



Community Bonds and Israel: Institutionalizing Dialogue, a Positive Trend

The state of the bonds between Jewish communities around the world, and especially between the two largest – Israel and North America – improved this year. The change isn't dramatic but a number of events and pieces of evidence enable us to see the recent period as one in which, on balance, positive developments occurred in the condition of community bonds. This year, we can also add to these developments a first-hand account gained during JPPI's comprehensive study, "Jewish and Democratic: Perspectives from World Jewry."¹

At the beginning of the study (further details on which follow) we included the finding that "Jews throughout the world support Israel and see the connection with it as an important matter that should be maintained." Israel, the study concludes, serves as a positive common denominator for world Jewry.

Positive Developments, Worrying Signs

New studies published in the past year on the state of the Jewish world, including the comprehensive study of American Jews by the Pew Center² as well as studies dealing with other Jewish communities (such as in the United Kingdom) demonstrated the intensity of the Jewish connection to Israel. The Pew study found that some 70% of Jews feel a "strong" or "some" emotional connection to Israel. In Britain, among couples in which both partners are Jewish, 84% of those surveyed stated that maintaining a connection to Israel is central to their Jewish identity.³

These studies support the claim that – at this stage, despite continued warnings on the subject – there is no real evidence of "distancing" from Israel by the world's Jews.⁴ Nevertheless, in the British study,

as in its U.S. counterpart, a strong link was found between the family status of younger Jews and the connection they feel to Israel. Compared to the 84% of Jews with Jewish partners, who consider Israel an important component of their Jewish identity, only 42% of British Jews with non-Jewish partners express this feeling. An essentially similar state of affairs exists among U.S. Jews, for whom there is also a significant link between intermarriage and a diminished intensity of connection to Israel.

In the large community of U.S. Jews there are two competing trends that are leading the young to opposite poles of the Israel-attachment spectrum. At one end, there is a dramatic rise in the number of young Orthodox Jews who today, according to weighted calculations of the Pew data, comprise over a quarter of all Jewish young people (even though the Orthodox community is only a tenth of all U.S. Jews).⁵ These young people are much more closely connected to Israel than American Jews in general.⁶ On the other hand, there is a dramatic increase in the number of non-Orthodox Jews who are choosing non-Jewish partners or who are designated by the Pew researchers as "Jews not by religion" (NBRs).⁷ Their connection to Israel is much weaker than that of other Jews, and their rising proportion among all young Jews is also reflected in the figures concerning the connection to Israel. Researcher Steven M. Cohen found in the Pew data proof of a gradual age-

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related decline in the intensity of Israel connection among non-Orthodox Jews. For example, the 18-29 age cohort tends to believe that "concern for Israel is an important component of being Jewish" to a lesser extent than older Jews (30%, compared to 41% among all non-Orthodox Jews, and 52% among non-Orthodox Jews aged 65 and older).⁸

The data concerning non-Orthodox young people, and particularly those who choose non-Jewish partners, reflect a real challenge for preserving community ties, just as they reflect a challenge for preserving Jewish identity in general. Over the long term, they are, of course, likely to contribute to negative trends pertaining to the sense of Jewish peoplehood. However, as mentioned, these data should not obscure the overall positive picture that emerges from the Pew study, one that generally indicates a continued strong connection between Jews around the world and Israel, as well as positive trends among the younger generation itself – for example, the growing number of Jews who have visited Israel (a number that should be attributed, it seems, to the success of subsidized Israel travel programs). In effect, as researcher Ted Sasson has claimed, the "stability of the connection to Israel" in terms of the community-wide data is "impressive," despite the dramatic increase of intermarriage, and it shows that concurrent with the erosion of Israel attachment among the growing segment of intermarriages, there is an apparent strengthening of Israel attachment among "Jews by religion" (who, in most cases, choose to marry other Jews).⁹

These findings are also supported by positive practical developments in Israel's connection

with the Diaspora. These developments can be divided into two main tracks: successful action to neutralize crisis factors, and intensified action for partnership in building a common Jewish future.

In the past year, special Israeli efforts have been evident (especially by government ministries and the Jewish Agency) to reach an arrangement in regard to the Western Wall Plaza. The goal is to accommodate non-Orthodox Jewish observance. These efforts, yet to be completed, have so far resulted in the creation of an additional prayer plaza for non-Orthodox worship, which has strengthened the feeling that Israel is willing to incorporate the concerns of Diaspora communities in setting policy. (See also "Worlds Apart: Systems of Jewish Identity in Israel and the Diaspora," this volume.)

In recent months, Israel has announced the comprehensive "Joint Initiative of the Government of Israel and World Jewry" to strengthen Jewish identity in the Diaspora. This initiative, which follows a number of earlier, more limited efforts, demonstrates more than any speech or declaration the abandonment of "negating the Diaspora" and a transition to supporting an active Jewish presence around the world. (See also: "Material Resources 2013-2014," this volume.)

This Israeli willingness to show greater consideration for the views of world Jewry and to become more involved in joint enterprises with world Jewry, beyond those solely intended for its own benefit, resonates with Diaspora Jewish communities.

A series of JPPI seminars held in dozens of Diaspora communities over the last six months raised questions of Israel-Diaspora ties for discussion. Professor Ruth Gavison, at the initiative of the Minister of Justice Tzipi Livni, was tasked with exploring an appropriate constitutional arrangement to enshrine Israel's Jewish and democratic character. JPPI, at the request of Prof. Gavison, examined Diaspora perspectives on the subject. JPPI's research, which was summarized in the report *Jewish and Democratic: Perspectives from World Jewry* (May 2014) dealt with a number of key questions, such as "How, in Diaspora Jewry's opinion, should Israel's Jewishness be expressed?" and "Which democratic values should guide Israel and how should it act when there is tension or a conflict between Jewish and democratic interests?" Questions related to Israel's relationship with non-Israeli Jews were also raised.

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The conclusions that arose from this consultative process clearly indicate a strong desire among Jews to identify and fully utilize partnership channels between Israel and Diaspora communities. This desire was shared by the vast majority of participants (it should be pointed out that most them are actively connected to the organized Jewish community)¹⁰ – though differences were found as to the precise nature of the desired involvement.

Main Points of the Report on Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State

JPPI's examination of the views of Diaspora Jews on the issue of Israel's identity as a "Jewish and democratic state" revealed an opinion pattern quite similar to that of the Israeli public.¹¹ The view that Israel should be a Jewish and democratic state creates a consensus conceptual framework even though the concrete meaning of a Jewish and democratic state yields a wide range of responses. The assertion that Israel should be "only Jewish" or "only democratic" excludes one from the Diaspora consensus.

Main conclusions from *Jewish and Democratic: Perspectives from World Jewry*

- Concerning the dilemma that sometimes arises from the dual definition "Jewish and democratic," JPPI project found opinions at both ends of the spectrum: an unequivocal preference for the democratic component over the Jewish, and the converse. However, there is no mistaking the dominant opinion found: the desire to see Israel as both Jewish and democratic, and the assumption that this combination is certainly possible, notwithstanding the tensions inherent in it. Accordingly, many regard the ambiguity of the current "Jewish and democratic" definition as an advantage that facilitates partnership and avoids factionalism and division.
- For many Diaspora Jews, democratic values are synonymous with "Jewish values." Thus,

conduct that belies Israel's democratic principles is also considered detrimental to Judaism and to Israel's character as a Jewish state. If Israel were not a liberal democracy, it would be less attractive to many Diaspora Jews.

- When tensions between Jewish and democratic were placed in sharp relief, the majority – who usually see a correlation between these values – divides into two camps: those who view Israel's democratic identity as attaching to its Jewish base, and those who emphasize the opposite arrangement. This distinction came into focus when participants were faced with some specific practical dilemmas that characterize life in a Jewish and democratic state.
- Diaspora Jews prefer a more substantial religious component in Israel's identity structure than in their own countries, and place great value in preserving Israel's Jewish nature. At the same time, the practical application of religion-state relations in Israel is not immune from criticism, particularly the Orthodox rabbinate's monopoly on religious affairs and personal status issues such as marriage, divorce, and burial.
- It was clear that many Diaspora Jews recognize the difficulties and constraints Israel faces given the regional hostility and threats to its security. Nevertheless, the majority does not consider this situation, or the fact that Israel's neighbors are not exemplars of democracy and human rights, as justification for lowering

the high values bar Israel is expected to maintain.

- World Jewry largely views Democratic and Jewish values as inextricable. Diaspora criticism of Israel's conduct in the Jewish sphere (over the Orthodox monopoly, for example) is often based on democratic values, just as its criticism of Israel's democracy is often based on Jewish values.
- Discussion about Israel's "Jewish and democratic" identity revealed a variety of Diaspora expectations:
 - That Israel should be pluralistic.
 - That Israel should be punctilious about equality for its non-Jewish citizens.
 - That Israel should strive for a reality in which it does not rule over the Palestinians.
 - That Israel should end the Orthodox monopoly over Jewish life and give equal status to all streams of Judaism.
 - That Israel should avoid imposing religious norms on a civil society that is mostly secular.
 - That Israel should strengthen its Jewish character by better educating its citizens about Jewish traditions, values, and history.

Diaspora Jews have a stake in Israel's identity:

- Israel's character significantly affects the way in which "Judaism" is perceived around the world by Jews and by non-Jews. For example, it is likely to influence the degree to which

the younger generation feel committed to their Jewish identity, and at the same time is likely to affect the non-Jewish environment's attitude toward the Jews who live among them.

- Jews are a minority everywhere in the world except Israel. This distinction is relevant to the considerable importance Diaspora Jews place on safeguarding the rights of Israel's minorities and on human rights in general.
- The right of Diaspora Jews to voice their opinions and exercise influence on matters decided in Israel was a central concern in seminar discussions.
- Their growing self-confidence in expressing views critical of Israel was marked, especially on matters related to the Jewish aspects of Israel's identity.
- Many participants emphasized that Israel's policies and image around the world affects the security and well-being of Diaspora Jews, and that they, therefore, have the right to be heard.
- Many discussants expressed the wish that Israel consult regularly with Diaspora Jews on matters close to their hearts. It was emphasized that such consultation would strengthen solidarity between Israel and the Diaspora.

Meeting, Consultation, Influence

A number of community level channels could be opened through which Diaspora Jews could express their connections to Israel and manage their relations with it in a systematic way. It is important to distinguish between this community level – the collective expression of groups of Jews who voluntarily associate in organizations or federations, or who simply live in the same areas – and relations with Israel on a personal level. Jews from around the world visit Israel, stay in touch

Certainly, there are also many Diaspora Jews who seek to influence Israel's foreign and defense policy

with relatives and friends in Israel, and follow news about Israel. JPPI seminar participants expressed the intensity of their personal connections to Israel, the importance of the relationship with Israel, and Israel's centrality to Jewish identity. Community level relationships with Israel expand upon the personal

and give collective weight to the opinions and desires of larger groups of Jews. They have the capacity to boost the connection of individual Jews to their local communities (which enables them to maintain a line of communication with Israel at a higher level) and enhance their sense of closeness to Israel itself (since their ability to influence it through their community provides them a sense of responsibility and belonging). Their importance to Israel is great because through them, it can benefit from providing greater attention to more

Jews in less time, and also because community bonds build communities with the capacity to engage in joint enterprises.

Jews around the world have expressed desire for dialogue channels with Israel ranging from non-binding consultation that still has a formal dimension, to dialogue intended from the outset to allow Diaspora Jews direct influence on Israeli policy.

But before we consider the significance of these channels and the manner in which it is possible to maintain them, we first note that most of the participants in the discussions JPPI conducted in communities – from Brazil to Holland to the UK, and from France and South Africa to many Canadian and U.S. communities – wish to be connected to Israel and place high value and significance on this connection. It is true that there are elements among world Jewry opposed to a connection with Israel for ideological (anti- or post-Zionist) or religious reasons, but they are at the far margins. Attachment to Israel, which does not preclude criticism of it, is very prevalent in the overwhelming majority of communities and organizations.

Here are a few examples of statements made in this spirit at the seminars we conducted. The report written following the seminar in Cleveland stated, "The connection between non-Israeli Jews and Israeli Jews is special and must be maintained." A participant in the New York seminar said, "A connection to Israel is the basis, and there is mainstream Judaism today that opposes it." In the summary of the discussions held by the New

Israel Fund in Australia, it was determined that "participants agreed that there is a special, strong relationship between Israel and Jews in the rest of world and they hoped that this would always be the case."

There was a prevalent sense among seminar participants that Diaspora communities have the right, and perhaps even a duty, to be actively involved in shaping Israel's character. In the context of active and real involvement, as indicated in JPPI's study, it appears that confidence is higher in the prerogative and ability to intervene in Judaism-related Israeli affairs and lower with respect to foreign and defense policy matters. That is, more participants thought their involvement should be limited to policy that directly affects Israel's "Jewishness." Certainly, there are also many Jews – whose voices have become louder in recent years – who seek to influence, whether directly or indirectly, foreign and defense policy as well.

The desire for permanent and substantial dialogue between Diaspora communities and Israel was universally expressed in JPPI seminars. The benefits of such a dialogue are clear: it strengthens the communities' sense of connection and involvement with one another; it allows for the early and orderly defusing of landmines that threaten the relationship; it provides Israel with an additional tool for clarifying its positions and policy on various subjects, including those that it currently has difficulty in communicating to certain segments of world Jewry; it provides Diaspora Jews with a tool for conveying messages to Israel discreetly and serves as pressure relief valve for frustration with Israeli policy on various

subjects; it presents Israel with opportunities to utilize advice from communities who have its interests at heart; it builds the trust necessary for cooperation on joint projects; and more.

Three principles for successful dialogue were raised in many of the discussions:

1. The dialogue should serve all parties, and not be conceived of solely as a tool to rally world Jewry around Israeli goals (even though this is a legitimate component of the dialogue). World Jewry seeks a dialogue that, for Israel, goes beyond utilitarian self-interest – one that actually weighs and factors in perspectives from world Jewry among its other considerations.
2. The dialogue should be conducted with Israelis who are in a position to influence decisions on the subjects being discussed. Some JPPI seminar discussants expressed concern that Israel will not really take what they say into account and only pretend to be listening. It is therefore important that the dialogue be conducted in a manner that engenders confidence that it has practical significance – this does not mean that Israel must carry out every recommendation raised as part of the dialogue, but it does require that representatives of the communities trust that their views will be taken into account.

The dialogue must be conducted in a manner that engenders confidence in its practical significance

3. The dialogue should be conducted with Diaspora Jews who have the capacity to communicate to Israel the range of views in their communities in all their ideological, political, religious, and organizational diversity. The possible decline of the centrality of major Diaspora organizations necessitates a dialogue

process that includes young leaders who operate outside the main traditional institutions with which Israel has been accustomed to talking. The question of representativeness itself deserves a separate and comprehensive discussion.

Existing dialogue frameworks do not provide a satisfactory answer to world Jewry's appetite for an orderly consultation process

The Existing Dialogue and its Limitations

Several dialogue frameworks between Israel and Diaspora communities and organizations currently exist. Some function as official forums (such as the "Coordinating Committee"¹²), and others are semi-official or voluntary. Some convene regularly and others meet on an ad hoc basis to deal with specific issues, such as the Conversion Law and the Western Wall plaza. Opinions are divided within Diaspora communities as to whether and to what extent a formal and permanent Israel-Diaspora consultative process should be implemented. Some argue that Israel, as an independent state, needs to preserve its autonomy in its decision-making processes, others

worry that formalizing a consultative mechanism would reinforce the "dual loyalty" stereotype. Nevertheless, when it comes to consultation on "Jewish" subjects – that is, on fundamental questions related to Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people and to how it functions as the core state of the Jewish people – Diaspora Jews largely believe that formal consultation is appropriate. Defining the dialogue's boundaries is, of course, a complicated process with many gray areas. Still, in most cases it is not difficult to distinguish between topics that fall under the "Jewish" umbrella and those in more problematic areas.

The existing dialogue frameworks do not provide a satisfactory answer to world Jewry's appetite for an orderly consultation process – or, as JPPI found in the study, to an increasing Israeli willingness to embrace such a process.¹³

- Many meetings take place between Diaspora and Israeli representatives in different forums, at different levels, and for a variety of reasons, but there is no clear and agreed-upon permanent consultative mechanism, one that doesn't take a single issue focus and that can survive successive Israeli governments. Existing forums tend to meet without having an orderly long-term agenda and without a clear methodology for conducting discussions, reaching conclusions, and following up on their implementation.
- Participants in these forums are rarely perceived as being truly representative of opinions prevailing in the Jewish communities in general.

- Current dialogue forums are insufficiently supported by suitable background studies that could provide more broad and reliable information about Diaspora Jews' opinions on various subjects, on their expectations of Israel, on the issues that are most important to them, and so on.

As is often the case in the Jewish world, the Israel-Diaspora dialogue arena does not suffer a lack of ideas, opinions, or initiatives, but they have not been coordinated or united by a clear goal. The result is less than efficacious. The feeling that there is no satisfactory consultation mechanism is still widespread in Diaspora communities. Diaspora communities and Israel have a clear interest in a significant and effective dialogue mechanism, yet there are obstacles on both sides that make it difficult to institute one.

In the Diaspora communities:

- Some organizations have difficulty relinquishing their status as the exclusive intermediaries of their constituents' opinions.
- Some organizations are not sufficiently democratic, which precludes them from acting as an instrument for delivering messages that reflect the views of the majority of Jews (or at least the views of those who are interested in being represented).
- Organizational agendas are sometimes different from the general Jewish agenda.

- The structural impossibility of controlling a discreet, orderly, and representative process in a situation in which community participation is voluntary.

In Israel:

- It is operationally convenient to work with the familiar organizations. Allowing in new players, some of whom make Israel uncomfortable, may cause resistance.
- Concern about over-interference in internal Israeli matters that would make it politically and diplomatically difficult for Israel.
- The politicization of processes within Israel for domestic purposes by those participating in them.

Recommendations

Israel should institutionalize an **effective and representative** channel for consultation with Diaspora Jewry on policy issues. **Development of a formal mechanism for dialogue between Israel and the Diaspora is necessary in order to:**

- 1. Preserve the unity of the Jewish people in an age of "free choice" in which the possibility of building and adopting other identities is widely available.**
- 2. Ensure participation of the next generation in Jewish life and in contributing to the community.**
- 3. Strengthen and develop Israel's character as a Jewish and democratic state and as the core state of the Jewish people.**

4. Advance Israel-Diaspora relations and those between communities around the world in a way that cultivates and preserves the value of shared responsibility as expressed in the statement: "All Jews are responsible for one another" [b. Sanhedrin 27b].

JPPI recommends deepening and institutionalizing a permanent dialogue with world Jewry for the purpose of consultation and coordination related to Israeli decisions that affect the Diaspora and to Diaspora decisions that affect Israel. In this regard, and building on the broad Diaspora consultation JPPI conducted this year on Israel's Jewish and democratic character, JPPI intends to conduct another round of seminars throughout the Diaspora in the coming year, in addition to its annual conference with the participation of leaders from Jewish organizations, communities, and academia.

The discussions will focus on the main challenges by relating to the five dimensions critical to the Jewish people's thriving: geopolitics, inter-community bonds, identity and identification, material resources, and demography. Particular attention will be paid to ensuring pluralistic settings, appropriate gender representation, and the involvement of the younger generation and new entrepreneurs in the field.

At the conclusion of the process, JPPI will prepare a report and submit it to the government of Israel and to Jewish leadership around the world. It will include detailed recommendations on strengthening and updating the consultative mechanism, and on the main parameters that should be focused upon.

Endnotes

1. See: Rosner, Shmuel, (May 2014), **Jewish and Democratic: Perspectives from World Jewry**, The Jewish People Policy Institute. This study, which drew from dozens of seminars held in Jewish communities around the world and summarized at a conference of Jewish leadership in New York in March 2014, was submitted to Prof. Ruth Gavison as background to her investigation into the constitutional arrangement appropriate for Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. Prof. Gavison was charged with this task by Minister of Justice Tzipi Livni.
2. Pew, (2013), **A Portrait of Jewish Americans – Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews**, Washington. <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2013/10/jewish-american-full-report-for-web.pdf>
3. Graham, David, Laura Staetsky and Jonathan Boyd, (January 2014), **Jews in the United Kingdom in 2013: Preliminary findings from the National Jewish Community Survey**, Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR). http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR_Jews_in_the_UK_in_2013_NJCS_preliminary_findings.Feb.%202014.pdf
4. For additional reading on this subject see: Rosner, Shmuel and Hakman, Inbal, (April 2012), **The Challenge of Peoplehood: Strengthening the Attachment of Young American Jews to Israel in the Time of the Distancing Discourse**, The Jewish People Policy Institute.
5. The weighting of these data was conducted by Prof. Steven Cohen. For further details see: Nathan-Kazis, Josh, (November 2013), "Orthodox Population Grows Faster than First Figures in Pew's Jewish American Study," *The Jewish Daily Forward*.
6. See: Cooperman, Alan, and Smith, Greg, (October 2013), **Eight facts about Orthodox Jews from the Pew Research survey**, Pew Research Center: "Orthodox Jews express much more emotional attachment to Israel than do other U.S. Jews. This is particularly true of Modern Orthodox Jews, 77% of whom say they feel "very attached" to the Jewish state. By contrast, among Ultra-Orthodox Jews, 55% say they feel very attached to Israel. And among American Jews overall, 30% say they are very attached to Israel".
7. The Jewish People Policy Institute published two brief reports that analyze the possible implications of the growth of the "Jews Not by Religion" category in the United States, a category that in the past year has appeared in two key studies: Shlomo Fischer dealt with the sociological significance of identification as 'Jews Not by Religion' in: Fischer, Shlomo, (November 2013), Who are the 'Jews by Religion' in the Pew Report?, *The Times of Israel*; Shmuel Rosner with the policy dilemmas that this category presents to the Jewish people's policy-makers in: Rosner, Shmuel, (Dec. 2013), 'Jews Not by Religion': How to Respond to American Jewry's New Challenge, The Jewish People Policy Institute.
8. For further details see: Rosner, Shmuel, (October 2013), "So What is Pew's Verdict: Are Young American Jews Attached to Israel?," *Jewish Journal*.
9. Sasson analyzed the Pew data and showed that a significant portion of the group labelled 'Jews Not by Religion' is made up of Jews who come from "mixed" homes. The general tone of the analysis is positive since Sasson identifies an increase in the level of identification with their Jewish heritage among children from mixed families – in other words, more children from mixed homes identify as Jews (although about half of them do so as 'Jews Not by Religion'). Sasson's full analysis appeared in *Tablet Magazine*. See: Sasson, Theodore. (November 2013), "New Analysis of the Pew Data: Children of Inter-marriage Increasingly Identify as Jews," *Tablet Magazine*.

10. The full report of the study includes an entire chapter on the methodology that guided those who conducted it, as well as a detailed analysis of the methodology's advantages and disadvantages in reflecting the views of world Jewry. In short: It is clear that the way in which the seminars were conducted had a real impact on the make-up of the participants, and one way or another on the views expressed in the discussions as well. This process focused on the connected and interested organized Jewish community, and other Jewish groups are not represented. Therefore, as a process for fully determining the views of all Jews, it is left wanting. On the other hand, it allowed for a profound understanding of the opinions of those Jews who are most likely to be mobilized for significant activity and whose commitment to a significant Jewish future is high.
11. The JPPI report "Jewish and Democratic: Perspectives from World Jewry" was completed and presented to Prof. Gavison on May 21, 2014 at an event with Prof. Gavison and the Chairman of the Jewish Agency, Natan Sharansky. The full report can be found on the Institute's website, www.jppei.org.il
12. The Committee for the Coordination of Activities Between the Government and the World Zionist Organization and the Committee for the Coordination of Activities Between the Government and the Jewish Agency for Israel (the Coordination Institution), see: <http://www.sela.pmo.gov.il/PMO/Secretarial/Comissions/committee25.htm>
13. In this regard, see also the minutes of the April 11, 2005 meeting of the Knesset Committee on Aliyah, Absorption and the Diaspora in which the Institute's then-president Prof. Yehezkel Dror and its current president Avinoam Bar-Yosef presented several recommendations for improving the dialogue between Israel and Diaspora communities. The situation has improved in many areas since that

discussion, but not to a sufficient degree. (http://www.nevo.co.il/law_html/law103/alia2005-04-12.htm).