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WHAT A JEWISH STATE MEANS TO ISRAELI JEWS

Among Israeli Jews, the terms Israeli and Jew are virtually synonymous. Israelis call their state "Jewish" as do others, friends as well as enemies. The term "Jewish State" denotes far more to Israelis than the fact that a majority of its population is Jewish. Yet it is quite remarkable that this basic feature of Israel's social and political contour has evoked so little interest among students of Israeli society, despite the fact that its Jewishness is that which provokes the enmity of its neighbors and the greatest consensus within Israeli society itself. In a recent survey, 93 percent of the Jewish population were of the opinion that Israel ought to be a Jewish state.[1] Now the term Jewish state undoubtedly means different things to different people, but to the vast majority of the population it means a state whose population is predominantly Jewish (83%), which lives in accordance with the values of Judaism (64%), and whose public image is in accord with the Jewish

1 Public opinion statistics cited here refer to a sample survey conducted by the firm of PORI for the authors. The survey was conducted in October and December of 1975 among 2,000 Jews who represent a random sample of the Jewish population of Israel aged 18 years and above. The poll excluded only the kibbutz population who comprise less than four percent of the population. The estimated margin of error for a sample this size is 2.5 percent.

Confidence in the reliability of the sample is reinforced by comparing two social and demographic variables where there was least cause for respondent error with figures from the Central Bureau of Statistics. A comparison of gainfully employed heads of households (excluding soldiers) shows the following results:

Occupations of Gainfully Employed Jewish Heads of Households
(in percentages)

Occupation	*Sample*	*Central Bureau* (data for 1974)
Manual labor	49.1	50.6
Clerical and sales	28.2	26.2
Professional and managerial	22.7	23.2

Age comparisons are as follows:

tradition (62%). Seventy-six percent of the respondents felt that there ought to be some relationship between religion and state in Israel. In other words, Jewishness or Judaism contains religious overtones for the vast majority of Israeli Jews and they seek a reflection of this in the conduct of the state.

This need not necessarily be the case nor, one suspects, was it always true. In theory, Israeli Jews need not necessarily identify Jewishness and Israeliness. Even if they accept the identity of the two concepts, they could conceivably define Jewishness or Judaism in such a way that it lacks a religious component although, in practice, this is a difficult exercise. One can find Israeli Jews arranged along a continuum of opinion which includes those who deny any connection between Jewishness and Israeliness, those who identify the two but deny that this has anything to do with religion, and those who assert a complete identity between Jewishness, the Jewish religion, and Israeliness.

THE DISSOCIATION OF ISRAELINESS AND JEWISHNESS

One can locate the ideological positions of Israeli Jews along a circular continuum, in regard to the importance ascribed to Israeliness and Jewishness in determining their collective identity. The circle metaphor is appropriate because the extremes converge. One position rejects Israeliness and its Zionist paternity, the other rejects Judaism.

The first position is associated with but not confined to the group known

Age Distribution of Respondents and of Total Jewish Population

Age	*Sample*	*Central Bureau* (data for 1974)
18–29	33.1	34.2
30–39	20.6	16.5
40–49	18.6	15.5
50–59	12.3	14.0
60 and over	15.3	19.8

The sharpest discrepancy between our sample and the Central Bureau's figures was in reported years of formal education. Thirty percent of our sample as opposed to 17 percent of the total Jewish population (according to the Central Bureau of Statistics) had an education of 13 years or more. This may reflect the desire of respondents to increase their status in the eyes of the interviewer rather than the unrepresentativeness of the sample. It may, however, reflect a lower rate of Oriental Jews. As a result, we make no use of education or ethnicity as an independent variable in our study.

as *Neturei Karta* (Guardians of the City). The ideological position is shared to some extent by a much larger community in Israel including the *Eda Haredit* (the Pious Community), numbering a few thousand families and located primarily in Jerusalem with many sympathizers in B'nei B'rak and isolated adherents in a few other communities.[2] To the *Neturei Karta* and those who share its ideology, the establishment of Israel was an act of rebellion against God. Jews, they believe, are enjoined to wait for God to reestablish a Jewish state. Zionism is the great heresy of modern Judaism. In fact, the Holocaust, the murder of six million Jews by the Nazis, was God's punishment for the Zionist heresy; an infliction on the Jewish people who had abandoned their true religion and substituted secular nationalism and the desire to establish a state. Any display of loyalty to Israel or recognition of its legitimacy is contrary to Jewish law.

The other extremist ideological position which dissociates Jewishness and Israeliness is that of the Canaanites.[3] The Canaanite movement was founded in the early 1940's. Many of its leaders were ultra-nationalists who were disenchanted with Jabotinsky and Revisionism as that movement increasingly embraced symbols of traditional religion. The Canaanite position was most clearly articulated by a group of then young and relatively talented Israeli writers and was shared by a substantial number of other Israelis, particularly the native born. It is difficult to know how many Israelis shared their opinion but some observers once felt that Canaanism, at least in modified form, would ultimately dominate Israeli society.[4]

2 On the historical background see Emile Marmorstein, "Religious Opposition to Nationalism in the Middle East," *International Affairs,* (July, 1952), reprinted in J. Milton Yinger, *Religion, Society and the Individual* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1957), pp. 541–553. For a sociological treatment, see Menacham Friedman, "Religious Zealots in Israeli Society," *On Ethnic and Religious Diversity in Israel* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1975), pp. 91–112. For a critical discussion of its ideology see Norman Lamm, "The Ideology of the Neturei Karta — According to the Satmarer Version," *Tradition,* 12 (Fall, 1971), pp. 38–53. More sympathetic treatments of the movement are to be found in Emile Marmorstein, *Heaven at Bay* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), and Yerachmel Domb, *The Transformation* (London: Hamadfis, 1958).

3 Remarkably little has appeared on the Canaanite movement in English. Its ideology is elaborated upon by one of its major proponents in Yonathan Ratosh, "The New Hebrew Nation," Ehud Ben Ezer, ed., *Unease in Zion* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1974), pp. 201–234. See also Baruch Kurzweil, "The New 'Canaanites' in Israel," *Judaism,* 2 (January, 1953), pp. 3–15.

4 Georges Friedmann, *The End of the Jewish People?* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967) and Melford Spiro, *Children of the Kibbutz* (Cambridge:

The Canaanites believe that life in Israel bears no relationship to Jewish life in the Diaspora. In Israel, according to the Canaanites, a new "Hebrew" nation is evolving. This nation comprises both Jews and Arabs and obliterates all past affiliations. Linking this new people with Jewish history or world Jewry only serves to distort the development of the nation. The Canaanites find Judaism inadequate as a source from which the symbols for their new society can be drawn. Instead they seek a symbol system associated with the land and the ancient peoples who occupied the land (including but not limited to the early Hebrew settlers). The effort to dissociate the Hebrew settlers from subsequent Jewish history in general and the Jewish religion in particular engages them in some rather intricate historical juggling but our purpose is not to take issue with any of the viewpoints which we present. The Canaanites, whose number have dwindled since the 1950's to the point where they are today virtually non-existent, sought a symbol system appropriate for the emergent Hebrew as distinct from Jewish society and a system which would provide personal meaning for them as well. Many of them changed their names, discarding those of East European and decidedly Jewish origin and substituted those associated with the land or the ancient peoples who had inhabited the land.

It is difficult to measure how many Israelis accept either the *Neturei Karta* or Canaanite positions or any version of those positions, be it radically religious or radically secular, which dissociates Jewishness and Israeliness. Six percent of our respondents (120 individuals) answered "no" to the question: "Do you feel the State of Israel must be a 'Jewish State'?" Of these respondents, only two (0.1% of the total sample) identified themselves as religious. This probably understates the presence of a *Naturei Karta*-type ideology within the population since their adherents would certainly refuse to be interviewed. Seventy percent of those who felt Israel should not be a Jewish state (4.2% of the total sample) defined themselves as non-religious. This is probably a fair estimate of the maximum number of Israeli Jews in sympathy with even the mildest variant of a Canaanite-type position.

Harvard University Press, 1958). Simon Herman, *Israelis and Jews: The Continuity of an Identity* (New York: Random House, 1970) showed how inaccurate the prognoses of these observers were. But the fear that Canaanism would ultimately dominate Israeli society was present within the Israeli population as well. See, for example, Baruch Kurzweil, *Sifruteinu Ha'khadasha — Hemshekh O Mahapeikha?* ["Our New Literature — Continuity or Revolution?"] (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1965), pp. 270–300. (Kurzweil's essay on Canaanism was originally published in the mid-1950's.)

ISRAELINESS AND JEWISHNESS AS COMPONENTS OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Three positions rest in between those of *Neturei Karta* and the Canaanites. The collective identity of all three is composed of both Israeliness and Jewishness. They are distinguishable by the relative importance they ascribe to traditional Judaism. The first intermediate position — classical Zionist-Socialism is an excellent example — affirms an association between Judaism and Israeliness (or Zionism in the pre-state period) but rejects the religious component in Judaism. This position, closest to that of Canaanism on our continuum, affirms the value of Judaism in a purely secular transformation.

This position involved its ideologues in rather painful paradoxes and entanglements which led them to a radical transformation and transvaluation of Judaism on the one hand, or a minimalization of its role in the construction of a collective identity on the other.

It would be a mistake to understand religion simply as a set of beliefs and practices. To many adherents it is also a matter of birth, family association and acknowledgement of the fact that the individual is related, if only by childhood memories, to the beliefs and practices of one religion and not of another. The matter is complex and need not detain us here. But it is important to recall that whereas Islam in North Africa and the Middle East or Christianity in its various expressions in Eastern Europe are certainly religions, they evoke a far more pervasive sense of identity than does Western Christianity for most of its adherents. If anything, this is even more true of Judaism in Israel. It ought not to surprise us, therefore, that Jews who label themselves as "atheists" or totally non-religious continue to call themselves Jews and insist that Israel must be a Jewish state.

The debate over the essence of Judaism — whether it is a religion, a people, a nation, an ethnic group, a race, a civilization, etc. — is as yet unsettled.[5] Nevertheless, there is no definition of Judaism, regardless of how secular or purely nationalistic, that denies the historical association of

5 For some recent summaries and observations on the historical and sociological aspects of the debate see Charles S. Liebman, *The Ambivalent American Jew: Politics, Religion and Family in American Jewish Life* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973); David Vital, *The Origins of Zionism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975); and Jacob Katz, ed., *The Role of Religion in Modern Jewish History* (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 1975).

Judaism and religion. Hence, any ideological position which asserts that Israel ought to be a Jewish state must accept symbols, myths, ceremonies and historical associations which evoke religious associations as well. But these symbols can be utilized selectively, transformed and transvalued or incorporated into a different value system so that their strictly religious connotations are eliminated or their religious resonance is minimized.

The ideology of the Israeli founders was characterized by universalism and a positive orientation to other nations. Jews, they claimed, were entitled to their state because Jews were a national grouping of people which, like all other national groupings, deserved a national state. The cultural tradition which the founders evoked was a secular nationalist one. They adopted a selective approach to Jewish history deemphasizing the Diaspora elements, particularly the elements of suffering and humility as opposed to the elements of autonomy and heroism. The political elite in the period up to the creation of the state sought "a universalist meaning to the national symbols and values."[6]

Jewish symbols as interpreted by the political and cultural elite played a central role in the development of a sense of national unity and purpose in the pre-state period. But Judaism was not the only source of values and symbols nor was it really the major component in shaping the political and social ideology of the elite.[7] In other words, the political culture which evolved in the *Yishuv* (the Jewish settlement in the pre-state period) relied heavily upon traditional Judaism for its symbol system but was by no means coterminous with traditional Judaism. Those who shaped the culture were quite anxious to filter out the particularly religious elements, or transform and transvalue them where they could not be eliminated altogether.

How much sympathy does such a position evoke today? How many Jews in Israel subscribe to a radical secular position — that Israel ought to be a Jewish state but that Jewishness has nothing to do with religion? Eighteen percent of our sample felt that being a Jewish state did not mean that the state should live in accordance with the Jewish tradition. Now, it is possible that the term "tradition" is interpreted as devoid of all religious meaning, though this is scarcely credible. However, 19 percent of the sample was of the opinion that there should be total separation of religion and state. Taken

6 Reuven Kahana, "D'fusim Shel Z'hut L'umit B'Yisrael" ["Patterns of National Identity in Israel"], S.N. Eisenstadt, *et al*, eds., *Khinukh V'Khevra B'Yisrael* ["Education and Society in Israel"] (Jerusalem: Akadamon, 1958), p. 46.

7 There is a detailed discussion of this issue in the historical chapters of our forthcoming study on civil religion in Israel.

in conjunction, the two figures show that we are dealing with the same population group who deny the connection between Judaism and religion.

The second intermediate position also affirms both Israeliness and Jewishness as components of a collective identity, but, unlike the secularist position, asserts that Jewishness is defined by the religious tradition. Among the advocates of this position we can identify two sub-groups, with the differences between them paralleling those found among secularist Jews. We noted that the difficulties in affirming a religionless Judaism led some Zionist Socialists to minimalize the Jewish component of their identity whereas others engaged in massive efforts at the transformation and transvaluation of traditional Jewish symbols to accommodate them to their socialist and secularist commitments. By the same token, among religious Jews who affirm Israeliness the problem of the inherently secular nature of the state and of early Zionism and the anti-religious propensities of the Zionists founders involves them in certain paradoxes. Hence, one sub-group, whose ideology is best reflected by *Agudath Yisrael* but whose adherents include some religious Zionists as well, tends to minimize the importance of Israel as a component in their collective identity. A second stream, whose ideological forefather was Rav Kook and is best represented today among the extreme nationalist elements in religious circles (e.g. *Gush Emunim*), have sought the transformation and transvaluation of traditional Zionist and Israeli symbols so as to render them more congruent with traditional Judaism. Although the majority of religious Jews fall somewhere in between these two subgroups, the middle ground lacks a clear ideological formulation.

Religious Jews who affirm both Judaism and Israeliness are also divided over the question of the extent to which Jewish law ought to be normative in Israeli society. Almost all, however, believe that, at a minimum, public life in Israel must conform to the dictates of religious law; i.e., Sabbath rest, Kashrut observance in public institutions, etc. The fact that there is no unanimity or even a program for governing Israel in accordance with Jewish law is not particularly troublesome as long as there is no reasonable possibility that a significant proportion of the population will accede to the symbolic program of the religious Zionists which calls for a Jewish state to be governed in accordance with the Torah.

How many Israeli Jews subscribe to the position that Israel ought to be a Jewish state and Judaism is defined by the religious tradition? Eleven percent of our population sample are of the opinion that there ought to be a complete accord between religion and state in Israel. This conforms roughly to the nine percent who answered "definitely yes" to the question whether

a Jewish state meant a state which sought to live in accordance with Jewish law. Of particular interest is the fact that half of those who felt this way did not define themselves as religious. In other words, there are religiously non-observant Jews who apparently feel that, regardless of how they conduct their private lives, the state ought to be conducted in accordance with religious law. In summary, roughly ten percent of the population adopt a position that the Jewish religion and Jewish religious law define the meaning of Israel as a Jewish state.

We have defined four ideological positions which describe the relationship of Israel, Judaism and religion. We noted that the first two positions, that of Neturei Karta and the Canaanites, which denied an affinity between Judaism and Israel, attracts about six percent of the population. The third position, that which affirmed Israel's Jewishness but denied that this had any religious consequences or meaning, characterized slightly less than twenty percent of the population. Finally, a fourth position identifying Israel, Judaism and religion was shared by about ten percent of Israeli Jews. What about the remaining sixty-four percent of the population? They fall somewhere in between the extremes of secular and religious Zionism; adherents of a new ideology and an attendent symbol system which has been emerging in the last few years.[8]

We believe that this group, whose ideological foundation is most ambiguous and least secure, includes a majority of Israelis. Only thirty-six percent of the respondents registered disagreement with the assertion that a Jewish state is one which seeks to live in accordance with Jewish law and, as we noted, only eighteen percent denied that a Jewish state was one whose public image was in accord with the Jewish tradition. Seventy-six percent of the sample felt there ought to be some relationship between religion and state.* Although we lack the necessary survey data, it seems very likely that

8 We are now at work on a larger study which attempts to describe the nature of the ideology and symbol system of what we call Israel's new civil religion. Preliminary findings appear in three articles by Charles S. Liebman: "Religion and Political Integration in Israel," *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, 17 (June, 1975), pp. 17–27; "Myth, Tradition and Values in Israeli Society," *Midstream*, 24 (January, 1978), pp. 22–34; and "Likrat Kheker Hadat Ha'amamit B'Yisrael" ["Toward A Study of Israeli Folk Religion"] *Megamot*, 23 (April, 1977), pp. 95–109.

* *Editor's note*: It is from this large pool that the religious parties hope to draw increasing strength, as Don-Yehiya and Sandler note in their articles: "The Politics of the Religious Parties in Israel," and "The National Religious Party: Towards a New Role in Israel's Political System."

this represents a dramatic change in public opinion over the last twenty years. In other words, we are suggesting that the increased penetration of traditional religious symbols into the national culture has had a positive impact on the evaluation which Israelis today give to the Jewish religion. Israelis have come to evaluate Judaism in a more positive light and the penetration of its symbols into the national culture has been facilitated because its symbols provide sources or objects of personal meaning and identification to many ostensibly non-religious Israelis. On the other hand, the vast majority of Israelis, including some who define themselves as religious, do not believe that religion is the sum and substance of Judaism. They have no clear guidelines or ideological convictions about what is or is not Jewishly appropriate for Israel. That Israel ought to be a Jewish state evokes virtually unanimous assent among Israeli Jews. How Israel ought to reflect its Jewishness continues to trouble the majority of the population.