

adoration of the "other" as such. It's inverted scale of values à la Orwell's 1984, is reflected in the selective use of pseudo Arabist terminology where, for instance, the pejorative epithet "racist" applies to Jews alone. Thus, while the encouragement of Arab emigration from Israel to the neighboring lands is vehemently condemned as worthy of a Hitler, the indiscriminate attack on Jews as Jews is glossed over in silence, if not actually condoned.

To those who claim that in the Middle East "local" confrontation tactics must elicit a "local" response, these apostles of ethnic egalitarianism unfailingly reply — "but surely, *we* must not sink to *their* (presumably subhuman Arab) standards." The pseudo Arabist formula whereby *we* and *they* are fully interchangeable, is here in cavalier fashion sidestepped in open disregard of basic logic. Instances of pseudo-Arabist perversity are legion. Suffice it to enumerate the "Hebron is Arab" parade staged on ground drenched with the blood of butchered Aaron Gross, the tree planting burlesque enacted before the rock throwers of Dahaiasha and the Magen David-to-Swastika "Metamorphosis," conceived by an *avant-garde* Israeli painter. The Star of David, emblem of Israel's rebirth, here, degenerates into the hallmark of modern Satan. This recent obscenity, immortalized on canvass, claims to represent the pinnacle of inter-racial fraternity, of Jewish

empathy with the Palestinian Arab plight. In reality it betokens the pseudo-Arabist's pathetic longing for no less than a racial transmutation. All semblance of rationality is here swept aside. Travestism, the donning of the opposite camp's outer garb, no longer contrives to encrust the pseudo-Arabist's festering Jewish core. Self-extirpation, under the banner of the Nazi *Endlösung*, is here invoked in this morbid scheme of redemption. Evidently, the "ugly Jew" chimera has yet to be banished from the horizon of Israel reborn. No longer at the mercy of the gentile oppressor, the Arabizer yet exhibits the classical Jewish-pupil-in-a-gentile class syndrome. Much like the proverbial dog in Pavlov's laboratory, he continues to secrete the saliva of existential guilt long after the original stimulus has vanished from the scene. We await a closer investigation of the psychopathology of pseudo-Arabism, to account for its varied manifestations. Its proliferation among the intellectually alert and artistically evocative sector of the population requires special attention in view of its corrosive impact upon the Jewish community at large. At the same time it calls for a more forthright examination of the historical process that it represents, i.e., the failure of the Jewish State, in its present constitution, to foster a normal growth of cultural roots capable of ensuring Jewish survival upon these shores.



MARTIN SEIDEN

## Who is a Jew?

A large group of American rabbis, Conservative and Reform, huddled in the cold February wind that swept across the Knesset plaza. They sang a song in English, then in Hebrew. A microphone was thrust in front of their spokesman and he explained the purpose of the group's vigil. They were expressing the hope that the 'who is a Jew?' bill to be voted on the following day would be defeated. Israelis watched this scene on their 9:00 news.

The legislation to which they objected would have required the use of procedures prescribed by the Talmud (halakic law) for the conversion of gentiles to Judaism. Is this the reason that these prominent rabbis and lay leaders flew all the way to Israel? Is this their reason for standing out in the cold and conducting

a vigil? Are so many Christians converting to Judaism? Are those that do convert so desirous of coming to live in Israel? Considering the long list of religious legislation on Israel's books and the longer list of non-religious legislation that concerns Diaspora Jewry this of all issues seems almost irrelevant. Nor were these protesters diplomatic in the usual American style. They hurled serious threats at the Israeli audience. They said that passage of the proposed law would split the Jewish People. They threatened that it would lead to a falling off of financial support from the American Jewish community.

Are we witness to a jurisdictional dispute between liberal and orthodox rabbis — a question of who is a rabbi? rather than who is a Jew? Not really. These two rabbinical groups have long had differences of opinion over less esoteric issues such as marriage, divorce, dietary laws, the sabbath, and the role of women. In Israel where there are no liberal movements these matters are entirely under the control of the orthodox rabbinate

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and there has been little if any protest from the liberal American rabbinate. Clearly it is not a simple question of jurisdiction. Something more fundamental is involved.

To understand the principle involved one must first be aware that this issue would not have arisen but for the existence of a Jewish State. This is the first pan-Jewish issue of principle in which the Jewish State is exerting or seeking to exert an influence upon normative Judaism in the Diaspora. Its origin is fairly simple. Under Israel's Law of Return every Jew regardless of his origin may come to Israel and claim Israeli citizenship upon arrival. Non-Jews must undergo a waiting period of several years as in American procedure. This necessarily raised the question — who is a Jew? The Talmudic answer and the one applying today in Israel is: anyone born of a Jewish mother and anyone who converted to Judaism. That led naturally to the question of how does one convert to Judaism when there are three substantially different approaches — orthodox, conservative and reform.

If Israel does not establish a standard then anyone can claim to have been converted who, for whatever the reason, seeks instant Israeli citizenship. On the other hand if Israel establishes a standard for conversion it is passing judgment on the authenticity of the different movements current in Judaism today, for what one expects from converts one expects from all Jews. Since the proposed law would establish Talmudic or halakhic law as the basis for conversion it represents a challenge to the very essence of liberal Judaism. This was not necessarily the original intention of its authors but rather the outcome of prac-

tical steps intended to meet a practical problem that follows from the existence of a Jewish State. In effect Zionism was on the verge of effecting normative Judaism in a way no one had anticipated.

To appreciate the differences involved between liberal and orthodox standards it is best to review an orthodox conversion as it is practised in Israel today. A specific case familiar to the author involved a young Australian woman of 26 born into a Christian family who came to Israel expressly for the purpose of converting to Judaism. The Jerusalem rabbinate assigned to her a mentor and sent her to a religious kibbutz in southern Israel where they maintain a school for conversion. She lived there and studied fulltime meeting with her mentor for periodic discussions. After four months she was sent to a women's Yeshiva on Mount Zion in Jerusalem where she continued her studies for another six months. The curriculum included the study of the Torah, the Talmud, customs and history. In addition she was required to spend weekends with orthodox families helping to prepare for and celebrate the Sabbath and holydays.

Through this process she became familiar with Judaism in its various aspects including our sense of values and our mode of behavior. It was what one could call total immersion among people who live Judaism intensively.

She was now ready to appear before the religious court. A court of three orthodox rabbis interviewed her, reviewed her background and read the laudatory recommendations of her mentor and teachers. They then rejected her application for conversion. She was told that if she still wished to convert she

could resubmit her application in a month or two. Unknown to her this was part of the process of conversion, a test of her will. When she returned a month later the process was perfunctory and she was told to appear at the local mikvah (ritual bath) for the final ceremony. One of the four Christian girls who roomed with her and went through the entire process was not accepted for conversion.

To most liberal American Jews this demanding procedure might seem rather harsh and excessive, there is the concern that the candidate might become discouraged. From the point of view of the rabbinate, the traditional form of conversion is not asking too much especially when compared to the years of study invested by a professional such as a lawyer, and he faces the prospect that half the applicants fail to pass the bar exam. Even a real-estate broker or a Freemason is required to study and take exams. Should the requirements and the expectation of future performance be any less demanding for a convert to Judaism?

Judaism is not an 'experience', not something to be taken casually. It is also not something that a person may accept in part as his intelligence dictates. It might be a reasonable religion but it nevertheless is a religion of authority. It does not ask man's approval but requires acceptance of the system as a whole, reason and inclination notwithstanding. Judaism tolerates no divided allegiance, no semi-proselytes. A convert to Judaism must erase his or her past. They must change their name and even the identity of their father. All converts to Judaism are regarded as the children of Abraham.

This absoluteness also characterizes the two monotheistic religions that are offshoots of Judaism. It was the pagan religions that were *laissez-faire*. They were characterized by permissiveness and license that Judaism rejects and against which it maintained an ongoing conflict through the millenia. There are today strong indications of the revival of the pagan spirit. Like the ancient pagans, modern secularism condones perversion, abortion, drugs, and a world view in which chance and uncertainty rule over nature. These views are antithetical to Judaism.

Judaism, it must be stressed is not defined by what Jews do. It is a carefully designed system of thought and action with an interrelationship among its parts that precludes simplistic changes. This is where the proposed Israeli law referred to as the 'who is a Jew?' legislation touched a raw nerve in American liberal Judaism. Implicitly it called for a halt in temporizing. But if it would have no force in the Diaspora why was there an outcry from the American Jewish establishment?

To appreciate the sensitivity of this subject in the Diaspora one must be aware that the situation there has reached a point of desperation. Jewish life in the Diaspora is in disarray. More than half of all marriages is an intermarriage. In most cases the trend is outward from there to the Christian or the secular community, if not by the couple then certainly by their children. The solution arrived at by liberal American Judaism is to try to attract the gentile partner to Judaism by making conversion as palatable and as easy as possible. This, as we saw, is diametrically opposed to the traditional approach as exemplified by

Israeli orthodoxy. The American Jewish community is in effect seeking a quick fix, a fast foods approach to a very serious problem.

A measure of the revolution that has been taking place in liberal Judaism, particularly conservative Judaism, is evident from the views expressed not so long ago (1938) by the late Rabbi Louis Finkelstein, Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, the center of conservative Judaism. He wrote that: "the Jewish code, together with social justice, demands adherence to traditional custom. It insists that the Jew observe his sabbath, the law of circumcision and that he not eat forbidden food. It sets up barriers between Israel and the world. But the barriers are not racial or national but religious... Far from being a backward step in the development of Judaism or religion, it is the climax of the whole prophetic teaching" (*Pharisees* p.462).

But events have overtaken the Diaspora since these words were published. It has become a real dispersion as ethnic enclaves and Jewish neighborhoods melt away. Jews no longer concern themselves with their proximity to a synagogue, kosher butcher, Hebrew school and other communal facilities catering to Jewish life. Without these facilities it is impossible to maintain even a limited posture of social and cultural alienation so necessary for the maintenance of group identity. American Jewry exposed themselves, voluntarily, to the overpowering centrifugal force of assimilation. (Whether liberal Judaism slowed this process or assisted in it, is a subject for serious scholarly study.) Further aggravating the disintegration of Jewish communal life has

been the policy of sending a Jewishly illiterate generation of youth to universities where secularism and Christianity made significant inroads. As a result, in the space of one or two decades, the fabric of Judaism and Jewish life in the Diaspora has begun to unravel.

The seriousness of the situation is difficult to exaggerate. Israeli demographers forecast an attrition of two million in the world's Jewish population by the year 2000. This will result from assimilation and the extremely low birth rate among Diaspora Jewry. It is also known that over 80 % of American Jewry have never contributed to Jewish causes or visited Israel. Most ominous of all is the fact that the total number of persons studying in any Jewish educational facility in the United States is less than 110,000 out of a total American Jewish population of more than 5 million. Clearly the process of disintegration is at an advanced stage. The Jewish leadership is grasping at straws when it looks to conversion of gentiles to fill the depleting ranks of Diaspora Jewry. Liberal Judaism can no longer cope with the situation. It has abandoned all pretense of leadership and is simply trying to tag along as exogenous forces take control of the world's largest Jewish community.

Miraculously, it is at this point that the Zionist enterprise entered upon the stage of Jewish history. We find, to everyone's surprise that the Jewish national home contains within it centripetal forces. A unique social phenomenon is now at work in Israel where secular Jews are moving in increasing numbers toward observant Judaism. Indeed, in its extreme form the 'baal t'shuva' movement, as it is called, has so alarmed

extreme secular circles that they have organized against it.

This inward movement in Israel is a natural outcome of the environment. There is very little attraction outward as the local society and culture are homogeneously Jewish. Israel's holidays are holydays. The names of cities, towns, streets, corporations, and commercial products recall personalities, locations and events of significance to Jewry. The symbols and the language are all there directing the Israeli inward toward Jewish civilization. We have been so involved and concerned by our physical survival following the Holocaust that we have almost forgotten that Zionism was also intended as an answer to our cultural survival.

What we are witness to in the 'who is a Jew?' controversy is the first sign of a shift in the balance between orthodox and liberal Judaism. Where in the past orthodoxy was losing followers to liberal Judaism, today it is finding its equilibrium and liberal Judaism is losing its following, albeit to the secular-Christian environment. From its new found safety in its bastion in Israel, orthodoxy calls out to liberal Judaism in the Diaspora to cease its temporizing. The extraordinary reaction of liberal Jewish leaders to this challenge would not have occurred had their situation been what it was decades ago. The Israelis however, were challenging the American liberal Jewish establishment's solution to what is clearly a catastrophe. The response was nothing short of hysterical.

Knowing the reason for their desire to convert gentiles helps to explain what would otherwise appear to be an overreaction on an irrelevant issue. For unless the convert sought to live in

Israel the views of the Israeli authorities have no relevance. What, however this issue did, albeit unwittingly, was to call attention to the more fundamental problems of which conversion was merely the tip of the iceberg.

The orthodox argue that not only does the average reform rabbi not keep to the basic code of Jewish behavior, he is in most cases not conversant with it. Dietary laws were long ago abandoned by reform Judaism as was the Sabbath, which is one of the Ten Commandments and the keystone of Judaism.

The conservative movement provides its rabbis with a deeper understanding of Judaism and many conservative rabbis are themselves observant. But they have accepted an unenviable role. They have allowed themselves to become the local professional Jew, a nostalgic model of what Jewry once was. It has also become the conservative rabbi's duty to look away from the behavior of his congregants. He must accept the fact that most of his congregants keep and know very little Judaism. How then, ask the orthodox, can he require more from a convert? — Judaism is a religion based on behavior not on faith, yet the convert is offered very little to convert to.

The time has come for serious reconsideration of the policies of the American Jewish establishment. The problem is that bureaucracies prefer to continue on the well trodden path. Change presents risks. Yet there are times when the familiar can be dangerous. When the leaders of a community are insensitive to the need for change, tragedy is not far off. As a first step the American Jewish establishment should look for assistance to Israel's religious authorities who are after all striving to improve the quality

of Jewish education and observance, objectives with which one cannot seriously take issue. And second, the significant financial and intellectual resources of the Diaspora itself should be redirected.

Israel has, for some time, not required the charity of the UJA or the Keren Hayesod. The truth is that Israel has been serving as the inducement to donate when in fact most of these funds have been earmarked for local American Jewish institutions. Only about one-quarter of the funds collected are sent to Israel, and these funds represent less than 1% of Israel's GNP. It would be best if all these funds remained in the Diaspora. But they should be devoted exclusively

to Jewish education, formal education, not to social centers that have failed to thwart assimilation and intermarriage, not to synagogues that remain empty most of the year and not to hospitals to provide internships for Jewish doctors. Only with the revival of an educated Jewry will the question of who is a Jew cease to be relevant. There is no other alternative.

To continue to pursue the policies of the past, policies that have condoned if not abetted assimilation, the American Jewish establishment runs the terrible risk of being labelled the Judenrat of the cultural holocaust, which few can deny is in progress at this time.



JOSEPH SCHAECHTER

## Theoretical Foundations and Symbolic Deeds

In his 1558 introduction to the *Book of the Zohar*, Rabbi Yitzchak Daltash argues with those who opposed the publishing of the secret teachings of the Tora, such as the *Zohar*. In their opinion, a person interested in secret teachings should receive them (directly) "from the 'authors'" and not from books, because it is not permitted to transcribe the oral teachings ... and if they should be written, then only in par-

ables and riddles, if at all; not stated outright as in the *Zohar*.

Rabbi Daltash confronts these, writing: "Behold the seventh year, the Sabbatical year is approaching, and when will we prepare ourselves? And when will we fulfill (the prophecy)? 'For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord'? If not now, when? In the seventh millenium the world will be destroyed. And now, nearly a third of the sixth millenium has passed, and still our soul loaths the food that nourishes the angels, and performs the *mitzvot* out of habit and the traditional law without meaning, reason or taste, and why did God create spice for the Tora, such as the *Zohar*? The *Book of the Zohar* was compiled and written in the generation of Shimon Bar Yohai ... in order that in the end of days, in the generation of the Messiah, with the approach of salvation, by virtue of this, the people of Israel will be redeemed. In order to take Israel out of exile they must acquire knowledge of the hidden...

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