



# Worlds Apart: Systems of Jewish Identity in Israel and the Diaspora

## Introduction

This expanded section on identity will focus on Jewish identity both in Israel and the Diaspora, especially the largest Diaspora community – the United States. There are significant differences in both the structure of Jewish identity and in the unspoken rules of how Jewish identity is thought about and realized (the "grammar" of Jewish identity). These differences often lead Israeli and American Jews to talk past each other. We begin with a brief discussion of the Jewish identity systems in Israel and the United States. Building upon this analysis, we will then analyze developments in Jewish identity over the past year in the Diaspora and Israel. Regarding the U.S., we will focus upon the highly significant publication: *A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings from a Pew Research Survey of American Jews* (October 2013) by the Pew Foundation. In regard to Israel, we will address various legislative initiatives concerning the Jewish identity of the state as well as continuing challenges to the received arrangements of religion and state.

We are choosing to present the Jewish identity models of these two communities because of their polarity; to a certain extent, their models are the negatives of one another. The other Jewish communities, those of Europe, Latin America and the British Commonwealth (currently or formerly – South Africa, Australia, and Canada) locate themselves between these two polar models.

**The unity of Jewish collective identity began to unravel with the advent of modernity**

## Two Major Models of Jewish Identity – the United States and Israel

### Jewish Identity in the United States

Contemporary Jewish identity in the United States is a variation of the historical forms of Jewish identity. Three dimensions of Jewish collective identity – ethnic, political-national, and religious – are woven together in the biblical narrative of Jewish history. The people of Israel are a tribe of common descent that achieves a sacred dimension by entering into a covenant with God. In fulfillment of this covenant, the people enter the Land of Israel and establish a polity. Thus, the biblical narrative assumes that Jewish collective identity will include a political or civic dimension. Until modernity – despite exile – the ethnic, religious, and political dimensions were conceived as inseparable from one another.

**The ethno-national element of Jewish identity along with Jewish solidarity forms the basis for "Jewish civil religion"**

The unity of Jewish collective identity began to unravel with the advent of modernity. The first change was the separation of religious identity from civic and national identity. As Jews became citizens of modern Western nation-states, they began to identify – politically and nationally – with their countries of residence, not with a future messianic kingdom. Certainly, from the perspective of the state, they retained their Jewish identity only in connection to religion; they

famously assumed the identity of "Germans or Frenchmen of the Mosaic faith."

National Jewish ethnic identity did not, however, entirely disappear. Instead, it was channeled in ways amenable to citizenship in the new nation-states. The major channel was in helping other Jews prepare themselves for modernity and transition into modern civic equality. This aid took many forms: providing a modern education to Jewish children in Eastern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East so they could enter the modern economy and integrate into emerging modern states; combating anti-Semitism; assisting immigration and acculturation to the West; and alleviating poverty. This solidarity was pioneered by Jewish self-help organizations such as Alliance Israelite Universelle, ORT, and, ultimately, the Joint Distribution Committee, the American Jewish Committee, and the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League. Eventually, it came to also include protecting and nurturing the Zionist yishuv in Eretz Yisrael and the nascent State of Israel.

Jewish identity in modern Western societies achieved a complex structure. Officially, it consisted of a privatized religious identity. In reality, Jewish identity included an important ethno-national element. This element was depoliticized at first and often disguised as "philanthropy." After the Second World War, as Jews began to feel more secure in their American membership they began to organize politically as an interest group. The emergence of AIPAC is one manifestation of this development.<sup>1</sup>

Like the sociologist Jonathan Woocher, we also claim that this ethno-national element of Jewish identity along with Jewish solidarity forms the basis for "Jewish civil religion."<sup>2</sup> The Jewish civil religion entails transnational Jewish solidarity and the sense of belonging to and promoting Jewish political, economic, and social flourishing (e.g. helping communities in distress, promoting Israel and its causes, advancing Jewish education and continuity). Its major practices involve membership in Jewish organizations, donations to Jewish causes, and mobilization for specific campaigns (e.g. political support for Israel, or, in the past, freeing Soviet Jewry). As a "religion," Jewish civil religion has a sacred aspect and rests upon a feeling of Jewish **sacred** ethnicity. This is in line with biblical and Jewish tradition in which the Jews as an ethno-national entity achieve sacredness through their covenant with God. The "sacredness" of Jewish sacred ethnicity expresses itself in a variety of ways: in the sense of Jewish "chosenness" or specialness, that Jews have special obligations to be moral or fight for justice, and in the normative obligations it imposes – especially regarding Jewish identity itself and continuity – one ought to identify as a Jew! This sense of sacredness is not doctrinal, but rather, is experienced. It does not necessarily entail formal religious belief. Indeed there are Jews who do not believe in God but feel that Jews are somehow special.<sup>3</sup> This sense of sacred, normative ethnicity contrasts with what might be termed "descriptive" or "ordinary" ethnicity. This kind of ethnic identity holds that a certain ethnic background (say, Irish, Polish or Italian) is simply a fact about an individual,

one that, in the U.S. today, most people are not ashamed of, and are even proud of. However, it is not very important to them, and it does not, for the most part, incur any special sense of belonging or obligation. And if their children do not feel or identify as Polish, Italian, or Irish, that's fine too. This is the ethnicity of white ethnics described by Richard Alba as being in a "twilight."<sup>4</sup> For the most part, white ethnics are totally assimilated into the American heartland with very high rates of intermarriage. For some, their ethnic or increasingly multi-ethnic background can be occasionally highlighted "symbolically" or "optionally" in situations in which it can provide "spice," status or interest. It generally does not contain any sacred or normative dimension, and it is sparsely passed on to their children. Ethnic identity among Jews also rests upon such sentiments (Jewish food and Jewish mothers, for example). It goes much further than that however, because Jewish ethnic affiliation is deemed a normative good. Rates of Jewish intermarriage, while alarming to some policy-makers, are low in comparison to other ethnicities.<sup>5</sup> The sacred, normative character of Jewish ethnic affiliation may explain this. Because the basis of the Jewish civil religion is a sacralized ethnic identity, **it can be symbolized and associated with the Jewish formal religion of the synagogue.**<sup>6</sup>

**Sacred ethnicity does not necessarily entail formal religious belief; there are Jews who do not believe in God but feel that Jews are somehow special**

At the core of mainstream American Jewish identity, then, there is a civil religion dedicated to Jewish political, economic, and social flourishing. This is what most American Jews, whether Reform, Conservative, Modern Orthodox, or secular have in common. They all affirm the sacred value of Jewish ethnic affiliation expressed in socio-political solidarity and toleration with differing levels of religious practice. The organizational loci of the Jewish civil religion are the large Jewish organizations and the 'mainline' Conservative, Reform, and Modern Orthodox synagogues.

**American Jews tend to view democracy, human and civil rights, and pluralism as Jewish religious ideas**

This civil religion has *internalized* sacred values. Participation in this Jewish civil religion, with its sacred character, is the real marker of Jewish identity. Since the civil religion itself is sacralized, participation in formal Jewish religious practice and organizations becomes voluntary – a matter of individual

choice and preference as is the case in regard to American (non-Jewish) civil religion. Most American Jews do belong to formal religious organizations or identify with Jewish religious denominations – in part because such belonging signifies the sacred character of Jewish ethnic affiliation, and in part because being Jewish is an official religious designation, and so, expected of them by society at large. But one could be a good Jew if one supported Israel and gave to the UJA,

even if one ate lobster and spent little or no time in a synagogue.<sup>7</sup>

In recent decades, the focus of Jewish civil religion has shifted from exclusive interest in defending against anti-Semitism and anti-Israel activities and in socio-economic advancement to "Jewish continuity," that the new generations should replicate this sacralized ethnic affiliation and solidarity. This new focus has produced a host of educational initiatives (including Israel travel education). Yet, the aim of these programs is not to impart knowledge of Jewish texts and religious practices, but rather, to encourage Jewish ethnic identification and solidarity.

It should be stressed that most American Jews think religious practice ought to be a matter of individual choice and autonomy.<sup>8</sup> It would seem that this orientation is due, first and foremost, to American "Protestant" assumptions about religion and state – that religion is a matter of private conscience and no state coercion or state establishment of religion should be countenanced. Hence, religious expression in America is, by nature, pluralistic.<sup>9</sup> In part, because of these historical beginnings, religious belief, practice, and affiliation in the U.S. are conceived of in highly individualistic terms. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century approximately 40% of Americans practice a different religion than the one they grew up in, that is, they switched their religious affiliation.<sup>10</sup>

This assumption has been eagerly taken up by American Jews. As a religious minority, they have been especially supportive advocates of religious freedom and, in the American context, separation of church and state.

Furthermore, Jewish civil religion (like American civil religion) seems to encourage the understanding that the practice of Jewish synagogue or sacramental religion (that is, religion as it is commonly understood) is, for most American Jews, optional, and best left to individual choice and autonomy.

As exemplified in the famous 17<sup>th</sup> century case of Roger Williams and others, freedom of conscience and religious pluralism in the United States became religious as well as civic ideals. As a result, in general, religion in America goes together with pluralism, civil rights, and democracy.<sup>11</sup> This is also true of the American Jewish community. As exemplified in the participation of Rabbi A. J. Heschel and other American Jewish leaders in the civil rights movement, American Jews and their religious leaders tend to view democracy, human and civil rights, and pluralism as not just Jewish, but as Jewish religious ideas.<sup>12</sup>

### Israel – National-Political and Religious Jewish Identity

In Israel, Jewish identity is primarily national-political. Jewish identity is extremely important to Israeli Jews, but its significance is radically different from that of Jewish identity to Diaspora Jews, especially in America. First and foremost, for Israelis, Jewishness ensures full membership in the Israeli political and social collectivity. It must be stressed that Israel is a democracy and all of its citizens have equal rights and equal legal access to all benefits of the state and society. Nevertheless, as in other societies, there are informal, social barriers to various social circles, jobs, schools etc.

to certain groups of non-Jews. It is, thus, highly desirable to identify as Jewish. Jewishness confers concrete political, social, and economic benefits such as access to jobs, including in the defense and high tech sectors, and access to fully funded schools, and protects against various forms of intrusion, such as identity checks.<sup>13</sup>

One aspect of Jewish identity that does not at all exist in the Diaspora is the Jewish identity of the state. This was of course reflected in the Proclamation of Independence (the Declaration of the Establishment of the State), which states that [we] "hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel, to be known as the State of Israel." The language, official state holidays and symbols all reflect the Jewish identity of the state as does the Law of Return (1950), which codifies Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people worldwide. In two Basic Laws (which have constitutional status), Israel is defined as a Jewish and democratic state.

**The religious dimension of Jewish identity in Israel is organized largely according to a European nation-state model**

The religious dimension of Jewish identity and religious life in Israel is organized largely according to a European nation-state model. According to European sociologists of religion such as Grace Davie and Danielle Hervieu-Leger,<sup>14</sup> this model has two aspects: 1) Religious identity is a function of collective national identity; and 2) Religious life and activity is organized around a state religious

organization ("church") which provides religious services for the collectivity. Thus, for Britons, part of being English is belonging to the Church of England. For centuries, Swedish subjects or citizens were inscribed at birth as members in the Swedish Lutheran Church. Only in 1952 did the Swedish Parliament pass a law that permitted one to retain Swedish citizenship while withdrawing membership in the Swedish Church. In such a setup, one does not have to do anything to be an Anglican or Swedish Lutheran. One's mere membership in the English or Swedish community

**Religion plays an important role in Israeli national membership**

makes one automatically into an Anglican or Lutheran. In this model, religious identity is not really a matter of individual choice or conviction; rather, it goes along with one's national, ethnic or political identity. Although the European example of this model was just given, in truth it characterizes most of the

world's societies. Viewed in a global context, it is the American model, which emphasizes religious identity based upon individual choice and conviction, that is exceptional.

According to the European model, the collectivity maintains an institution that ensures its continued religious identity, a state church. The state church and its staff, the clergy, practices religion and even "believes" on behalf of all members of the society. It also provides religious services when they are

needed by the broader population – especially at life cycle events such births, marriages, and deaths. In that sense it is a public utility. It is supported by taxes and it is available to the entire population, like the postal service. Given this role, there is an understandable preference that the state church should reflect, to the extent possible, tradition, history, and religious authenticity.

The Israeli model is clearly within the European paradigm. Jewish Israelis are automatically registered within the population registry in the Ministry of the Interior as of the Jewish religion. When the late writer Yoram Kaniuk wished to be registered as "of no religion" he needed an injunction from the High Court in order to force the Ministry of Interior to accede to his wishes. At the same time, the court denied the petition filed by Prof. Uzi Ornan to be registered as "Israeli" instead of Jewish. In sum, religious identity in Israel comes together with national membership and identity.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Israel maintains a state religious organization, the Chief Rabbinate, tasked with maintaining the religious identity of the national collectivity. The staff and functionaries of the Chief Rabbinate, especially the municipal and local rabbis whose salary is paid by the state, conduct religious prayers in the central synagogues on behalf of the entire population. Like their counterparts in Europe, they also keep the individual religious prescriptions (*kashrut*, *Shabbat*) and thus they represent the religious character of the national collective. The Chief Rabbinate also provides religious services for the entire population – such as marriage and burial. The phrase *sherutei dat* "religious services"

is well established in Israeli Hebrew. The word "services" (*sherutim*) should be understood as in the sense of "cleaning services" or "office services." For years, the *Histadrut* (the trade union federation), whose members were personally pious or religious to various degrees, maintained a department of "religious services."

Religion, in Israel, is a public utility supported by taxes. As a utility, it is not something one really thinks about, nor is it really an object of personal choice or self-expression. No matter how inefficient or bothersome utilities are, we generally accept them as "the way things are." And in most cases we don't even think about abolishing them or even breaking their monopoly. While there is a significant minority that expresses vehement displeasure with the Chief Rabbinate, the majority of the population seems to (passively) accept the status quo.<sup>16</sup> It is also recognized that insofar as it serves the entire Jewish population it should be organized according to the widest common denominator, that is, in Orthodox fashion, so that even the most devout can benefit from the services it provides. There are, of course, also historical reasons why the Chief Rabbinate is Orthodox, and, in addition, as in Europe, religious institutions are conceived of as something that ought to be historical, traditional, and "authentic."

Religion in Israel, an intrinsic part of the national project, plays an important role in the determination and definition of national membership. This role is in the first place negative: One cannot belong to another religion and be considered a member of the Jewish nationality. This principle was not always obvious – quite

the contrary – but it was ironed out over time. Theodore Herzl's revolutionary project seems to have included a radical re-ordering of Jewish collective identity. It was to be defined entirely by territorial and state boundaries. Those who lived within the boundaries of the Jewish State were to be Jews, while those outside of it were to be part of the nations in which they lived (Frenchmen or Germans, not Jews).<sup>17</sup>

This radical Herzlian conception of Jewish identity was rejected by the Zionist movement. The most important and famous statement of the negative importance of religion for Jewish national identity occurred in the Brother Daniel Rufeisen case in which Israel's High Court ruled that as the term "Jew" is understood both by the legislators (who passed the Law of Return) and ordinary people, one cannot be Jewish if one converts to Christianity. This is so even if by Jewish religious law (*halacha*), such a person "who sinned" is still considered a Jew. As a result of this ruling, Rufeisen was registered as being of "no nationality." The High Court and the government of Israel have, on other occasions involving population registration, sustained this conception.

Thus, religion is intrinsic to national identity and the public sphere, and not only in a negative way. According to the Avichai-Israel Democracy

**Jewish national secularization is not the idea of the separation of church and state, but subordination of religion to the national principle**

Institute Report, *A Portrait of Israeli Jews 2009* (published in 2011), 61% of Israeli Jews “believe that the State of Israel should ensure that public life is conducted according to Jewish religious tradition.”

What, then, is the nature of secularization in Israel? The Israeli state and society think of themselves, roughly, as secular or non-observant. Central spheres of government and social life are clearly independent of religious control, especially the law, the political arena, the economy, the military, and even the state electronic communications media.

**Religious control of marriage and divorce irks but is tolerated because Jewish religious endogamy is considered to be in the national interest**

At the same time, there are serious departures from any rigorous model of secularism. Israel has a religion that is clearly privileged by the state – Orthodox Judaism. There are areas of law – notably personal status, marriage and divorce – over which the state has delegated control to the clergy. Furthermore, the

state supports Jewish religious education. How to explain this particular pattern, this particular interweaving of secular and non-secular elements? What Jewish national secularization seeks is not the familiar idea of the separation of church and state, but rather the autonomy of the state and the related spheres of the economy and military from religious control, and, on the contrary, **the subordination of religion to the national principle**.<sup>18</sup> The Chief Rabbinate and the Ministry

of Religious Affairs are organs of the state originally designed to accommodate the Jewish religion to the interests of Jewish nationalism (in accordance with the understanding that Jewish nationalism itself is a religious value).

We can now go back and look at some of the anomalies in the Israeli pattern of secularization. First, clerical control of marriage, an inheritance from the Ottoman millet system preserved by Great Britain in all their colonies, has the power of inertia. More importantly, religious control of marriage and divorce irks but is tolerated (at least in part) because Jewish religious endogamy is considered to be in the national interest. It is considered to be an important expression of national solidarity that Jews can and do marry other Jews. A widespread notion in Israel is that it is important for national integration and well-being for the different Jewish social groups (religious and secular, left and right, Ashkenazim and Sephardim) to be able to marry each other.<sup>19</sup> This is expedited by subordinating all the groups to the Jewish religious law of marriage and divorce.

In a similar vein, the state supports religious education because enhanced Jewish religious membership is considered to be enhanced Jewish national membership.

All articulations of Jewish collective identity have at least two components: the religious and the ethno-nationalist. As long as the collectivity remains Jewish, at least in a historical, recognizable way, both components in one fashion or other will persist. The real question involves the relation between the components. This is the real question

dividing Haredi and Zionist (including Religious Zionist) Jews. The Orthodox-Haredi conception of Jewish collective identity includes a strong and salient ethnic or ethno-nationalist conception (which is often very particularist and even xenophobic), however this component is always subordinated to the religious-Halachic component and is entirely regulated by it. The Zionist (including the Religious Zionist) conception does not negate, but persists in maintaining, the religious component. However it serves and is subordinate to the national component.

In regard to religious Zionism, it might be more accurate to state that it constitutes an alternative articulation of Jewish nationalism in which religion serves to qualify or specify Jewish nationalism. Religious Zionism is genuinely nationalistic insofar as it views national fulfillment – a Jewish state – as an intrinsic value and not only as a means of fulfilling other, religious values such as keeping the commandments associated with the Land of Israel (the sabbatical year, tithing). For Religious Zionists nationalist values are of the highest order and justify (to one degree or another) suspension of religiously based behaviors and practices (Torah study or segregation from secular, non-observant Jews). In fact, as their very high participation in IDF elite units and junior officer corps indicates, Religious Zionists are among the most dedicated nationalists of the Israeli Jewish population. Yet, their understanding of the national "substance" differs from that of much of the secular and especially liberal Zionist population. For many Religious Zionists the Jewish people are not a collection of individuals who came together

because of shared language, religion, culture and history, but rather, a sacred, organic entity in which the collective precedes the individual. Similarly, the State of Israel is not a neutral expression of sovereignty and political control, but a realization of Divine social, ethical, and legal ideals and the concrete incarnation of God's kingship in the world.<sup>20</sup>

### Jewish Identity in Europe, the Current and Former British Commonwealth, and Latin America

Jews in all of these countries have full citizenship status and rights and an unmediated relationship with the government. At the same time, in most of these countries, the non-Jewish majority populations have a strong sense of ethnic-national-cultural identity to which Jews do not belong. In regard to this, these countries have a different structure of collective identity than does the United States. In the United States ethnic-national identity is relatively weak and American identity is largely founded upon commitment to American values, the "American way of life" and American civil religion.<sup>21</sup> Thus, full American identity is no longer restricted to Protestants who originated in the British Isles but rather to all whites and increasingly to African-Americans, Americans of Asian descent,

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and Hispanics. Undoubtedly, this inclusive aspect of American collective identity has encouraged Jewish assimilation into the American non-Jewish population and intermarriage.

In those countries in which there is a strong sense of majority (non-Jewish) ethnic national identity, Jewish communities, too, tend to have a strong sense of ethnic-cultural Jewish identity. Non-U.S. English-speaking countries (Canada, Australia, and South Africa)<sup>22</sup> have developed strong multi-cultural orientations in recent decades stressing a mosaic of ethnic-national identities rather than a “melting pot.” Here too, in keeping with the multi-cultural ethos, the Jews have developed a relatively strong sense of ethnic-national identity. Jewish life in most of these places is often characterized by centralized Jewish community institutions, strong Jewish educational systems with high enrollment rates of Jewish children, strong Zionist movements, and lower intermarriage rates than in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

In regard to religion, Jewish communities in Europe, the former and current British Commonwealth, and Latin America have arrangements that are similar to Israel and the European nation-states. In Great Britain and France for example, there are central Jewish religious organizations of an Orthodox-traditional character (The United Synagogue and the Consistoire Central). In both, the Chief Rabbi is always Orthodox and religious services are conducted in central synagogues in traditional-Orthodox fashion. It is always understood that the individuals who might be attending such services need not be Orthodox, and in fact, most of them are not. It is expected that these central Jewish religious organizations provide life cycle services to the entire Jewish population – including marriage (sometimes to non-Jews) and burial.

## Developments in 2013-14 in Jewish Identity and Jewish Identification in the Diaspora and Israel

### The Pew Report and the State of Jewish Identity in the United States<sup>24</sup>

The Pew report, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans* (released October 1, 2013) and other studies raise major questions as to whether the pattern characteristic of the American Jewish community discussed above, of continued involvement in the Jewish civil religion and dedication to Jewish "sacred ethnicity," can continue, at least in its current form. In part, the effectiveness of such publically engaged Jewish organizations such as ADL, AIPAC, JFNA, and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations rests upon the fact that Jews and the Jewish community are (or have the image that they are) willing to be mobilized for various political and public causes. The Pew report and other research raises questions as to why Jews are willing to be mobilized for such causes, and whether such willingness will persist. Does it have to do with the nature of contemporary Jewish belonging, identity, and commitment? If so, are these changing or staying the same? If they are changing, in which direction? We ask these questions not so much in terms of the Jewish community's current attitudes and support, but in terms of the possible future trends that the Pew and other studies have revealed. We view these issues as determining part of the socio-cultural infrastructure of American Jewish communal life in general, including the triangular

relationship between Washington, Jerusalem, and the U.S. Jewish community.

The picture that emerges from the Pew report is that a large majority (about 80%) of American Jewish adults report high levels of a sense of Jewish belonging and solidarity.<sup>25</sup> However, an emerging group, which is much more highly represented in the younger age cohorts, differs in very significant ways. This second group exhibits a pattern of ethnic identity that is closer to that of "ordinary" or descriptive ethnicity rather than the sacred ethnicity, which was hitherto characteristic of American Jews.

The group that according to the study participates in Jewish civil religion and exhibits a high degree of "sacred" ethnic Jewish solidarity is designated "Jews by religion." These Jews have relatively high rates of in-marriage (64% have a Jewish spouse). 93% are raising their children as Jewish, and 82% say that all, most, or some of their close friends are Jewish. Furthermore, being Jewish is important to them: 90% said that it is very or somewhat important to them (56% said very important). Even more significant, 85% said that they have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people, and 71% indicated that they have a special responsibility to care for Jews in need. Regarding Israel, 76% have an emotional attachment to Israel, and 91% say that caring about Israel is an essential

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or important part of being Jewish. These feelings and attitudes are also backed up by behavior and action. 61% are members of synagogues or other Jewish organizations, and 67% have made a donation to a Jewish organization in the past year.

At the same time, as we have indicated elsewhere,<sup>26</sup> "Jews by religion are, in fact, not very religious, in the sense of a belief system and a set of practices that relate to things Divine (God, afterlife, divine worship and religious ritual). In response to the question, "How important is religion in your life?" only 31% (including the Orthodox who are 10%

**Among Jews by religion, the Modern Orthodox evince the most commitment to Jewish solidarity and flourishing**

of the Jewish population) answered "very important." In contrast, among the general American population, 56% answered that it was very important, and among the population that defined itself as Christian, 69% said it was very important. We find similar numbers in

regard to belief in God. 39% of Jews by religion (including Orthodox) indicated that they are absolutely certain regarding their belief in God (general population 69%, Christian population 78%). Attendance at religious services shows the same pattern: Among Jews by religion, only 29% report monthly attendance (50% for the general American public, and 62% among Christians)<sup>27</sup>

In other words, U.S. Jews affiliate with religion and belong to Jewish religious organizations, but are not religious in either belief or in practice.<sup>28</sup> What

does this mean? What does it mean to be a Jew by religion? We would say that in the majority of cases when Jews say that their religion is Jewish, what they really mean is that their ethnicity is sacred. That is, the Jewish religion is an explicit, adequate symbol for the sacredness of Jewish ethnicity and for the religious, sacred aspect of Jewish civil religion. Thus, for most American Jews, Jewish civil religion goes together with synagogue membership or denominational affiliation.

An interesting illumination of the relationship between the Jewish religion and its practice and between solidarity with the Jewish people, and commitment to its flourishing is presented by a recent article in *Commentary* on "social orthodoxy."<sup>29</sup> Among Jews by religion, the Modern Orthodox evince the most commitment to Jewish solidarity and flourishing, that is, to Jewish civil religion and "sacred" ethnicity. Very high numbers indicated that they have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people (100%), that they have a special responsibility to care for Jews in need (87%), have an emotional attachment to Israel (77% very attached), and say that caring about Israel is an essential part of being Jewish (79%). The author, Jay Lefkowitz, a Modern Orthodox lawyer, explains that his religious practice – his donning *teffilin* every morning, his observance of the Sabbath and Jewish holidays, but also his touring of Israel (which he puts into the same category) – engenders and expresses his sense of belonging to the Jewish people. As he puts it, he roots his Jewish "identity much more in Jewish culture, history and nationality" than in religious concepts such as faith, God, the commandments and the like. In

this he says he is a social Orthodox Jew, and he is not alone.

We would suggest that it is not only the Modern Orthodox who link “religious” behavior with Jewish belonging and ethno-national solidarity; American Jews by religion in general do so. Conservative and Reform Jews, though they practice the Jewish religion in somewhat less intense fashion than do Modern Orthodox and hence their Jewish belonging is in general slightly weaker, but the basic code is the same: “religious” behavior, especially membership in synagogues and denominations engenders, expresses, and symbolizes ethno-national belonging and solidarity. This transmutation is able to take place because both the religious sphere and the Jewish ethno-national sphere, for the Jews by religion, share a common characteristic – they are both “sacred.” That is, they carry a transcendent or charismatic character and they engender normative obligations. At the same time, American Orthodox Jews also resemble non-Orthodox Jews by religion in that their conception of “Jewish civil religion” is largely non-religious. This was clearly visible in what they confirmed as essential to Jewishness: “leading an ethical life” (80 %), and working for justice/equality (51 %). Thus, in sum American Jews by religion, whether Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist or Reform mainly view their Jewishness as constituted by a “Jewish civil religion,” which is not religious in content in the conventional sacramental sense (God, faith commandments) yet is experienced as sacred or normative and thus symbolized by religious belonging to synagogues and religious denominations.

## Jews of No Religion and Their Significance

One of the central messages of the Pew report is that about 20% of adult Jewish Americans are “Jews of no religion.” In contrast to “Jews by religion,” “Jews of no religion,” overall, lack Jewish connection: They are much more likely to have a non-Jewish spouse (79%); and they are much less likely to raise their children Jewish (67% will not raise their children Jewish vs. 7% of Jews by religion).

Similar results were found in responses to the sentiment that “being part of the Jewish community is essential to being Jewish.” Only one in ten Jews of no religion agreed with that concept. Jews of no religion are less attached to Israel (only 12% are very attached); they belong to Jewish organizations of any kind to a much lesser extent; and they give much less, if at all, to Jewish causes (20%). They are also less likely to have mainly Jewish friends (14% versus 38% for Jews by religion).

**Jews of no religion are less attached to Israel: only 12% are very attached**

What separates “Jews of no religion” from “Jews by religion” is not religion as it is commonly understood. What separates them is their different relationship to Jewish ethnicity. Jews by religion, as we have seen, share a sense of sacred ethnicity; Jews of no religion have a sense of ordinary or descriptive ethnicity. Jews of no religion are

indeed proud of their Jewishness (83%), however, only 12% said that it was "very important" to them. Most Jews of no religion, as we have seen, do not prioritize passing on their Jewishness to their children, nor do they have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people.<sup>30</sup> In other words, Jewish ethnicity for this group is a simple fact about themselves. It is a fact that most are not ashamed of and are even proud of. Thus, the ethnicity of Jews of no religion is very similar to the "twilight" ethnicity of other white ethnics.

**There is a strong overlap between the population Pew identified as "Jews of no religion" and Jews who are either intermarried or the children of intermarriage**

Another group, which partially overlaps with Jews of no religion or is close to it, are "the Jews of no denomination" (30% of all Jews, 66% of Jews of no religion). Among this group, too, we find very high levels of intermarriage (69%), and only 13% of them reported that being part of a Jewish community is essential to being Jewish. Similarly, only 31% reported that caring about Israel was an

essential part of being Jewish, and only 22% thought being Jewish was important in their lives.

Although Jews of no religion are still very much a minority, their importance will likely grow. While they constitute only 22% of the overall population of Jewish adults, among the Millennials, they constitute 33%. In general, as one descends among age cohorts the percentage of Jews of no religion grows (among the "Greatest Generation," they constitute 7%).

## Jews of No Religion and Intermarriage

While many reactions to the revelation that about 1.3 million adult Jewish Americans are Jews of no religion, with low Jewish connectedness and a high(er) rate of intermarriage, were extremely pessimistic with respect to the future of American Jewry, other responses saw cause for encouragement. Some researchers, such as Ted Sasson, have pointed out that the current survey of Jewish Americans gives a much higher number of Jewish Americans than previous surveys – 6.7 million versus 5.5 million in the 1990 NJPS. Sasson argues that part of the increase in the overall number of Jews is caused by the increase in the rate of intermarriage, as well as the increase in Jewish identification among the children of intermarried parents. Furthermore, among the Jewishly identifying children of intermarriage, about half (in age cohorts under 64) identify as Jews of no religion. So, as Sasson puts it: "The increasing portion of Jews of no religion from the older to the younger generation is therefore explained by increasing rates of intermarriage during the 1970s and 1980s and the increasing tendency of young adults from intermarried backgrounds to identify as Jewish."<sup>31</sup> In sum, according to Sasson, "Jews of no religion" are largely children of intermarried couples who identify as Jews, but who tend not to identify themselves as "Jews by religion." That is, when asked if they are members of the Jewish religion they answer in the negative, but they do say that they are Jewish by ethnicity and ancestry.

Indeed, there is a strong overlap between the population Pew identified as "Jews of no religion" and Jews who are either intermarried themselves

or are the children of intermarriage. 36% of Jews of no religion have non-Jewish mothers. As other studies have shown, the children of intermarriage are very likely to intermarry themselves. According to Pew: "Among married Jews who report that only one of their parents was Jewish, fully 83% are married to a non-Jewish spouse. By contrast, among married Jews with two Jewish parents, 63 % have a Jewish spouse and 37 % have a non-Jewish spouse."

The Pew study further demonstrates the overlap between Jews of non-religion and intermarried Jews in regard to enrolling children in Jewish educational programs, the sense of belonging to the Jewish people, and the responsibility to care for Jews in need.<sup>32</sup>

The connection between intermarriage and "Jews of no religion" is intuitive. If one has parents of two different religious backgrounds or faiths, a likely response is a lack of identification and commitment to either faith tradition. This would be especially the case if in the parents' generation such religious commitment was in the first place weak, as often happens in intermarried couples.

If one is the child of two or more ethnic communities and backgrounds, then one will tend to place them all on the same plane. One's Jewish background becomes like one's Irish, British, or Polish (or Chinese or Hispanic) background. That is, one's Jewish ethnic background becomes normalized and starts to resemble other American ethnic backgrounds. It becomes de-sacralized and loses its normative connotation. Thus, among the children of intermarriage, Jewish ethnicity

becomes part of the fabric of American "twilight" and "post-ethnicity"; "symbolic" and "optional,"<sup>33</sup> to be assumed on certain occasions when one chooses (when it contributes interest, spice or status), but without a sacred or normative character.

At the same time, there is a possibility that the overlap of Jews of no religion and intermarriage does not occur because of a causal relation between the two, but because both have a common cause – integration into American society. Since Jews are almost totally accepted into American society, and in almost no sense downtrodden or persecuted, the normative need for solidarity with other Jews tends to disappear. At the same time, acceptance into American society and comfort with non-Jews facilitates intermarriage.

**Since Jews are almost totally accepted into American society, the normative need for solidarity with other Jews tends to disappear**

### Jews are Who/ When/ If/ they Marry

The Pew report's "Overview," divides figures on "Jewish Identity by Generation" (from youngest to oldest: Millennial, Gen X, Boomer, Silent, and Greatest), and contrasts the Greatest Generation's 93% Jewish by religion with the Millennials' **seemingly** eroded 68% Jewish by religion. However a closer look reveals a somewhat different meaning to these figures. The decline by age in the number of Jews by religion does not differentiate between young adults who had one or two Jewish parents. The Millennial population

is actually bifurcated into children of in-marriage and children of intermarriage. The adult children of intermarriage have a very different relationship with religion, and the pattern of intermarrying is passed along and exacerbated in the next generation: Pew data show 83% of adult children with only one Jewish parent are married to non-Jews, compared to 37% of adult children of two Jews. The higher rates of Jews of no religion in the younger age cohorts is due to the higher rates of intermarriage among more recently married Jews.

**American intermarriage intersects with delayed marriage: on average, intermarrying Jews marry three years later than in-marriage Jews**

The most powerful and accurate predictor of an American Jew's involvement with Judaism is his or her spouse. To an extent not always appreciated, American Jews today are who they marry, and who they marry is connected with when they marry. Religious identification influences marital choices – and marital choices influence

religious identification. New Pew data currently being generated by demographer Steven M. Cohen show shocking differences in the "raising this child as Jewish" rates of the most recently intermarried. For Jews who married during the period 2000-2013, raising the oldest child as a Jew was reported by nine out of ten in-married Jewish men and women, but fewer than one in five intermarried Jews (Josh Nathan-Kazis, "The New Face of Jews Who Marry Out: It's Female," *Forward* 2/21/2014).

For many years, Jews who marry Jews marry earlier than those who marry non-Jews. This occurs for several reasons: first, more traditional Jews marry earlier, and second, single Jews as potential mates are numerically more readily available in college, graduate school, and professional school environments than they are in subsequent work environments. Thus, American intermarriage intersects with delayed marriage. While many American Jewish students are sexually active, only the most religiously observant are likely to regard persons they date as potential life partners. All this contributes to the widespread postponement of what the *New York Times Magazine* has dubbed the five sociological milestones of adulthood: "completing school, leaving home, becoming financially independent, marrying, and having a child" (August 22, 2010).<sup>34</sup>

This situation produces a paradox that is often overlooked. Looking at the contemporary scene through lenses from past decades, some observers want to "blame" college attendance for intermarriage, but the opposite is true. For American Jews, higher education is ubiquitous, and universities bring Jews together with other Jews in peer relationships denser than most will ever experience again. Once they migrate to diverse cities and workplaces, however, young American Jews often drift into cohabitation. According to recent national research, such living arrangements often bypass "mindful" emotional commitments, one reason why couples who live together and marry later, sometimes much later, have twice the divorce rate of those for whom

engagement precedes cohabitation or marriage. This is also true of marriages across ethnic and religious boundaries, which also tend to end in divorce more often. Here, too, the Jewish case is similar. On average, intermarrying Jews marry three years later than in-marrying Jews, often cohabiting in the interim, and marriages between Jews and non-Jews, like marriages after uncommitted cohabitation, are twice as likely to culminate in divorce.

Perhaps most surprising, compared to habits of the past or to Israeli patterns, is that even after marriage American Jewish couples often postpone starting a family until their careers are better situated or they can move into more capacious living quarters. To put these decisions into a kind of slogan, American Jews don't have families until they have homes with family rooms. However, biological realities have not changed as much as optimistic couples sometimes imagine: Despite improved reproductive technologies, female fertility levels gradually begin to decline around age thirty-two and then drop rapidly after thirty-seven, and couples who delay are more likely to find themselves struggling with unwanted infertility. All of these facts affect the culture of American Jewish attitudes toward intermarriage. Potential Jewish grandparents often view their child's non-Jewish spouse and non-Jewish children as a far better option than no grandchildren at all. Rather than opposing intermarriage, they are relieved to see their children embarking on the creation of their own families.

## Implications for the Public and Political Involvement of the Jewish Community

The Pew data (along with that of other studies) seem to raise significant challenges regarding the socio-cultural infrastructure of the public involvement of the Jewish community. The majority of American Jews, especially the older ones, continue the pattern of "sacred" normative ethnicity and Jewish civil religion. What seems to raise challenges is the growing number of "Jews of no religion." As we have seen, they do not share in the Jewish civil religion and are not committed to sacred ethnicity. Can they form a base for public and political engagement on the part of the Jewish community?

**Three options are available to the organized Jewish community and its leadership**

From the data it seems that three options are available to the organized Jewish community and its leadership:

1. To find a way to reverse the trends.
2. To find a way of living communal life of a new type, not yet discovered.
3. To have many Jews in the U.S. – possibly even more than today – but a shrinking "Jewish community."

This has implications for Jewish institutions; it makes the need to improve and consolidate institutions even more urgent. It also has implications for Israel, which will likely have less

support in the political-communal sense, even if Jews are still "attached" to it on a personal level. Finally, it has implications for Judaism itself, as it takes us back to a Judaism that is a personal religion rather than a communal expression.

### Re-centering Jewishness in American Lives – What is to be Done?

While totally reversing current trends seems very challenging at best, there are steps the American Jewish community can take to improve Jewish connectedness and commitment. Traditional

**Some Jewish communal leaders, practitioners, and rabbis report they are giving up attempts to discourage intermarriage**

Jews were – and, as the Pew study shows, still are – the most likely to retain all three aspects of American Jewishness – peoplehood, religion, and cultural expressions – and to see them as being closely interconnected. Other segments of the American Jewish community, including Jews of no religion, often

relate to specific aspects of Jewishness: some feel "ethnically" Jewish; some find personal resonance in Jewish music or humor; some have warm memories of particular religious events, such as a Passover seder at a grandparent's home. Outreach efforts that build on these bases are often successful. The demonstrable effectiveness of the Birthright Israel/Taglit program in building on rudimentary feelings of ethnic Jewishness shows that educational interventions are far from wasted. However, it would

be a tragic mistake to divert communal resources sweepingly from "Jews by religion" in an attempt to entice "Jews of no religion" into engagement.

The Jewish engagements of non-Orthodox Jews by religion cannot be taken for granted. Among Reform Jews, for example, 50% of those who are married are married to non-Jews. We find a similar phenomenon among younger Jews by religion. Among Jews by religion who married after 2005, 55% married non-Jews. Thus, in-marriage and Jewish engagement will not happen without thoughtful and well-supported interventions. Jewish connections must be planted and nurtured throughout childhood, the teen years, and well into young adulthood so that this largest segment of the American Jewish community feels Jewishness to be a central component of their lives. The Pew study shows that a Jewish marriage fosters lifelong Jewish connections, but it takes communal educational interventions to increase the likelihood that younger American non-Orthodox Jews will find Jewish friends and Jewish spouses, care about Israel and Jews around the world, and find meaning in their own Jewishness.

Despite the general bifurcation that emerges from Pew's Portrait of Jewish Americans between connected Jews by religion and non-connected Jews of no religion, there are also challenges among "Jews by religion." The low rates of Jewish connectedness among many Reform Jews – and the resulting extraordinarily high rates of intermarriage among their children – are discouraging. Some Jewish communal leaders, practitioners, and rabbis report they are giving up

attempts to discourage intermarriage, and instead treat it as a *fait accompli*.

This defeatist approach is probably the worst possible strategy. Intermarriage is not the random and indiscriminate phenomenon sometimes portrayed by the Jewish outreach industry. Marriage between two Jews is demonstrably influenced by early and continuing educational interventions that are rich in opportunities for peer interaction. High-quality Jewish education (not only in day school settings) that lasts through the teen years, summer camps, college classes in Jewish studies, and Israel trips dramatically increase the likelihood that Jews will marry Jews and create unambiguously Jewish homes.

These interventions are effective largely by socializing young Jews to feel connected to Judaism and to the Jewish people. The Pew report, like most studies before it, makes clear that (1) connecting to a wing of Judaism, and (2) marrying a Jew, make all the difference. These connections are best created through appealing formal and informal educational opportunities for teens and diverse Jewish-connected social opportunities for college students and Jewish adults in their twenties and thirties in every sizeable Jewish locale. The lesson of Birthright Israel's estimable and clearly documented success is not that Israel travel is the one "silver bullet," but that communal will and intelligent, focused interventions can make a difference.

We must realize that moving from a matter of fact, descriptive ethnicity to sacred, normative ethnicity would seem to involve some kind

of conversion experience. It is a change in the very essence of one's Jewishness. Such an intervention would be unlike almost anything major Jewish organizations habitually do. We need to understand the mechanisms that could lead Jews who do not think their Jewishness compels them to act on behalf of the Jewish people to change their mind and begin to take part in its ongoing welfare and continuity. The challenge presented by these Jews is compounded by the fact that the increasing presence of Jews of no religion and Jews of no denomination seems to be the result of the success of Jewish integration into American life. The policy question then becomes: How do we maintain this success while also maintaining Jewish commitment and sense of belonging?

In response to these challenges we should conduct further, mainly qualitative, research to further untangle the relationship between intermarriage and Jews of no religion. Secondly, we should allocate a small amount of resources to pilot programs that encourage the type of identity reconstruction that occurs in conversion experiences.

Birthright-Israel is a program that seems to have an effect even on Jews of no religion and no denomination, that is, on Jews who if they are connected at all are only minimally so. Qualitative research on Birthright-Israel trips has shown

**Moving from descriptive ethnicity to sacred, normative ethnicity would seem to involve some kind of conversion experience**

that what occurs to participants on such trips is “re-biographing,” that is, participants revise and retell their own biographies. In this retelling, their Jewishness and Jewish identity is ascribed a new and more important significance than it hitherto had.<sup>35</sup> The experience of the Birthright tour parallels experience garnered in the feminist and other “identity-politics” movements. In these movements too, activists often undergo a “consciousness raising” experience in which being a woman, Black, Hispanic, Gay, or Mizrahi achieves a new and central salience in one’s life, explaining central events, achievements

**During the 1990s Israeli-Palestinian intellectuals began to float alternative definitions such as a “Multi-cultural State”**

and failures.<sup>36</sup> Here too, consciousness raising and the re-biographing it entails have often resulted in new activism and engagement. Thus, the Jewish community should promote new and creative programs that promote consciousness raising and re-biographing for those young Jews who don’t

regard their Jewish ethnic background as normative and sacred, and hence, feel very little sense of belonging, connection, or solidarity with other Jews and with the transnational Jewish community.

## **Developments in Jewish Identity in Israel**

Over the past year, there have been interesting developments regarding Jewish identity in Israel. Some of them have been in accord with the pattern

described above, others have challenged it. Some of these challenges have been connected to the increasingly voiced desire on the part of U.S. and other Diaspora Jews that religious arrangements in Israel better accept and reflect Jewish religious pluralism.<sup>37</sup>

### **Initiatives to Modify Basic Laws Concerning the Jewish Character of the State**

The first of these developments concerns the Jewish identity of the state. In the initial years, after the Proclamation of the Establishment of the State in May 1948, the Jewish identity of the state was taken for granted. Only in the early 1990s, two Basic Laws, Freedom of Occupation-1992 and Human Dignity and Liberty – 1992, enshrined the “Jewish and democratic” formulation.<sup>38</sup> It seems that this formulation was introduced partially in response to the liberal citizenship discourse of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which these two Basic Laws exemplify. The very explicit and formal definition of the state as Jewish was partly responsible. During the 1990s Israeli-Palestinian intellectuals and leaders began to float alternative definitions such as a “Multi-cultural State,” a “Bi-National State,” or a “State of all its Citizens.”<sup>39</sup> Continued challenges to the Jewish definition of the state in the ensuing years began to dovetail with globalizing citizenship discourses that separated citizenship from ethnic-national identity (Soysal 1994), and especially the spread of a globalizing human rights regime.<sup>40</sup> After “Operation Cast Lead” in Gaza during the winter of 2008–2009 and the subsequent Goldstone Report, a perception grew in certain circles that international and some Israeli human rights organizations were engaged in an effort to

delegitimize and ultimately dismantle the State of Israel. This applied not only to the occupation of the West Bank and the interdiction in Gaza, but also to the Israeli state in general.<sup>41</sup>

One of the responses to this has been the introduction of a proposed new Basic Law – Israel as the Nation-state of the Jewish People – in the Knesset. The first proposal was introduced in 2011 by MK Avi Dichter (Kadima) and had the support of 39 other Members of the Knesset.<sup>42</sup> In June 2013 a revised proposal was introduced by MK Yariv Levin, chairman of the governing coalition, and MK Ayelet Shaked of the Jewish Home party. The current bill establishes that the State of Israel is the national home of the Jewish people and that the right to the realization of national self-determination in Israel is reserved solely to the Jewish people. The bill also states that the Land of Israel is the historical homeland of the Jewish People. Subsequent paragraphs anchor Israel's democratic regime, and the law contains a clause stating that the State of Israel will remain committed to the civil (personal) rights of all of its citizens.<sup>43</sup>

In response to this proposal Minister of Justice Tzippi Livni, the minister in charge of legislation, initiated the formulation of an alternative Basic Law – Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State. As part of this initiative Livni asked Prof. Ruth Gavison to submit a memorandum making recommendations on the advisability of such a law and its precise formulation. Prof. Gavison, seeking input from various constituencies, including Diaspora Jews, asked JPPI to gather input from Diaspora Jewish communities on Israel's Jewish

and democratic character. A short summary of this project is included in the Bonds Between Communities section of this Annual Assessment.

### Initiatives Attempting to Loosen Orthodox Rabbinic Control of the Jewish Religion

As shown above, a centralized rabbinate supported by the state both guarantees the religious dimension of collective identity and provides religious services to the population. In the past year, members of the Knesset and leading officials have initiated a number of initiatives to loosen the Orthodox monopoly on religious services and its control of conversion.

Conversion to Judaism in Israel is crucial to both Israeli citizenship and to personal status, specifically, the ability to marry another Jew in a state-recognized religious ceremony. It is crucial to Israeli citizenship because the Law of Return awards Israeli citizenship either to Jews who were born of a Jewish mother, or non-Jews who have at least one Jewish grandparent, or converts to Judaism. In Israel today there is a large population of several hundred thousand immigrants (mainly from the former Soviet Union) who are not Jewish by the standards of Jewish Orthodox religious law (halacha), but are Israeli citizens because they have at least one Jewish grandparent. Some of this (and other) population(s) would be ready to convert to

**Other rabbis have been more forthcoming because of the commitment to Israel and the Jewish people these would-be converts express**

Judaism, partly in order to marry Jews in a state-recognized framework. Some rabbis in the rabbinate have been reluctant to convert these individuals or recognize their conversions (even if conducted by official conversion courts!) because of their non-Orthodox lifestyles. Other rabbis have been more forthcoming **out** of national considerations – i.e. it is not healthy to have a large Israeli-Jewish oriented population excluded from full Israeli-Jewish identity – and because of the commitment to Israel and the Jewish people that these would-be converts express (they

**Influential Religious Zionist rabbis fear allowing converts in a non-controlled manner would sully or damage holiness or “chosenness”**

speak Hebrew, serve in the IDF, and celebrate Jewish holidays). A bill proposed by MK Elazar Stern of Kadima and other members of Knesset would allow local municipal and regional rabbis to convene special rabbinic courts to effect conversions.

The bill has passed an initial vote and was passed by the Knesset Committee on Constitution, Law, and Jurisprudence. It is due to come up for final votes in the plenum. The chief rabbis, in the meantime, have announced their opposition to the bill, and the Jewish Home party, an important party in the coalition, has also voiced its opposition. Opposition not only stems from Haredi circles and those close to them – i.e. the chief rabbis, but also from Religious Zionist circles. Influential

Religious Zionist rabbis fear that allowing converts in a non-controlled manner would sully or damage the holiness or “chosenness” of the Jewish people who are embodied in the State of Israel.

The second initiative is the Sharansky Western Wall compromise. Natan Sharansky presented a plan at the beginning of April 2013, according to which the Western Wall (*Kotel Maaravi*) and its current plaza would be extended to include an area south of the Mugrabi Bridge (i.e., the area around Robinson’s Arch), where a section would be built to accommodate non-Orthodox Jewish practice, including mixed gendered, egalitarian prayer.<sup>44</sup> This plan has yet to substantively move forward, however, Minister of Religious Affairs Naftali Bennett has effected the construction of a prayer area adjacent to the southern part of the Western Wall in which egalitarian and non-Orthodox services do take place.

Similarly, starting on Jan. 1, 2014, four Reform regional council rabbis began receiving salaries from the state, just like their Orthodox counterparts. This arrangement came into effect 18 months after the state agreed to do so, following the petition of the Reform Movement and of Reform Rabbi Miri Gold to the Supreme Court in its capacity as the High Court of Equity.<sup>45</sup>

These developments are interesting because they maintain the connection of religion to state and sustain the “public utility model” of the state religious system. Yet, at the same time, they make this organization more inclusive, more humane, and more egalitarian.

### *Hitchadshut Yehudit* (Jewish Renewal)

In February 2013, MK Ruth Calderon, created quite a stir when she taught a passage of Talmud during her maiden speech before the Knesset. Dr. Calderon, who is not Orthodox, is the founder and director of the Alma College – Home for Hebrew Culture, which specializes in the teaching (to adults) of contemporary Hebrew and traditional Jewish texts. Thus, the phenomenon of *Hitchadshut Yehudit* (Jewish Renewal) entered the public eye for the first time. The attention directed at this phenomenon was strengthened by the March 2014 publication by the Jewish Funders Network of *the Greenbook: Guide to Intelligent Giving – Hitchadshut Yehudit – Jewish Renewal in Israel*.

The phenomenon of *Hitchadshut Yehudit*<sup>46</sup> refers to "the phenomenon of programs that offer Jewish Israelis opportunities for learning, cultural expression, identity exploration, spirituality and prayer, and social action – all explicitly based on Jewish values, texts and traditions, and infused with the principles of pluralism and autonomy."<sup>47</sup> It is claimed that secular Israeli Jews are re-appropriating traditional Jewish texts and practices and incorporating them into non-Orthodox life through such programs. On this basis it is further claimed that young secular Israeli Jews are increasingly taking ownership of their Jewish identities.

*Hitchadshut Yehudit* involves "an amalgam of hundreds of programs and organizations with diverse political and ideological commitments, multiple approaches and varied methodologies –

all operating in a wide range of settings. It touches Israelis in schools, in the army, in community centers and public spaces, on the internet and through the media, and in the study halls of learning programs."<sup>48</sup> Despite all this, it is hard to gauge what real impact these programs have had, or may have in the future.

The Greenbook notes that although the phenomenon is very Israeli it does "bear the influence of Diaspora conceptions of Jewish identity and the field still depends upon funding outside of Israel." This resemblance to Diaspora conceptions of Jewish identity is the result of the fact that for the *Hitchadshut Yehudit* activists Jewish identity is not only a function of collective national identity, but is also a matter of personal choice, appropriation, and ownership.

Simply put, Israeli Jewish identity is dynamic. While it does reflect historical patterns such as regarding religion as a public utility, yet at the same time, at the edges at least, it is adopting and adapting patterns and orientations that come from American Diaspora. Does this presage greater understanding and harmony between the two communities? Only time will tell.

## Endnotes

1. Along with feeling secure, it seems that the guilt that American Jews felt for having feared to use their influence on behalf of European Jews during the Holocaust also played a role.
2. Jonathan Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews* (1987.) See also the review of Jonathan Sarna in *Commentary*, December 1987. The concept of civil religion comes from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du Contract Social* (1762.) Robert Bellah famously applied it to American public life, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus*, 96, 1967, p. 1-21.
3. The above section is also to be found in Shlomo Fischer, "Implications of the Pew Report for the Public and Political Involvement of the Jewish Community," in The Jewish People Policy Institute, *The Conference on the Future of the Jewish People -2014: Background Policy Documents..* (Jerusalem, 2014)
4. Richard Alba, *Italian Americans: Into the Twilight* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1985.)
5. Richard Alba, "The Twilight of Ethnicity among American Catholics of European Ancestry," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 454, 1981.
6. Our understanding of Jewish civil religion thus differs from Woocher's who argued that it was held by people removed from traditional Jewish religion.
7. The current controversy regarding the membership of J Street in the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations illustrates this nicely. Membership in this umbrella body has become a symbol of membership in the Jewish community as a whole. Those who reject J Street's membership do so on the grounds that it is insufficiently loyal to the Jewish people because it pursues lobbying in Washington which is at variance with policy of the Israeli government.
8. Jewish People Policy Institute, *Jewish and Democratic: Perspectives from World Jewry: A JPPI Report*, 2014.
9. See the correspondence between President Thomas Jefferson and the Danbury Baptist Association, 1801-1802.
10. Robert Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (NY, 2010.)
11. David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*, (Agincourt, Ca. 1978,) S.N. Eisenstadt and Bernhard Geisen,, "The Construction of Collective Identity," *European Journal of Sociology* (36:1,) 1995, 72-102.
12. Jewish People Policy Institute, *Jewish and Democratic: Perspectives from World Jewry: A JPPI Report*, 2014. See Shlomo Fischer, "American Jews are Protestants, Israeli Jews are Catholic's," <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/american-jews-are-protestants-israeli-jews-are-catholics/>.
13. It is also the case that certain Jewish groups have in the past and to a certain extent today suffered from social, informal discrimination.
14. Grace Davie, "Is Europe an Exceptional Case," *The Hedgehog Review*, 8(1-2,) 2006, p. 23-34. Danielle Hervieu-Leger, "Religion and Sozialer Zusammenhalt in Europa," *Transit: Europäische Revue*, 26,2004 p. 101-119. Jose Casanova, "Rethinking Secularization," *The Hedgehog Review*, 8(1-2,) 2006 p. 7-22.
15. Tomer Zarchin, "Yoram Kaniuk Can Register as of no Religion," *Haaretz*, October 2, 2011; Ravital Hovel, "Supreme Court: the Existence of an Israeli Nationality has not been Proven," *Haaretz*, October 2, 2013.
16. According to the Avichai-Gutman *A Portrait of Israeli Jews 2009*. " Roughly half of the respondents believe that civil marriage should be introduced in the country, outside the rabbinate (51% answered "yes, absolutely yes," or "perhaps yes".) However, only 20% said that they would avail themselves of such marriage. According to the "Jerusalem Institute for

Market Research 16.7% of the population married outside of Israel and 8.4% engaged in common law arrangements (הסכם זוגיות.)

17. Indeed Herzl did not write this explicitly but it is definitely possible to interpret Herzl's writings in this fashion. The case of his son, Hans supports this reading. Hans Herzl converted to Christianity but claimed that he is Jewish in terms of nationality. In this, he argued, he continues the Zionist conception of his father. Therefore, he rejected the criticism of those who claimed that by converting he stained his father's memory. See Yigal Eilam, *Judaism as Status Quo: The 'Who is a Jew Polemic of 1958 as an Illumination of Religious-Secular Relations in Israel* (Tel Aviv 2000) (Hebrew,) p.77.
18. In this sense, Zionist-Israeli secularization resembles that of Kemalist-Turkish secularization. In Turkey, since the founding of the secular Republic of Turkey in 1922, there is not separation of religion and state. On the contrary, religion, that is, Islam, is integrated into the state and controlled by it. This is accomplished by the Directorate (or Presidency) of Religious Affairs, basically, a government ministry which trains Imams and sets doctrine in accordance with the interests of the state.
19. Ever since the classic study by the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston, 1969,) we know that social groups connect by exchanging women, that is, by marrying each other. (This idea was expressed vividly by Shechem and Hamor in the Biblical story of the rape of Dinah.)
20. Shlomo Fischer, "Continuity or Turning Point: The Torah Stat, Citizenship and the Origins of Radical Religious Zionism," Zeev Shavit, Orna Sasson-Levi, Gai Ben-Porat (edt.,) *Points of Reference: Changing Identities and Social Positioning in Israel*, Hakibbutz HaMeuchad and Van Leer Institute, Tel Aviv, 2014. Shlomo Fischer, "Self-Expression and Democracy in Radical Religious Zionist Ideology," Ph.D dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2007.
21. See for example Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective..*(New York, 1967)
22. The UK had a strong multi-cultural orientation. However in recent years there has been a retreat from this policy. See Prime Minister David Cameron's remarks in February, 2011 that "multiculturalism has failed,"<http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/02/terrorism-islam-ideology>.
23. "Selected Indicators of World Jewry," *Annual Assessment 2012-2013*, Jewish People Policy Institute. One exception to this are the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. Here, decades of communist rule and the small size of the Jewish communities have made for very small and weak communities and systems of Jewish education and very high rates of intermarriage. The Jewish community of Germany, composed as it is of Jews from the former Soviet Union, has similar characteristics. (See the article on Eastern European Jewish communities below, "Twenty-five Years since the Fall of the Iron Curtain".)
24. This section is an abridgement of two papers that the Jewish People Policy Institute previously published on the Pew Report: Shlomo Fischer "Implications of the Pew Report for the Public and Political Involvement of the Jewish Community," [http://jppi.org.il/uploads/Implications\\_of\\_the\\_Pew\\_Report\\_for\\_the\\_Public\\_and\\_Political\\_Involvement\\_of\\_the\\_Jewish\\_Community.pdf](http://jppi.org.il/uploads/Implications_of_the_Pew_Report_for_the_Public_and_Political_Involvement_of_the_Jewish_Community.pdf) and Shlomo Fischer, "Who are the 'Jews by Religion' in the Pew Report," <http://jppi.org.il/news/146/58/Who-are-the-%ef%bf%bdJews-by-Religion-%ef%bf%bd-in-the-Pew-Report/>.
25. Among the younger age cohorts of this group as well, some of these components, such as in-marriage and level of organizational affiliation is weakening. See below.

26. Fischer, "Who are the Jews by Religion"
27. For further data supporting these claims please see "Who are the Jews by Religion."
28. Cf. Steven Cohen and Lauren Blitzer, *Belonging without Believing: Jews and their Distinctive Patterns of Religiosity- and Secularity*, The Florence G. Heller JCC Association Research Center 2008..
29. Jay P. Lefkowitz, "The Rise of Social Orthodoxy: A Personal Account," *Commentary*, 2014.
30. (42% have a strong sense of belonging vs. 85% for Jews by religion.)
31. Theodore Sasson, "New Analysis of Pew Data: Children of Inter-marriage Increasingly Identify as Jews," *Tablet*, November 11, 2013, <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/151506/young-jews-opt-in>.
32. See "The Implications of the Pew Report for the Public and Political Involvement of the Jewish Community." [http://jppi.org.il/uploads/Implications\\_of\\_the\\_Pew\\_Report\\_for\\_the\\_Public\\_and\\_Political\\_Involvement\\_of\\_the\\_Jewish\\_Community.pdf](http://jppi.org.il/uploads/Implications_of_the_Pew_Report_for_the_Public_and_Political_Involvement_of_the_Jewish_Community.pdf).
33. David Hollinger, *Post-Ethnic America: Beyond Multi-Culturalism* (NY, 2006); Herbert J. Gans (1979): Symbolic ethnicity: The future of ethnic groups and cultures in America , *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2:1, 1-20 , Mary C. Waters, 1996 "Optional Ethnicities: For Whites Only? In *Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race and Ethnicity in America*, Sylvia Pedraza and Rumbaut, Ruben, 444-454. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Press.
34. Robin Marantz Henig, "What is it About Twenty-Somethings," *New York Times Magazine*, August 22, 2010.
35. Shaul Kelner, *Tours That Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage and Israeli Birthright Tourism*, New York: NYU Press, 2010.
36. Nissim Mizrach, "The Iron Cage of Identity Politics," *Symposium in Honor of the Retirement of Prof. Sami Smooha*, University of Haifa, December 16, 2013.
37. This demand was voiced with great energy by some of the participants in the *Conference on the Future of the Jewish People*, Glen Cove New York, March 12, 2014. See Shmuel Rosner, "Jewish and Democratic Perspectives from World Jewry," [http://jppi.org.il/uploads/Jewish\\_and\\_Democratic\\_Perspective\\_from\\_World\\_Jewry.pdf](http://jppi.org.il/uploads/Jewish_and_Democratic_Perspective_from_World_Jewry.pdf).
38. "The purpose of this Basic Law is to protect human dignity and liberty, in order to establish in a Basic Law the values of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state."
39. Rouhana, Nadim. *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State: Identities in Conflict*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997.
40. Yasmin Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Post-National Membership in Europe* (Chicago, 1994.)
41. See *The Annual Assessment 2010*, The Jewish People Policy Institute, Jerusalem pp. 162-165.
42. This bill was one of several proposed bills aimed at limiting the de-legitimizing effect of international and Israeli human rights and extreme left wing political organizations. The vast majority of these proposals did not pass. See *The Annual Assessment 2011-2012*. Jewish People Policy Institute.
43. Yonatan Liss, "The Nation-State Law of the Likud and the Jewish Home Party." *Ha'aretz*, June 25, 2013.
44. *Annual Assessment 2012-2013*, Jewish People Policy Institute. Pp. 203-206.
45. <http://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Jewish-News/Israeli-government-pays-salaries-of-4-Reform-rabbis-336788>
46. The Israeli term "Hitchadshut Yehudit" has a different resonance than the term "Jewish Renewal." in

North America. There, it tends to refer to a liberal stream of Judaism often characterized by neo-hassidic spirituality, experimental ritual, and new-age undertones. In the Israeli context, “Hitchadshut Yehudit” is a much broader term. In order to differentiate between the North American and the Israeli resonances attached to the term, we have chosen to use the Hebrew phrase throughout to refer to the Israeli phenomenon (Claire Goldwater, *Greenbook: Guide to Intelligent Giving – Hitchadshut Yehudit – Jewish Renewal in Israel*, 2014. P. 3)

47. Claire Goldwater, *Greenbook: Guide to Intelligent Giving – Hitchadshut Yehudit – Jewish Renewal in Israel*, 2014. P. i.

48. Ibid.