populations . . ." for which, he believes, the superpowers should foot the bill. Mearsheimer, it should be recalled, does not belong to the generation of the 1940s, when population transfer was an acceptable practice. Mearsheimer belongs to the elite of contemporary American academia. He is one of the authors of a book against the pro-Israel lobby, and an outspoken anti-Zionist. Thus, he is on the "right" side – neither fascist nor right-wing, and he is not alone, but part of an academic stream that espouses these views.

There is no need whatsoever to be pulled in this direction in the case of Israel. On the other hand, there are admittedly no ideal solutions – just dilemmas. It is possible and necessary to maintain a Jewish majority because the alternatives are worse; and at the same time it is imperative to aspire to the integration of the Israeli Arabs, while attempting to expand the shared ethos. This means, for example, accelerating the efforts to expand equality in every field, including affirmative action where possible, while rejecting, with as heavy a hand as necessary, Islamic and nationalistic trends.

All of these dilemmas stand in the balance. Their message is that every democratic society must deal with processes that are occurring in democratic and liberal countries. There is only one very preliminary conclusion for Israel: The sovereign-national model based on "Jewish and democratic" is not the best. It is simply the least of all evils.

Batya Kahana Dror

Dead End: In Solidarity with Women in the Rabbinic Courts

Attorney Batya Kahana Dror, director of Mavoi Satum, attests to the accurate representation of rabbinical divorce courts in the prize-winning film "Gett," by Ronit and Shlomi Elkabetz. “Due to the difficulty in obtaining a divorce, I support freedom of choice in marriage in Israel, and advocate to advance laws for civil marriage."

Those fortunate enough never to have needed the services of the rabbinical courts might think that *Gett: The Trial of Viviane Amsalem*, the film by Shlomi and Ronit Elkabetz, is no more than a caricature of a legal procedure, rabbinical judges (*dayanim*), and the rabbinical court. However, having participated in hundreds of such procedures, I can attest to the fact that the Elkabetz film is an authentic depiction.

The protagonist, Viviane Amsalem (Ronit Elkabetz), contrary to everything expected of her – that is, at odds with all the norms so oppressive to women in the strictly traditional patriarchal society in which she lives – appeals to the rabbinical court for her liberation. In other words, she demands a divorce – a *get* – from her husband.

At the focus of *Gett* is the issue of the troubling norms governing women’s lives in traditional society. But let us not delude ourselves: the problem exists not only among Mizrachi, ultra-Orthodox, and religious women; secular, Ashkenazi and educated women of all breeds can also find themselves in a rabbinical court fighting for a divorce from men who abuse the power that the law grants them.

Unlike other legal systems, according to *halakha* (Jewish law) the dissolution of marriage depends entirely on the good will of the husband, and the court cannot of itself annul the marriage. The only threat that the court can wield is coercing the husband into agreeing to end the marriage, but this option is possible only under very specific conditions so as not to undermine the legitimacy of the *get*, which must be given of the husband’s free will.

Attorney Batya Kahana Dror is the director of Mavoi Satum, an organization that provides legal and emotional support to women who have been refused a Jewish divorce.

With the development of Jewish law, and since the decree banning polygamy instituted by Rabbenu Gershom about 1,000 years ago, most Jewish communities around the world have accepted the further decree that for a *get* to be valid, the wife must also agree to accept it, and she cannot be divorced against her will. Nevertheless, this decree does not correct the non-egalitarian imbalance of the divorce procedure. Since the man is all-powerful in his ability to prolong the subjugation of his wife, the concept of reciprocity in marriage, based on recognition of the individual’s freely made decision to relinquish a certain measure of freedom, is turned upside down when the wife attempts to dissolve the union. The restrictions of the *get* represent the fine line between the possibility for each member of the couple to decide that the relationship has ended and the actual power either party has to bring about that end.

Women, like the fictional Viviane Amsalem, whose requests for divorce are denied by their husbands, turn to us at Mavoi Satum ("Dead End") so that we can help them find a way to regain control of their lives. Some come to us lost, broken, and in despair, while others are informed, vigilant and knowledgeable about all the details.

One way or another, most are surprised to discover that not only do we not view their decision as a sin, but we are committed to encouraging them to do whatever they can to pursue it. Our job at Mavoi Satum is to give them tools and support them to demand their rights and not give up, even though the obstacles placed before many of them often appear to be almost insurmountable.

The film portrays the isolation and lack of understanding to which women whose cases are handled by the rabbinical courts are subjected. Viviane, contrary to everything considered just and proper by those around her, and contrary even to her own understanding of a woman’s place, is no longer willing to continue in her marriage. The financial support, honor, home, children and everything else that her husband and marriage ostensibly give her cannot change the fact that she simply wants to live without him. As the film proceeds, the human drama witnessed in the insensitivity and callousness she encounters in her immediate surroundings – her husband, family, female neighbors – unfolds because of her desire to end her marriage. The lack of understanding she must endure is not just the result of a rigid halakhic system; it is the by-product of an age-old social structure deeply rooted in our culture and tradition. This is evidenced by the fact that all the participants in Viviane’s bizarre saga, including those who wish her well (such as her lawyer and family), unquestioningly accept the court’s requirement that her right to escape from a bad relationship depends on establishing “grounds.” Until Vivian is able to produce “proof,” requiring a protracted legal battle, her decision to voluntarily give up her status as a married woman is viewed as unthinkable.

The film also reliably portrays the degrading experience women endure in the rabbinical court, as

The protagonist, Viviane Amsalem (Ronit Elkabetz), contrary to everything expected of her – that is, at odds with all the norms so oppressive to women in the strictly traditional patriarchal society in which she lives – appeals to the rabbinical court for her liberation. In other words, she demands a divorce – a *get* – from her husband.

Tragically and ironically, the arena in which Viviane and all women refused a *get* wage their struggle to be liberated from the marriage contract is the rabbinical court, the very place where men’s power is unchecked and unbridled, constrained neither by law nor halakha, and certainly not by the fear of God

Viviane is repeatedly humiliated. From the moment she seeks to end her relationship with her husband, she loses her right to privacy. Through the invasive legal process, she is gradually stripped bare by the witnesses, lawyers and dayanim. For example, in order for the dayanim to agree to her demand for a divorce, Viviane must provide evidence of shortcomings in the familial and conjugal behavior of the husband, such as reports of infidelity or a lower level of religious observance, the public presentation of which generally involves a gross invasion of privacy. Only then, if the court is convinced that there is substance to the grounds, will it require or force the husband to give his wife a divorce. Even in these cases, the court cannot declare a marriage void without the husband’s cooperation.

In some cases, even forcing the husband to give a divorce may prove ineffectual, with the marriage never coming to an end.

Tragically and ironically, the arena in which Viviane and all women refused a *get* wage their struggle to be liberated from the marriage contract, is the rabbinical court, the very place where men's power is unchecked and unbridled, constrained neither by law nor halakha, and certainly not by the fear of God.

Since the man is all-powerful in his ability to prolong the subjugation of his wife, the concept of reciprocity in marriage, which is based on recognition of the individual's freely made decision to relinquish a certain measure of freedom, is turned upside down when the wife attempts to dissolve the union

The inequality between men and women in divorce proceedings is not limited to the burden of proof. For example, infidelity on the part of the wife is always considered grounds for divorce, but the same is not true when the husband is the perpetrator. Furthermore, even if one side obstructs the divorce, the husband is free to remarry (with special permission), whereas this privilege is denied to women under any circumstances. If a woman denied a divorce wants to have children with another man, they are considered the product of an adulterous union, and the child will eternally bear the stigma of a mamzer (bastard); the husband faces no barriers to having children, even as he continues to refuse to release his wife from the marriage.

In counterbalance to the discrimination inherent in the rabbinical court, Israeli civil law has established and strengthened recognition of the autonomy of the individual's will as an essential element of Basic Law: Human Freedom and Dignity. The remarks of former Supreme Court President Aharon Barak in this context are often cited: "A Jewish and democratic state must base human dignity and liberty on the image of God found in every individual, the image that emphasizes both the uniqueness of every human being and the common father that we all share . . . recalling once again the Jewish and biblical source of human rights. It is not human rights that lie at the center, but rather the image of God found in every human being. From this it follows that every human being everywhere is entitled to the principle of human dignity.

When at one point during the movie the cry of "liberté!" is heard as Viviane finally receives her *get*, one cannot but recall that the ideas of individual freedom that arose in the period of the Enlightenment and were further promoted as a result of the French Revolution, played an important role in the founding of the democratic nation-state as we know it today. It is the state that is responsible for safeguarding the seemingly straightforward right that Viviane demands throughout her tribulations – the right to be the author of her own life story. The individual agrees to allow the representatives of the sovereign power to limit his freedom to some extent on the condition that they defend his freedom as a basic value. However, this contract between the individual and the sovereign is vulnerable, and the state may betray that trust at any moment. In the case of marriage in Israel, because it is regulated in part through the religious court system, it is the state itself that – in addition to protecting the wife – denies the woman autonomy and her promised freedom.

Who is a Jew?

In the Jewish state, the problem of impairing a woman's freedom by means of religious law and its representatives in the legal system cannot be separated from the question of "Who is a Jew?" As we all know, this question has two answers:

One answer is that of the Law of Return, which determines that anyone who has even only one Jewish grandparent is entitled to immigrate to Israel and be granted citizenship immediately upon arrival. This is founded on a basic philosophy that nationality is determined by identification and a sense of belonging, and should not necessarily be dependent on a narrow religious definition. The other answer is the Orthodox religious position, held by the Chief Rabbinate and the rabbinical courts, which have a monopoly over marriage and divorce in Israel. It maintains that a Jew is a person who has a Jewish mother or who has undergone an Orthodox conversion.

The two approaches have created a situation whereby under the Law of Return, our interface with the Diaspora operates according to an expansive, ethnic definition, whereas inwardly, for the purpose of personal status, the religious definition prevails. While it is true that the State of Israel has formally adopted the Law of Return, and on this basis has taken in hundreds of thousands of new immigrants, on the other hand it has never publicly recognized them as full members of the Jewish nation, a fact that is clearly indicated by the laws of personal status.

This normative dualism is a direct outgrowth of the approach of the British Mandatory government to the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious authorities, preserved by David Ben-Gurion due to the fear that an alternative approach would split the Jews in the new State of Israel into two irreconcilable groups – religious and secular. The resultant continuation of a religious monopoly, based on the fundamentally undemocratic denial of an individual's right to choose, can only be based on a view that it is the Chief Rabbinate, by means of marriage and divorce, that safeguards our status as a Jewish state, and that the rabbinical courts must define for us what it means to belong to the Jewish people and who is a Jew.

Whether freedom is at all possible in a situation in which the oppression of women is so integral to the system is a key question posed by the film – for even when divorce is granted, this is a technicality; the fundamental goal of allowing women to function as genuinely autonomous is not achieved.

At Mavoi Satum, we address the difficulties presented by the rabbinic courts on two tracks, the halakhic and the civil. We make a moral demand of the halakhic authorities, the dayanim, and the rabbis, along with all those who have been put in charge of matters of marriage and divorce on behalf of the State of Israel. They have been granted an absolute monopoly over matters of personal status, but are not fulfilling their duty: senior halakhic decision-makers are failing to devise solutions for those unable to obtain a divorce. As they remain in office and hold fast to comfortable jobs that give them strength and power, irreparable and ongoing damage is accumulating to the detriment of one of the most basic freedoms and rights of citizens of the state.

We do not need the cinema for examples:

A young woman whose husband had been in a coma for seven years approached the rabbinical court in Safed for a divorce and was told, "Pray for him to die because there is nothing we can do, since he is not of sound mind and is unable to grant you a divorce." Mavoi Satum sent heart-wrenching letters on the wife's behalf to the most important rabbis and she was interviewed in the media. The case became so well known that Rabbi David Lau, on being appointed Chief Rabbi, declared publicly at the President's Residence that a solution would have to be found for the wife. It was only the Chief Rabbi's intervention that led them to understand that the problem was not the wife's, but a challenge to halakhic jurisprudence whose solution was the responsibility of the halakhic authorities. A year and a half later, a rabbinical court appointed itself as the husband's agent and granted her a divorce.

The rabbinical court applied a halakhic technique that invokes Jewish monetary law along with the halakhic concept of legal agency. After the divorce, posters were plastered all over Jerusalem attacking the ruling and an appeal was submitted to the rabbinical court claiming, among other things, that the Chief Rabbinate had "capitulated to the women's organizations." Every time a rabbi finds halakhic solutions to help agunot – those women whose husbands refuse to give them a *get* – they are accused of being "Reform."

Should we give up on halakha?

As a person who observes halakha, I ask myself whether we – who live here because of our tribal or religious heritage deeply rooted in the Bible – can completely adopt the liberal concept according to which the state merely regulates agreements between couples without any commitment whatsoever to religious law. Is there a middle ground?

There are different ways in which changes can be made while still preserving Jewish marriage – kiddushin – according to halakha. For example, Rabbi She'ar Yashuv Hacohen, the Chief Rabbi of Haifa, applied a well-known halakhic technique based on the caveat that if one of the partners falls ill, is missing or recalcitrant, the marriage can be retroactively annulled. The rabbi also composed a marriage contract that contains this condition. Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits wrote a book in which he compiled all the methods that favor conditional kiddushin. Both rabbis were forced to contend with fiercely vehement opposition and invective as a result.

A further option for changing the nature of the debate in the rabbinical court is to do whatever possible to prevent any implementation of the farcical procedure portrayed in the movie requiring the inevitably invasive and superfluous production of "proof." This might include resorting to the civil system and petitioning the High Court of Justice to outlaw the procedure.

Given the tragedies I have witnessed, and in solidarity with the many women in Israel whose lives are turned upside down when they are suddenly robbed by arbitrary courts of their human rights in matters of divorce, I have taken on a further cause. Alongside advocating for more humane implementation within the halakhic system, I am working to promote freedom of choice in marriage in Israel, including the advancement of laws for civil marriage.

Women whose request for divorce is denied by their husbands, come to us at Mavoi Satum so that we can help them find a way to regain control of their lives. Some come to us lost, broken, and in despair, while others are informed, vigilant and knowledgeable about all the details

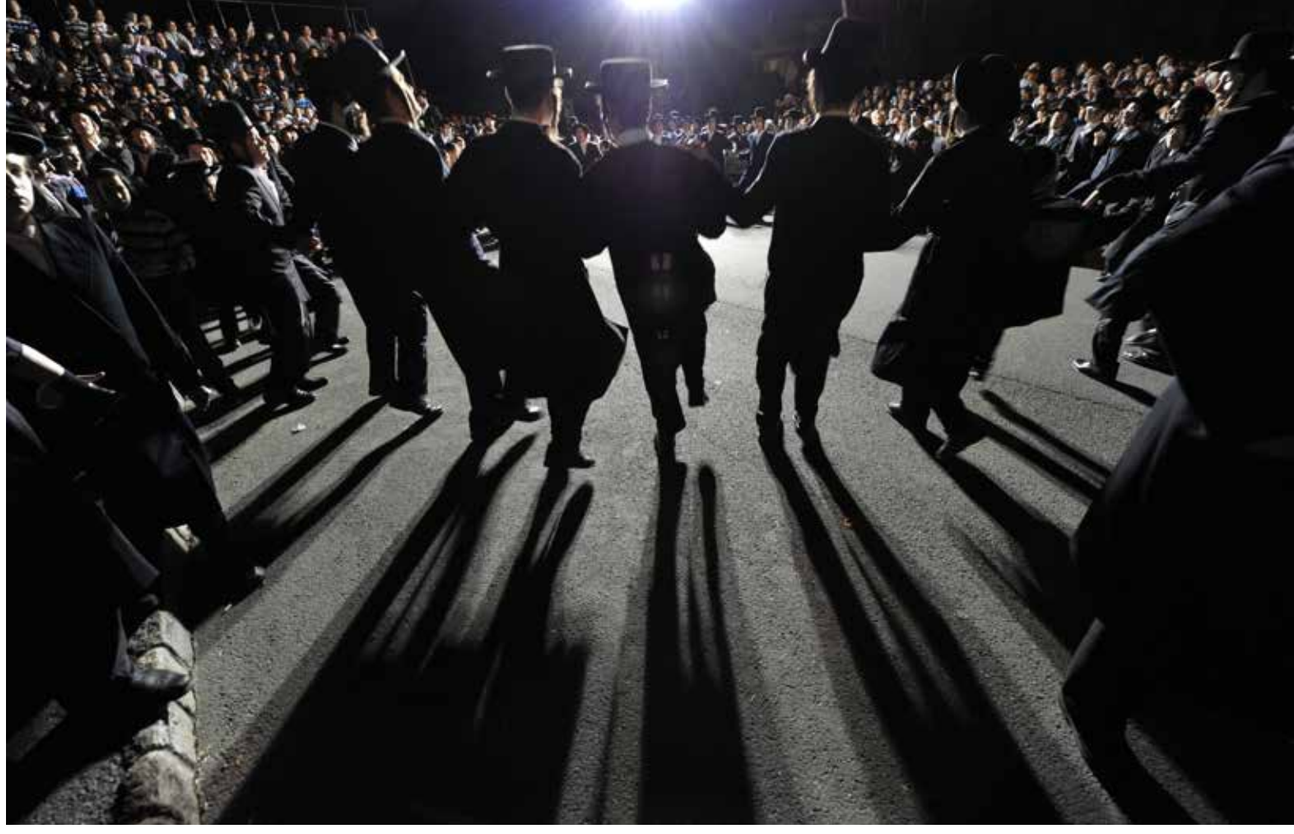
Unlike traditional society, one of the features of modern society is that the individual is given the opportunity to realize his or her right to choose a lifestyle. In the case of the struggle for a *get*, women's lives become completely subject to the whim of an "other" (either their husband or the court), and they have no one to protect or rescue them. To me, the sense of arbitrariness in this reality is unacceptable by any criterion, whether halakhic or constitutional, and that is the reason I decided to join in this struggle.

Ultimately, I believe that Judaism, and specifically *halakha*, can give us the tools to find solutions to create a reality in which the traditional values of the family and communication between partners to a marriage do not contradict modern, liberal values. These solutions will restore *halakha* to its natural vitality and reconnect it to the reality of our lives, at the same time connecting all sectors of the public to the State of Israel as a Jewish state. ■

Sima Zalcberg Block

Completely Orthodox, Completely Modern

Rabbi Ysoscher Katz left Satmar Hasidism, took up a pulpit in a liberal Modern Orthodox synagogue, and currently provides support for young people interested in leaving the confines of the ultra-Orthodox world and finding their way. “Extremism in and of itself is somewhat problematic, but it also contains truth. Because if you believe in something, you go all the way. Apparently I was looking for a place that, like Satmar, would go all the way with its ideology. Since I decided that my direction was Modern Orthodoxy, I am going all the way.“



Katz: “When you’re in Satmar, as a teenager, and you’re looking for counterculture, the choice is either a book by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, or drugs . . .” | Satmar hasidim celebrate Lag Baomer in Kiryas Joel, New York, 2012 | Photo: AFP

The geographical distance from the café where I’m sitting with Rabbi Ysoscher Katz, in the heart of Manhattan, and the neighborhood of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, is not very great; it is no more than an hour's ride on the subway that goes over the Williamsburg Bridge. And yet, for Rabbi Katz, crossing the bridge that separates the two worlds – the extremist Satmar community in Williamsburg and the heart of Manhattan – was no simple matter.

Katz was ordained at the age of 18 by Rabbi Yechezkel Roth, a *dayan* of UTA Satmar. He studied at the prestigious yeshivas of Brisk and Yosef-Novardok for over a decade, and taught a *daf yomi* (daily Talmud study) class for many years in Borough Park. At present, he is head of the Talmud Department and Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies at Chovevei Torah in Riverdale, New York, a yeshiva poised at what may be the most liberal, left-wing edge of American Orthodoxy. In addition, Katz serves as rabbi of the Modern Orthodox Prospect Heights Synagogue, and as director of the coed Judaic studies program at the Luria School in Brooklyn.

Katz is not the only person who has left the ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) world and the path of Satmar Hasidism. He estimates that there is not a single family that does not have a son or daughter who has left the community. And yet his story and worldview are particularly interesting because, in contrast to many others who grew up in that milieu and completely abandoned the environment and religious way of life in which they were raised, Katz has not rejected his roots and he still maintains an Orthodox lifestyle. Katz also does not forget the young people grappling with questions and difficulties similar to those that he himself faced when he was younger. Together with his friend Rabbi Levi Brackman, formerly of Chabad, he established “Frum and Stuck,” which helps people who, in Rabbi Katz’s words, “have decided to leave the Haredi world but not relinquish the religious lifestyle. We don’t dictate any particular direction, but try to help those who turn to us to navigate the search for an alternative.”

Rabbi Ysoscher Katz: “How Orthodoxy can provide meaning for secular Jew”

In order to understand the long road Katz has traveled, a brief background on Satmar Hasidism is necessary.

Satmar Hasidism began with Rabbi Yoel (Yoelish) Teitelbaum (1887-1979), in the city of Satu Mare in Transylvania. After World War II, Rabbi Yoelish moved to Williamsburg, in Brooklyn, New York, and established his hasidic community there. Satmar hasidism is characterized by complete opposition to the State of Israel and the Zionist enterprise. This is in keeping with the teaching of Rabbi Yoelish, who viewed Zionism as the root of evil and the main cause of the troubles that befell the Jews in the twentieth century. In his famous book, *Va-Yoel Moshe*, Rabbi Yoelish wrote: “If we take all of the immorality of the generation, and the many transgressions committed in the entire world and place them on one side of the scales, and the Zionist state on the other side of the scales, [the State] would outweigh all of it, since it is the root of the most primordial impurity in the entire world.”

Rabbi Yoelish also espoused extremist positions against modernity and “secular” education, as well as an ideology of isolationism from the “impure” world outside of the Satmar community. As part of this, he encouraged his adherents to speak only Yiddish.

The lifestyle of the Satmar community is based on strict regulations and practices pertaining to all realms of life, and harsh sanctions are imposed on those who violate them. For example, like other sects, Satmar hasidism maintains strict rules regarding sexuality – manifested, among other things, in the separation between the genders beginning at a young age, early arranged marriage, and strict adherence to a modest dress code. In addition, Satmar women are required to completely shave their heads after marrying and to cover them with a wig or kerchief.

After his death, the Rebbe, Rabbi Yoelish, was succeeded by his nephew, Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum (1914-2006). When Rabbi Moshe passed away, the sect was divided between his two sons – Rabbi Aharon Teitelbaum, whose court is located in Kiryas Joel, within the town of Monroe, New York, and Rabbi Zalman Leib Teitelbaum, whose court is in Williamsburg. Large Satmar

Dr. Sima Zalcberg Block is a researcher specializing in Haredi society.

communities also exist in Antwerp, Montreal, São Paolo, Melbourne and London. In Israel, Satmar has communities in Jerusalem, Bnei Brak, Elad, and Beit Shemesh, totaling, according to various estimates, over 120,000 adherents worldwide.

Rabbi Katz, who was born in 1968 to an elite hasidic family, explains, "My grandfather, who grew up in a strict religious home in Hungary, lost his father at a young age, and was sent by his mother to the Satmar Yeshiva. At that time, Satmar hasidism was just starting out. The yeshiva was small, and my grandfather, like the other students, easily developed close ties with the Rebbe. The Rebbe was a very significant figure in my grandfather's life, and later, in my father's life and in my life. I was 11 when the Rebbe died, and of course, I went to his funeral. And like all the hasidim who stood there and cried, so did I. It was as if my father or a very close uncle had left us."

When Katz announced that he was leaving his job as maggid shiur, it was especially difficult for them that I didn't cast off my religious obligations. In Satmar they know how to handle those who cross over to the other side, to the secular world, but since I was neither here nor there, they had no tools for handling the situation

For Katz, the change began when he was approaching age 18, as he describes, "I was caught at the yeshiva reading the *Tanya* [the core text of the Chabad-Lubavitch sect, written by Chabad founder Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi] – not with an ordinary copy of the book, but one with comments by the last Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, and that, in the eyes of the Satmar leadership, was considered a particularly egregious act, something that is not done."

Why?

Katz: "During that period, the mid- to late 1980s, a small group of hasidim from the elite of the community switched to Chabad, and the leadership of Satmar was concerned that this would catch on among the rest of the adherents. This migration was so threatening for the leadership that when one of the hasidim who belonged to the elite left for Chabad, the leadership got together some members who kidnapped him, beat him terribly, and shaved off his beard, so that the other hasidim would see and become intimidated. The discovery of the Tanya in my possession triggered a fear that I was also part of this same crowd."

What attracted you in the Tanya that caused you to assume such a risk?

Katz: "When you're in Satmar, as a teenager, and you're looking for counterculture, the choice is either a book by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, or drugs . . . [and] I came to understand that the story they told us in Satmar wasn't so true."

After being expelled from the yeshiva, Katz convinced his parents to send him to study at the Brisk Yeshiva in Jerusalem, one of the most prestigious Lithuanian yeshivas. Sending youth to study in Israel, according to Katz, was considered an unacceptable step in Satmar, "both because of their anti-Zionist ideology, and due to the secularization rampant in the Holy Land."

What form did they take?

Katz: "Here I am, in Israel, and I see people who are not Haredi, and they are not as 'terrible' as they taught us in Satmar. The Brisk Yeshiva was at the time near the Schneller Camp [an army base in Jerusalem], and every morning, when we would set out for the yeshiva, we would see male and female soldiers. We would say among ourselves jokingly, hey, this is a girl soldier, but she's one of ours – in other words, the daughter of Jews – and we would call her 'Chanaleh'; and, hey, that guy soldier, he's also one of ours, 'Yankeleh.' And so, bit by bit, I came to understand that the story they told us in Satmar wasn't so true."

"Once," he relates, "we decided to take a top-secret trip to the Tel Aviv beach in the middle of the night. For us, the Tel Aviv beach was considered the root of all impurity. But it was 'Jewish impurity,' of 'Chanaleh' and 'Yankeleh'. And so, in the dead of night, all of us, thrilled by the adventure, arrived at the Tel Aviv beach. You can imagine that we of course saw nothing earth-shattering or terrible. Sure . . . a few senior citizens showed up at 5 a.m. . . . "Here and there, during this same period, Katz began reading the secular Israeli daily *Yedioth Ahronoth*, and, he says, "I became totally addicted to it."

Shidduch

If all this excitement weren't enough, a month after Katz arrived in Israel, his parents called to tell him that "I was being offered a very fine shidduch, and I'd better go back. I went back, got engaged, and returned to Israel for a year of study until the wedding."

A year later, Katz married the young woman who had been chosen for him, and moved to Borough Park, Brooklyn, where he studied for a few years in a kollel (full -time yeshiva for married men) and also began working as a maggid shiur (a lecturer in advanced Talmud studies). He taught daf yomi classes in two places, and his lessons, which drew large audiences, were considered a great success. During that period, two children were born to Katz, and he was leading an ostensibly routine life in the framework of the community. "But one day," he says, "I simply felt that it was over, that ideologically and philosophically speaking, I had a serious problem with what was happening in Satmar – it wasn't making sense anymore."

What was the problem?

Katz: "At the time, it was difficult for me to define what was bothering me, but looking back, I can say that it was a combination of several factors. First of all, I had been in a difficult marriage for 7-8 years. I said to myself: If the community had a more modern way of arranging the shidduch, they would have seen the mismatch between us, and they would have spared two adults and two children much suffering. I said to myself that if they've got this wrong, perhaps they're also mistaken regarding other things, and these questions shook my faith in the entire system. Secondly, most of the men in my family are considered brilliant Torah scholars. On the other hand, my mother and sisters, who are no less intelligent and talented than the men, were given no access to our knowledge and tradition, because of Satmar's constraints. I was very concerned about the exclusion of women, and it led me to look for a way out. You know, in the hasidic world there is a superstition that eating the end of the challah causes forgetfulness. But since it's a waste to throw away a piece of bread, in Satmar, husbands used to give the ends to their wives. I used to think, 'How nice, the husband is doting on his wife and giving her the first piece.' Later, it was explained to me that the wife gets the end since she has nothing to forget."

The "Ha-Sha'ar" (Gateway) Program opens the gate

The period during which Katz began searching for a way out was particularly difficult for him. He explains: "I knew that it was over – I couldn't live that way anymore. And on the other hand, it was very frightening to leave." During our entire meeting, Katz continually emphasizes his good ties with his family, and the fact that he grew up "in a warm and protecting home." In addition, he says, "there was the regular lesson that I spent 4-5 hours every day preparing, and two more hours giving, and this filled me completely and provided me with tremendous satisfaction." One of the ramifications of leaving Satmar was giving up all of these. And yet Katz's greatest difficulty was rooted in the fact that he couldn't share what he was going through with anyone. "It was a safely guarded secret locked away in my heart, and Heaven forbid that someone should know. Because then my entire world would collapse – my family, my friends, my source of income."

One of the places that Katz often visited during this period was the Conservative Movement's Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS) in Manhattan. "At that time," says Katz, "JTS was a kind of refuge for people like me, Haredim who were looking for a way out. Among all of us, there was tacit agreement that no one disclose the other. Most of the time we sat in the library, but we would also go to the synagogue to meet students. It was interesting for us to speak with people who were studying the same texts but from a different perspective."

It sounds similar to what happens at the National Library on Givat Ram in Jerusalem. There are many Haredim there, including those who are looking for a connection with the "outside" world.

Katz: "Exactly. It was a kind of Givat Ram on the banks of the Hudson. There were Haredim there from all of the groups and streams, and no small number from Satmar."

During this period, Katz relates, "I had the sense of being stuck, with no way out. I felt like I was living a lie that greatly detracted from my ability to derive a sense of satisfaction in life."

Katz began seeing the first rays of redemption when he joined "Ha-Sha'ar" - a teachers' training program at the Drisha Institute, an establishment for Jewish education in the spirit of Modern Orthodoxy, located on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Katz showed up at the initial interview in his Satmar "uniform," and was rejected on the spot. But later that same evening, he received a phone call from Rabbi David Silber, one of the founders of Drisha, informing him that he had been accepted to the program.

Sarah Erenthal: Self-portrait, 2014, from "Project Freedom," sponsored by Footsteps, an American-Jewish organization founded in 2003 by Malki Schwartz, originally of Chabad, to provide emotional, social and educational support to individuals who seek to leave the Haredi world in which they grew up and become integrated into American society-at-large. Participants were asked to express what 'freedom' means to them.

How did that miracle occur?
Katz: "Rabbi Silber told his wife that a hasidic applicant had come to be interviewed. His wife, who teaches at JTS, knew me from there, and asked her husband to describe that 'hasidic guy.' To this day, I maintain that this woman saved my life."

One foot in, one foot out

A year later, after completing the program at Ha-Sha'ar, Katz obtained a teaching position at Ma'ayanot, a Modern Orthodox girls' high school in Teaneck, New Jersey. Ma'ayanot was founded by Esther Kraus, also originally from a hasidic home.

"I had a change of uniforms," says Katz. "In the morning, for school, I dressed like an ordinary person, and in the evenings, for the class I taught in Borough Park, I changed into my Satmar uniform. I held on that way for two years. Meanwhile, my marriage was disintegrating and I wanted a divorce. I wondered if this would lead to my being fired – since at the time, 12 years ago, divorce was perceived as extremely deviant and unacceptable in Satmar."

My father is a tzaddik in the full sense of the word. He accepts everyone, but he once said to me that not a day went by that he didn't cry over my leaving Satmar, and there wasn't a day that he didn't ask the *Kadosh Barukh Hu* why I left"

To his surprise, Katz was not forced to leave his job. He believes that more than anything, this response reflects the understanding that the community showed towards his situation, and that despite the rigidity and extremism that characterize Satmar, "in many senses they are much more modern than I thought." Paradoxically, this response was a disappointment for Katz, as he explains: "I was hoping that they would fire me from my job and that this would excuse me from having to make a decision as to whether to remain in my position."

Katz remained in his job, but the double life he led became increasingly burdensome. "Once, for example, when I was teaching Tractate *Sukkah*, I got to a section where Maimonides claims something radical – that the study of metaphysics can be more important than the study of Gemara – and I taught it. In response, the participants asked, 'Why are you telling us this'? When we reached the end of the tractate, I arrived at a section where Maimonides speaks almost mystically about the importance of joy at the time of performing a mitzvah. At that point they perked up and said, 'You need to teach *this* kind of thing.' I asked myself 'why?' – after all, they're both Maimonides. Ultimately, I decided that I couldn't go on, and made up my mind to leave my job."

What Katz went through during those years might be described as "transaffiliation." Dr. Sarit Barzilai, in her study *Yotze'im le-she'elah [Leaving Religious Life] in Israeli Haredi Society* (2001), defines the "transaffiliaters" as those whose religious identity is divided, such that part is expressed through public identification with Haredi society, while another part secretly identifies with secular society. And yet, while the "transaffiliaters," in Barzilai's view, do not aspire to leave Haredi society, and are content to merely peek out and sometimes to indulge in it more deeply, Rabbi Katz was interested, ultimately, in leaving the Haredi framework.

When Katz announced that he was leaving his job as maggid shiur, "it wasn't pleasant. What was even more difficult for them was the fact that I didn't cast off my religious obligations. In Satmar," continues Katz, "it was told that in Sighet, the city where Rabbi Yoelish's father was the Rebbe, one of the hasidim decided to study medicine. He became a doctor and remained a hasid. The Rebbe, the Grand Rabbi of Sighet, used to say that he prayed every day that this hasid would convert to Christianity because if he had left entirely, it would have been easy to handle him, but since he had both a secular education and was a hasid, coping with the challenge he posed was much more difficult. Other hasidim might have come to believe that one could study non-religious books and be religious, and this, in the Rebbe's perspective, was a genuine threat to the desired social order."

The changes stirring inside Katz not only confused those around him – they also aroused pain, particularly for his father, as Katz illustrates: "My father is a tzaddik in the full sense of the word. He accepts everyone. At the same time, he once said to me that not a day went by that he didn't cry over my leaving Satmar, and there wasn't a day that he didn't ask the Kadosh Barukh Hu why I left. My father is a pure soul, and his theology is very straightforward: everything has a reason, and in my case, it was difficult for him to understand the reason for my leaving, and this pained him greatly. I am pleased that both my family and I insisted on trying to preserve the relationship and doing everything to prevent a 'disconnect.'"

When did you actually leave Satmar completely?
Katz: "I don't know if I left completely . . . During that period I continued to wear a shtreimel [fur hat worn by married hasidim on the Sabbath and holidays] until I remarried. I'm not sure why – maybe because it was ideologically important; maybe because I didn't have the courage to take it off, maybe because I had children there who meanwhile have grown up – and maybe because I still wanted to belong to the community."

Katz left Borough Park and moved to the Upper West Side nine years ago, when he married Sharon Flato, a professor of Judaic Studies at Brooklyn College, who grew up in a Modern Orthodox home. This time, the shidduch was made in a more "modern spirit." Professor Flato wrote her doctorate on Rabbi Yechezkel Segal Landau, one of the great halakhists of the eighteenth century, also known as "Ha-Noda Be-Yehudah." Since Katz was very interested in the great halakhic authorities from this period, a friend introduced them. "He thought that we would have a lot in common," explains Katz, "and . . . he was right."

How did you migrate from the extremism of Satmar to Chovevei Torah, an institution at the liberal extreme of Orthodox Judaism known for encouraging women's religious leadership?
Katz: "There's something very attractive about Satmar's extremism: the intensity, the intensiveness, the total commitment to observing the mitzvot, and the totality of faith. Extremism in and of itself is somewhat problematic, but it also contains truth. Because if you believe in something, go all the way. Apparently I was looking for a place that, like Satmar, would go all the way with its ideology. Since I decided that my direction was Modern Orthodoxy, I am going all the way – I'll be completely Orthodox and completely modern, and I find the total combination of these two things in Chovevei Torah. It has serious and deep Torah study, and at the same time embodies an attempt to find, to the extent possible, modernity. It seems that deep inside myself, I'm still Satmar," continues Katz, with a smile. "When I do something, I go all the way, and the same applies in being outside of Satmar."

Something is rotten in the state of Satmar

Katz's description of the overall treatment he received from his family and community points to the existence of "absorption mechanisms" that enable the Satmar community to accommodate, in one way or another – at least partially – members who no longer lead a lifestyle in keeping with its accepted norms. Indeed, according to Katz, the numbers are rising, including those "who have completely left, and others who appear to be hasidim in every way, but in private, they have renounced everything: they do not lay tefillin, they don't keep Shabbat, and they eat at McDonald's on Yom Kippur."

What gave rise to this crisis?
Katz points to three main explanations. One is that the first Satmar Rebbe, the charismatic Rabbi Yoelish, did not leave successors. As a result, today there is no figure in the sect who is capable of spearheading change, of refreshing the leadership and tightening the ship.

The second factor in the crisis, in Katz's view, lies in the economic reality. "My father works in diamonds and he supports an entire family respectably. Until a few years ago, one could support a large family even without professional training. The reality has changed. Today, there are almost no jobs where one can earn a respectable living without professional training of some kind. Since in Satmar 'secular' professional training is forbidden, not to mention higher education and academic studies, most people in Satmar are very poor, and poverty makes people lose their grip on sanity and their connection with God."

Finally, of course, it is impossible not to mention the Internet, which "cracked the walls of the ghetto. It was a change that made the 'outside' much more accessible for the hasidim."

These three factors, according to Katz, led to a sense of disappointment in the Satmar establishment for many hasidim. He explains: "A small core of people continue along the same path of rigidity, religious zealotry, and opposition to modernity. And yet, all the rest of the hasidim, and we're talking about tens of thousands of people, know that something is very rotten in the State of Satmar."

You benefit from the unique perspective of a man who is both here and there. From this vantage point, how would you describe the state of US Jewry today?
"We are living in a very turbulent and exciting age, an age of many processes and changes." At the same time, the present reality in the United States, in Katz's opinion, poses a serious challenge to Modern Orthodoxy. "Rabbi Avi Weiss stated that some 90% of American Jews are not Orthodox, such that Orthodoxy in effect knows how to speak to only ten percent of American Jews and does not know how to speak to the rest – and that's a serious challenge. My wife and I go to Tel Aviv every summer for two months, and we see the revival, the renewed awakening of Judaism, and I'm jealous. I would be very happy to see such an awakening here as well. My aspirations, those of Chovevei Torah, those of Modern Orthodoxy in the US, are to bring Orthodoxy to that other 90%."

In speaking about bringing Orthodoxy to those who do not lead a halakhic lifestyle, Katz does not mean proselytizing. He means that "instead of marketing Orthodoxy as a possible way of life, we need to think how Orthodoxy can provide meaning for secular Jews, despite the fact that they choose a non-religious lifestyle."

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Despite Katz's bold moves in life and his commitment to assisting Haredi seekers like himself, throughout the interview, he emphasizes that not only does he bear no grudge against Satmar – he even misses certain aspects of it. He explains: "The study at Chovevei Torah is very serious, deep and fertile, but I feel like I am missing spirit and soul. And therefore, every few weeks, when my wife and I need some sustenance for the soul, we go to my family in Satmar on Shabbat." But, he continues, "after a whole Shabbat in the Satmar community, as seudah shlishit approaches, my wife and I say to one another, 'It's time to go back to Manhattan."

Naama Shaked

Reading “Bareback“

The Elul Beit Midrash was the pioneer in pluralistic, egalitarian text study not limited by the conventions of binding interpretive traditions familiar to religious participants, or by inhibitions one might expect of newcomers to the Jewish canon. The Elul methods spawned, directly or indirectly, scores of open batei midrash programs in Israel, inspired the approach to text-study in Israeli mixed secular and religious schools, and on a clear day, one can see its traces in points as far as Limmud International.

“Bareback reading,” or as it’s called in Hebrew, “barefoot reading,” *keri’ah yechefah*, is one of the most distinctive features of the early years of Beit Midrash Elul. It was developed and consolidated in Elul, and spread in various forms to other beit midrash programs that arose in its wake.

Elul was established in 1989 by a mixed religious and secular group, with members from both the right and left of the political map, who were looking for an innovative approach to the study of Jewish texts grounded in an open and egalitarian encounter and a sense of partnership and shared responsibility for Israeli society. The members of the group that coalesced in Elul brought with them various study methods, drawing from academia, the yeshiva world, the Kibbutz Movement College’s Judaica program (Midreshet Oranim), and influences from students of hasidism and kabbalah; without embracing such a range, the resulting study methods would not have adequately accommodated and reflected all the members.

Bareback reading refers first and foremost to the reading of canonical Jewish texts unmediated by any exegetical tradition. This type of reading created a shared substrate that transcended the disputes between the different reading traditions, bodies of knowledge and ideologies that came together in Elul. For many people, studying in the beit midrash was and still is a profoundly defining experience involving an intellectual, personal and creative dialogue with Judaism’s traditional texts, their study partners and themselves.

Naama Shaked, author of the poetry collection *Copper, River* (HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 2013), has served as the coordinator of the Elul Beit Midrash, and as a text-study facilitator.

I asked a number of people who were part of that original group what they believe bareback reading is and what role it played in the formative years of Elul:

Gera Tuvya: “People came from such different worlds and levels [of textual proficiency] that it was impossible to take any set assumptions for granted. From that perspective, the environment was conducive to creating something. We had to make sure that everyone felt comfortable. We insisted that there would be no authority, no ranking, no ‘Torah scholars.’ We were very strict about peer facilitation and the hevruta [study partners] method, and we refrained from long introductions [providing background to the texts]. Necessity brought out the magic. Contending with a text in an unmediated fashion became something that was very much taken into consideration. It made the secular participants feel more self-confident: Your encounter with the text is not the study of a foreign language. You can approach it and start to talk to it and it will teach you how to talk to it. You don’t need a mediator. Some may call this chutzpah, arrogance. For the religious participants, it represented an immense, powerful sense of liberation: the ability to rediscover texts that they were seemingly already familiar with, the possibility of responding in different ways, of not necessarily loving or accepting the text, and so on.”

Melila Hellner-Eshed: “In Elul, we defied compartmentalization by ‘opening the drawers,’ and we found ourselves in a big world, exposed on all sides, in which the verses of the Bible, the midrashei halakha, aggadah, modern Hebrew poetry, plays and the stories of the *Zohar* all coexisted under a single roof. This created an experience of being connected to generations of interlocutors – and in this way, we dared to view ourselves as a new link in the chain of dialogue. An understanding was born that this was no finite body of knowledge that we were studying, but rather something infinite and constantly changing, while at the same time, as we engaged in learning, we were creating it and ourselves.”

Jack Jano, “House of Letters on Wheels,” 2009, iron and paper. From Superstam- Hatzava Ivrit Exhibit, Angel Gallery, Tel Aviv, 2009

What is the source of the term “bareback reading?”

Rotem Preger-Wagner: “The bareback aspect has its source in a relatively large core of men and women born in kibbutzim who were among the founding group. The kibbutz culture viewed itself as a kind of indigenous culture, in the sense that it sought to shed the conventions, values and perceptions of bourgeois society; it was as if the bareback reading touched on the real thing, rather than on layers of exegesis. It’s not that there is really something called bareback reading. Within culture, one can never be completely bareback. Still, it is a concept that allows for some imaginary and very potent beginnings within Israeli culture; by the same token, it is vital to outgrow it and move toward interpretive work that is more conscious and requires a greater commitment.”

“The heavens were opened and I saw visions of God”

When I arrived at Elul a few years later, bareback reading was part of the local culture, of the language of the beit midrash. I was one of the “religious people” whose powerful experience of discovery Gera described: The possibility of encountering the familiar sources and discovering with wonderment and amazement how, when reading them together, they are completely reopened, giving rise to a sentiment similar to that described in Ezekiel’s vision: “The heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.” It was the experience of reading Hebrew poetry with love and awe and exaltation, like the Torah, of reading Mishnah like poetry, the possibility of standing opposite the words, face to face, without barriers, and allowing them to enter the soul, to filter into one’s blood, to wake up and be woken.

Learning text in hevruta using the bareback approach enables us to shed defenses and facades. The listening, questioning, the willingness to discover and be surprised, the shared desire to seek out new revelations in the text – all these create a different kind of contact between the learners. The extraordinary opportunity to encounter people who are so different from me and to create such a great closeness and affinity with them changed my life. I became part of Elul’s open and mixed community of religious and secular individuals, and all the various shades in between. I am no longer able to feel that I want to be part of a monolithic community. ■

Rebecca Lillian

Mapping Our Jewish Journey with Limmud

Limmud, an international values-based adult Jewish learning experience, was initiated by a small, grass-roots group of British Jews in 1980. Today, it is a global Jewish phenomenon run by at least 3,000 volunteers across 80 communities in 41 countries. Its mission is simply a promise: "Wherever you are on your Jewish Journey, Limmud will take you one step further." Rabbi Rebecca Lillian reports from Malmö, Sweden.

Just about everything I believe about Jewish solidarity I have learned by watching the Limmud core values in action as a "volunticipant" (volunteer/participant) with various Limmud International groups around the world. I've held volunteer leadership roles with teams in two very diverse locations, and participated in Limmud events put on by half a dozen other teams. This I do despite the fact that I am a Jewish educator by profession – or perhaps also because of it. Limmud offers an unparalleled opportunity to follow the Talmudic dictum to "look out and see what the people do."

What the Limmudniks do is transcend borders respectfully. Rather than pretend that Jewish solidarity could ever come from creating a "Jewish learning without borders" sort of enterprise, Limmud honors the many and varied borders that might divide Jews. It then offers us the tools, the vocabulary, and the meeting space needed to bridge these gaps. The Limmud mission and values are the key to the tool kit.

I witnessed this in action in December 2008 at the annual residential Limmud Conference in the UK. Since the event coincided with the frightening first days of Operation Cast Lead, the Israeli ambassador to the UK was invited to facilitate some special sessions, which were in addition to the many diverse sessions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that were already on the program. One of these was a performance by a comedian I had not heard of, which turned out to include an ardent critique of Israel, Zionism, and the "special relationship" between Israel and the USA. At none of these sessions was any view delegitimized or attacked, let alone any presenter interrupted or jeered; neither did I witness any pejorative behaviors at other sessions that might have been divisive, whether the potential contention was about interfaith marriage, feminism, LBGT rights, or gefilte fish recipes. These are the Limmud values in action.

This values-based adult Jewish learning experience was initiated by a small, grass-roots group of British Jews in 1980. Today, Limmud is a global Jewish phenomenon run by at least 3,000 volunteers across 80 communities in 41 countries. Its mission is simply a promise: "Wherever you are on your Jewish Journey, Limmud will take you one step further." Its method for ensuring that this happens is so effective and inspiring that new branches spring up every year.

Limmud is based upon learning, of course, but its mandate for adult Jewish education is as broad as it is deep. This is exemplified by the innovation that everyone should be a student and anyone can be a teacher; therefore, all presenters are also active participants. At one session, for example, you might be studying biblical narrative with Aviva Zornberg. Two hours later, she is sitting next to you while a young graduate student teaches about Hollywood's portrayal of Jewish families. Neither are all teachers academics or rabbis. A college student taught one of my most memorable sessions, on the art of henna among Mizrahi women.

The custom at Limmud is that everyone is on a first-name basis, so my friend's 13-year-old daughter doesn't realize that the person she is discussing Yehuda Amichai's poetry with over dinner is a well-known professor at Hebrew University. This relaxed atmosphere encourages everyone to ask serious questions, and to answer them candidly – in learning sessions, at meals, and over late-night drinks.

Rebecca Lillian lives in Malmö, where she wears many hats: rabbi, teacher, writer/editor, project manager for a social cohesion initiative called Open Skåne, and, of course, Limmud volunteer.

Limmud's mandate for adult Jewish education is as broad as it is deep: Adam Moscoe of Limmud Ottawa, teaching about Jews and musical theater at Limmud Warwick UK, December 2014.

At the most recent Limmud Conference, I was enjoying a few "l'chaims" with two Modern Orthodox rabbis. I was surprised by their comments about what some Orthodox communities in both the UK and North America are doing to reach out to Jews from Orthodox backgrounds who are intermarried. After saying good night to them, I joined a discussion with Jews from South Africa, Israel, and Canada on how Limmud fulfills Mordecai Kaplan's vision of Judaism as a civilization. Then a few of us wandered into a comedy improv workshop in which one of the participants had been my Talmud teacher earlier the same day.

If this happened only once a year, dayenu. But given that these learning conferences are all volunteer-driven and take months to plan, the values on which they are based are experienced daily by the cadres of volunteers that create Limmud events worldwide.

The effect this is having on the tiny Jewish communities in Copenhagen, Denmark, and neighboring Malmö, Sweden, is revolutionary. When I first arrived in the area in 2011, the only organized Jewish activity that bridged these two cities (which are 30 minutes apart) was the occasional youth group event. Individually, the Danish and the southern Swedish Jewish communities were each painfully fractured. Members of sub-groups (religious vs. secular; Progressive vs. Orthodox; native-born vs. immigrant . . . ad nauseum) knew nothing about one another except for conventionally held, rumour-based notions. Now Øresunds Limmud, a Swedish-Danish regional Limmud group, is finalizing plans for its fourth annual event. The team is comprised of Danes and Swedes (native-born and immigrant) ranging in age from 30-something to 70-something, spanning Jewish practice from self-identified-secular to shomer Shabbat and kashrut, diverging in Jewish knowledge from convert-in-progress to Jewish studies scholar, and differing in political perspective from far left to center-right.

I laughed and cried through a riveting session on "What is the one thing that unites the Jewish people?" The teacher's theory was that only the need to debate and dispute with other Jews is what all Jews have in common . . . The breadth of his evidence was compelling

Last year, at our Limmud event in Malmö, I taught on a favorite topic – reading the Megillah, the Scroll of Esther, as a comedy. A woman attended my session after leading her own conversation about secular Jewish identity. She told me that she hadn't realized that discussing Biblical texts could be so much fun, because she would never attend a study circle at a synagogue. We both laughed. And I laughed and cried through a riveting session on "What is the one thing that unites the Jewish people?" The teacher's theory was that only the need to debate and dispute with other Jews is what all Jews have in common. If that is so – and the breadth of his evidence was compelling – then the Limmud value that only arguments "for the sake of heaven" are welcome, will continue to unite more Jews of all stripes.

Some Limmudniks say that Limmud celebrations of Jewish learning and culture are like summer camp for adults. I respectfully disagree. Jewish camp was a highlight of my youth, but there I only met kids close to my age, from my own youth movement. Limmud creates cross-communal and inter-generational experiences – not by pretending that there are no borders between various types of Jews, but by believing that a values-driven map of what Jewish solidarity could look like will actually get us there. And it does.

Yehudah Mirsky

How Do We Want to Live?

The Meanings of Jewish Belonging in Our Time

The identity crises of Jews and Judaism arose amid the collapse of the traditional frameworks in the modern era, which left us bereft of the "meaningful belonging" that is the bedrock of mutual responsibility. The following are excerpts from the reflections of rabbi, activist and scholar Yehudah Mirsky on questions of identity, solidarity, and faith.

Pre-modern Jewish life was structured around the organized community, the kehillah. Then, beginning in the late eighteenth century, and with growing speed and scale through the nineteenth, a variety of factors – the rise of the European nation-state and its difficulty integrating national and religious minorities, and the rise of modern philosophy and science and their undermining of religious tradition – together undid the frameworks of meaningful belief and belonging that had long been inescapable for Jew and gentile alike. With this steady collapse, fundamental questions of both organization and existence were blown wide open. Much of modern Jewish life has been an attempt to recreate the kehillah in which Jewish life was embedded and intuitively made sense.

Writing in 1897 and in response to the First Zionist Congress, Ahad Ha-Am put his finger on the problem with characteristic elegance (the Jewish question so preoccupying Europe was really two questions) – that of securing Jewish physical, social and economic survival and well-being, and of providing a new foundation for the meaning of Jewish existence; as he put it: the problem of the Jews, and the problem of Judaism. And, he pointedly asserted, while the new political Zionism put forth by Theodor Herzl was perhaps an answer to the first, it neglected the second.

Today we are all living different answers – political, religious, cultural – to the problem of the Jews and of Judaism and the new forms of belief and community that they called into being. The tensions within and among these answers and their proponents were reshaped and even radicalized by two once-unimaginable events: the Holocaust, and the creation of the State of Israel. Whatever one thinks of the State of Israel, it has taken many unexpected turns and stirred as many questions as answers. The debates surrounding it are not only arguments over politics and power, but also about how to live as Jews, as Israelis, as members of humanity.

* * *

Israel, by definition, figures prominently in the various permutations of Jewish belonging and in very different ways. For Diaspora Jews, Israel is one possible component of their Jewishness; for some it is central and even at times the core element of their Jewishness, while for others it can range from less central to irrelevant or even serve as a reference point for a Jewish identity defined by anti-Zionism. Similarly, while for Israeli Jews, Jewishness frames their lives overall, their relationships to Jewish religion or historical culture are often complex. (And Israel's Jewishness figures very differently for its non-Jewish citizens.) Like Israel for Diaspora Jews, Jewishness for Israeli Jews varies from central to not figuring at all, while others define themselves as avowedly un- or anti-Jewish (at least, staunchly unidentified with Judaism as a religion).

And one more thing: Diaspora Jews (at least the organized Jewish community) need Israel for their cultural – and, perhaps physical – survival in ways that Israeli Jews simply do not. Meanwhile, the meaning of Jewishness is as contested in Israel as it is anywhere, and the stakes are very high, for Jewish and non-Jewish Israelis, for Jews around the world, and for those on the receiving end of Israeli power.

"The task in the meantime is to assert one's own vision of Jewishness, expressing the deepest stirrings of one's own soul." Maya Zack, "The Shabbat Room 4: The Mystical Shabbat," detail from The Shabbat Room, 2013 (Room installation; four lambda prints). The project was commissioned and developed for the core exhibition of The Jewish Museum Vienna and has been on exhibit since 2013.

Once upon a time, belonging was not a choice, or at least not the choice it now is in the Western World. For all we know, that may come back, but for now, we are fated to choose

It's all such a complicated and thorny thing, this sifting through of Jewish meaning and belonging in our time.

* * *

Why do we persist in it? Because in the end we all have to come from, and build our lives, somewhere, on the ground, and in our minds and hearts. The free-floating, unattached individual is a myth, dangerous and seductive. To deny that we are all born into experiences and language shaped by others is foolishness – although to deny the reality of

Yehudah Mirsky, an American Israeli, served in the US State Department's Human Rights Bureau, is associate professor at Brandeis University's Schusterman Center for Israel Studies, and is the author of *Rav Kook, Mystic in a Time of Revolution* (Yale University Press, 2014).

Dedicated to the students of Brandeis University who organized the Now Project Conference at which some of these ideas were first presented, in the fall of 2013.

our abilities to choose is a dangerous illusion. If we do not take hold of and choose how we navigate our belongings – of ethnicity and kin, of civic engagement, of transcendent belief, value and longing – others will be happy to deny them to us, or to manage them for profit or power.

If choosing an identity seems like a contradiction in terms, that is because in many ways it *is*. Indeed, "Jewish identity" is in some ways a kind of ghost, a marker of things left behind – halakha, community, God. Or at least God encountered, experienced, revered, obeyed or denied through the inescapable framework of a community. Yet God, or at least theology, is inescapable, since we need some kind of grounding, some kind of ultimacy, to shape our choices and commitments over time. This is hard to say in the wake of the Holocaust – indeed it often seems as though one reason that the Holocaust looms so large in contemporary thought is precisely because its sheer immensity and incomprehensibility and loss, as terrifying as they are, make it the only thing large enough to take the place of God.

In our world today, we talk a great deal about identity – which is not an obvious thing to do. Our concern with identity, talking about what it is and what we mean by "identity" is itself a sign that our identity, whatever it is, has become unstable. Indeed, the very term "identity" entered Jewish life only a few decades ago, in the sweep of Jewish history – at most, the day before yesterday

* * *

God is, of course, larger than us all, than our questions or our answers, or our theologies. To commit to a life lived in and with God is a choice everyone must make for him or herself. The meaning of that choice is not saying "yes" or "no" to abstract propositions, but of choosing to live in relation to Him and to communities, of the living and the dead, and to do all that living in communities entails.

* * *

What sort of community is a Jewish community? It is a curious mix of family, society and the cosmos. It is a large family, with all the familial reality of flesh and blood and birth and death, of hard love and hard obligation. It is a family that fosters its own kind of society. And it is a family living for universal truths – of ethics, of the fact of our created-ness, the creatureliness of our being – that aim to speak to, and heal, all of humankind.

This thinking of Jewishness as family has many implications. Families offer shelter and they confer responsibility. In the case of conversion, for example, one becomes part of a new family, and in so doing takes responsibility for the new family's members, and they take responsibility for him or her.

Thinking of Jewishness as a universally-minded family also sets the terms for many of the crucial theological dilemmas arising from the complicated marriage of the universal and the particular. I can indeed care more in some ways about the immediate welfare of my own family than that of another – but nobody would imagine that I am thus relieved of my responsibility for the welfare of the members of other families.

In Israel, the danger to Judaism is that the particular will overwhelm the universal, by virtue of Jewish majority, and through the military conflicts besetting the state, becoming bitterly or even proudly chauvinistic. In America, it's the reverse: the universal overwhelming the particular, with Jewishness becoming synonymous with middle-class life, even to the vanishing point. The possibility of dissolution, of becoming just one more set of tiles in the great American mosaic, poses the danger of idolatry, of losing the possibility of judgments standing outside and beyond ourselves. And in Israel, the possibility of chauvinism is itself a temptation of idolatry, the absolutization of blood and ethnicity and kinship in their own terms instead of ethical values which of necessity point beyond all our affective ties and our lives.

* * *

How to think all this through in a fast-changing and bewildering present? To borrow a line from the rock group R.E.M.: "Talk about the passion."

When we look back at the fierce ideological struggles that marked Jewry up until the Holocaust, one thing becomes clear: the protagonists who mattered most, whose words are still worth reading whatever the historical verdict – cared passionately about Jewish physical and cultural survival, and staked their lives on their visions of how to secure it.

That passion served to anchor the reflections of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hacohen Kook (1865-1935), founder of the modern Chief Rabbinate of Israel and one of the greatest Jewish leaders and thinkers of modern times, who, among many other things, thought through the meaning of Jewish argumentation to its foundations.

In a justly famous set of reflections written around 1912-13, Rav Kook points to three distinct dimensions of Jewish identity: nation (group, ethnicity or peoplehood), universal ethics, and the sacred. In pre-modern Jewish life, these all clustered together and reinforced each other. In modern times they split apart, each becoming the property of a specific party; in Kook's day, respectively, Zionists, Socialists, and Orthodoxy. These "camps" were not just different ways of addressing problems practically, they were vehicles of identity, of articulating and living different visions of Jewishness. But the one thing that they shared – to me, still the indispensable prerequisite to being part of the Jewish conversation today – was a passionate

Faith is indeed a narrow step, or, if you will, a very narrow bridge. Didier Ben Loulou, Jerusalem 2015

commitment to Jewish physical and cultural survival, each by its own lights.

For Rav Kook, the true meaning of the "sacred" is the ultimate unity of all three: Jewish peoplehood at once particular and universal and thus enacting God's being universal and particular, transcendent, and immanent.

The task in the meantime is to assert one's own vision of Jewishness, expressing the deepest stirrings of one's own soul, while recognizing the ultimate impartiality of one's own perspective and the inescapable need for the strivings of other Jews – including those with whom we disagree.

Something additional emerges from Rav Kook's ideas here, a workable sketch of what we mean by Jewishness, this thing we know in our bones yet struggle so hard to

What is this thing called identity? What do we mean when we talk about it? In conversation with colleagues some years ago, we hit on the notion of "meaningful belonging" – of my being connected to something else in ways that mean something to me, how I orient myself and determine my actions in the world, and how I choose to live

understand. It is an amalgam of 1) our primal ties to one another as a large family that loves to argue, but stays committed to one another's physical and sociocultural survival and well-being; 2) our commitments to the realization of our ideals in practice, and to ethics and

justice, within the Jewish world, and in our relations to human society as a whole. This includes enlightened self-interest with self-criticism of our own potential chauvinism, the bitter fruits of historical experience as a persecuted minority, and at the same time, recognition of our shared existence on the planet with other citizens of an evolving global society, and, for some, our beliefs in God as creator of humanity as a whole; and 3) our trying to live in the presence of the sacred, God, the spirit, that which ultimately vouchsafes the authenticity and meaning of our existence and our struggles – paradoxically, by pointing beyond it towards a distant horizon, never reachable, but nonetheless one whose silhouette gives us an orienting place to stand, a direction in which to move, and frames the rhythms of light and darkness in our world.

Moving to our day, Jewishness simultaneously affirms the global and the local, the universal and the particular, while lodging a permanent protest against the idea that any one particular identity, and any one – even universalist – ideology is the one-size-fits-all God-like answer to the human condition in all its diversity.

> We are the heirs of collapse. The sheer speed and extent to which traditional Jewish life came undone in the modern period is simply breathtaking. I often think that we aren't still shocked and awed by the changes of the nineteenth century only because of the mind-bending horror, and subsequent, painful achievements of the twentieth

Jewish global responsibility in our time, then, means preserving and protecting Jewish collective and individual flourishing (physical and cultural) alongside a commitment to human flourishing overall, with humility, and the recognition that we are ultimately serving ends larger than ourselves. Crucially, it means finding some way to manage and, ideally, benefit from, inevitable and deeply felt disagreements within the Jewish world.

And it necessitates hope – not as a passive wistfulness, or aesthetic pose, but as an active motive force in human history. It is the conviction that the things that we work for are worth working for – and that our struggles themselves have meaning.

Religion is how we approach people, things, and being. The key feature of monotheism is that you turn to the universe in the second person singular and say, "You."

That is a real leap of faith and one that does not suit everyone. But no matter what, there still abides the question of how best to live in a human world and face one another, and say, as fully and richly and as morally as we can, "You." How do we live in common as full human beings and in light of our ultimate values? And how do we do so with the humility that saves us from fanaticism and its violence?

* * *

Faith or fanaticism?

Abba Kovner, the poet, leader of the partisans of the Vilna Ghetto, and Israeli cultural luminary, once pointed out in the torturous conversations following the 1973 Yom Kippur War that history is made not by intellectuals but by men of faith. There is, he said, but a footstep's worth of difference between faith and fanaticism, but it is on that one step that the Jewish people built all that they have built in the Land of Israel (and, I would add, in the Diaspora, too). The problem today, he said, is that we are too intellectual (in the original Hebrew, hakhamim) to believe.

Are we? Perhaps it depends on the meaning of faith, which we can define as that on which one can build.

What is the difference between faith and fanaticism? Both the faithful and the fanatic ask themselves whether they are living up to their ideals. The difference is that the fanatic knows that his ideals are perfect as they are. The person of faith, by contrast, is willing to question his or her own ideals in light of other, competing, or even superior ideals, and to question the form of life to which he or she is committed – and never assumes that the fact of commitment makes him or her qualitatively better than all the rest.

Faith is indeed a narrow step, or, if you will, a very narrow bridge. Kovner pointed out that on one side of the gorge lies fanaticism; I would add that nihilism occupies the gorge's other side. Nihilism and fanaticism are, each in its own way, equally capable of crushing life. What keeps the person of faith from fanaticism is questioning; what keeps him or her from nihilism is the willingness to commit oneself and to act, in the teeth of questioning and doubt.

Again, the fundamental question is, as always, how do we want to live? In trying to answer, we dig down to our deepest commitments – moral, social, political, communal – the commitments and the institutions without which we cannot live and for which we may indeed be willing to die. I believe that in this post-metaphysical age, where even if God is still with us, nobody can claim with a clear conscience to be His designated representative or spokesman – if indeed He could even have such a thing; it is by digging into those commitments that we can find the footing, the courage to look at one another and at the universe and say, "You."

That is where our commitments, our willingness to take responsibility, will begin. That is where Judaism will begin, and that is where the dialogue of Judaisms between Israel and America and the rest of the Diaspora will begin, if it can begin at all. . . But then again, if we want to endure, it must. ■

Elisha Golani

The Rebellion of Renewal

Elisha Golani, 22, is the coordinator of a local branch of the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement in Jerusalem. Following are excerpts from an interview by Pua Hershlag.

We definitely aim high, in that we believe that we make a difference. Together, we aspire to create a foundation for the new society that we want to see in Israel. We choose to take a stand on various frontlines – against privatization, alienation and racism, against violence, against anti-democratic trends in Israeli society. We have made a choice to position ourselves at the center of society, at the heart of the conflicts. I am moved by the very possibility that our actions in society, including my own actions, will have a ripple effect and influence the reality in which we live.

Every generation speaks to its youth in tongues of fire – that is also Buber's teaching. It is difficult to say whether today's flames burn with a low intensity, or whether we are living at a fateful moment. In any case, it is clear that in today's society there are trends leading us towards the light and reverse trends leading towards darkness. Within this charged situation, it is important to remain undeterred in our striving for human liberation.

Human liberation is the basis for a sound society. It is not merely a personal quest for a more "correct" existence for oneself, but also a vision for changing the basic frameworks of our society, such as the labor market. We adhere to a Zionism of the kind that Herzl envisioned: a society where citizens and residents enjoy mutual responsibility – a multicultural space with the benefits of societal wealth and a sense of security. This touches on questions such as social rights, and the state's responsibility for its citizens. It is also a matter of partnership between individuals. A state is the broadest expression of mutual responsibility, arevut hadadit – a core value in Judaism. Government, in its various aspects, is the broadest foundation for partnership, for the expression of agreement and disagreement. It is also where various sectors meet and complexity comes into being.

Various states of awareness are drifting apart. I believe that if we don't act consciously to change these trends, we will wake up and find that we have split entirely into parallel experiences between which it will be very difficult to find a common denominator. I would like to ask: When will the time of meeting arrive?

Today it is very difficult to hold on to a utopian vision.

Elisha Golani: "We definitely aim high." | Photo: Yossi Zamir

There are so many contradictory trends in society that it is simply impossible to know if what we observe corresponds to reality. Does the government represent the people? Without optimism, however, we will not find the energy to invest the effort needed to bring about a change. This is an enormous challenge in a consumer society with branding and rating, rising nationalism, and a "smartphone" culture. Today there are children who have no need to be in contact with humans, and it is undeniably challenging to successfully combat the power and temptation of the technology and not lose values, companionship and conversation.

It is a conscious choice; to stick to optimism without despair, however, is no simple task. And one more thing: utopia is an ideal with no end. In Hashomer Hatzair, we still use an expression that the pioneers used: "the Nebo consciousness," referring to Mt. Nebo, from which Moses looked out on the Promised Land knowing he would never enter it. It refers to something you cannot sink into, a place you cannot settle, and that you can never reach. By the way, it's no easy thing for a young person to say, "What – we'll never get there?!" ■

Eretz Acheret (A Different Land) is a magazine and forum for the active and critical exploration of core issues in Israeli society, without preconception or bias. We believe that thoughtful discourse on the people and problems of Israel and the clarification of our values and goals as a society are integral and vital to the process of positive growth and social sustainability.