Jewish Identity and Identification: New Patterns, Meanings, and Networks

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The Jewish people today is mostly divided into two subpopulations: the Jews of Israel (~43%) and those of North America (~40%). They differ not just in the content of Jewish identity but in its very structure. Jewish identity in the Diaspora consists of voluntary religious and ethnic identification and solidarity. Alternatively, in Israel, while Jewish identity is of core importance, it is largely automatic. Its major implications have to do with language, territory, citizenship, and political membership. Reigning patterns of Jewish identity are now challenged by dissenting conceptions and emerging new forms. In order to make effective policy, decision makers must deepen their understanding of Jewish identity in each of the two main centers and confront the challenge of forming a common language to bridge these two disparate conceptions of Jewish identity.

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Jewish Identity and Identification in the Diaspora

For the last century the form and structure of modern Jewish identity was stable. This mainstream Jewish identity – 'Jewish civil religion' – is increasingly challenged, from one side, by the growing Haredi form of Jewish identification and, from the other, by increasing numbers of secular Jews, intermarried Jews, and those who claim not to identify as Jewish at all. Challenges to modern mainstream Jewish identity are also emerging as a result of a rupture between generations. Strong, established Jewish organizations continue to support mainstream patterns of identity. Yet, a younger generation, coming of age in a society dramatically affected by new technologies,

is exhibiting radically new configurations of Jewish identity: highly individualized, fragmented, or entirely self-fashioned. Traditional political allegiances of Jews are also changing. Mainstream Jewish identity has long been associated with political liberalism. But with the shift of Jews from 'outsiders' to 'insiders' with considerable economic and political resources, a Jewish conservative political identity is emerging. Both political identities are embedded in a Jewish intellectual and religious vision.

In this paper, we focus on three major issues:

Modern Mainstream Jewish Identity as Civil Religion. How does modern Jewish civil religion reshape older forms of Jewish identity? Do the Haredim take part in the Jewish civil religion? Do secular Jews? If not, what can be done to include them? Are there new patterns of Jewish identity, such as 'Judaism as civilization,' that could supplant the Jewish civil religion?

Generational Gaps and the Transition to a Network Society. Identificational shifts among the younger generation – from ethnic to cultural, from community-oriented to individualistic and customized – as well as the turning away from mainstream Jewish organizations toward alternatives may be, in part, a manifestation of the transition to a network society. How do we retain the advantages of networking while mitigating its disadvantages? How can we bring back the historical "added value" of belonging to a Jewish network larger than one's local circle in an era of global connectivity? Do we need a virtual porthole in which Jews participate in building hypothetical Jewish communities, new Jewish projects, or an ideal, partly virtual Jewish civilization?

Changing Political Affiliations and Alliances. Do the altered material and political circumstances of Jews entail a long-term shift from identification with the have-nots to identification with the haves? This is not only a tactical or strategic question, but it is also bound up with how Jews understand their Jewish identity. Is liberalism still compatible with Judaism? With Zionism? Is a free-market ideology compatible with the traditional emphasis on social justice?

The Jewish Civil Religion of Modernity

Dimensions of Jewish Identity: Interwoven or Distinct?

Three dimensions of Jewish collective identity – ethnic, political-national, and religious – are woven together in the biblical narrative of Jewish history. The people of Israel are a tribe of common descent that achieves a sacred dimension by entering into a covenant with God. In fulfillment of this covenant, the people enter the land of Israel and establish a polity. Thus, the biblical narrative assumes that Jewish collective identity will include a political or civic dimension. Until the advent of modernity – despite exile – the ethnic, religious, and political dimensions were conceived as inseparable from one another.

The unity of Jewish collective identity began to unravel with the advent of modernity. The first change was the separation of religious identity from civic and national identity. As Jews became citizens of modern Western nation-states, they began to identify – politically and nationally – with their countries of residence, not with a future messianic kingdom, nor even with fellow Jews in their bounded communities. Certainly, from the perspective of the state, they retained their Jewish identity only in connection to religion. They famously assumed the identity of "Germans or Frenchmen of the Mosaic faith."

National Jewish ethnic identity did not, however, entirely disappear. Instead, it was channeled in ways amenable to citizenship in the new nation-states. The major channel was in helping other Jews prepare themselves for modernity and transition into modern civic equality. This aid took many forms: providing a modern education to Jewish children in Eastern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East so they could enter the modern economy and integrate into emerging modern states; combating anti-Semitism; assisting immigration to the West; and alleviating poverty. This solidarity was pioneered by Jewish self-help organizations such as Alliance Israelite Universelle, ORT, and, ultimately, the Joint Distribution Committee, the American Jewish Committee, and the Bnei Brith Anti-Defamation League. Eventually, it came to also include protecting and nurturing the Zionist Yishuv in Eretz Yisrael and the nascent State of Israel.

Jewish identity in modern Western societies achieved a complex structure. Officially, it consisted of a privatized religious identity. In reality, Jewish identity included an important ethno-national element. This element was depoliticized at first and often

disguised as "philanthropy." After the Second World War as Jews began to feel more secure in their American membership, they began to organize politically as an interest group. The emergence of AIPAC is one manifestation of this development.

This trans-national Jewish solidarity aimed at sustaining a flourishing Jewish life became the basis of what we term the 'modern Jewish civil religion.' The term 'civil religion,' popularized by Robert Bellah, was intended to capture the links between religion, morality, and politics in the modern nation-state. In 1987, the sociologist Jonathan Woocher argued that Jews, as a group, also have a civil religion.[1] We agree. But, in contrast to Woocher's formulation emphasizing a set of civic tenets held largely by American Jews essentially uninterested in traditional Jewish religion, we believe that the basis of the Jewish civil religion is an ethnic identity that is sacralized. In line with Jewish tradition itself, which treats Jewish peoplehood as a sacred value, the new Jewish ethno-national solidarity that emerged in modernity was also sacralized.

While non-sacralized ethnic identity rests upon sentiment (and sentimentality), sacralized ethnic identity has a normative component to it – one ought to identify as a Jew! Jewish ethnic identity is different from other ethnic forms of identification. White ethnics in the United States have a non-sacralized ethnic identity. They may have sentiments for old Ireland or Sicily, but in the late modern American reality such sentiments disappear quickly. Ethnic identity among Jews also rests upon such sentiments (Jewish food and Jewish mothers, for example). It goes much further than that however, because Jewish ethnic affiliation is deemed a normative good. Rates of Jewish intermarriage, while alarming to some policy makers, are low in comparison to other ethnics.[2] The sacred, normative character of Jewish ethnic affiliation may explain this.

In the mid-twentieth century, Jewish identity in the United States crystallized into a pattern similar to American Protestant denominationalism.[3] At the core there is a civil religion dedicated to political, economic, and social flourishing. This civil religion has *internalized* sacred values. Participation in this Jewish civil religion, with its sacred character, is the real marker of Jewish identity. Since the civil religion itself is sacralized, participation in formal Jewish religious practice and organizations becomes voluntary – a matter of individual choice and preference. Most American Jews do belong to formal religious organizations – in part because such belonging signifies the sacred character of Jewish ethnic affiliation, and in part because being Jewish is officially a religious designation, and so, it is expected of them by society at large. But one could

be a good Jew if one supported Israel and gave to the UJA, even if one ate lobster and spent little or no time in a synagogue.

Recently, the focus of Jewish civil religion has shifted from exclusive interest in defending against anti-Semitism and anti-Israel activities and in socio-economic advancement to "Jewish continuity": that the new generations should replicate this sacralized ethnic affiliation and solidarity. This new focus has produced a host of educational initiatives (including Israel travel education). Yet, the aim of these programs is not knowledge of Jewish texts and religious practices, but rather, Jewish ethnic identification and solidarity.

Membership in this Jewish civil religion stretches from the Modern Orthodox to the Reconstructionist and Reform. They all affirm the sacred value of Jewish ethnic affiliation expressed in socio-political solidarity and toleration of differing levels of religious practice. The organizational loci of the Jewish civil religion are the large Jewish organizations and the "mainline" Conservative, Reform and Modern Orthodox synagogues.

Contemporary Challenges to Mainstream Jewish Civil Religion: Too Much Religion or Too Little?

One major challenge to the mainstream civil religion is from the Haredim. The increasingly visible growth of the Haredi community has given this challenge a revived importance.[4] Haredim do accept the Jewish identity of individual non-Haredi Jews, provided that such Jews fulfill the criteria of the halacha. However, they do not accept the sacred value of the Jewish civil religion. Jewish political and socio-economic flourishing do not really interest the Haredim. Even their interest in defending against anti-Semitism is minimal. They don't participate in the Jewish civil religion. Very few of them donate money to these causes or are members of the federations or self-defense organizations. What interests the Haredim is punctilious observance of the halacha and Haredi lifestyle, and financial support for Haredi religious and educational projects. For mainstream Jewish civil religion, sacredness is a function of ethnic solidarity. For Haredim, the opposite is true. Ethnic solidarity is a function of the halacha or the sacred dimension enjoining one to express or practice such solidarity (e.g. saving Jewish lives.) While the Haredim are not fully sectarian – they *do not* claim that they are the only true Jews– they do claim that *their* collective endeavors are the only legitimate Jewish collective endeavors.

What, if anything, could be done to mitigate this sort of sectarianism? If intervention is not possible or desirable, should participants in the mainstream form of Jewish identity, nonetheless, continue a relationship that is asymmetric?

From precisely the opposite direction, recent survey data indicate an increasing number of Jews are ceasing to identify religiously. They indicate when queried that they have no religion or are "secular." Russian-speaking Jews, for example, display little interest in the Jewish religion, and certainly not in religious institutional life, although they identify strongly with the Jewish people. Moreover, the denominational style espoused by the Jewish civil religion is foreign to them. Russian-speaking Jews tend to assume that that there is one "authentic" Jewish religion, even if they do not wish to follow its precepts. Is formal religion, then, an unnecessary component of a sacralized Jewish identity?

Does the rising number of young secular Jews point to a weakening of Jewish identity itself? Do these Jews, in fact, more weakly identify with both the Jewish religion and with Jewish ethnicity? Especially salient in this regard are the intermarried. Intermarriage produces low Jewish ethnic social capital – a low level of social relations with other Jews and Jewish friends. It also produces low Jewish religious identification. To attract more intermarried families, should religious and ethnic identity be formally separated?

Can the texts and traditions of Judaism take the place of belief and formal religion? Many Jews view Judaism's texts and traditions as a rich cultural heritage and, more pertinently, as a present-day resource for how to order social and interpersonal life. Both in Israel and the Diaspora the notion of "Judaism as a civilization" awards the social message of Judaism and the ordering of interpersonal relations a centrality in Jewish culture. This is potentially one of the most important cultural developments of the past decade; new ways of advancing it should be deeply considered.

Generational Shifts in the Content of Jewish Identity – A Jewish Identity for the Network Society?

Trends Among Younger Jews

There is a marked generational shift in Jewish identification from religious to secular, ethnic to cultural, community-oriented to individualistic and universal. Younger people choose how to express their identity and this is frequently individual and idiosyncratic, often with musical, artistic, and literary materials. Younger American Jews frequently embrace the particulars of Jewish culture but reject tribal "us/them" configurations of ethnicity. Is Jewish identity losing its normative character as a result of these developments?

The orientation toward global social justice is related to this issue. The classical Jewish civil religion, while liberal in political orientation (see below) was almost exclusively concerned with Jewish defense and advancement. Many younger Jews find this too confining. They wish to express their Jewishness through social justice work globally, and have created innovative Jewish social justice startups to do so. What, if any, are the implications of this for traditional Jewish solidarity?

Another, overlapping set of challenges concerns the institutional loci of Jewish identity. Many young Jews do not join mainline Jewish organizations––federations and synagogues (especially Conservative synagogues). At the same time, they are finding new venues to express their Jewishness. Very often, these venues include the significant participation of non-Jews. They are not membership organizations, but rather, "alternative" sites of artistic, musical, and literary expression: concerts, clubs, bars, etc.

Transitioning to a Network Society

We wish to explore whether these generational changes are manifestations of a larger phenomenon: the transition to a network society, which has identifiable and predictable features. Has this pattern of joining organizations and finding new Jewish venues been influenced by the "network" paradigm organizing production, firms, and general human interaction? Networks are opposed to top-down, command structured, centralized bureaucratic organizations and institutions. General Motors is not a network. Neither is the modern bureaucratic nation-state. Networks are "flat," decentralized, often without true collective action and leadership – initiative can come from anywhere. Networks emphasize that interaction is based upon material

or ideational interests and is very often ad-hoc and short term. This paradigm has been especially prominent in high-tech industries and touches almost everyone who has used the Internet. Young people who grew up online with the new social media will not be interested in joining traditional one-size-fits-all, large, highly-structured, and hierarchical Jewish organizations (such as federations). They will be interested, instead, in projects based on shared interests and mutual quests for meaning.

At the same time, networks and networking also provide opportunities. The Internet and its social media allow young Jews to connect, especially marginal and peripheral Jews who cannot have or do not wish to have ongoing social connections to Jewish organizations, institutions, and social frameworks.

In addition to questions of membership, affiliation and association, the networking paradigm also seems to impact Jewish identity construction itself. In contrast to traditional media, such as television, which played an enormous role in constructing collective identity, the Internet encourages individualization and customization in identity construction. Individual identity-crafting emphasizes a customized and fragmented identity. Recent surveys (including that of the New York Federation) have indicated the significant incidence of individually constructed, customized, and fragmented Jewish identities, and a rising number of unconventional identity configurations (including identifying as Jewish even though lacking any connection to Judaism through birth or conversion).

The increasing customization of Jewish identity is a formidable challenge to maintaining a collective Jewish identity, especially in the Diaspora. While Jews will continue to express a Jewish identity, they will identify differently with various dimensions of Judaism and there will not necessarily be an overlap or common core.

The policy question can be simply stated: How do we retain the advantages of networking while mitigating its disadvantages? Because Jewish society operated as a global, networked society historically, it has traditions on which it can draw to thicken the idea of a Jewish network. At the same time, new social networks have diminished, if not erased, a traditional "added value" of Jewish belonging: having a Jewish network larger than one's local acquaintances. How can we best bring back the added value of belonging to a Jewish network? Do we need a virtual porthole in which Jews participate in building communities, new Jewish projects, or an ideal, virtual Jewish civilization?

The Jewish People and Shifting Political Allegiances – Between the Haves and the Have-Nots

Over the last several decades, Jewish support for conservative and neo-conservative political positions has increased. A number of prominent U.S. Jews have endeavored to rally Jewish support for the Republican Party. Beginning in the 1970s, several Israeli governments – both left and right – and leading political figures, too, have appeared closer to the Republicans than the Democrats.

Beyond party politics, these developments raise a larger question: To what extent is the Jewish people shifting positions in the world? For the past 250 years, since Moses Mendelssohn came as a teenager to Berlin, Jews have positioned themselves as change advocates, as part of the great camp of have-nots. Until the second half of the second century, Jews largely lacked basic civil and human rights, were targets of persecution and genocide, were largely without economic opportunity, and did not posses their own state or exercise political national self-determination. Those factors, together with aspects of their religious tradition, disposed Jews toward new political and economic orders with a re-distribution of rights, full political membership, and economic resources and opportunities. They favored coalitions with other oppressed groups––racial and ethnic minorities, workers, and other economic underclasses. Many Jews supported some variant of democratic liberalism or socialism.

Today, the vast majority of Jews live in the most advanced Western countries and, for the most part, are part of the upper education and income sectors in each country. Jews also possess a successful nation-state with a strong military and economy, which has a European per capita income. Today, Israeli and Diaspora Jews are challenged by groups claiming to have not––Palestinians who want their own state on Israeli-held territory, the Muslim minority in Europe, and, to some extent, by black and Hispanic minorities in the U. S.

Do the altered material and political circumstances of Jews entail a long-term shift in orientation from identification with the have-nots to identification with the haves? Does it entail a concurrent de-valuing of the have-not position and a new orientation toward maintaining the status quo?[5]

These questions are not only tactical or strategic but also go to how Jews understand themselves, their self-identity. On this, Jews seem to be divided. Certainly, a significant number of younger and older Jews see Judaism as bound up with social justice and

social and political change. Yet, there is an increasing number of Jewish intellectuals and agenda-setting philanthropists and organizations promoting a conservative agenda (in terms of economic policy or foreign and defense policy) in America and in Israel, which is equally rooted in an intellectual vision of Judaism. This intellectual vision emphasizes the importance of the religious dimension of Judaism in shaping virtuous citizens and the importance of its texts and traditions, most notably the Hebrew Bible, as a source of moral values for the nation-state.[6]

For the time being there seem to be various Jewish ideological universes in which the common currency is mutual de-legitimization. (leftist or liberal Jews are labeled self-hating or anti-Zionist, while conservative Jews are described variously as corrupt, anti-democratic, or, if they are Orthodox, "fundamentalist and fanatically messianic.") Yet, from the standpoint of understanding and strengthening Jewish identity and identification, it is worth asking: Is liberalism compatible with the texts and traditions of Judaism? Is liberalism compatible with Zionism? Is a free-market ideology compatible with the traditional emphasis on social justice?

Perhaps one basis of commonality between liberals and conservatives can be found in the Judaism-as-civilization approach alluded to above. Both right and left can share the notion that at the center of Judaism lies its social message. Within that common agreed upon space, liberals and conservatives could argue about the essence of that social message and its political and social implications.

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Israeli Jewish Identity

Majority Pattern of Identity

Jewish identity is extremely important to Israeli Jews, but its significance is radically different from the significance of Jewish identity to Diaspora and especially American Jews. First and foremost, for Israelis, Jewishness ensures full membership in the Israeli political and social collectivity. As such, Jewishness is juxtaposed to membership in and identification with the main minority culture in Israel: i.e., Arabs. The current reality is that the life chances – i.e., education, employment, and housing – of Jewish Israeli citizens are better than those of the Arabic-speaking minority in Israel (Arab Muslim, Christian, Druze, or Bedouin). Thus, it is highly desirable to identify as Jewish. Jewishness confers concrete political, social, and economic benefits such as access to jobs, including in the defense and high-tech sectors, and access to fully-funded schools, and protects against various forms of intrusion, such as identity checks. As the marker of the majority culture, Jewishness also includes an important symbolic dimension. The language, official state holidays and symbols all reflect Jewishness. The state is defined in Israeli basic laws (which have constitutional status) as "a Jewish and democratic state."

Identity is often constructed over and against the other. Whereas for much of Jewish history, Jews constructed themselves over and against Christians and Christian culture, in the case of Israeli Jews, the other is Arab. How then does an Israeli citizen signal to others and herself that she is Jewish? Many of the most important signals are connected to language: speaking Hebrew with an Israeli accent or a recognizably Jewish non-Arabic accent, such as Russian or American. Some of the most important signals would not be recognized as specifically Jewish by Diaspora Jews, such as a Western, urban habitus – that is, a set of dispositions. Israeli Jews (especially non-Haredi Jews) conduct and regulate their behavior (distance between people, tone of voice, relations between the sexes, etc.) in a manner closer to the Western or modern European norm. In contrast, the Arab-speaking minorities exhibit bodily and emotional dispositions closer to the Middle Eastern norm.

Thus, certain groups, such as some of the Russian immigrants of the 1990s, even though they initially lacked some basic characteristics of Jews (such as the Jewish religion and a Jewish language) and even though their Jewish identity may have been problematic on religious or ethnic grounds, were accepted into the majority

Israeli-Jewish collectivity on the basis of their Western, rather than Middle Eastern, identity.

What, however, is the *content* of Israeli Jewishness and what is its meaning for Israeli Jews? Among the majority of Israeli Jews, its primary meaning seems to be that one identifies with the Jewish state and values the state's well-being. Israeli Jews largely see themselves as partaking in the effort and responsibility to maintain and cultivate the state, and to share in the trust and social capital necessary for this effort. Some Orthodox Israeli Jewish groups would formulate their commitment to Jewishness differently, mainly in terms of loyalty to the Jewish religious tradition. Some (mainly Haredim) would also formulate their attachment to Israel differently – not in terms of the well-being of the state but in terms of the well-being of the Jewish community living in Israel, or in terms of the well-being of individual Jews.

With the exception of these Orthodox Jews, then, the primary meaning of Jewishness for the majority of Israeli Jews is *context-bound:* it has to do with their life in the State of Israel. This, along with other factors, probably contributes to the finding that about half of all Israeli Jews who move abroad do not have any contact with the local Jewish community. Many of them do, however, constitute communities of expat Israeli Jews in which they share attachment to Israeli life (news, sports, culture).

Important Subdivisions

Despite broad commonalities, Israeli Jews have important sub-divisions in terms of life-style and geographic origin.

Veteran Ashkenazic Population – This population historically constituted the political and economic state-building elites and leadership. Today, this population is still over-represented in the academic, legal, and economic elites, but ethnic origin continuously plays a smaller role in the constitution of these elites. A very large proportion of this population defines itself a "secular."

Haredi Population (about 8%) – This population understands Jewish identity as bound up with the strict observance of traditional Jewish law. Historically, they were opposed or indifferent to the creation of the State of Israel, arguing that such a project was either opposed or irrelevant to "true Judaism." Today, they constitute a separate enclave in Israeli society. A very large majority of Haredi males under age 35 have claimed exemption from the Army on the basis that "Torah study is their vocation." Above the age of 35, about 50% have not done any military service. Since those who

claim "Torah study is their vocation" have not been allowed – by law – to work, Haredi males are very much under-represented in the labor force. As a result, Haredi communities have high poverty levels. In recent years, small but significant numbers of Haredi males have started to both work and serve in the IDF. The law exempting men from military service on the basis that "Torah study is their vocation" expired on August 1, 2012. This may have far-reaching implications for Haredi life. There are both Ashkenazic and Sephardic Haredi populations. Haredim are largely xenophobic and tend to align themselves with right-wing political forces.

Religious Zionists - Religious Zionists (around 12-15%), in contrast to Haredim, attempt to integrate Orthodox Judaism and modern Israeli Jewish nationalism. They assign religious value to nation building activities such as settlement, military service, economic development, and even the cultivation of national Hebrew culture. For many Religious Zionists, the primary instrument for the explicit sacralization of Jewish nationalism is the project of settling and annexing "Greater Israel" (Judea and Samaria and the Golan). Through this project, both the Jewish religion and the Jewish nation (identical in their eyes) are to reach ultimate realization. They tend to view Israeli governments and population sectors willing to relinquish parts of Greater Israel in the context of a peace process as betraying the Jewish nation and the Jewish religion. Because of their high commitment to the national collectivity, they are increasingly prominent in collective national projects such as the IDF.

Traditionalists (Masoratim) – Traditionalists are known by a "flexible" or individual choice-based observance of Jewish religious practice. The most famous example is going to synagogue on Shabbat morning and then driving to a football game or the beach. Yet traditionalists affirm that Orthodox Jewish practice is the only "proper" or legitimate form of Jewish practice, and are largely opposed to non-Orthodox practices regarding women, gays, and social issues. About 80% of traditionalists are of Middle Eastern or North African origin. Data from focus groups and interviews suggest that traditionalists view themselves as belonging to a sacred ethno-national collective – the Jewish people. The Jewish people as *collective* must observe the Torah and the traditional commandments. This is accomplished when the authorized representatives of the Jewish people – leading rabbis – keep the Torah in a strict and saintly fashion. Individual Jews show their adherence to the sacred collective by selectively keeping commandments. Political ethno-national solidarity is a very high value for traditionalists.

Jews from Russia and the Former Soviet Union – In the 1990s, over a million immigrants came to Israel from Russia and the former Soviet Union. Many members of this aliyah came with very high educational credentials and professional training and have provided Israel with a technological and economic boost. The Russian Israeli-Jewish community is unusual insofar as it retained its orientation to the Russian language and culture. This aliyah also contains many who were atheistic and anti-religious. About 30% of this immigration were not Jewish by halachic standards; being Jewish for much of the Russian olim is a socio-economic or national category. As recent survey data has shown however, in the past twenty years Russian immigrants have assimilated Israeli norms regarding affiliation and attitude to religion. The political party most identified with the Russian immigrants, Yisrael Beiteinu, affirms that religion is a core component of Jewish identity yet it should be subordinated to the national component. Thus, it wishes to streamline conversion processes for Russian olim who are not halachically Jewish.

Fault-Lines in Jewish Identity

There are two major fault-lines in Jewish identity; the first centers on the relationship between religion and nationalism, the second on the relationship between ethnicity and modern civic nationalism.

Religion and Nationalism. As noted, certain groups (the Haredim and some members of the historic nation-building elite associated with Labor Zionism) have viewed traditional religion and modern national renewal as opposed to one another. The historic elite viewed traditional Jewish religion as too connected to the Galut and its perversions, and thought it should be jettisoned to create the new national Jew. In contrast, both traditionalists and Religious Zionists, in one fashion or another, see a connection between nationalism and Religion. (Shas, the Sephardic Haredi movement, straddles a position between the anti- or non-Zionist Ashkenazic Haredim and its traditionalist Mizrahi constituency.) Recently, however, a small but growing and important group of academic and social elites has been trying to unearth a renewed Jewish culture – culled from traditional Jewish sources – appropriate for a modern Jewish state, yet not identical to the militant religious nationalism of Religious Zionism. This group subscribes to the notion of "Judaism as a civilization." They would assign the social message of Judaism and the ordering of interpersonal relations a centrality in this Jewish civilizational culture. Once again, one of the most important cultural developments of the past decade.

Ethnicity and Civic Identity. Important historical figures and streams within Zionism (including, to a certain extent, Theodore Herzl) viewed Zionism in revolutionary terms: Zionism would be a negation and sublimation of traditional Jewish sacred ethnic identity. Traditional Jewish religious identity held that there were deep, even ontological, differences between Jews and gentiles. This would be overcome by the "normal" existence of the Jewish state. Jewish apartness was to be transmuted into the cultural differences every nation has: language, literature, art, citizenship, etc. In other words, Jews as a normal people are basically the same as the French, Czechs and Canadians. It is only because they live in their own country that they have their own language, literature, and culture.

According to this line of thought, Zionism and the Jewish state constitute a *break* with the Jewish past and traditional Jewish identity. It represents a redirection of Jewish identity into a higher, better form. Accordingly, Israeli Jews are fundamentally different from Diaspora Jews. They are normal, not distorted. We see the effects of this construction of Jewish identity when Israelis move abroad. Not only do many Israelis have nothing to do with their local Jewish community, second generation Israelis assimilate especially rapidly, with very high rates of intermarriage, into the indigenous non-Jewish community of their places of residence. 74% of the children of Israelis currently residing in Europe do not rule out marriage with a non-Jew and see it as a private matter, and 25% of all such children of Israelis have a non-Jewish partner. Among children of Israelis in the U.S., we see similar patterns.

The "negation of the exile" is no longer an explicitly formulated ideology in Israel. But one must ask whether it is no longer explicitly formulated precisely because it has been assimilated into daily life. One indication is Israeli names. Israeli Jews (except for the Orthodox) almost never give their children traditional Jewish names.

A New Jewish Identity?

Is, then, Israeli Jewish identity a continuation and expression of Jewish ethnic identity as it existed in the past and as it exists in contemporary Diaspora communities? Or is it something new, closer to the form of identity of non-Jewish majority populations in their national states, such as the Americans, British, French, and Norwegians? Or is it both?

Israeli Jews and their Relationship to Diaspora Jews

The relationship of Israeli Jews to Diaspora Jews is deeply ambiguous. On one hand, Israeli Jews do not view the Diaspora or Diaspora Jews as necessary to the maintenance of their identity. If Jewish national life is the highest form of Jewish existence (as Zionist ideology asserted), it should not be surprising that Israeli Jews do not generally feel they need Diaspora assistance in maintaining their identity. Indeed, Israeli Jews exhibit very little interest in contemporary Diaspora Jewishness or Judaism. For over 60 years, no Israeli curriculum has included a unit on Diaspora Jews. Diaspora Jews are mentioned, if at all, only in connection with the dangers of assimilation and anti-Semitism.

Yet, at the same time, 92% of Jewish Israelis say they feel part of the global Jewish people; being part of the Jewish people is an important guiding principle in their lives. Israelis also state a willingness to protect Jewish communities around the world.

These responses, we submit, are a direct result of Zionism. Zionism is a movement of the redemption of the Jewish people. Israeli Jews, as the realization of the Zionist vision, still see themselves as playing this redemptive and protective role vis-à-vis the Jewish people as a whole. They believe Diaspora Jews must support and protect Israel for precisely the same reason: so that the Jewish people is redeemed. Despite this basically positive attitude, deep understanding and familiarity with one another's Jewish life is still lacking in the relations between the two communities.

Should Israeli Jews move beyond these manifestations of early Zionist ideology? If so, what should be done to encourage Israeli Jews to relate to Diaspora Jews as full partners in modeling Jewish identity? Can interventions such as curriculum reform and people-to-people programming succeed in the absence of a new, explicitly formulated Zionist vision or ideology? Would a renewed Jewish culture, culled from traditional Jewish sources and appropriate for a modern Jewish state, help bridge the gap?

Endnotes

1 Jonathan Woocher, Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews (1987). See also the review of Jonathan Sarna in *Commentary*, December 1987.

2   Richard Alba, "The Twilight of Ethnicity among American Catholics of European Ancestry," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 454, 1981.

3 See Talcott Parsons, "Christianity", *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* , Stanford U. Press, 1968.

4 Jewish Community Study of New York, UJA-Federation of New York, 2011

5   Other factors, alluded to in previous sections, both reinforce and militate against this shift toward identification with the "haves." The younger generation reared in a "network society" is increasingly libertarian, an attitude reflecting the larger theme of operating outside the ordinary channels set up by society until now, including government. Conversely, the Haredi form of identification, with its de-emphasis of material success, aligns an increasing number of Jews with the "have-nots."

6   This intellectual vision of Judaism returns us to the theme of civil religion discussed above. In many ways, this vision seeks to resuscitate an American civil religion to which Judaism and Christianity contribute by bequeathing their shared biblical heritage.