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A New Role for Israel in American Jewish Identity

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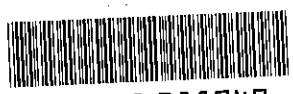

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FOREWORD

American Jewish leaders today wrestle with issues of Jewish continuity. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey of the Council of Jewish Federations documented increased assimilation and declining Jewish identity among American Jews. How to ensure Jewish continuity in an age of increasing intermarriage and declining commitment to leading a Jewish life has become the critical policy question of the 1990s.

Israel will clearly play a role in any initiative to enhance Jewish identity. The Israel experience is perceived to have a transforming impact upon one's Jewish identity, and Jewish communities are considering possibilities of broadening those experiences so as to make them accessible to many more American Jews. The underlying assumption is that Israel has molded the Jewish identity of today's Jewish leaders and will, if given the opportunity, do so for Jewish leaders of the future.

At the same time, questions have repeatedly been asked in recent years whether Israel and American Jews are growing farther apart rather than becoming closer. Differences of language, religious practice, ethnicity, and politics threaten to erode the ties of peoplehood uniting these two communities. Moreover, widely held perceptions of Israel as the "obstacle" to peace in the Middle East -- perpetrated by the media and sometimes by the U.S. government -- may attenuate American Jewish support for Israel and its political positions. If conceptions of Israel are becoming less positive, how can they enhance American Jewish identity?

To answer these questions, the Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations called upon Professor Arnold Eisen of Stanford University to develop a position paper on how American Jews view Israel and how stronger bridges can be built between these two communities. Professor Eisen notes that the "myth" of Israel has receded. In its place stands an image of Israel that is sharply dissonant with American Jewish norms -- political, social, cultural, religious. He calls for more realistic images of Israel coupled with greater direct involvement in all aspects of Israeli life.

To be sure, one may question whether the "myth" of heroic Israel -- gathering in the exiles and reclaiming the desert -- has in fact receded. The sight of Scud attacks brought home to American Jews as never before the reality of Israel's vulnerability. Recent polls suggest increased support for Israel's tough stance in foreign affairs and defense. The rescue of Ethiopian Jewry deeply moved most American Jews, who are now resolved to help Israel absorb the tide of Soviet Jewish immigration.

Nevertheless, Eisen's hypothesis and his policy proposals merit study and analysis. Some American Jews have been considering a more realistic relationship with Israel for some time. The "who is a Jew" controversy in 1988 brought, for the first time, direct Diaspora engagement in questions of Israeli policy. Although one might question aspects of Eisen's specific proposals -- e.g., whether his calls for Hebrew

literacy are realistic -- his paper serves to clarify the issues. Surely it will stimulate communal reconsideration of what unites American and Israeli Jews as a single people and of how to strengthen the ties between these two communities.

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A NEW ROLE FOR ISRAEL IN AMERICAN JEWISH IDENTITY

Arnold Eisen

The fundamental assumption underlying this essay is that attachment to the State of Israel has of late become far more problematic for American Jews -- and, if present trends are not reversed, will become still more problematic in decades to come. Two sources of the difficulty are immediately apparent.

First, as anecdotal and statistical evidence confirms, American Jews born after the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel do not have the same profound feeling for Israel as did the generations for whom blue JNF boxes were ubiquitous, debate over the proper direction of Zionism was central, and the drama of the State's creation marked a biographical high point never to be forgotten.[1]

Second, the "myth" of Israel that nourished the American Jewish imagination and helped to sustain American Jewish identity for much of this century no longer functions with anything like its former power. Israel is not associated in American Jewish minds exclusively or even primarily with larger-than-life images of a people reborn, a desert reclaimed, the weak grown strong, and the ideal made actual. Those images, once prominent features of the story American Jews told about themselves, must now compete with TV news accounts of occupation and intifada, resurgent religious fundamentalism, a political system in need of overhaul, and problems of unemployment, bureaucracy, pollution, etc. -- in short, the complexities of any real-life society that, unlike a myth, is both far from perfect and impossible to understand well from afar.

The result is that many American Jews born since 1948, let alone students born since 1967, do not really know what to do with Israel. They have trouble placing it in the mosaic of self-identity. For some, Israel continues to matter a great deal on a deep emotional level. The question is how to make it matter day to day, how to express and act upon the attachment that they feel. For others, including many committed Jews, the question is why Israel should matter at all. The State is far away, very different -- and often troublesome. Such Jews feel a tug in its direction, particularly at moments of crisis, and they may even experience some wonderment at events such as the aliyah of Soviet and Ethiopian Jews. But these moments are rare, and the distance separating the State from their lived reality in America is immense. They feel no strong desire to bridge the distance. More and more American Jews, I suspect, find themselves in the latter category with every passing year. The consequences of this trend are apparent and worrisome.

I shall attempt in this paper to present options for the strengthening of Israel's place in American Jewish identity, coming at the issue from the dual vantage points of research into the subject[2] and my personal experience, these past twenty years, of the two communities, their self-conceptions and their images of each other. My investigation will proceed in three steps. First, I will briefly examine the overarching vision of Zionism that animated American Jews for almost a century, setting this view over against the very different conception that guided the Zionist movement worldwide and then came to direct

the State itself. Both halves of the Israel-American Jewry equation must be kept in mind as we proceed, because the gap between the two communities is not exclusively of our making. The way we see ourselves in relation to Israel is in part a function of the way Israeli intellectuals and political leaders have seen us -- and continue to see us today. In the paper's second section I will probe the move in recent years, on both sides, away from the myths that guided their relations for almost half a century. I believe that we are beginning to see a more realistic assessment by each community of what the other is like and what can be expected from it. The paper's third section will consider short-term options for strengthening the American Jewish relationship with Israel. Despite joint responsibility for this bridge, I will focus upon repairs that can be initiated from our side.

I will conclude with reflection on what seems to me an incontrovertible fact regarding the long term -- namely, that only a strong attachment to Judaism and the Jewish people among both Israelis and American Jews will secure their continued vital interaction. That attachment, on their side, probably "comes with the territory." On our side, it is very much in doubt.

Zionism, American Style

A history of American Jewish definitions of and support for Zionism is neither possible nor necessary in the compass of this paper. But one feature of that history is of overwhelming importance here -- namely, that American Jews have consistently looked upon the Jewish State as a resource for their own identities. Several prominent examples should make the point quite clearly.[3]

Theodor Herzl's political Zionism, first laid out in *The Jewish State* (1896), insisted above all that the Jews were not a religious group but a nation. As such they would remain subject to anti-Semitism until they either had a state of their own or were permitted to disappear through assimilation into the states of other nations. In Herzl's view there simply were no other alternatives. But Louis Brandeis, the best-known early champion of Herzl's vision in America, legitimated that vision on these shores by expunging its fundamental either/or. The Diaspora was not to be "negated"; anti-Semitism was not inevitable outside the Jewish State; assimilation did not await Jews in America. Rather, Zionism meant creating a home for Jews who did not and could not have one elsewhere, e.g., in America. It was a way of extending the dream shared by Judaism and America -- freedom, justice, opportunity for all -- to Jews denied it because they were Jews. "Negation of the Diaspora" did not figure in this Zionism at all -- because American Jews, then and since, have had no interest in predicting their own imminent destruction.

Ahad Ha'am's cultural Zionism was more easily embraced in America, since it explicitly envisioned a "spiritual center" in service to the Jewish people as a whole, most of whom would remain in the Diaspora. But it too underwent a decisive transformation here. Solomon Schechter's famous embrace of Zionism in 1906, for example, affirmed that "we are in *galut* [exile]" but interpreted this to mean "the *galut* of Judaism" -- ignorance of the Jewish heritage, alienation from Jewish tradition. The work of national regeneration, Schechter believed, would help to remedy that and thus bring Jews back to the religion of their ancestors. Ahad Ha'am had no such hope. For him, nothing could keep Jews Jewish, in the absence of divine commandments that he believed anachronistic, except a national center in which Judaism -- reconceived as a national culture -- could thrive, its products exported to the Diaspora communities in its orbit. What for Ahad Ha'am was an end was for Schechter a means. The center would produce culture, and this culture would revitalize religion -- which could then survive, as it had for two millennia, wherever Jews built Diaspora institutions such as Schechter's, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

I do not mean to exaggerate the homogeneity of American visions of Israel. There were differences of opinion, of course, and these at times were significant and/or vituperative. But whether American Zionists defined themselves as "political" or "spiritual," "socialist" or "revisionist" or "religious," they tended

not to take seriously the contention of Zionist thinkers outside America that the "laws" of Jewish history applied no less forcibly on these shores. They insisted rather that in this respect too "America was different." Others were in exile. We lived, at home, in Diaspora.

Even Mordecai Kaplan, who in *Judaism as a Civilization* (1934) stated unequivocally that American Jews could experience Judaism only as a "subordinate civilization" dwarfed in its role in their lives by America, took pains in later works to disavow the aim of a comprehensive ingathering of the exiles. "Long-distance building of Eretz Israel . . . cannot serve as a substitute for Jewish life here," he declared. In fact, he proclaimed in *A New Zionism* (1955), "Zionism has to be redefined so as to assure a permanent place for Diaspora Judaism." I take this extraordinary statement to be the credo of American Zionism, before and since. The Jewish State existed in order to help the Jewish people "become a fit instrument of this-worldly salvation for every Jew, wherever he resides."

This was not, to say the least, what people like Ben-Gurion had in mind.[4] Ben-Gurion, like his predecessors and successors in the Zionist leadership, imagined a break with the past of exile. *Galut* had meant passivity, powerlessness, and death -- witness the destruction of European Jewry. Only those who had come home to bear arms in their own defense were alive in 1948 to tell the tale. Even before the Holocaust, the option of living among the nations had in his view been decisively discredited. Small wonder that he derided the commitment of Diaspora Jews who declined to come on aliyah as "pseudo-Zionism" and made sure that the Jewish history taught Israeli children in the schools skipped over the millennia of Diaspora life, which he hoped to reverse and bring to an end. Israel existed to serve the Jewish people -- by bringing it home. Any other view was self-deceived.

In sum: American Jews assisted mightily in the creation and building of the State, and Israelis gratefully accepted that assistance. But the two sides agreed to disagree on the fundamentals of what the Jewish past, present, and future were about. Each chose to remember and forget a different aspect of traditional Jewish reflection upon exile and homecoming. American Jews seized on the "metaphysical" reminder that no one can be fully at home on God's earth after expulsion from the Garden; the Torah offered as much of paradise as was available. Ben-Gurion and other Israelis seized on the tradition's "political" side, its stress upon the disabilities of exile first learned in the Land of Egypt: powerlessness, oppression, the decimation of one's culture. Each side, now as ever, defined itself in terms of the other, imagining home with the help of exile and conceiving exile as the reverse of home -- thereby reminding itself of what it was by repeatedly pointing out what it was not.

Interestingly enough, the watershed events of 1967 and 1973 only altered this state of affairs somewhat without actually transforming it. American Jews by all accounts suddenly came to feel connected to Israel as never before. Their financial support increased dramatically, and some even joined the significant (by American standards) aliyah that came in the wake of the Six-Day War. American Jewish organizational life centered increasingly on Israel, Hebrew literacy grew more widespread, Israeli art and ritual objects appeared in many more homes, and some synagogue services added prayers for the welfare of the State and its soldiers. Israelis on their side became more dependent than ever before on the financial and political assistance provided and secured by American Jews, and increasingly acknowledged their existential connection to the Diaspora. *Beit He-tefutzot* became part of the education given every Israeli soldier. In 1977, with the accession to power of Menachem Begin, the Jewish people and the Holocaust assumed an ideological importance in the "new civil religion" that they had never had under Labor governments.[5]

And yet the ideological cleft between the two remained, and, far more important, the day-to-day life of the average Jew on either side continued to contain little reference to the existence and nature of the other. This was to be expected. There simply was not time for the substantive integration into one's routine of concern for and knowledge of a "spiritual center" far away. Political leaders traveled back and forth, intellectuals made it their business to read widely about Israel and attended conferences there, but

the content of synagogue liturgy did not change except for the prayers just mentioned, American Jewish religious thought accorded the State a peripheral importance at best, and American Jewish popular culture bore few traces of the State's existence. Even in organizational life, Israel was but one of many concerns, and not always paramount. Israelis for their part continued to know little about American Jewish life and, despite increasing tourism, made no effort to learn. Their concern for the Diaspora, in the nature of the case, was far less than our concern for them -- our Center.

All this might not have been a problem for relations between the two communities had the "myth" of Israel not eroded in America and a new generation, born after 1948, come to maturity. But those factors did come into play in the seventies and eighties -- and so the "glue" holding the two communities together despite their highly divergent concerns imperceptibly but steadily became unstuck.

Present Dilemmas

On one level this development needs no explanation. It is much easier to relate to a dream than to a reality; one imagines as one pleases. For similar reasons, it is much easier to hold fast to a mythic picture of a society and culture far away than to know them in the innumerable specifics of their actual workings. American Jews could feel intimately bound up with the myth of Israel. They too had witnessed and assisted in the rebirth of the Jewish people from the ashes. They had helped to plant trees to make the deserts bloom. They shared a common history and cultural background with Ben-Gurion, and even more with Golda Meir. So long as Israel represented life and strength and youth and the good, American Jews could revel in their connection to it and say, in utter sincerity (and despite Israeli disavowals), "We are one." But when the myth was overtaken by the facts, when the dream became reality -- and turned out to be other and more complicated than what one had imagined -- one had to reckon with problems that had not been part of the millennia-long vision of return to the Land of Israel. A living society can only be known up close, in its own language, on its own soil. That sort of knowledge is not widely available to American Jews. Most have still not even visited Israel once. And so they have felt increasingly alienated from the state which is putatively theirs and yet so palpably other. The gap can only widen as the two societies develop in necessarily differing directions.

We do well to pay attention to four factors that have played particularly crucial roles in the formation of that gap. We might label these, for convenience, politics, religion, ethos/ethnicity, and ideology. I will examine each in turn briefly, before passing in the final section of this paper to measures aimed at overcoming the problems I have identified, to the extent this is possible.

Politics[6]

I mention politics first not because it is most important but because it springs most readily to mind. American Jews have been discomfited by the drift of Israeli government policy to the right, beginning with Menachem Begin's accession to power in 1977, continuing with the Lebanon war of 1982, and, most recently, evinced in response to the intifada. These events would have posed a problem for American Jews even were all of them knowledgeable about Israel. Their impact is all the greater given the widespread ignorance that prevails. The vast majority of American Jews are dependent for their knowledge of Israel on American media, particularly television, and the images of Israel that have dominated the news in the last decade have been those of its soldiers battling Palestinians and of its leaders rebuffing territorial compromise.

Again: the "mythic" days of identification with Golda and Ben-Gurion, are gone. Total sympathy with Israeli government policy has been replaced by unease and contentiousness. Awareness of the divisions and paralysis besetting Israel's political system has only increased alienation. I do not mean to suggest that American Jewish support for Israel has dried up. It has not, of course. Nor has the myth of Israel become a total anachronism. It has not, witness the rescue of Ethiopian Jewry. I do mean to

emphasize that support for Israel comes less easily, is no longer unqualified, and is accompanied by much anguish. For Jews less identified with Judaism or the Jewish people, the obstacles lying in the path of support for Israel may prove too many to overcome -- particularly if American government policy shifts course in coming years and names Israel the principal "obstacle to peace" in the Middle East.

Religion[7]

When American Jews picture Israeli culture as opposed to Israeli politics, the image uppermost in their minds is likely to be that of a bearded Orthodox figure dressed in black who claims a monopoly on the definition of Judaism. It is a truism to say that the "who is a Jew" issue galvanized the American Jewish community as no other issue has in recent memory because it hit American Jews where they are most vulnerable. American Jews have by definition chosen not to emigrate to Israel, although (or because) they recognize that the State represents or embodies the collective existence of the Jewish people and is the most graphic "answer" to the threat posed to that existence by the Holocaust. Similarly, the vast majority of American Jews have chosen not to embrace ultraorthodoxy, although (or because) that orthodoxy represents their ancestors, their past and the religion from which they are estranged. And now the government of the Jewish State was being urged by its Orthodox parties to declare conversions by non-Orthodox rabbis in America and elsewhere invalid for purposes of Israeli citizenship, thereby denying American Jews simultaneously their homeland and their ancestral faith. The symbolism was powerful indeed, and so was the response.

Even beyond this specific issue, the problem would seem to be that American Jews expect Israeli patterns of observance to run parallel to their own and demand Israeli compliance with the religious pluralism, and the separation of church and state, that they have come to accept as normative. Israelis, who inhabit a different society, driven by a different history, refuse to conform to American expectations. Reform and Conservative Jews are put off by this, and American Jews who are not synagogue-goers at all can find still less comfort in the perceived hegemony of the Orthodox in Israel (even if it does confirm them in their nonbelief) because they recognize that the Israeli delegitimation of Reform and Conservative American Jews applies even more forcibly to them. Moreover, they have little in common with the culture of Israeli secularists. (I shall elaborate on this last point in a moment as part of my discussion of the Israeli "ethos.")

Still another religious factor comes into play: Israeli Judaism is fast taking on aspects that have grown out of the Jewish people's renewed presence in the Land of Israel. We in America cling to Abraham Heschel's dictum that Judaism is a religion that sanctifies time and not space -- while they are increasingly attached to holy sites such as the Western Wall and Hebron. We take the separation of religion and politics for granted, while they wrestle with the ordering of their society and polity in keeping with the demands of Torah. We find messianism incomprehensible and rather frightening, while they -- perhaps as frightened as we are -- must confront several varieties of messianism at close range, including one stamped with the name of the Land's greatest religious thinker, Abraham Isaac Kook. Reform and Conservative Judaism have as yet made only small inroads. The vaunted return of *kibbutznikim* to Jewish sources seems stalled. In short, religion as yet offers little room for fostering closer bonds between the two communities.

Ethos and Ethnicity

Until the recent wave of *olim* from the Soviet Union, it seemed that American Jews would feel increasingly distant from the character or tone lent to Israeli society by a demographic majority rooted in Asia and North Africa rather than Central and Eastern Europe. This was not a source of major discomfort, I suspect, but it did threaten the easy rapport that comes from having a *landsman* whose grandparents grew up with one's own grandparents back in the shared Old Country. The Soviet aliyah will change Israel's demographic structure enormously, reestablishing the Ashkenazi majority. But, as

American Jews are already discovering, the Soviet Union which these immigrants have abandoned is not at all the Old Country that their own ancestors left a century ago. In matters of style, sensibility, diet, religious observance, etc., American Jews will not fit in easily with the emerging ethnic mosaic of Israel.

Given the inevitable exclusion of American Jews from ultimate decision-making with regard to political matters, and the continued exclusion of Reform and Conservative Jews from state support and protection in the religious sphere, this divergence of ethnicity and ethos takes on more and more importance. I link the two, somewhat artificially, to make the point that much of what makes American Jews who and what they are is related to things such as food, humor, taste, intellectuality, professional or business identities, etc. -- in a word, ethos -- some of which is linked to shared ancestry and collective memory. These factors have no exact echo in Israeli society but rather run parallel to quite different tastes and so do not offer common ground.

One cannot expect the ethos of one society to resemble that of another, particularly given the diverse ethnic origins of the populations. To the degree that American Jews and Israelis still share a common ethos, they do so for two principal reasons. First, despite the variant emphases of their respective forms of Judaism, the two communities are nonetheless linked by loyalty to Judaism -- however each individual defines it -- and to Jewish peoplehood. Israeli Jews, probably even more than American Jews, have nightmares about the Holocaust -- and anxiety about the future of Israel. They want their children to be Jewish, and are proud of the heritage they pass on to them. Their calendar, even more than ours, is organized according to the holiday cycle that we both share.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, Americans and Israelis share in aspects of modern culture nearly universal in the Western world today. These include not only American-made movies and television shows, which occupy a predominant place in Israeli entertainment, but more serious matters such as professional roles and family patterns. Scientists, lawyers, doctors, business people, etc. share common practices and even meet at international meetings. Modern individuals of whatever profession share concerns about child care, education, divorce, aging. These "universals" provide powerful linkages between Americans and Israelis, and are not to be underestimated in their potential for helping to bridge the gaps that do exist. I shall explore that potential later.

But neither should the gaps in ethos be underestimated, lest we fail to address them. They are in fact quite substantial, as participants in the "Moriah process" of dialogue between Americans and Israelis have discovered. The most obvious source of difference is that army service occupies a major portion of the time of every adult male in Israel -- and a corresponding portion of the psyche of Israeli men and women alike. The men have likely seen battle; most American Jews of the current generation have not. And war is the least of it. Two full months of every Israeli man's year, of late, if he is between 25 and 55, have gone to *milu'im* (reserve duty), likely served either in Lebanon or on the West Bank. Both "fronts" are fraught with danger, and the latter in particular has provoked mental anguish and moral choices that Americans cannot easily understand. Women must keep their families together during these long periods, while carrying on all their usual responsibilities as normal. Men and women alike have lost friends and family members in Israel's wars; in the Gulf War, they were forced to sit with their children in sealed rooms wearing gas masks. These experiences leave their mark. They create a sense of shared risk and collective responsibility -- a conviction of common destiny -- that excludes outsiders.

There are other differences too, more subtle but no less real. Israelis in the nature of the case live close to parents and siblings. Their country is quite small. They spend a great deal more time than we do with extended family -- particularly on Sabbaths and holidays. It is not uncommon to carry on friendships formed in childhood or army service through all of life. What is more, the small size of the country, combined with the limited size of the Israeli economy, has resulted in a lesser emphasis upon success in one's career than we find among American Jews. Collective achievement is stressed more than in our country, individual ambition somewhat less. Indeed, the country's small size, its tragic history of

war, its constant economic pressures, the ideological character of Israeli politics, and (until very recently) the dearth of alternatives to government-sponsored television have joined to create a remarkably tight society, despite the diversity and cleavages that tend to fill the headlines. Israeli Jews are united by a sense of community utterly different from anything known to American Jews -- and akin, in fact, to what many American Jews seek in their Jewish commitments. One might say that in this as in other respects we in America are free to choose what is given Israelis with their very identity.

Increasingly, as the Israeli character develops with each passing year and each subsequent wave of aliyah, American Jews will feel less and less at home there when they visit. Ethos and ethnicity will present yet another ground of divergence. The gap will grow immeasurably in the event that peace in the Middle East permits Israel's cultural integration in the area.

Ideology[8]

Finally, there is the refusal of some Israeli intellectuals, even at this late date, to reckon with the reality of an American Jewry that defies classic Zionist depictions of *galut*. This refusal is paralleled by the unwillingness of many American Jews to recognize that Israel cannot and will not satisfy most of the demands which Jews who choose not to live in the State make upon it because of their own needs and desires. The ideological factor merits careful study, because recent events have once more brought it forcefully to mind.

On the Israeli side, one finds Amos Oz telling American audiences that Judaism is alive and flourishing only in Israel, while Americans Jews are like the curators of a museum. Nothing Jewish lives in their care. One can still hear A. B. Yehoshua pronounce American Jews "neurotics" because they refuse to abandon their divided existence for the wholeness of homecoming. And one still encounters declarations like that of Shlomo Avineri who, at the time of the Pollard affair, wrote that American Jews are as much in exile as the Jews of the Soviet Union or Iran. He has suggested that Israel refuse our aid, so that we can no longer glory in their dependence. The inherited categories of political Zionism apparently die hard.

Yet there are signs of change. One of my own most moving experience while on sabbatical in Israel last year came in a debate with the Israeli critic Gershon Shaked, author of a collection of essays entitled *There Is No Other Place.* Shaked conceded that his view of Jewish history had been shaped by the childhood trauma of the Nazi invasion of Austria, that his perspective might well be different had his biography been different. He declared his hope that Israel and American Jewry each independently develop their own versions of Judaism and Jewish culture so that they could interact and fructify each other. There could be an "other place." Arye Carmon's Institute on Democracy in Israel[9] gives institutional expression to this view, affirming the legitimacy of Diaspora existence and involving Diaspora Jews in Israeli issues such as reform of the political system and religious pluralism. And even argument between the two communities now has an honesty and directness that it has often lacked heretofore.

Take two recent "open letters" from Israel penned during the Scud attacks by Iraq. Shlomo Avineri, bewailing the failure of Jewish "leaders, activists and plain tourists" to "come to Israel and share our plight," asks, "What is really meant by Jewish solidarity? Is it merely financial, political and emotional support, or does it have an existential dimension. In moments of danger, you usually try to be with your family."[10] Uri Gordon, head of the Jewish Agency's immigration and absorption department, writes that he expected the Jewish people to "rise up in force in support of the State of Israel," but discovered that the "'uprising' to date" consisted only of fear to visit, the arrival of very few volunteers, few demonstrations of support abroad, and "raising money -- business as usual." The leaders of Israel had been wrong over the years not to ask for "true friendship" from American Jews. Their relation "cannot be only one of raising money. It has to be something deeper."[11]

there, so that Israelis who come to America on business or as tourists have the opportunity, via a parallel to the Melitz Center for Jewish-Zionist Education, to learn about the American Jewish community and to meet its members. The expense would be shared.

(c) *Student exchanges*. Thousands of Israelis (probably tens of thousands) reside in America as students. They are largely unintegrated (in large part at their own volition) into the American Jewish community. (*Yordim* seem a separate issue altogether.) For American students from committed families, a year in Israel before or during college, perhaps leading to lifelong friendships with Israelis, should be expected.

The overall goal is to find a new model for the time that members of each community spend in the others' country. Tourism will generally attract visits only once, particularly to Israel -- so much smaller than America. Meetings with political leaders do not provide a true sense of the country or its people. The idea is to ensure that when average American Jews hear the word "Israel" they have other faces in mind than Shamir and Rabin, other realities in mind than intifada and absorption. Ideally, they will have in mind a galaxy of faces -- people to whom they are devoted and who are devoted to them.

Money

It is not surprising that the predominant currency of American Jewish interaction with Israel has been the most universal currency available: dollars. Money travels easily, is easily converted from one person's desire or intent to that of another, and in this case has represented something American Jews have in surplus and Israelis lack. Two problems have beset this relationship of late. One, the value of American Jewish philanthropy has decreased in relative terms as the Israeli economy and American government support have grown. Two, Israeli dependence on our gifts has promoted resentment and anger -- witness the Gordon and Avineri letters cited above. They die in war, spend two months a year in *milu'im*, and pay some of the highest taxes in the world -- while we contribute what we do, identify with their achievements, and proclaim "we are one." We resent their resentment -- and so it goes.

I take it that we are already embarked upon a major transformation in the way American Jews send dollars to Israel, a move from philanthropy to economic partnership and investment. The latter not only allows but demands accountability, involves no opprobrious status differences of donor and recipient, and requires "hands-on" knowledge by the investor. The symbolism of such joint ventures is appropriate: American Jews and Israelis are partners in the current chapter of Jewish history, though Israel (the site of most joint efforts) is central -- the "address" on which the concerns of Jews the world over are focused. Israel may lose a degree of independence from such foreign investment, a legitimate concern that it will have to confront. One wants neither its press nor its vital interests in the hands of multinational corporations. And, depending on the scale of such efforts, Israeli fear of "colonization" may replace resentment at philanthropy. Time will tell; at present, the benefits on balance seem considerable.

Involvement

Some of this money will likely be spent on nonprofit projects in which American expertise could be helpful. The success of Project Renewal needs no rehearsal here. Suffice it to mention the symbolism once again: local communities linked to local communities, meaning that American Jews visiting Israel include Kiryat Shmona or Shekhunat Ha-tikva on their itineraries and when they return home count faces from those communities in their mental inventory of images of Israel. The involvement of Hadassah's elite in the nuts-and-bolts issues of health care in Israel is another noteworthy example. Community is formed not only by living together (unworkable in the case at hand) but by working together.

Other avenues to the same end should also be mentioned.

(a) Individual efforts by American volunteers are unlikely to have the impact of communal linkages, but are not unimportant.

(b) Organizations like the New Israel Fund or the Association for Civil Rights in Israel could include hands-on work by their supporters in America, and might well serve to interest American Jews otherwise alienated from Israel or Jewish affairs generally in the State. Groups such as Women of the Wall have a similar potential. Often the exploitation of that potential does not involve funding or programming but only awareness of what can be done. IDI has tapped journalists, lawyers, intellectuals, and business people from around the world for useful involvement in Israeli debate.

(c) Political and religious involvement in Israel by American Jews and American Jewish organizations is likewise growing. There is less and less sense that such interventions are illegitimate; the "who is a Jew" debate seems to have widened the scope of legitimate interests and involvement. Groups such as Nishma, bringing Israeli generals and academics into the American political process, represent still another step which, whatever one thinks of it, probably heralds an emerging trend. More and more, it seems, American Jews will be drawn to single-issue causes and organizations, which will in the nature of the case seek to educate their contributors or members about a particular aspect of Israeli policy rather than ask for blanket endorsements or "unrestricted" giving.

Knowledge

Any such involvement both requires and fosters reduction in the widespread ignorance of Israeli life that prevails among American Jews. Here, rather than discussing organizational initiatives, I would invoke the notion of a communal norm. It is now inconceivable that a self-respecting American Jew not have read Elie Wiesel. Among committed Jews, trips to Israel, the purchase of Israeli art, synagogue and/or organizational affiliation, giving to some Jewish cause, and (most recently) a degree of Jewish literacy are now expected of others and oneself. Knowledge of Israel might well join this list.

(a) I have in mind, at a minimum, subscriptions to the *Jerusalem Post*, the *Jerusalem Report*, and journals such as the *Tel Aviv Review*; reading of Israeli authors in translation; sponsorship of and attendance at Israeli film festivals; visits to Israel in the framework of Melitz-like efforts to know the country and its people.

(b) CNN broadcasts from Israel during the Scud attacks revealed the power of television to bring Israel into our homes. We were placed in the sealed rooms of Israeli families, heard the warning and all-clear sirens, saw the damage even before Israelis did. Those broadcasts emphasized the incalculable impact that Jewish television programming, a Jewish cable network, could have on American Jews -- not least in strengthening connection to Israel, the obvious source of much programming. I doubt that any single step we could take would have nearly as much impact as bringing Jewish cable TV into the home of every American Jew who chose to subscribe to it. This might well become a mark of identification with the Jewish people, and I suspect it would be near-universal. Programming, needless to say, would be most available from the source most relevant here: Israel. Programming produced here, no less important, would be screened there. The cost would be considerable -- apparently the reason for the lack of cable to date -- but so would the benefit.

A side benefit of such programming -- and indeed of knowledge of Israel more generally -- would be closer ties with the rest of the Jewish Diaspora, united primarily at present by its common focus on Israel. Here too linguistic and cultural barriers are immense. Relatively few American Jews know much about any other Diaspora culture. We may visit the Amsterdam synagogue, or walk the streets of the Marais in Paris, but our acquaintance with the Jewries of Holland and France remains minimal. Jewish media would address that problem, meaning that even as we learned more about Israel we would also learn more about common concerns such as the maintenance of a minority culture, remembrance of the

Holocaust, and absorption of Jewish emigre populations. We have the possibility -- for the first time in the modern period, really -- of giving Jews worldwide the intimate knowledge of one another's cultures supplied before the modern period only to an elite by ties of trade and common religious practice.

Language

A final demand we might make upon ourselves is Hebrew literacy. On the one hand, this seems a self-serving suggestion from a Jewish Studies professor who learned Hebrew as a child. On the other hand, we know that more and more American Jewish youngsters are enrolled in day schools and year-abroad-in-Israel programs and university language courses which (unlike Hebrew schools, apparently) present a real opportunity for learning conversational Hebrew. We are probably the first monolingual Jewish community in our people's history -- and that language is not a Jewish language, meaning that most American Jews have no immediate access to the sources of their tradition or the culture of their homeland. Preaching the necessity of Hebrew literacy is not likely to achieve it. But progress in any of the four modes listed above will likely create a hunger for the intimacy that comes only when each side speaks to the other in its own language -- and knows it is understood.

Conclusion

I have made no attempt to prioritize or operationalize these options. Some paths are obvious, others less so. All stem from one picture of American Jewish involvement with Israel, presuming that the modes of involvement predominant heretofore will not serve us in the future. In the words of Daniel Elazar, "We must recognize that the Israel-Diaspora relationship will not continue to be based upon that consensus of sentiment that not only animated but dominated the first generation after 1948 . . . the Jewish people have now reached a period in which simple consensus on many of the critical issues affecting the Israel-Diaspora relationship will not easily be attained."[13] In the absence of the "consensus of sentiment," new initiatives are called for.

Let me note in conclusion that the suggestions made above regarding people, money, involvement, knowledge, and language neither sidestep nor confront head-on the four divisive factors mentioned earlier: politics, religion, ethos/ethnicity, and ideology. This is as it should be.

- American Jews will have to trust Israelis with ultimate responsibility for the negotiation of Middle East peace, and Israelis will have to trust American Jews to act and voice dissent from Israeli government policy in a responsible manner.

- The future of religion in Israel awaits political reforms that may or may not come in the short term, and cultural developments that will surely come in the long term. Whatever the face of Israeli Judaism a century from now, one thing is certain: it will resemble neither American Judaism nor the Israeli Judaism of today. Three millennia of history cannot but shape the Jewish State, though what that shape will be only time will tell.

- Ethos and ethnicity will vary within and between the two communities; the joy and challenge of their interaction, the object of their quest for mutual knowledge, will lie precisely in these divergences. And the more time each community spends with the other, on the other's soil, speaking the other's language both literally and figuratively, the less the differences will prove a barrier to conversation.

- Myths, finally, arise and survive because they are needed. American Jews and Israelis have chosen and repeatedly choose to act out the two very different possibilities for Jewish existence presented to Jews in the modern world -- emancipation and sovereignty. They make these choices, if they do so self-consciously, because they differ in the role they imagine for themselves as human beings and as Jews. No good purpose will be served by an "end to Jewish ideology." Unity of opinion is neither possible nor

desirable. Much goodwill comes of continuing argument "for the sake of heaven" -- in other words, the confrontation of opposing ideologies in a conversation that will last as long as the State and the Diaspora.

For reasons that would take us far afield, and so will not be noted here, my own working assumption is that serious Jewish life of whatever sort is a minority option in America, while in Israel it is an inescapable personal and societal necessity. When all is said and done, that asymmetry cannot be altered. Whether American Jews remain attached to Israel will depend on the depth of sentiment that informs their relation to the Jewish people, its culture, and its faith. Even if the latter bond is affected in no small degree by the depth of attachment to Israel, it is ultimately determined to a far greater degree by forces and decisions beyond the scope of any immediate intervention. The options outlined in this paper for deepening the role of Israel in American Jewish identity represent necessary and doable repairs, but they do not substitute for continued work on the more basic task: Jewish identity itself. That task, if history is any guide, will prove unending.

Notes

1. See, principally, the numerous published essays of Steven M. Cohen, some of them prepared for the AJC, and "Are Americans and Israeli Jews Drifting Apart?" a manuscript presented at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, December 1988. See also Lawrence Sternberg, "Bridging the Gap Between a New Generation of American and Israeli Jews," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 66 (Summer 1990): 321-330; Joyce R. Starr, *Kissing Through Glass: The Invisible Shield Between Americans and Israelis* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1990), pp. 137-213; and Monty Noam Penkower, *At the Crossroads: American Jewry and the State of Israel* (Haifa: University of Haifa, 1990).

2. See especially Arnold M. Eisen, *Galut: Modern Jewish Reflection on Homelessness and Homecoming* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

3. I draw in this section on Eisen, *Galut*, ch. 7. For a full history of American Zionism, see Melvin Urofsky, *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1975). The primary sources cited here are available in Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966).

4. I draw in this section on Eisen, *Galut*, ch. 6. For a recent reassessment of Zionist ideology, see Anita Shapira, "Trends in Zionist Ideology and Their Contemporary Meaning," in *Zionism Today: A Symposium* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1986).

5. See Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yihiya, *Civil Religion in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

6. See Charles S. Liebman and Steven M. Cohen, *Two Worlds of Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), ch. 5.

7. See *ibid.*, chs. 4 and 6. See also Charles S. Liebman, "Religious Trends Among Jews in the United States and Changing Images of Israel," a paper prepared for delivery at the Hebrew University, December 1989; and Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem Friedman, *The Haredim in Israel* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1991).

8. I have treated this subject extensively in Eisen, *Galut*, chs. 6-7. See also David Sidorsky, "Interpreting the Diaspora-Israel Relationship," in *Zionism Today.*

9. The initials originally stood for Israel Diaspora Institute but recently changed to mean Israel Democracy Institute, reflecting a change in emphasis. See the Institute's publication *Israeli Democracy.*

10. Uri Gordon, "The Case of the Silent Telephone," in *Kesher*, no. 1 (February 1991), distributed by the Israeli Forum.

11. Shlomo Avineri, an open letter of Jan. 28, 1991 distributed to members of the Seminars on Zionist Thought sponsored by the World Zionist Organization.

12. I quote here from Arnold Eisen, "An Older Israel; a Wiser American Jewry?" *Sh'ma* 20 (April 13, 1990): 92.

13. Daniel Elazar, "Israel and the Diaspora: Working Together to Strengthen Jewish Unity and Continuity -- Prospects and Problems," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 86 (Summer 1990): 315-320.

RESPONSES

Jonathan Woocher

It is both a pleasure and a problem to respond to Arnold Eisen's paper. A pleasure because it is a typically insightful and well-crafted analysis from one of our best and brightest thinkers. That makes it difficult to add very much. Therefore I will not offer a systematic response, but a few glosses and brief responses to the questions posed by Steve Bayme in his introduction.

One of the strengths of Eisen's paper is the emphasis on the multidimensionality of the American Jewish relationship with Israel. The various dimensions are interrelated -- the political, the philanthropic, the cultural, the ideological. They are, however, also separable. I want to question the existence of what has been referred to as "the myth." We should think instead in a more differentiated way about aspects of the relationship that are changing and aspects that may be more stable. It is extremely important that we recognize that American Jews relate to Israel in a variety of ways. The studies of this Institute bear that out quite well. There is no one American Jewish relationship with Israel. There are many ways of relating.

In thinking about the question of how Israel functions in relationship to American Jewish identity, there are at least three important ways in which Israel functions as a component of American Jewish identities, that is, the identities of individual American Jews. For some, Israel is a foreign country, a place that is perhaps of some special interest, viewed with sympathy, but that is essentially *other*. Israel is peripheral to their identities as Jews. It may be a factor in their consciousness, but it is not central in any significant way. I am concerned that this marginalization of Israel, particularly among younger American Jews, may become, if it is not already, the norm. Typically we hear them speak of Israel as a nice place to know about, or as a place one reads about in the newspapers or hears about on television news broadcasts. But, in the end, "Israel is Israel, it is not me."

There is a second way of relating: Israel as a religious or ideological symbol. As such a symbol, Israel occupies a definite place, perhaps *several* places in one's personal meaning system. Usually it is a positive place, although there are some American Jews for whom Israel is highly salient in a negative way, including people who go out of their way to find fault with Israel, often expressing their own conflicted Jewishness, verging on self-hatred.

Generally, the images of Israel that correspond to this role are Israel as Promised Land, Israel as source of the Jewish tradition, Israel as refuge to Jews in need, Israel as expression of Jewish power and self determination, Israel as dynamic young democracy. The value system may be explicitly religious, fitting Israel into the framework of one's religious Jewishness. It may be a more secularized ideology -- Israel as the ethnic homeland, Israel fitting into a secular-Zionist ideology. This symbolic role certainly has been the dominant focus of concern in terms of the changing role of Israel. Our question is this: Is Israel as *potent* a religious/ideological symbol as it once was? As a religious/ideological symbol, is it

as *positive* as it once was? These two dimensions of what we refer to as saliency and valence are both important. Israel can be a potent symbol, but it can shift from positive to negative or it can remain positive but at a low level of intensity. Marginal involvement may be no more meaningful that no involvement.

There is yet another way in which Israel is functioning in the identity of American Jews -- Israel as a "second home." I do not mean this literally, though there are many American Jews who do maintain residences in Israel. I mean relating to Israel as a place that one knows personally and intimately, a place where one feels comfortable and "at home." Being in this relationship does not preclude being knowledgeably critical of Israel, as any insider would be.

This third way has a natural quality, much as our Americanness and our Jewishness can become seamlessly integrated into our identities. In this framework, Israel functions very much like the synagogue -- as something that we know well and with and in which we feel quite comfortable. But it goes beyond symbolism, for here it becomes a familiar aspect of our reality, a second home or a home away from home. This notion deserves greater attention than it typically receives. Perhaps we need to move beyond the myth of Israel, toward this nonmythical notion of Israel as *second home.*

Eisen suggests a few ways we might move in this direction and I would like to add a few of my own. First, in speaking about the relationship of Israel and Jewish identity, we should differentiate between two different dimensions: Israel as a *source* of Jewish identity and Israel as a *function* of Jewish identity. The former has to do with the way in which one's Jewishness is affected by an encounter with the reality of the Jewish state. It is reflected in a statement like "Until I encountered Israel I really didn't appreciate my own Jewishness." From my experience, a direct encounter with Israel can be a potent *source* of Jewish identity.

Israel as a *function* of Jewish identity is quite different. For large numbers of Jews today, the importance of Israel is an outgrowth of a general attachment to Jewishness and involvement in Jewish life. Thus, the most effective way to enhance the Israel component of Jewish identity is to strengthen Jewish identity generally. By way of illustration, we know that the Orthodox community shows the highest level of attachment to Israel as evidenced in travel and enrollment in educational programs. Conservative and Reform Jews are less attached, followed by those classified as nonaffiliated or the "just Jewish." I believe that the relationship of American Jews to Israel is increasingly a function of the quality of their Jewish identity and the level of Jewish commitment as a whole. It is misleading and incorrect to try to isolate Israel as an identity component from other dimensions of Jewishness.

In assessing recent developments I want to emphasize the importance of differentiating between elites and the general Jewish community. The two are quite different in some important ways. Programs and policies that may seem quite sound at the elite level may not work for the majority of Jews. For example, the goal of making Hebrew a living language only makes sense for those receiving an intensive Jewish/Hebrew education -- that is, the Jewish day-school elite. Our Jewish day schools now reach about one-third of all the young people who receive any Jewish education. Were those schools to make Hebrew language a very high priority (in most it is not), it might be possible to produce a Jewishly educated elite thoroughly comfortable in Hebrew. However, for the majority of young people not receiving intensive Jewish education, Hebrew will never be a living language.

Initially, the bulk of our policy recommendations will be directed toward elites, since it is with these groups that we can have the greatest impact. Serious thought must be given to devising strategies that would reach large segments of the community, the moderately and the minimally affiliated. We should also think about how the two segments of the community -- the highly identified and committed core and the periphery -- interrelate and impinge upon one another.

I do not by any means wish to depreciate the value of progress made within the ranks of elites, because I believe that much of Jewish life has been, is, and will always be carried on at that level. Therefore, programs that bring American and Israeli Jews together, such as the Israeli and North American Forums' Moriah Process, the Young Leadership encounters, the seminars of the Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations, and others, are all important programs, even if they reach only elites.

Third, a comment about the role of education. JESNA, the agency that I head, has spent much of its energy in the last five years working on what we call "building educational bridges to Israel." At present, we are involved in a great many arenas with a variety of partners. From our experience, I have concluded that there is far more that can be done within Jewish education to strengthen the relationship to Israel, if only we took the challenge seriously. Our studies have shown that Jewish education touches approximately three-fourths of all Jewish young people. If we were to succeed in reaching 60 percent or even only half of these, that would still constitute a significant core of our young people who could be exposed to Israel in significant ways.

Much of our teaching about Israel has been at what I referred to earlier as the "second level" of Jewish relationship, that is, as an aspect of our symbolism or of our mythos. Having experienced the problematic nature of that approach, we must turn our energies to educating about Israel at the third level -- Israel as a "second home."

Clearly, the centerpiece of this should be programs in which our young people spend time in Israel, living there, studying there, and making it their second home. Over the last few years we have experienced a dramatic drop in the numbers of young people who are spending time in Israel on short-term summer programs, from a peak of over ten thousand per year to three or four thousand. While external events such as the Gulf War do have an impact, market research suggests that the decrease is not merely a function of concerns over security.

Here I add my voice to those who are calling for a major statement of Jewish public policy that endorses the concept of a youth experience in Israel as a component of the Jewish education of all of our young people. To be fully a Jew in 1991, one must have spent some *quality time* in Israel. We must work toward the goal of making Israel a major component of Jewish education in America.

With regard to many of the issues raised by Arnold Eisen -- identity, values, the purpose and meaning of Jewish existence, issues shared by American and Israeli Jews -- Jewish education can serve as a bridge between the two communities. These are the central concerns of Jewish education in both Israel and in the Diaspora. There are institutions that have had remarkable success working with both Israeli and American Jews, such as Melitz, and have shown that it is entirely possible to build bridges between American and Israeli Jews around these central Jewish educational and existential themes.

Finally, a comment about politics, ideology, religion, and culture, the four categories that Professor Eisen indicates are so problematic. Here we have to do a bit of lemonade making. I agree that the differences, the distinctions of culture, of ethos, of the role of religion, of politics -- these will remain. However, we should continue to point out that, precisely around these issues, there are opportunities for engagement. The issues that matter most to us as American Jews (who and what is a Jew) are, after all, issues of controversy in Israeli life. There are opportunities for us to become engaged with those with whom we share common political, cultural, and religious perspectives. I am sure the Reform and Conservative movements would be delighted if American Jews, who protested so vigorously over the issue of "who is a Jew," would channel some of those energies into being actively involved with the strengthening of alternatives to Orthodox Judaism in Israel.

There is a danger that increasing this involvement will put American Jews preponderantly on one side or the other of Israel's internal debates. But this is the price that we will have to pay for some serious

involvement. If Israelis are serious about wanting the active involvement of American Jews, they must be prepared to have us enter into the thick of even the most volatile issues. They cannot say "We want your involvement" and then add "but don't comment on that issue because it is too controversial or too political." I am not so much concerned about the political issues because that cat is out of the bag. But I am concerned about issues that relate to the quality of religious and cultural life.

I conclude with a brief comment on Steve Bayme's question -- is the myth of Israel dead? I believe that it is not dead but that it does operate differently than it once did, and that it operates differently for different people. For some it may be weakening, which may be a good thing. Can the myth be reactivated? Yes, certain components of it will be reactivated by a clash with a U.S. president who appears hostile to Israel or by another round of the "who is a Jew" controversy. What concerns me is not the myth but rather some of the critical issues facing Jewry.

Will closer ties benefit Israel? I believe that we have no choice but to work to strengthen the relationship. If there is one wager that we Jews must make, it is that we will remain one Jewish People. The only way to do that is by strengthening those ties even if it may involve some disagreement with Israelis.

Is the dichotomy between American universalism and Israeli particulatism necessary? Is it valid? I believe it to be an oversimplification. We all struggle with that tension in our lives, as human beings and as Jews. The discussion about universalism and particularism can be a very fruitful ground for engaging American and Israeli Jews in a process of mutual and self discovery. In that person-to-person encounter, we may discover that we have more in common than we believed.

Allon Gal

Let me begin by sharing with you two events that changed my life as an Israeli and as a Jew. One event was on a deeply emotional level. When I came here to pursue graduate studies, I knew we had Orthodox relatives living in Boston. We came to this country from kibbutz Hashomer HaTza'ir, a radical Zionist, very secular kibbutz, and because of our differences we tried to ignore those relatives. Somehow it happened that we were invited to their Passover seder, our first Passover in this country. A heated discussion took place in the Gal family whether to participate.

Finally, a compromise was worked out, namely, that we would participate, but without relinquishing our identity as secular, humanistic, and radical socialist Israelis. We decided to symbolize this identity by bringing as a gift to this Orthodox Passover seder the Haggadah of our kibbutz movement. In that Haggadah, God is not mentioned at all. It emphasizes the natural, agricultural aspects, the spring festival, and the Exodus as the national liberation of our people.

The seder began, and it was a strictly Orthodox seder. Still, we were elated by its spirituality and seriousness. You could feel the weight of those thousands of years of Jewish history. Haggadot were open on the table, and of course they were the traditional versions of the Passover story. Everyone at the table participated by reading a section. When it was my turn to read, the leader of the seder stood up and said, "Well, here we have a special treat. We have guests from Israel, and they have brought with them a special Haggadah."

I felt that I had made a grave error. I wanted to disappear. But the leader approached me and said -- and this was a crucial experience in my life -- "Our guests from Israel will participate *from their own Haggadah in their own way* and will share in our Passover in their own tradition." For me, it was a

pivotal event. I knew then that American Jewry was different. I began to understand the meaning of American Jewish openness and pluralism.

The second experience was in the context of my doctoral research. It was the early seventies when I began my research on the life of Louis D. Brandeis, specifically, how he became a convert to Zionism. He was almost an assimilated Jew and was from a very liberal professional family. There are many similarities to the life of another great Zionist, Theodor Herzl.

Here there was the case of Herzl, also a liberal Jew, a journalist, from a well-off, assimilated family. Herzl became a Zionist, even the founder of modern Zionism. Of course, there was the influence of the Dreyfus affair. Naturally, as a devoted Zionist, I looked for something akin to the Dreyfus case in America. I invested many, many months in archives, in libraries searching for such an event. To this day I have not found the American Dreyfus case. I concluded that Louis D. Brandeis evolved from being an assimilated Jew to a lifelong commitment to Zionism without anti-Semitism having been a major factor. My research taught me that *positive* rather than negative factors transformed Brandeis.

So I have learned that America *is* different, and I decided that in order to seriously pursue my degree I should not confine myself to American Jewish history but study American history as well. In the course of those studies I learned that *America* is different in many important ways from Europe. As an Israeli I had not fully understood America and American Jewry. When I returned to Israel (at the end of 1975), I returned not merely as an Israeli but as an Israeli *Jew* with an appreciation of the genuine qualities of American civilization and of the American Jewish community.

Now, with regard to Professor Eisen's excellent paper and the question of the myth of Israel. Is the myth dead? One half of it is dead -- the *American half*. American Jews now see Israel in a much more realistic way, in a much more mature and balanced way. On the Israeli side, however, the myth about American Jews, generally speaking, is more or less as alive as it ever was. One factor is that not too many Israelis get the opportunity to have the experiences and education I described earlier.

Regarding Eisen's conclusion, can we be certain that Jewish traditional values will continue to unite us? I'm not so sure. Our approaches to Judaism are quite different. Let us take Hanukkah as an example. I participated in many Hanukkah events in this country and of course in Israel. These are two rather different holidays. Hanukkah in America is often a celebration of the separation of church and state. It is something warm and pleasantly mellow. In Israel it is a heroic chapter in the ongoing struggle for national liberation. So even if the two Jewish communities are celebrating the same holiday, we cannot really be certain of its ability to unite us.

Eisen suggests that Israel is still a Western country. Well, this is a problematic issue indeed. First, we are in neither Europe nor North America. We are in Asia, specifically in the Middle East. You are justifiably worried about the problem of assimilation here, but please think about the dangers of being assimilated into the Middle East and of being absorbed into the social-political values of the surrounding countries. When the idea of a Jewish national home emerged, the ideal Jewish state was conceived as one that would be radically different from the neighboring states. It was to be a genuinely Jewish creation built by people whose democratic values represented the rejection of the economic and political feudalism and the despotism that controlled the Arab world, including the Palestinian population. Today, however, that historic aspiration has been attenuated.

There are very strong undercurrents moving Israel closer to a "Middle Eastern civilization." One watershed was the 1982 war in Lebanon. I believe that only the first stage of the Lebanon war was justified. We had no right to brutally bomb Beirut, nor did we have the right to try to create a "new order" in Lebanon. That war was not a *Jewish* war. It caused many to question the notion of Israel as an enlightened Western society.

Some here have expressed concern that American Jews do not know Hebrew. I can understand that concern, and yet I have another concern that so many Israelis do not have a working knowledge of English. My own foreign minister does not know English. To me it is quite disturbing that many of our university students come here with rather poor English backgrounds and try to get by without seriously learning the language. The real question is of course whether younger Israelis can learn to appreciate the English-speaking world civilization.

I believe that one's Jewishness is deeper, richer, and more valid once it is based upon a knowledge of Hebrew. But I also know that one can be a very good Jew in English. And I also know that in Israel people may be living a completely non-Jewish life while speaking Hebrew.

Now regarding Professor Eisen's third point. We *are* united as members of one people; but let us remember that the demographic composition of Israel is very much in flux. Over 50 percent of Israelis are of Oriental background. Most do not have relatives in this country and American Jewry is something rather foreign to them. Now one may say, "Now that the Russians are coming, Israel will be more Ashkenazi and this will strengthen the ties between Israeli and American Jewries." We Israelis who are concerned about Israeli democracy have some concerns about those among the immigrants from the Soviet Union who were part of the Soviet system. Thus Russian aliyah partly and indirectly may work to widen the gap between Israel and American Jewry.

Just as American Jews are worried about the Jewish education of your children, I have serious questions about education for and appreciation of Western Jewry in Israel. In Israel one can matriculate while knowing next to nothing about Jews in the Western world. A high-school graduate in Israel does learn about the Holocaust, about life in the *shtetl*, and about Oriental Jewry. But one does not learn very much about Jews in the Western world, including North America. Together, we must do something to change that. Common wisdom in Israel is that American Jews are either going to assimilate soon or come to live in Israel. You can hear this not only from the Israeli "man in the street" but also from distinguished professors, academicians, and intellectuals. This will give you a sense of the rootedness of this myth in Israel.

Now regarding the involvement of the American Jewish community in Israeli affairs, I think you *should* be involved. I believe that Israel exists not only for Israelis but for the entire Jewish people. Our goal should be the building in Israel of a universal Jewish civilization because a narrow Israeli civilization might be too nationalistic, too narrow-minded, and too fundamentalist to be meaningfully Jewish.

You have a certain advantage living as a minority, as one group among many. Minorities tend to be more sensitive to human values, to minority rights, to the plight of the weak and oppressed. On the one hand you are in exile. One may say, "This is after all a *Christian* country." And there are powerful trends in this country working to make it more Christian. But the American system guarantees basic human rights, a polity, which we do not have in Israel. Human rights are not built in to our system constitutionally, and we Israelis might shift away from those refined values and ideals that we still share. The Prophets of Israel come to mind. Years ago the Prophets were central figures in the Israeli ethos. You could feel it. People quoted them and often gave their children the names of Prophets. In the Israel of today the situation is changed. Too many Israelis are connected today with the mythical heroes of the past rather than with the humanist and socially conscious heritage of the biblical Prophets.

To conclude, let me say that overall, despite the severe problems, I am not pessimistic. We have the means, many of which were referred to by Professor Eisen, to bridge the gap. *If* American Jewry will become more involved in Israel; *if* Israelis will become more acquainted with and educated about this Jewish community; *if* interaction between Israel and American Jewry will become more intensive and inspiring -- all these factors may then work toward bringing us closer together, and may enable liberal Israelis, and Jewishly oriented Israelis, to feel more at home in their own homeland.

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