Changing Conceptions of Jewish Collectivity Among Young Adult Jews And Their Implications for Jewish Education: A Dual Research Project

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Introduction

This proposal addresses two interrelated questions in parallel fashion. The first concerns, "Changing Conceptions of Jewish Community and Their Implications for Jewish Education." The second focuses upon "Changing Conceptions of Israel / Jewish Peoplehood and Their Implications for Jewish Education."

Each project will be conducted in parallel, with a single principal investigator, research team, data collection procedures, and outside advisors. However, we will conduct two related but distinguished investigations. Discussions, interviews and survey data collection will treat both related topics simultaneously. We will produce two series of written interim and final reports.

Accordingly, this proposal describes each project separately. The sections on research procedures and budget, that follow the substantive narratives, refer to both projects jointly.

In point of fact, these two projects complement and enrich one another. Both treat two major dimensions of Jewish collectivity. The community project relates primarily to an attachment that is based upon genuine social interaction. The Israel and Peoplehood project treats the "imagined" basis for collective connection, using the parlance fashionable in social scientific writing on community. Both, obviously, draw upon experiences of social interaction as well as acts of imagination, seeing oneself as part of a Jewish collectivity, near and distant, that extends through both time and space. Social scientific research demonstrates that the communal involved are also more attached to Israel and Jewish Peoplehood; those with Israel experiences and attachment express them and have them reinforced by way of strong Jewish community. The two dimensions, then, are clearly intertwined – but not so inextricably intertwined that we cannot examine each independently, with an eye on the other. The power of the two research projects, when taken together, is the ability to begin to conceptualize how local communal conditions intermesh with the topic of the connection of Jews to Israel and the Jewish People. These topics are normally treated as separate – the relation of individual to Israel is not normally studied from the perspective of the relation of that same individual to his or her Jewish community. Here they are being treated interactively and simultaneously.

Project 1: Changing Conceptions of Jewish Community among Young Adult Jews and Their Implications for Jewish Education

1. The Centrality of Jewish Community:

Clearly, understanding contemporary Jews' changing relationship with community is critical for understanding Jewish life today and for Jewish educational policy and practice, whether it be focused on Israel and Zionism, or on other matters. Indeed, for this reason if not others, changes in and challenges to Jewish community constitute major concerns to educators, rabbis, Jewish community leaders, communal professionals, and policy makers of all sorts.

Undoubtedly, Jewish community, while important in its own right, is also central to Jewish identity and Jewish education. For Judaism, both historically and contemporaneously, Jewish community is at the core. All aspects of Jewish life presume a Jewish communal context. It is fair to say that all of the following depend upon strong, effective, and well-functioning Jewish communities: Religious observance and piety; Jewish education and socialization; charitable activities, mutual assistance, and voluntary organizations; social engagement in the wider society, the exercise of political influence externally, and the practice of politics internally; as well as maintaining ties with Jews elsewhere, with Israel and with the Jewish People around the world. Moreover, "good" Jewish communities are essential for the application and transmission of traditional norms of behavior, for the development of new norms suitable to contemporary life, for encouraging individuals to abide by those norms, and for providing ultimate meaning and purpose to Jewish life. Without Jewish communities, none of this makes sense; and a lot of it simply could not take place. With Jewish communities, especially strong Jewish communities, much of these functions take place automatically, and all are far more likely to be done and done better.

Accordingly, Jewish communities and Jewish education stand in an intimate relationship with one another. Jewish communities shape Jewish identities and provide the context for their expression. They define the contours, boundaries, and content of what is "Jewish knowledge." They determine the relevance, significance, and purpose of Jewish education, by setting the agenda, influencing the content, and affect the form of Jewish education.

For its part, Jewish education in all its variety is critical to Jewish community. At its most basic, Jewish education motivates and trains people to participate more fully in Jewish community life. More than that, Jewish education is at the very essence of Jewish community. Classically, Jewish communities have conceived of the very act of Jewish education as one of the most urgent and important functions of Jewish life (and community) itself. "On three things the world stands: On Torah, on worship, and on acts of loving-kindness."

2.Challenges to Jewish Community

The challenges to Jewish community may be viewed on three levels:

- Challenges to community of all sorts;
- Challenges to conventional religiosity; and
- Challenges specific to Jewish community.

Several streams of research point to changes in all forms of community, and what some may term the decline or weakening of community. Indeed, whether change or decline is taking place is at the heart of debate on the matter, as some ask whether we are failing to observe community as it takes on new, unrecognized forms. Beyond dispute, though, is the decreasing consensus and understanding regarding the very meaning of community. Does it require repeated contact and association among its members? Does it demand conscious recognition? Does the sharing of common interests or perspectives suffice to create community? To what extent is community constituted by shared values, stories, threats, opportunities, past, future, space, institutions, and boundaries? Is community primarily an idea in people's minds and hearts, or the context for and result of repeated social interaction?

However one answers these questions, social scientists are fairly united on the issue of the decline of many older forms of community, collectivity, and solidarity. People seem less structurally attached to and less emotionally committed to such traditional bases for community as … country, church, religion, ethnic groups, corporation, voluntary associations and neighborhood, to name just a few traditional contexts for community.

With respect to religion specifically, a master theme of research on religion in the US and other Western countries speaks of greater individuation. People more readily change religions,

denominations, and churches. They make decisions on religious belief and practice more independently of doctrinal teachings and of their clergy and lay leaders. They engage in more personal ways of knowing, basing their learning and conviction on personal experience rather than teaching based on theory, reason or doctrine. More than in the past, they focus upon finding personal meaning and fulfillment, on serving their individual needs for social supports, on inwardness, self-reflection, and spirituality. Western Christianity is, in a sense becoming more post-modern; and post-modern societies are, in a sense, becoming more "Protestant" (spiritually committed, seeking rather than dwelling, individualist rather than collectivist) than ever.

With respect to Judaism in particular, the evidence suggests that Jews have also moved in the direction of declining conventional communities, and a more individualist bent in their religious life. With respect to changing relationships to community, the extant research derives primarily from the United States. Learned observers suspect that parallel trends are underway in other settings, but we have yet to systematically study major Jewish Diaspora communities outside the U.S. to any great depth or extent. In the American case, we do know that all sorts of connections between Jews and each other and their elements of community have been in decline. Among these are families (i.e., occasioned in part by rising intermarriage), friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Fewer Jews count other Jews among their "significant others," in these capacities. With the exception of synagogues, schools, and JCC's, fewer Jews are members of Jewish communal institutions, and those who are say they are less invested and attached than they or their predecessors were in the not so distant past. Included in the long list of contracting Jewish institutions are federations, other charities, defense agencies, fraternal organizations, and health and welfare institutions. Aligned with these changes are declines in attachment to Israel and Jewish Peoplehood (the subject of an accompanying proposal).

On cultural and attitudinal levels, Jews evince the same sorts of changes that have emerged in other religious (and ethnic) groups, albeit in ways peculiar to Jews and Judaism. To state matters succinctly, they are more voluntarist, autonomous, personalist, and non-judgmentalist. Voluntarism implies a readiness to select those particular forms of activity and belief that appeal to them, with a far less sense of guilt, shame, or obligation to custom, law, and tradition. Autonomy refers to locating the source of commitment and obligation within oneself rather than in some outside (heteronomous) ideology or religious system, and to insisting on choice and control in practicing Judaism. Personalism refers to using the extent of personal

meaning as the arbiter and measure of Jewish involvement, saying in effect, I'll freely pick and choose those beliefs and activities that I find personally meaningful. Non-judgmentalism refers to the rejection of the very act of assessing who is acting as a good Jew, rejecting at times that the very notion of a good (or bad) Jew is in any way meaningful.

These trends, both the more general and the specifically Jewish, pose new challenges to the construction and maintenance of Jewish community in the Diaspora. The porousness of institutions means that people pass in and out of more fluid social boundaries. The decline of conventional and historic forms of voluntary organization means that the social environment no longer supports the sorts of structures that historically have characterized Jewish life. The growth in religious individualism undermines traditional religious authority and makes the articulation and sanctioning of shared norms trickier, to say the least. Emerging cultural patterns stand in sharp contrast to a Judaism that emphasizes obligation, responsibility, and collectivity.

Having said all this, we cannot ignore the impact of recent events upon the experience of and appreciation for community among Americans (if not Westerners) generally, Jews specifically, and younger Jews even more specifically. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 immediately brought a new sense of community, patriotism, and togetherness to Americans (particularly those in the New York area, where at least a quarter of American Jews reside). Many observers predicted that these effects would be short-lived and that Americans would return to their more individualist cultural and communal patterns. At the same time, some effects of these tragic events seem to have carried forward. Some scattered pieces of research point to more trust in others, more confidence in social and political institutions, more patriotism and community-mindedness, more voluntarism, and more participation in religious life if not other civic activities. These trends may or may not persist. We have no idea of the extent to which they indeed will persist, nor to what extent they may be influencing Jews' appreciation of community.

Beyond whatever impact that "9/11" exerted on Americans and Westerners generally, its impact may be even more potent and widespread among Jews. The perpetrators of the attack, of course, were Middle Eastern Arabs with an avowed anti-Israel philosophy. Together with the ongoing hostilities and terrorism in Israel, the World Trade Center tragedy may have had additional meaning for Jews, and even more meaning for younger Jews on college campuses where many are subject to harsh criticism of Israel, if not expressions of antisemitism.

3. Research Questions

This research seeks to explore how young adult Jews in three English-speaking Diaspora countries approach matters of Jewish community, with specific reference to the educational implications of this research. Focusing on the United States, Canada, and Great Britain, the research will seek to understand the following issues:

a. To what extent do younger adult Jews (age 18-25) value community in general and Jewish community in particular?

b. How have they experienced Jewish community in their lives, for well or for ill?

c. What are the incentives and deterrents to their community involvement?

d. How do they think about community? What constitutes community, what are the elements of community, and what can and should Jewish communities ask of their members?

e. To what extent are porousness, dispersal, detachment, secularism, religious individualism, voluntarism, autonomy, personalism, and non-judgmentalism challenging these Jews' interest in forming communities and abilities to do so?

f. How have educational experiences, formal and informal, influenced their views on and experiences of Jewish community?

g. How have historic events, and most particularly recent acts of terrorism in the US and Israel affected their sense of a need for community?

Project 2: Changing Images of Israel / Jewish Peoplehood among Young Adult Jews and their Implications for Jewish Education

Overview

The persistence of ongoing hostilities in Israel have had two sorts of very profound effects upon the relationship of Diaspora Jews with Israel and, more specifically, on the conditions and opportunities for educating them to matters pertaining to Israel and its relationship to being Jewish.

On the one hand, the hostilities have sharply curtailed participation in Israel-based education programs, arguably, the primary instrument for deepening and enhancing engagement with Israel. Amidst over two decades of documented declining attachment to Israel, the one definable group not to have experienced such declines are those who have been to Israel, often in educational programs.

The contraction of participation in these programs is troubling in many ways, some less readily apparent than others. For years, these programs (both short- and long-term) have been the incubators of future generations of Jewish educators, rabbis, communal professionals, academics, and lay leaders. The Israel experience helped mold them and produced life-long networks of relationships. The curtailment of these sorts of experiences means the possible emergence of a "lost generation," cohorts of Jewish young people who are lost to the possibilities of intensive Jewish and Israel-related personal and professional involvement.

On the other hand, the hostilities have a positive side as well. They have generated a sharp increase in attachment to, concern for, and involvement in Israel. Diaspora Jews see themselves engaged in defending Israel's moral and political standing, amidst environments that are perceived as rife with antagonism to Israel, if not, at times, outright antisemitism. The drop in visiting and the rise in concern call out for explanation. Typically, more concern has meant more visiting. Here the opposite pattern has taken place, raising questions about the nature of the concern for Israel as well as the very practical question of whether some of that concern can be tapped to at least partially reverse the drop-off in rates of travel and study in Israel.

The near-collapse in Israel-experience participation comes on the heels of rising participation toward the end of the previous decade. The arousal of Israel-related attention comes

on the heels of a long-term decline in Israel-attachment, arguably stretching from the end of the 1970s until, approximately, the Netanya bombing on Passover 2002.

The increased attention to Israel, while welcome, raises a number of worrying concerns and related policy questions:

1. To what extent will this attention be sustained? Even if hostilities continue, will Diaspora Jews retain a deep and passionate commitment to Israel, and to what extent? Indeed, what is the very nature of that commitment, especially in light of the resistance to visiting Israel?
2. The attention on Israel is highly focused upon conflict, hostilities, defense, public relations, victimization, and all the war-and-peace matters. To what extent is this focus obscuring or even inhibiting attachment to Israel in other ways?
3. Specifically, given the synergistic relationship between commitment to Israel and commitment to Jewish Peoplehood, to what extent can revived attention to Israel be utilized to build and re-build commitment to Jewish Peoplehood? In light of the parallel research (described earlier) on connection to Jewish community, how do all these bases for collective identity work together?
4. In the current context, and with these challenges in mind, how can the diverse instruments of Jewish education be mobilized to attain three objectives:
    a) Sustain the renewed attachment to Israel;
    b) Broaden the attachment beyond matters of war-and-peace and victimization; and
    c) Move beyond concern for Israel alone to a more profound and powerful connection with Jewish Peoplehood worldwide?

This research aims to understand the Israel-related views of young adult Jews in three English-speaking Diaspora countries: the U.S., Canada, and England. It looks at diverse populations, distinguished by the depth of attachment to Israel. It compares young adults (18-25) with those somewhat older (35-45) to gain a better understanding the the distinctive views and beliefs of the

younger generation. It will turn to key informants, and to the young adults themselves. And it moves from qualitative research, to quantitaive research, to policy formulation, under the guidance of a committee of senior educational practitioners and academicians.

To more fully elaborate upon the proposed research, and to place it in the proper and wider conceptual context, we begin with an historical overview of the relationship of American Jewry with Israel, partially illustrative of the relationships experienced by their counterparts in Canada and England (an assumption we shall examine). Each historical period not only left its imprint on those which followed, but the patterns specific to each, to a greater or lesser extent, continue to characterize parts of Diaspora Jewry to this very day. Hence, taking a step back in time and away from the current moment both provides useful perspective and generates intriguing questions for research and analysis. The narrative below draws heavily on the extant research on American Jews, but draws comparisons with Canadian and British Jewry where appropriate.

Distancing from Israel, Until 2002: The Evidence

What would be seen as the "miraculous" victory of the Israeli army in the Six-Day War in 1967 set in motion a rather remarkable period in the history of American Jewry. Israel moved to the fore as the most compelling cause in American Jewish life and became the centerpiece of fund-raising and of political activism. The cause of Israel pushed aside the civil rights agenda, liberalism, and even the fight against American antisemitism as the major public issues of American Jewry's vaunted organizational infrastructure. Philanthropic campaigns reached new heights, exceeded in turn by the campaigns during the Yom Kippur War of 1973, another time of palpable threat to Jewish survival. These developments also helped to recruit thousands of lay and professional activists -- many of them affluent, well educated, and thoroughly Americanized -- to the Jewish organizational world.

Two additional issues soon came to capture the attention of those activists. The first, beginning in the 1970s, was the plight of Soviet Jews oppressed in their own country and denied the right of free emigration to Israel or the West. The other issue, which emerged at about the same time, was the Holocaust. Remembering and memorializing the Shoah through museums, school curricula, books, university courses and chairs, conferences, the arts and manifold acts of

public recognition, became a major cultural and institutional focus of American Jewish life. They certainly dominated Jewish public activity, epitomizing the struggle for survival against great odds that served as the major leitmotif of "civil Judaism" (Woocher 1986).

Indeed, the three thematically complementary causes (Israel, Soviet Jewry, the Holocaust) were seen as alternate applications of the same fundamental principles: Jews constituted one people with an obligation to come to one another's aid in time of danger. The United Jewish Appeal's slogans of the time, such as "Keep The Promise" and "We Are One," blatantly appealed to this keenly felt sense of shared obligation. So did the rallying cry, "Never Again." American Jews' failure or inability to come to the aid of the victims of the Nazis served to heighten the resolve of the generation of the 1960s and 1970s to "never again" allow Jews, wherever they might be, to fall victim to persecution. Israel's defiance of the perceived odds in 1967 and 1973 was taken as paradigmatic of what Jews could and had to do, time and again. American Jews, by fighting for the survival of their fellow Jews elsewhere, would in turn justify and work toward their own survival, against the odds of assimilation.

In retrospect, we can see that The Six Day War inaugurated a very unusual, and eventually limited period in the relationship of American Jews with Israel. The period before 1967 (aside from the years surrounding the wars in 1948 and 1956) was one that saw only limited involvement of American Jews with Israel (see, for example, Sklare and Greenblum 1967). Similarly, perhaps by way of returning to their pre-Six Day War stance, since the early 1980's and lasting until early 2002, American Jews had become decreasingly attached to Israel. This decline in attachment has taken a number of forms. Thus, during this period, American Jews grew less enamored of Israelis, less interested in Israel, and less active in supporting Israel by way of political activism, and, centralized philanthropic contributions (e.g. Bubis 1992; Cohen and Bubis 1998).

The initial impetus for the distancing argument derived from the criticism of Israeli government policies by American Jewish leaders that emerged in the 1980's. (To be clear, criticism in and of itself signifies attachment –the most Israel-involved American Jews have been more prone to criticize Israeli politics over the years.) The 1970's witnessed only isolated instances of public criticism by what were, in effect, fringe intellectuals in the Jewish community. But, by the 1980's, increasingly mainstream American Jewish leaders publicly

voiced demurral from Israeli government policies. Four major flash points are particularly noteworthy. The first is the Sabra and Shatilla massacres in September 1982. Next came the arrest of Jonathan Pollard in 1986. Shortly thereafter came the intifada in late 1987 and early 1988. Next, American Jews closely watched the post-election bargaining in the winter of 1988-89 that raised what become known as the "Who-is-a-Jew?" question. In the 1990s, in part, because events narrowed the range of options in Israel's relations with the Arab world, American Jews seemed less likely to hotly contest Israeli war-and-peace policies from the right or the left. However, repeated clashes within Israel related to the rights of Conservative and Reform Judaism captured the attention of American Jewish leaders and the rank-and-file (Cohen 1988).

American Jews' adverse reactions to these events signified a growing disenchantment not just with certain Israeli leaders and policies. In time, the broadening disenchantment has come to pertain to Israel as the Jewish state and to Israel as a Judaic symbol in the consciousness of American Jews (Cohen 1989b, 1990b, 1992). The critical statements of American Jewish leaders and activists of hard-line Israeli policies had the effect of expressing, signifying and promoting less regard and admiration for Israelis' sagacity, morality, commitment to democracy, and sincerity in the pursuit of peace. Moreover, Israel's unfavorable images among Americans generally (i.e., non-Jews) may well have contributed to Israel's diminished standing among American Jews. In the 1980s Eytan Gilboa (1987) wrote presciently, "Substantial anti-Israel shifts in the attitudes of the general public toward Israel, which so far have not occurred, could cause erosion in the ethnic attitude structure [i.e., attachment to Israel] of American Jews." (See also Gilboa 1990.)

The declining levels of American Jews' philanthropic contributions to the local Jewish federation drives, the centralized philanthropic campaigns, constitutes another expression of the distancing phenomenon. For years, the United Jewish Appeal (whose successor is the United Jewish Communities) has functioned as a barometer of American Jewish commitment to Israel. The cause of supporting Israel was understood, at least until recently, as the principal single motivation for Jewish philanthropic giving to the local federation campaigns that feed into the national UJA drive.

The declines in giving to Israel through centralized charities have taken place on three levels. First, total giving in real, inflation-adjusted terms has declined fairly steadily since the

mid-1970's. Second, the proportion of all funds allocated to Israel and other overseas beneficiaries has also declined. Last, philanthropic support for Israel is declining in terms of its meaning for Israel. As a fraction of the budget for social welfare needs of the Israeli citizenry, or as a fraction of the total economy, the dollars derived from American Jewish donors comprise a far smaller share than in the past.

At the same time, we cannot ignore some evidence to the contrary. Observers report marked increases to "friends of " and other specialized campaigns. These trends may point to not so much a decline in interest in Israel-oriented philanthropy, but to a shift in interest from giving to a multi-purpose campaign, collectively oriented destination toward more specific and more narrowly focused causes.

But perhaps more fundamental than all these issues is the implicit comparison of the recent times (say, the last two decades or so) with the unusual period of American Jewish romance with Israel that followed the Six Day War. The Six Day War helped produce a profound re-orientation in the American Jewish psyche, one that was increasingly political, assertive, and pro-Israel.

In the decade that followed, several highly captivating news reports helpful to Israel's image followed fast upon each other. Jews and other Americans clearly attended to the early acts of urban terrorism in 1968, the War of Attrition in 1969-71, the Munich Massacre in 1972, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, the proclamation of Arab unity behind the PLO in 1974, the UN's Zionism-is-racism resolution in 1975, and, finally, the Entebbe Rescue in 1976. These stories served to reinforce the idealized images of Israelis so widespread among American Jews in the late 1960's and early 1970's. The highly critical reactions of American Jewish leaders to the less favorable events of the 1980's took on special meaning precisely because they were in such sharp contrast with the wildly unrealistic favorable images of Israelis commonly held by American Jews (and others) just a decade earlier (Cohen 1985).

Certainly far less favorable stories dominated the news in the 1980's: Sabra and Shatilla in 1982, the election of Meir Kahane in 1984, violent clashes between Haredim and their opponents in the middle 1980's, the Jonathan Pollard Affair in 1986, the outbreak of the intifada in late 1987, the attempt to revise the Who-is-a-Jew law in 1988, seamy in-fighting and wrangling over constructing a coalition in 1990, the clashes between Haredim and Conservative

and Reform Jews over prayer at the Western Wall, and the ongoing struggles over non-Orthodox conversion. The string of peace agreements between Israel and Arab parties in the middle 1990s may have added to admiration for Israel. On the other hand, we cannot assume the same for two significant subsequent developments: the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin and the election of Prime Minister Netanyahu over Shimon Peres, a figure well-known to American Jews.

The steadily declining favorability of news (to American Jewish eyes and ears) coming out of Israel comported very neatly with reports of a significant age-related gap in pro-Israel sentiment (see, for example, Cohen 1987, 1989c, 1991b; Waxman 1992). The attitudes of younger adult Jews are of course especially critical, in part because they are destined to inevitably replace their elders in the ranks of American Jewish leaders and public.

Analyses of all the surveys on the matter produce the same essential results: a weak to moderate direct relationship between age and Israel attachment. Older American Jews are somewhat more attached to Israel than their middle-aged counterparts who, in turn, are more attached than younger Jewish adults. The patterns vary somewhat over time and by the particular measure being utilized, but the essential contours of the relationship emerges in all surveys and with almost all measures of Israel attachment.

Significantly, as noted at the outset, the age-related decline in Israel attachment is limited to those who have never been to Israel. Among those who have traveled to Israel, be it once or more often, age and attachment are unrelated; younger Jews who have traveled to Israel are as attached as their older counterparts. Only among those who have never been to Israel do we find a clear relationship between (younger) age and (lower) Israel attachment. Moreover, younger Jews are not less attached to Israel "because" they are less involved in Jewish life at the moment. Rather, these results indicate that younger Jews' lower levels of attachment to Israel are better conceived as an enduring feature, one that may derive from long-term historical processes rather than a transitory consequence of their youthfulness.

Writing in 1996, after reviewing survey evidence that at the time, ran counter to the distancing hypothesis, I nevertheless came to the following conclusion, in effect arguing with my own data. "If … the cohort-based decline in Israel attachment [is real], then the apparent stability in aggregate Jewish involvement with Israel through the 1980's may well be followed by a slow and gradual but persistent erosion in Jewish support in the early part of the twentieth first

century" (Cohen 1996). Indeed, in survey data I collected in a national survey of American Jews in 1997 (Cohen 1998), this prediction proved true.

The survey results were augmented and supported by the qualitative data Arnold Eisen and I collected for, *The Jew Within*, our study of American Jewish identity (Cohen and Eisen 1998, 2000). To take a compelling example, the limited extent to which Israel actually figures in the private lives of American Jewish consciousness was underscored for us by two focus group discussions conducted I conducted in 1995 with parents of Hebrew school youngsters in a suburban synagogue in New England. Both sessions opened with responses to very general questions on what parts of being Jewish the participants found attractive and unattractive. *None of the participants in either focus group so much as mentioned Israel during these initial conversations, each of which lasted about half an hour.* This failure was all the more startling in that I had moved to Israel about three years earlier from the same community, a fact well-known to the focus group participants. For these focus group participants, at least, Israel carries little real import in the private sphere of Jewish identity, the part that is closest to their inner core.

To sum, for the most part, Israel has not been recently central to who American Jews are as Jews -- and so the need to visit it, or learn about it, or wrestle with its importance to the Jewish people -- is far from pressing. The situation is somewhat different in Canada, and very different in the UK where the vast majority of Jews have been to Israel. And, whether the combination of 911 and terrorism in Israel (and attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions elsewhere) is shaping a new configuration of Israel-oriented Jewish identity remains to be examined.

Some Explanations: The American Case

Explanations for the long-term decline in Israel attachment (until quite recently) are more readily available in the American case than that of Canada or the UK. In addition to checking the validity of these assumptions in the United States, the research aims at elevating the discourse on these matters with respect to the two other societies. For the purposes of this proposal, we are compelled to focus exclusively upon the American case, owing both to the more advanced state of knowledge and my own greater familiarity with Jews in the United States than with Jews elsewhere.

The forces of personalism and privatization that have come to characterize American Jewish identity, and the diminished salience of their ethnic identification, have exerted a major impact upon Jews' engagement with the public sphere in recent years. That engagement, measured both by the comments of from depth interviews and by the responses to sample surveys, has noticeably and sharply declined. Today's Jews differ markedly from their predecessors in their perception of the public sphere, and differ too in the degree to which that sphere serves as the fulcrum of their own Jewish identities. The relative importance of the private sphere and the public sphere in Jewish identity has shifted in favor of the former. This development comes at a time when Israel involvement among American Jews has classically resided in the public sphere.

To elaborate, since the inception of the Zionist movement, the organized American Jewish community has pursued a largely two-dimensional relationship with the Jewish community of Israel (at first the pre-State settlement or Yishuv, and, since 1948, the State). One dimension of their relationship has consisted of lobbying Congress and the President to extend economic, military, and diplomatic support to Israel. The other dimension has comprised fund-raising to support pressing social welfare needs that largely flowed from the rescue of Jewish refugees and their re-settlement in Israel. More generally, the funds were meant to lend material support to a society perceived as having to expend a disproportionate share of its resources on security needs. Israel was perceived as the bulwark of Jewish survival in the second half of the twentieth century, with American Jewry playing a key role in ensuring that the State had the wherewithal to perform that function.

Both the relation between the two Jewries (Israeli and American) and the perception of that relation has changed dramatically in recent years. The ultimate cause for that change is more deep-seated: The growing priority for American Jews is <u>individual</u> Jewish meaning, and the question is whether Israel enhances or detracts from that meaning. All too often, Israel is been judged and found wanting.

One change underlying the cooling American Jewish passion for Israel, surely, is the loss of the factor that had served to fuel attachment to Israel heretofore. The once-beleaguered Jewish State no longer seems to require the financial and political assistance it once did. Israel's army is

strong, its economy booming. Fears for Israel's survival have abated. American Jews no longer feel that Israel needs their help to the same degree, and feel less compelled to offer it.

Their political and philanthropic contributions, they have reason to believe, are no longer as prized by Israelis as they once were. In the mid-1990s, several Israeli public figures said, in effect, to American Jews: “We don't need you.” In his first visit to the U.S. after his election as Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin told AIPAC officials that Israel no longer needed their help lobbying Congress and the Administration. Shortly thereafter, Finance Minister Avraham Shochat commented that Israel no longer needed Israel Bonds - that Israel could (and soon would) borrow more cheaply on the open markets. Yossi Beilin, serving as Deputy Foreign Minister, observed that Israel no longer needed Diaspora contributions for social needs. And, in repeated statements, President Ezer Weizmann announced that Israel needs nothing at all from the Diaspora, with the single exception of young Jewish bodies coming on *aliyah*. To be sure, these statements made their biggest impressions on top American Jewish leaders. But the sentiment conveyed (“We don’t need you”) certainly seeped down to the lower rank of pro-Israel activists.

The vast majority of American Jews see themselves as pro-Israel. At the same time, many harbor ill-defined doubts, confusions, or objections to the State's policies, particularly when the Israeli leadership emanates from the Right (Fein 1982, 1989). Yet they resist aligning themselves with American Jewish groups and informal networks that publicly dissent from official Israeli government policy -- whether out of a sense of professed ignorance, or more tellingly, out of a sense that they lack the moral standing to dissent. In private, though, they do not shy away from criticism in conversations.

Some Diaspora Jews object strongly to the militarism associated in their minds with Israel. For some, it is the perceived prominence of right-wing political forces, especially when associated with what they regard as the “Orthodox lunatic fringe,” that drives them to distance themselves from Israel.

The war and peace issues may have functioned as a minor irritant in most Jews’ perception of Israel. However, over the years, what has come to be known as “the religious pluralism” question has captured even more attention among American rabbis and communal leaders, as well as the rank-and-file. One reason for this shift is their resentment of traditionalist Orthodox Jews. In addition, American Jews more readily assume they have more moral standing in debating,

criticizing, and intervening in Israel's decision-making processes affecting religious issues than on those affecting Israeli security. At various points, Israeli political and religious leaders have been embroiled in heated debate over such issues as whether converts to Judaism who were converted by non-Orthodox rabbis would be regarded as Jewish under Israeli immigration law. Other matters of controversy entail whether non-Orthodox institutions should receive government funding to the same extent as that received by comparable Orthodox institutions; or whether sexually mixed Conservative and Reform prayer groups, would be permitted to pray within sight of the Western Wall.

These issues touch directly upon the Jewish sub-group identities of moderately (and actively) involved American Jews, almost all of whom identify with a major Jewish denomination (Lazerwitz et al. 1998, 40). It is thus no surprise that as many as 80% of the respondents in a 1997 survey of American Jews agreed with the statement, "I get upset when Orthodox Jews in Israel try to limit the practice of Conservative and Reform Jews in Israel."

Many American Jews feel that Israel symbolically belongs to them, or should. Perceived denigration of Conservative and Reform movements, ultimately at the behest of highly traditional Orthodox groups, thus seem equivalent to stealing Israel away from them, from the Jewish people as a whole, and limiting symbolic attachment to the Orthodox. Writing about these matters in 1989, I explained the reactions to questions on the pending "Who is a Jew?" legislation among a national sample of American Jews thusly:

The theme running through these responses is one of fear of potential rejection by Israel. Respondents felt that, by passing the proposed legislation, Israel would be rejecting their brand of Judaism, their family members [especially non-Jewish in-laws and many of their children], their friends, and their claim to a special attachment to the Jewish state, which they regard as a center and refuge for all Jews, not just the Orthodox. (Cohen 1989c, 48)

Recent Events

The slow decline in Israel attachment, the decreasing centrality of Israel to the Jewish communal agenda, and the advancing de-coupling of Israel and Jewish Peoplehood from Jewish identity seem to have all turned around in the wake of recent events. The potential impact of "9/11" has already been mentioned with respect to need for community and possibly solidarity with Israel. With respect to Israel specifically, we need to consider the impact of ongoing terrorism, Israel's responses, criticism of Israel, and antisemitic incidents in Europe. Although this wave of

violence in Israel is thought to have begun in earnest shortly after Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount on September 28, 2000, world Jewry was seemingly galvanized only after the Netanya terrorist attack on Seder celebrants in April 2002. Prior to then, Jewish organizations had planned and cancelled several solidarity events. Just afterwards, it may be said that the UJC in the United States, the UJIA in London, and other counterpart agencies around the world had no need to organize rallies, they merely announced them. In a short period of time, a significant fraction of Diaspora Jewry participated in pro-Israel events, starting a pattern of heightened engagement that has continued, more or less, to the current moment.

As noted at the outset of this narrative, we have not systematically examined the nature, magnitude, staying-power, and implications of the burst of solidarity with Israel. We have not yet fully fathomed the opportunities and obstacles it presents for Jewish-Zionist education.

The Persistence of Israel Attachment

It is telling that significant numbers of American Jews still explicitly regard Israel as an important part of their being a Jew, going well beyond a momentary feeling of solidarity, despite all the factors that tend in the opposite direction. The question, of course, is why. How does Israel nourish American Jews' sense of themselves as Jews?

For some, Israel is important to them as "a safety net," a "sanctuary" in case Jews should face persecution elsewhere in the world. Others speak of their pride at Israel's military prowess. Still others, it must be said, feel completely unconnected to the State.

Notwithstanding the general tendencies during the last two decades outlined above, some significant small number of American Jews today (and many more Canadian Jews, and many, many more Jews in the UK) regularly visit, call, and write their friends and family members in Israel. They closely follow news of Israel in the Jewish as well as the general press. They know some Hebrew, and are at least somewhat familiar with Israeli society and culture beyond the question of Israel-Arab relations. They maintain direct relations with Israeli people, not just formal ties with institutions. They may have business relationships as well. Many of them envy Jews who make *aliyah*, and would be satisfied, if not pleased, were their own children to do so. Such Jews may be characterized as those who spend the major portion of their lives in the United States, Canada, or the UK, but who have significant emotional lives in Israeli society as well.

Such individuals have constructed a meaningful and compelling personal relationship with Israel. How did they do so? Perhaps it has been through visits, getting inside Israeli homes, and establishing or strengthening ongoing relationships with Israelis who were accessible to them -- former Americans, now olim; business associates; colleagues; family; and so forth. Letters, then telephone, and now e-mail have served to sustain and cement these relationships.

Research Questions

The foregoing analysis suggests several questions for this research.

The first concerns the measure of attachment. How can attachment to Israel be conceptualized and further refined. It comprises such emotions and behaviors as philanthropic support for Israel, political involvement, cultural activities, and learning and knowledge of Hebrew. What are the objects of attachment and how are they differently understood? Specifically, how do American Jews feel about the Land, People, Government, Religion, and Culture of Israel?

Next, what affects attachment and to what extent? How influential have been each of the following factors:

i. Concerns over the treatment of Conservative and Reform Judaism in Israel.

ii. Confusion over and disagreement with Israeli war-and-peace policies.

iii. The declining importance of Peoplehood generally, and of politics, philanthropy, and organizational life more pointedly.

iv. The worldwide concern with terror, especially that perpetrated by militant, extremist Muslims from Arab countries.

v. The criticism of Israel in the US (particularly on college campuses), the anti-Israel sentiments among some journalists and the attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions by European Moslems and others in major Western countries.

vi. The terrorism in Israel, especially those incidents that seem to particularly strike home (e.g. the Passover in Netanya, the Moment Café in Jerusalem, and The Hebrew University in July 2002.

Last, we need to understand how some people manage to formulate a very personal relationship with Israel. What does it mean for a small group of American Jews (and larger

proportions from Canada and Great Britain) to have Israel serve as a very meaningful part of their Jewish identity? How did they get that way? What is the role of visits, reading material, family, business ties, and personal relationships?

For all these questions, we need to adapt a comparative perspective. We need to compare the cohort of 18-25 year olds with their somewhat older counterparts, 35-45. We need to compare American, Canadian and British Jews. And we need to compare the most engaged with those exhibiting more typical levels of connection and attachment to Israel.

Certainly, these are not the only questions we need to answer. But they are among the most interesting, urgent, and policy-relevant.

For only by understanding the current, dynamic, and varying relationship of Jews in three important, English-speaking Diaspora societies can we expect to fashion effective educational policy and practice.

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Research Procedures for Both Projects

The Interviews: To arrive at the answers to these questions, both with respect to community and to Israel and Jewish peoplehood, we intend to conduct interviews both of key informants (e.g., Jewish educators and youth workers) and of respondents, both individually and in groups. The interviews will be conducted in London, Toronto, New York, Boston and two other locations in the U.S. to be chosen. We will interview across a spectrum of involvement in Jewish communal life. We will range from those heavily involved in religious, social, and politically oriented Jewish communities and/or Israel-related activity (as appropriate), to those who are relatively positive about their Jewish identities and Israel, yet are not heavily involved in structured Jewish community life or Israel-oriented activity. We will also conduct interviews with select groups of English-speaking students and young people touring, studying, and/or living in Israel who, by virtue of their having come to Israel, if not by virtue of their Israel experience, may well exhibit yet other patterns of responses to our questions on community.

To gain perspective on how these matters have changed over a generation, and might change with the passage of the family life cycle, we will also interview Jews somewhat older, perhaps 35-45, in the same locations (U.S., Canada, the U.K. and appropriate counterparts in Israel, temporarily or longer).

To summarize the major dimensions to the "map" of interviews:

1. Informants and respondents.
2. London, Toronto, New York, Boston, and two other U.S. locations, as well as selected young adult programs for English-speaking Diaspora youth and younger adults in Israel.
3. Adults 18-25 and 35-45.
4. Jewish diversity: moderately affiliated, highly engaged, Israel program participants.

Sequential phases: We anticipate three phases to this research, each lasting about one year, as follows:

1. Phase 1: Qualitative research (individual and group in-person interviews).
2. Phase 2: Primarily quantitative (survey) research.
3. Phase 3: Developing and testing implications for Jewish education.

To elaborate, the depth interviews constitute the first phase of this research, and should last approximately one year. The interviews will be analyzed to arrive at initial answers to the questions outlined above, and to generate new questions for the next phase of research. The first phase will conclude with the production of two reports on the qualitative data, one focusing on community and the other on Israel and Jewish Peoplehood.

The second phase, to be conducted in the second year, entails the conduct of two quantitative surveys. We will conduct surveys of the American Jewish population through the Market Facts, Inc. Consumer Mail Panel. These will take place at the beginning and the very end of the second year. We intend to interview the same individuals at two points in time, a very powerful research tool known as "panel analysis." The surveys will allow us to capture a dynamic portrait of differential engagement in Jewish community and in Israel and Jewish Peoplehood. The second survey can also be used to perform methodological checks on the first survey, and to ask questions that measure real change over time as well as reliability or instability of response. Most importantly, the second survey can address those questions that emerge as important issues only after complete and thorough analysis of the first survey.

The third phase will consist of developing implications for policy and survey research, to be designed in accord with the findings.

To provide consultation and guidance throughout the research, we will constitute an, "Academic and Professional Advisory Committee," consisting of about 6 individuals to augment the three automatic insiders (Dr. Ami Bouganim, Prof. Steven M. Cohen, and Dr. Ezra Kopelowitz). The committee will consist of a mix of academicians with relevant expertise, and senior educational policy makers, some of whom may be associated with the Education Department. [The following represent the sorts of individuals we would seek: Prof. Charles Liebman of Bar-Ilan University, Prof. Phillip Wechsler of the Hebrew University, Dr. Ilan

Ezrachi of the Department, Dr. Nomi Nachanson of the Department, Don Scher of the Alliance for Israel Educational Programs, Ann Lanski of Shorashim.]

Three-year budget for both projects (to be spaced over 36 months)

Principal investigator's salary ……	donated
Research assistant, statistical clerk @ $1,000 per month ……	$36,000
Travel, international (once per year to US, to UK) …….	$15,000
Travel, domestic (within North America) ……..	$10,000
Interviewers (18 focus groups @ $1500) ……	$27,000
Interviewers (40 individual interviews @ $100) ……	$ 4,000
Transcription (18 groups + 12 individuals = 30 X $300)……..	$12,000
National surveys of American Jews, 2 @ $35,000…..	$70,000
Advisory Committee (4 outsiders X $1,500 X 3 years) ……	$18,000
Advisory Committee, meeting expenses (3 years X $2,000) …	$ 6,000
Copying, supplies, publications (3 years X $2,000) ……	$ 6,000
Miscellaneous ……..	$20,000
3-year total ……..	$224,000