

Inside Diaspora Identity

<i>Aryeh Cohen</i> A Diaspora Manifesto	1
<i>Nancy Levene</i> The State and the state of Israel	3
<i>Marc B. Shapiro</i> The Kernel and the Shell	4
<i>Roger Bennett</i> Loss or Creative Reinvention?	5
<i>Eugene R. Sheppard</i> Babylon and Jerusalem	6
<i>Rachel Biale</i> From the Banks	7
<i>Shaul Kelner</i> A Global People	8
<i>Annette Ezekiel</i> Homeless	9
<i>Frances Kreimer</i> Beyond Slogans	9
<i>Tali Hyman</i> At Home	10
<i>Shalom C. Elcott</i> The "Power Elite"	11
<i>Ruth Calderon</i> The Balcony	12
<i>Marc Gopin</i> Book Review	13
<i>Jonathan Boyd</i> 21st Century Judaism	14
<i>Jonathan Ariel</i> NiSh'ma	15
<i>Jeffrey K. Salkin</i> Sh'ma Ethics	16
<i>Adam Weisberg</i> Counterculture on Campus www.shma.com	
Discussion Guide www.shma.com	

FOR OVER 50 YEARS, there seemed a stark and fundamental choice between living in the midst of Jewish sovereignty or in a larger, arguably foreign place. Now, in a shrinking world, where much of Israel resembles the West, and where culturally rich, self-confident American Jews are acutely aware of their assets and achievements, the nature of this choice feels — at least to some Jews — very different. In this issue addressing American Diaspora identity, writers evaluate how they see the intersections, and the disjunctures, between Jewish life here and in Israel.

“Seek the Welfare of the City to Which I Have Exiled You...” Toward another Diaspora Manifesto

Aryeh Cohen

I DON'T RECALL that there was a single, particular moment when the light when on and I realized that the Zionist narrative was also myth — unlike the moment when, perhaps belatedly, I first confronted the radical possibility that God did not exist. The latter moment I remember with stark clarity. Walking with a friend through *Gan Ha-Pa'amon* in Jerusalem, engrossed in one of our many long and intense conversations — he was spending a year in Israel at Hebrew University and was grieving the loss of his father, I had just started University after finishing the army and was mourning my friends who had died in Lebanon — it was a year infused with death and loss — a now long-forgotten remark brought me up short and frightened. I could actually feel what it would have been like to not believe in God. I still believed in God. I wouldn't actually lose my faith till several Maimonidean years later, and then recover it in the neo-Hassidic cloisters of Somerville, Massachusetts.

Walking those same Baka streets almost two decades later — on a rare visit back since my descent in 1988 — I experienced an odd dissonance. I had a physical memory of the streets of Jerusalem and, at the same time, an inability to picture my way to any of the places that used to be so familiar. In the early jetlagged hours of dawn I found myself being led by pure instinct to the places of memory. It was the feeling one has when meeting one's ex-lover. There is a combination of intense familiarity combined with a similar amount of distance and alienation. And then there is the pain, and the anger.

On a very hot summer day in 1978, standing on a parched and sandy drill field in the Armored Corps' training camp, I pledged my troth to the State of Israel and its Armed Forces. That moment was the culmination of much of my childhood — growing up in an adamantly Religious Zionist home even as the Orthodox community was swept rightward. That day, the magical Zionism of my childhood, the boisterous Zionism of my adolescence, and the militant Zionism of my young adulthood were given the official stamp of approval.

Slightly more than four years later, in a very temporary reserve army camp, sometime soon after my unit returned from Lebanon, I returned the tokens of that approval. The commander of our tank unit placed a pile of Lebanon war service ribbons outside our tents and announced that anyone who wanted one should take one. The pile remained largely untouched.

Slowly, in fits and starts, dark nights of struggling, hours of conversation, the myth crumbled. Purity of arms fell away, then purity of intention, then integrity of purpose. Surprisingly, the last to go was the abiding belief that the State of Israel was and had to be the center of the Jewish universe. Sitting in a small, sometimes claustrophobic, davening

To subscribe:
877-568-SHMA
www.shma.com

room in a ramshackle New England clapboard house, I learned in my flesh that Torah doesn't only come from Zion.

And so in the harsh reality of the ongoing morning-after of my decades-long Zionist affair, I took stock. American Judaism was not dying. Far from becoming a spiritual and intellectual wasteland drawing sustenance from Jerusalem, the Diaspora — especially the North American Diaspora — has flourished. There are both Jewish universities and universities with important Jewish Studies departments, in addition to a plethora of *yeshivot* and seminars of all ideological stripes.

The last to go was the abiding belief that the State of Israel was and had to be the center of the Jewish universe.

The American Jewish community stands in a long tradition of Diasporic communities — from Philo's Alexandria before the turn of the millennium to Sura and Nehardea of sixth century Sassanian Persia, to Kairouan in tenth century North Africa, Toledo, Sarragossa and Gerona in the Spanish Golden Age, Spires, Worms, Dampierre and Ramerupt of eleventh to fourteenth century Franco-Germany, centuries of Jewish civilization in Vilna, Warsaw, Medzibezh and Lodz, Fes, Izmir and Baghdad, Berlin and Paris. The culture produced in these Jewish communities are not merely books on the shelf of Judaism, they are Judaism itself.


The fact of the State of Israel has, of course, nuanced and textured what it means to be a Diasporic Jewish community. The passion, the commitment, the sheer hard work, the wonder, the awe, the aura, the borrowed glory of the Zionist movement, and the founding of the State swept Diasporic Jews along with it to the point that the notion of another tradition, another way of thinking of themselves, was almost completely occluded. For hundreds of years the Jewish community saw itself as of the Diaspora until the messianic age of a distant future. Historically there had almost always been a Diasporic community — even during the Second Commonwealth.

And so here we are: probably the most learned, most affluent, most politically powerful Jewish community in the history of the world, and we are tied up in knots about who we are. The borders of accepted speech are as-

siduously patrolled by self-appointed guardians of the walls. (I have a file of hate mail, letter after letter of people comparing me to a kapo, and I am far from alone in this.) The public domain of our institutions and the popular Jewish press has been colonized by the most right wing element in our community. Israel is not a problem for me because my allies on the progressive left think it's a problem. Israel is a problem because it claims to speak for the Jewish community, and the Jews who speak for it confound and subvert the Judaism that I love and teach — the Judaism that can contribute to creating a better and more just world.

We in the North American Diaspora are in a position to embrace a Torah that speaks to our deeper selves while at the same time commanding us to do justice in the world. The rabbinic tradition of social and economic justice can and should be read through the filter of Jeremiah's charge to the newly exiled Jewish people in Babylon: "Seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the Lord in its behalf; for in its prosperity shall you prosper." (Jeremiah 29: 7). Rather than reacting to the enlightenment by cutting loose non-ritual Jewish law, we should be universalizing it — arguing that there is much to be gained from a serious engagement between Jewish conceptions of civil and criminal law and American society.

As the ultimate insider-outsiders, we are in a position to create alliances across the necessarily permeable intellectual and physical boundaries of our communities. While I wish those alliances were all for progressive ends, it is a sign of the vitality of our community that while the Progressive Jewish Alliance forms coalitions with Latino and Asian-Pacific human rights groups to eradicate sweatshops, the legal arm of Agudath Israel coalitions with conservative groups in favor of school vouchers.

Diaspora is necessarily a fragmented and fluid identity claiming a tradition that is homeless but sustaining. And so, on a winter night I pile my kids in the car and explain to them in Hebrew (the language in which I always speak to them) why we are going to support the grocery workers who are on strike. We talk about the obligation for economic justice and then we walk the picket line for an hour or so. Shachar and Oryah come home happy, though I must admit that it was mainly because they got *shoko cham*, hot cocoa. 

Dr. Aryeh Cohen, a member of the Sh'ma Advisory Board, is Chair of the Rabbinics Department at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies of the University of Judaism. He is also President of the Progressive Jewish Alliance.

The State and the state of Israel

Nancy Levene



THE STATE OF ISRAEL — or is it the state of Israel? — occupies a great deal of mental space in the North American Diaspora and has done so for the past half-century. In Aryeh Cohen's "Diaspora Manifesto," we (North American Jews and presumably other interested parties) are encouraged to begin to re-think this state of affairs — to clear some space for a Diaspora based on something other than the "magical," "boisterous," and finally "militant" Zionism with which Cohen, and many other Jews, were raised. For Cohen, this is not because the Diaspora — for so long the only site of Jewish life and culture — threatens to languish in the presence of a displaced core; it is because "the myth" of Zionism is crumbling. With Israel now revealed as a state like other states — not any more or less virtuous or complex than other struggling modern states — Jews can now return, sobered, to the demands of Jewish life, where home is Torah and Jerusalem a beloved hope, "a quiet habitation, an immovable tent." (*Isaiah 33:20*)

But as Cohen's personal experience clearly attests, the way home is neither simple nor straight for someone raised to think of Israel as the logical and existential outcome of a committed Judaism. To be sure, this is a recent phenomenon, this notion that place (and not just law) could speak to the demands of covenant, and this only makes Cohen's loss more deeply ambivalent. The modern state of Israel was an eruption — an interruption — and the question since that fateful moment in the middle of the last century has simply, yet agonizingly, been: an interruption of what sort?

What Cohen helps us to see is that Israel's existence for Diaspora Jews is truly paradoxical: a change that is no change, an interruption that connects back up with what was thereby stalled. Israel was, is, and will be the change that returns Jews to their homes just as much as it was, is, and will be, for some, the new home that changes the very notion of return (the home to which one can return without ever having been there). That is to say, Israel changed — changes — everything, but the change is not so much *it* but *us*. Cohen was ineradicably changed by his experience as an Israeli. Indeed, what stands out in his essay is not so much his disillusionment with the "myth," but his acceptance of the real, concrete

difference Israel makes. Speaking to his children in Modern Hebrew, Cohen knows that he is thereby tying them into that myth as much as he is unraveling it and its consequences for himself. For, as he well knows, there is not one myth of Zion and never will be. If magical, boisterous, and militant have run aground, there is still prophetic and peace-loving, self-critical and tolerant, quiet and humble. To paraphrase Jonathan Z. Smith, "myths (like maps) are not territory — but myths are all we possess." Insofar as they no longer provide orientation, we need to reach for new ones.

The way home is neither simple nor straight for someone raised to think of Israel as the logical and existential outcome of a committed Judaism.

Hence, "seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you..." is an exile that takes on new mythical coloration by the fact of *its* being a return. There has always been Diaspora, Cohen reminds us, from Persia, to Spain, to Poland, and beyond. But like any return, the return to Diaspora — the return from Israel — brings a new vision of what was always there. Perhaps Cohen learned above all that the State of Israel depends on the state of Israel — on the willingness of the people Israel to seek the welfare of the city to which they are exiled. In this light, our question is not "what is the *State* of Israel?" but "what is the *state* of Israel? Is it just, engaged, interested in the welfare of others?" Perhaps, too, though, this question can, tentatively, be turned around. Perhaps the state of Israel — the people's relationship to the Torah of justice — depends, in some as yet not fully articulated way, on the State of Israel — on the fact that, in one moment and at one place, Diaspora Jews were interrupted in their absorption in Judaism, and became for a time actively and creatively committed to the welfare of the city to which they had returned. That this return, this interruption, now points in many directions and to many cities does not change its significance. Cohen's fragile truce is its own testament to this fact.

Nancy Levene is Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Jewish Studies at Indiana University.

December 2004

Tevet 5765

To subscribe: 877-568-SHMA

www.shma.com

Eating the Kernel and Discarding the Shell

Marc B. Shapiro

Please do not photocopy Sh'ma.

For bulk copies — for your school, synagogue, or study group — contact Heather:

HHolmes@JFLmedia.com
877-568-SHMA

ARYEH COHEN'S PORTRAYAL of his disillusionment with the Zionist dream surely reflects the sentiments of many in our post-Zionist era. I wonder, though, why he felt the need for a "Diaspora Manifesto." After all, the American Jewish community has voted with its feet: in this case, by keeping them still. They have not immigrated to the State of Israel, and while Israel remains important to them, it is not central to their religious and cultural life. Very few American Jews speak Hebrew, and most will never even take a trip to the Holy Land. The social and religious issues that affect the American Jewish community are uniquely American, and it is clear that Ahad Haam's vision of the Land of Israel providing a world Jewish cultural center does not resonate in America.

For obvious reasons Israel has always been much more important to Jews in countries with a strong history of antisemitism and/or Christian or Muslim identity. So while Jewish cultural life in South America could revolve around Israel, this is not, and has never been, the case for North America. Because of this, while reading Cohen's article I couldn't help feeling that he was bringing coals to Newcastle.

Furthermore, Cohen is simply mistaken to say, when speaking of the United States, that the passion of Zionism and of the State of Israel "swept Diasporic Jews along with it to the point that the notion of another tradition, another way of thinking of themselves, was almost completely occluded." The fact is that Zionism in the U. S. has been an abysmal failure, and early on the leaders of Israel realized that it made no sense to speak of *aliyah* when appearing before American audiences. Instead, Zionism was retooled so that American Zionism came to mean philanthropy. Yet the cultural disconnect between the two countries has been there from day one. Thus, American Jews don't have a clue who the most popular Israeli singer, poet, and writer is, and Israelis don't know anything about the lives of American Jews either. In other words, Aryeh Cohen's "Diaspora Manifesto" is already a reality.

I can't help thinking that Cohen has more

on his mind than that America not be regarded as a "spiritual and intellectual wasteland drawing sustenance from Jerusalem" (which it has never been!). Cohen is also focusing on political issues, although I would have hoped he'd draw out these remarks more fully. Implicit in his comments, and I apologize if I have misunderstood him, is also an argument for a separate Diaspora political identity. No more, in Cohen's mind, should the State of Israel be a central concern to Diaspora Jews. After all, Israel is a "problem"; its actions in the world subvert Cohen's progressive outlook. Israel is the great embarrassment for Jews on the left, the living proof that Judaism and social justice are not identical.

Tired of the American Jewish establishment's apologetics on behalf of *all* Israeli policies by *all* Israeli governments — a strange situation whereby the most liberal Kerry supporters will defend the most right-wing Israeli leaders — Cohen is opting for a way out. By asserting a new Diaspora identity, Cohen need no longer relate sympathetically to the State of Israel, and religious ties are all that remain to bind him to the people of Israel. It is here, in the United States, that he can identify with all sorts of progressive causes, and he will not be tarnished by public identification with a supposedly Jewish State that continues to "subvert the Judaism that [he] love[s] and teach[es]."

All that remains is for Cohen to take the final leap, to join the Satmar and others in declaring that Zionism is not only irrelevant, but also malevolent. Whereas the previous generation argued that one's connection to Judaism was strengthened by one's attachment to the State of Israel, the new anti-Zionists, and Cohen appears ready to stand with them, argue just the opposite: that the State of Israel has been, and continues to be, a corrupting influence on Jewish values. With such an outlook, it is obvious why Cohen seeks a new progressive Diaspora identity that can remove the Israeli albatross. Yet as a Talmudist, Cohen is well aware of the image of eating the kernel while discarding the shell. I ask therefore, is Israel so rotten that both shell and kernel must be discarded?

Marc B. Shapiro holds the Weinberg Chair in Judaic Studies at the University of Scranton.



Loss or Creative Reinvention?

Roger Bennett



WE ARE LIVING in a time of change, when the core tenets of our social fabric — identity, community, and meaning — are up for grabs. Aryeh Cohen is correct in stating that at the very time when Judaism should have so much to say to both Jews and to the world, “we are tied up in knots about who we are.” This, despite the fact that the mandate for consistent change and reappraisal is one of the most enduring secrets of our unparalleled existence. According to American Jewish historian Jonathan Sarna, Jewish history has been one of constant challenge and response. In his essay, “A Great Awakening,” he writes, “New historical conditions create new movements, new emphases, and new paradigms — the very opposite of the tried and true.”

Today, though, our community is experiment averse. At times, we are reluctant to even admit that the world is changing around us, so it is wishful thinking to say, as Cohen does, that the North American Diaspora is “flourishing.” We will remain unable to make that claim until we find new movements, emphases, and paradigms for Jews in America. But it is no exaggeration to say that our reality is loaded with possibility, and if we are bold, innovative, and self-confident enough, our generation can make the Diaspora flourish.

Being Jewish will evolve substantively in the coming decades. For the most part, we no longer live in exclusively Jewish neighborhoods, nor do we move in exclusively Jewish social networks. In addition, the generation that witnessed the Holocaust and knew a world without Israel is passing on. The loss of their knowledge, memories, and values will have a huge impact on our Judaism, our identity, and our community. The question is, will this become a time of loss, or trigger a time of creative reinvention?

There are a number of reasons to be optimistic. A great many young Jews are beginning to express their Jewishness in ways that are remarkably different from their parents and grandparents. Within the broad Jewish community, a growing number of innovators are launching entrepreneurial expressions of Judaism and Jewishness, often outside institutional settings. Most of these expressions are experimental and unconnected to a movement or Jewish organization. The issues being tack-

led run the gamut from Jewish responses to breast cancer to attempts to transmit Jewish values through the development of record labels, magazines, salons, theater, and even drag performances. The majority of these projects are woefully under-funded; little money exists for innovation.

External changes in American identity over the past 30 years have also impacted Jewish identity. Immigrant waves no longer have to surrender their unique differences and pass themselves off as Rockwellian Americans. They can now maintain a minority or sub-persona and express it passionately alongside the universal American identity. As a result, young Jews have witnessed and participated in the growth of holidays such as Cinco de Mayo and St. Patrick’s Day, which loom larger on their calendars than either Lag B’Omer or Simchat Torah. Today, it is common for young Jews to participate in other ethnic or religious groups’ rituals and traditions and then, turning an eye to their own heritage, ask critical questions such as: “What am I inheriting? What does it mean to me? What am I going to do about it?”

So while we have a ways to go before we compare ourselves to Sarragossa and Gerona in the Golden Age, our fate is in our hands. The way we relate to Israel is a good example. A generation of Jews has come of age with the war with Lebanon, the Intifada, and the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin as their defining moments, rather than the more “glorious” experiences of the Six-Day War or the Raid on Entebbe. If they are to maintain an emotional connection to the Jewish State, young Jews must be encouraged to have an honest and nuanced conversation that is grounded in Israel’s social, cultural, and ideological realities. We must trust that such a conversation will allow them to develop constructive relationships of meaning with the Jewish state. By creating a platform for honest debate without assumptions, supporting innovation, and fostering a culture of experimentation, we can help construct the meaningful communities that young Jews crave, and the action and values the world beyond ourselves so badly needs.

Roger Bennett is Senior Vice-President at the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies where he co-founded Reboot, a network for Jewish Innovation (www.rebooters.net) and 21/64, a consulting division specializing in generational philanthropic strategy (www.2164.net).

Shma.com for more essays

December 2004

Tevet 5765

To subscribe: 877-568-SHMA
www.shma.com

Babylon and Jerusalem: The Integrity of the Diasporic Critical Mind

Eugene R. Sheppard


IN THE MID 1950S in Waltham, Massachusetts, Simon Rawidowicz (1897-1957) wrote *Bavel Verushalayim* (*Babylon and Jerusalem*), a magisterial two-volume collection of essays purported to lay out a philosophy of Jewish history. Rawidowicz died before the book was published, but its appearance signaled the unapologetic Diasporic voice that marked his life's work as a tireless scholar, publisher, and politico-cultural activist. At a time when world Jewry sought to find its bearings after the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, he offered a dynamic vision of continuity and change that might seem especially suited for Jewry's groping need for reorientation. He mobilized his unrivaled command of the entire sweep of Jewish thought in order to offer a critical standpoint from which contemporary Jewry could meet and engage the challenges of its past, present, and future.

But with a few notable exceptions the book went unnoticed by all but the most engaged Hebrew readers who acquired the *maskilic* taste for grand conceptual history immersed in texts ranging from Bible and Rabbinics to canonical humanist and modern Zionist tracts. The Hebrew-reading audience, which Rawidowicz nourished in Europe and in Palestine, were no longer available audiences. And Rawidowicz's passionate love of the rich heterogeneity of Jewish existence in both its ancestral home and Diasporic centers did not resonate with Hebrew readers who were preoccupied with building a state that would be home for all of Israel, whether or not they lived within the borders of the sovereign state — a claim Rawidowicz flatly rejected in a bold exchange with none other than David Ben-Gurion. Rawidowicz argued that choosing the name Israel for the new state, rather than the State of Israel, would cut Diasporic Jewry off from its ancient and rightful place as an equal member and participant of a whole people.¹ For Rawidowicz, "Israel" signified the collective unity of the Jewish people regardless of place and time.

The title *Bavel Verushalayim* — Babylon and Jerusalem — symbolizes the vitality of the Jews and their legacy as it emerged from

the dynamic tension of a collective spiritual and physical existence. Babylon represents the religious, political, and philosophical legacies of the various historic centers of the Jewish Diaspora, while Jerusalem culls together the different characteristics that were forged in and harken back to the land of Israel. The interplay of these two spatial and political vessels shaped the contours of Jewry from generation to generation. And Rawidowicz struck a position pitted between the two zealous factions of Israel. On one side stood those Zionists who advocated a complete negation of the exile (*shelilat hagalat*), with all of its oppressive weight, as an urgent desideratum for the collective return to the Jewish people's ancestral homeland and national rebirth. On the other side stood those Diasporists/Galutists who just as adamantly rejected the political and cultural efforts of the Zionists to remold Jewish existence around the singular option of resettling and building a new autonomous Jewish state in the Holy land of Israel. Rawidowicz had a consistent response to both sides: *Babylon and Jerusalem*.

Babylon-and-Jerusalem is just one set of images and concepts deployed throughout Rawidowicz's *oeuvre* that tapped the collective history and memory of Israel in order to serve as guides to a people accustomed to peripatetic and reactive approaches to the expected crises and catastrophes facing each generation. In Rawidowicz's lexicon, the two houses of Israel (*bayit rishon* and *bayit sheni*) do not merely refer to the first and second temples, but rather to nurturing vessels within which the unique and dynamic treasures of Jewish existence had been forged.

Rawidowicz saw the moral and philosophical integrity of Israel as rising from the accommodations, self-assertions, and reformulations of its collective character in that tension-filled space between Babylon and Jerusalem. While we may be weary of embracing mythic concepts as the starting point of our political and spiritual orientation, we anxiously await such a powerfully relevant voice of learned and inspired humanism in contemporary debates about Israel-Diaspora relations. 

Eugene R. Sheppard is Assistant Professor of Modern Jewish Thought and History in the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies and Assistant Director of the Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry at Brandeis University. He is the author of a forthcoming book, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile*. He is a co-organizer of an international symposium, *Babylon and Jerusalem: the Politics and Thought of Simon Rawidowicz*, to be held at Brandeis University on April 10, 2005.

December 2004

Tevet 5765

To subscribe: 877-568-SHMA
www.shma.com

¹Excerpts of this correspondence were translated and reprinted in Simon Rawidowicz, *State of Israel, Diaspora, and Jewish Continuity* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England, 1986) p. 194-204. This English language volume, edited by Rawidowicz' son, Benjamin C. Ravid, also includes selections from *Bavel Verushalayim*.

From the Banks of the Jordan to the Shores of the Bay

Rachel Biale

IN 1970 I graduated from a kibbutz high school nestled between the tip of the Kineret and the Jordan River flowing southward. We all saw ourselves as good “Zionist kibbutznik Israelis.” Who would have predicted that 30 years later my closest friend would be living in Australia, my desk-mate would become, the charismatic, radical rightwing leader of the National Religious Party, and I would be ensconced in the Berkeley hills?

My classmates and I came of age in the shadow/glow of the Six-Day War. The conflicting experiences of pre-war gnawing anxiety and then startling victory underlay our divergent paths. Facing the danger before the War, we momentarily conflated Israel with the Warsaw ghetto. Despite the feeling of prowess that overwhelmed Israeli society after the War, it seemed we had survived a moment when our existence was as precarious as Jewish life had been in the Diaspora. Israel was not a new “normal” state, but part of the continuum of the “Jewish fate” of ever-present threat. In response, a small group of us felt compelled to understand ourselves as Jews in relationship to Jewish history and tradition, this “fate,” and Jewish identity.

After serving in the army and marrying an American Jewish student activist, I came to the United States to study Jewish history, a rather untypical pursuit for an Israeli in America. I believed, like most Israelis here, that I was preparing for my return to Israel. Those were the days when leaving Israel was “*yerida*” — descent from the high-place, failure, betrayal. Indeed, to this day, most Israelis in the U. S., even if here for decades, continue to talk about returning to Israel and segregate themselves from the American Jewish community in tight-knit Israeli circles. They try to evade the stigma of *yerida* by ignoring the telltale signs of settling here permanently: good jobs, nice homes, and American-born children. However, with growing disillusionment about life in Israel — the decline of idealism, insecurity, ongoing occupation and a stalled peace process, social fissures, and economic difficulties, I saw the stigma of *yerida* diminishing. Personally, I felt more at ease living in a country with which I did not fully identify, feeling less responsible for its actions. I was fond of saying, half seri-


ously, “I only feel at home where I don’t really belong.”

American Jewish life provided me a canvas on which to define my Jewish identity while being an Israeli remained at my core. What I evolved is a new hybrid: an Israeli American Jew. Increasingly, I encounter this hybrid identity among other Israelis. As they raise children, they enter into the Jewish community

Israeli identity in Diaspora and the place of Israelis in American Jewish life are rarely addressed.

through day schools or the bar/bat mitzvah experience, and they begin to feel Jewish as well as Israeli. Yet, Israeli identity in Diaspora and the place of Israelis in American Jewish life are rarely addressed. The “space” for such discussion is hemmed in by Israelis’ reluctance to acknowledge their permanent moved away from Israel and by the American Jewish community’s discomfort with embracing Israelis. Such acceptance seems to undermine the commitment to Israel and *aliyah*.

Though Israelis may resist seeing themselves as yet another wave of Jewish immigration to the U. S., they are, in fact, not radically different from the Jewish immigrant story. They come seeking economic opportunity and freedom. Admittedly, it is not freedom from persecution and antisemitism they seek. Rather, they are after freedom from life in Israeli society, so permeated with dangers and obligations. Here, Israelis feel free to be individuals, free from the pressures of security concerns and military service, free not to tow any numbers of lines.

In my work planning Jewish cultural and educational programs at a large JCC in the Bay Area, I try to give voice to this Israeli American Jewish identity and, at the same time, support Israelis who wish to create their own Israeli social-cultural life in Diaspora. Within our large community of Israelis, old paradigms and labels are shifting. As the radical dichotomies Israel/Diaspora and *aliyah/yerida* lose their charge, being an Israeli in the United States is emerging as one more manifestation of the long history of Jewish life in Diaspora. 

Rachel Biale, born and raised in Kibbutz Kfar Ruppin, received her BA and MA in Jewish History from UCLA and her MSW from Yeshiva University. She is the author of Women and Jewish Law. She is Director of Community Services at the Osher Marin JCC.

December 2004

Tevet 5765

To subscribe: 877-568-SHMA

www.shma.com

THE GLOBAL ECONOMY'S swelling tide offers a stark choice: either learn to sail or get swept under. For Israel, this means thinking about the economic impact of political choices. Prime Ministers Rabin and Peres saw their Oslo Accords not only as land-for-peace, but also as land-for-prosperity. They swapped tribal grievance for trade and growth, using the deal to open once-hostile markets to export, shift resources to high-tech, and invest in the infrastructure needed to stay competitive.

Globalization is forcing Israel to choose between a vision of statehood that is primarily economic and universalistic or primarily cultural and particularistic. It is not an easy choice. Zionism emerged in an era that saw the state as a cultural project, the means by which a nation expressed its peoplehood. A century later, a more bottom-line philosophy has taken hold in the West: The *raison d'être* of any state is to promote individual opportunity and the welfare of its citizens. Where peoplehood fits into this vision is anyone's guess.

The clash between these opposing views lies at the heart of Israel's *kulturkampf*. While Israelis duke it out, their country and the world continue to change around them. An influx of migrant workers from Thailand, Nigeria, and other places is making Israel — already one-fifth non-Jewish — even more diverse. Elsewhere, supranational institutions like the European Union, multinational corporations like Exxon-Mobil, and transnational networks like al Qaeda (*lehavdil*), are weakening state sovereignty. For Israel, this raises troubling questions. If, for example, economics compelled Israel to shed its *sheqel* as France has foregone its *franc*, what would this mean for the Jewishness of the Jewish state?


These trends are unsettling Israelis who see their country as the bearer of Jewish hopes and dreams. Are they left only with a choice between defensive nationalism and drifting universalism? Hopefully not. Globalization can help tie Israel closer to a worldwide Jewish people, even as it makes Israel more vigorously multicultural.

From the time of the Babylonian exile and through the present day, Jews have always been a global people. It has taken a few thousand years, but the technology has finally caught up. Air travel, cell phones, satellite

television, and the Internet have all democratized the experience of being part of a community that transcends place.


Zionism, of course, rejected on ideological grounds the notion of transnational communities. But today's networked world is blurring the concept of place on which Zionism's negation of the Diaspora rested. Who is in exile and who is at home when most Israelis have close family living abroad and everyone is meeting in cyberspace?

Globalization offers the rationale and the means to modernize Israel's Jewish mission. Strength today no longer lies in core-periphery models, nor does power rest in states alone. World Jewry and Israel would be stronger if Zionism helped Israelis experience Jewish transnationalism, not escape it. They would be stronger if Israel treated itself less as the Jewish people's mainframe, and more as a node in the Jewish people's distributed network. And they would be stronger if Israeli public policy placed more weight on what is good for the economy rather than what is good for the Jews.

Herzl never envisioned a time when state power would be on the wane. But that era is now, and it will reshape Jewish peoplehood, hopefully for the better. 

Calling, from page 11

tion and less connection to things beyond the material, more multimillion-dollar JCCs but a 50 percent rate of intermarriage among American Jews, how do we know what galvanizes Diaspora Jewish attention and "fits"? And is what "fits" sufficient to sustain Jewish identity for generations to come? And where, in this mix of identity, is the place of Israel?

Our Jewish communities must invest in and listen for the quiet seeking of the thousands of unaffiliated Jews. Many of them have financial resources that can buy whatever services they want; they do not "need" the Jewish community. But our rich Jewish tradition can help them envisage a meaningful transformation of Judaism, and challenge them to use their resources to help redefine the landscape of Jewish life in America. 

Dr. Shaul Kelner, a sociologist, is a Senior Research Associate at Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies.

Homesick and Homeless


Annette Ezekiel



ON MY FIRST TRIP to Israel, I was struck by the country's beauty and puzzled by my disorientation. "Otherness" had become the core of my identity, and being homeless had become my home — the place where I felt most comfortable. I am a Jewish musician, a bandleader, singer, and accordianist with the New York klezmer-rock band Golem, and our new CD, "Homesick Songs," includes twelve songs about different *shtetlach*, the towns of Eastern Europe. The recording explores the conflictual state of homesickness and longing. The songs describe places that we have escaped, places where we are happy *not* to be, where we are not wanted — places that no longer even exist as we knew them. We have made better lives for ourselves in new homes. And yet, we miss the *shtetl*. The words of the songs are sung over and over, as if one were whispering them to a lover.

Golem's music explores Jewish identity through Jewish music that exists outside of Israel, as an expression of life in a place that is never truly home. In an alchemic reaction, klezmer musicians created a new form of music that expressed a strong Jewish identity based on difference, unbelonging, and a rootlessness that sprouted its own roots.

Golem is called a "klezmer-rock" band because we play klezmer music with a young, contemporary, rock-and-roll sensibility. We appeal to young people, young Jews especially, who feel unsure of their identity, both within the Jewish community and outside of it. In fact, they too feel homeless, and by mixing together today's references with those of their immigrant grandparents and great-grandparents, a new Jewish culture is born — part of the ever evolving Jewish culture in America.

Because Jews still feel homesick, our songs — some dating from the 1910s and 20s, some as far back as the 19th century — remain timely and relevant to Jews today. I wonder, though, if we're really looking for a specific place to call home. I feel most connected — to the past, to those around me, to my grandmother who died before I was born and for whom I am named — not when I am in a certain place (Israel, Eastern Europe, or New York City), but when I am playing and singing Yiddish music. It becomes my music — the music of my ancestors, of my grandparents. It is the music of those who are constantly wandering and searching, fleeing one place and finding another, always caught in between. For me, this state of homelessness is home. 

Annette Ezekiel is artistic director, accordianist, and singer of the New York-based Klezmer-Rock band, GOLEM (www.golemrocks.com). She speaks five languages and researches Eastern European music, dance, and literature. An audio clip from the CD, "Homesick," can be heard on www.shma.com.

Beyond T-Shirt Slogans: Reclaiming a Jewish Inheritance of Diversity

Frances Kreimer

"WHEREVER WE STAND, we stand with Israel," claim t-shirts, posters, and other Hillel paraphernalia. While this slogan conveys a common sentiment of many Zionist institutions, it does not resonate with many young Jews, like me. We consider ourselves heirs to powerful and varied dialogues with tradition; our contemporary challenge is not to force our communities to speak with one voice, but rather to engage in multiple ongoing Jewish conversations. While many Jews look to Israel to provide a unifying identity, in reality, Israel only proves the impossibility of such unity, and underscores the need to expand the conversation.

Three weeks before my bat mitzvah, the bullet that killed Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin shattered hope for thousands and

my understanding of Jewish identity. I learned of the assassination during *havdalah* in Brooklyn, where my Reconstructionist synagogue's teen group was spending a weekend in a Lubavitch community. While I was challenged by concepts of gender, observance, and tradition, I was also aware of the similarities I shared with my host family, and fascinated by the challenge of finding out what made us all "Jewish."

I was stunned when my hosts uttered approval of the assassination, stating that Rabin's assassin had "fulfilled a mitzvah." I refused to accept this as a definition of religious commandment. Despite or because of the deep fractures regarding Israel, some Jews (particularly those interested in pluralism) are beginning to explore self-definitions that do not

Frances Kreimer was born and raised in Philadelphia. After spending a year in Israel working for coexistence, she moved to New York City, where she currently studies Human Rights, Political Science, and the Middle East at Columbia University.

December 2004


Tevet 5765

To subscribe: 877-568-SHMA

www.shma.com

focus on a Zionist state. We may look to Jewish histories of evolving traditions, languages, and cultures that thrived for millennia before Israel. My Jewish identity is a dialogue with these histories.

This does not mean that I ignore Israel. The historical and liturgical relationships of Judaism to the land of Israel are deep and compelling. And I am morally implicated by a government that purports to speak in my name and

act on my behalf as it denies another people the self-determination upon which Zionism is allegedly founded. My Jewish identity pushes me to ask questions about justice and think critically about what communities I claim and who claims to speak for me. As a Jew, I want to ask these questions in the context of the texts, liturgy, and histories that constitute the continuing conversations that are my true birthright. 

At Home with Many Identities

Tali Hyman

“JEWS ARE ALWAYS exiles wherever they call home,” commented photographer Frédéric Brenner. (*Diaspora: Homelands in Exile Exhibit*, New York, 2003) What is home? How does it feel? How do you know when you’re there? Is there a “there” there? Do Jews ever feel at home? Like Brenner, literary scholar Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi argues that having an exilic orientation, feeling displaced, does not depend on physical dislocation. (*Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination*, 2000, p.10) A geographic home does not guarantee a spiritual one.

How does this impact our feeling of being at home in our Jewishness?

Jews have, at times, felt unsettled, comforted, and inspired about *homecoming and about diasporic displacement*.

Social scientific, historical, and philosophical researchers have long tried to capture identities in motion, as Brenner does in his photographs. And much ink has been dedicated to gaining ever tighter conceptual holds on that amorphous and mercurial phenomenon that William James labeled “identity.” Ironically, among scholars of “Jewish identity” in particular, there is little consensus as to what “it” really constitutes or how “it” develops. But there does seem to be agreement that there is, indeed, an “it.” Particularly in fields of education, identity has long been reified as a powerful *product* to be urgently manufactured and marketed. Across American Jewish communities, too, of course, one “Jewish identity” or another becomes the product, par excellence, that Jewish education is expected to able to deliver — to parents, community, and, ultimately, to the future.

The power, even magic, behind identity is that it is touted to have the strength to bring us home — to repair the ethnic-religious split

that America forced upon its immigrants as they arrived from the putative organic wholeness of the European Jewish experience. In his 1994 tract entitled “Against Identity,” Leon Wieseltier asserted, “[f]or social scientific intellectuals in postwar America, identity was what alienation was not. It was the promise of home.” (*The New Republic* p.3) The home that identity promises is a deep-rooted, profound sense of belonging and a feeling that all of one’s disparate selves are safely and coherently contained.

Jonathan Woocher, in his 1995 essay “Towards a ‘Unified Field Theory’ of Jewish Continuity,” points to seven ways that contemporary American Jewish identity is broken. He observes American Jewishness to be “hyphenated, fragmented, truncated, episodic, pluralized, marginalized, and homogenized,” a deleterious state for American Jewry. But what might we be able to explore and consider if we wrote articles with titles like, “Facing the Dissonance: Lingering in the Conflicts of Jewish Identity Formation”? In other words, can we accept as healthy Jewish identities that are not only harmonious, unified, stable, and coherent, but which are also conflicted, multiple, dissonant, fluid, and contradictory? This would honor dispersion as well as ingathering, Diaspora as well as home.

In other words, Jewish educators and professionals invite (sometimes implore) us to cease vacillating among our competing selves, acting as temporary auditors to our Jewishness, and come home. That promise of home seems to drive Jews inexorably toward some fantasy of home where we would calm our panic over survival and continuity.


We seldom talk about, hear about, or fund projects to name our diasporas — the productive and counter-productive tensions that in-

Tali Hyman is a Doctoral Candidate at New York University in the Steinhardt School of Education’s program in Education and Jewish Studies.

fuse Jewish identities. Author Jonathan Rosen allows himself to yearn for both a spiritual homepage (*The Talmud and the Internet: A Journey between Worlds*, p.14) as well as a critical experience of Diaspora. In a characteristically confessional passage he divulges:

“[I am the] bearer of twin legacies, both of which I am heir to, and which I would like in some way to reconcile. But perhaps reconciliation isn’t necessary. Why can’t the two live together in my mind – if not integrated, then at least, in the manner of the Talmud, side by side, a point and counterpoint? Why should they, any more than the body and the soul, be separated?...Finding a home inside exile, finding unity inside infinity, finding the self inside a sea of competing voices was an ancient challenge and is a modern one, too.” (pp. 108, 131)

Rosen honors both his desire for home and his desire for models that simultaneously affirm contrasting meaning systems; that is, the diasporic experience. The shift and flux in this on-going process epitomizes the notion that identity is, after all, an activity that requires soulful courage as well as a cultural tool-kit to navigate, as Rosen put it, the sea of competing voices.

Ezrahi suggests that for Jews, this activity, historically, has resembled archaeology more than eschatology; it is more of a continual process of digging and uncovering and less about arrival. Despite contemporary American emphasis on the promise of home, Jewish creativity has typically capitalized more upon Diaspora. And yet we know that each is necessary to make the other meaningful. 

Calling the “Power Elite”

Shalom C. Elcott

AMERICAN JEWS are experiencing a greater degree of freedom, opportunity, and wealth today than in any other period in the country’s history. While 50 years ago voluntary Jewish associations competed for a minority of people that had nowhere to go, today many universities, philharmonics, and other secular institutions count Jews among their major donors, putting an even greater demand on Jewish associations to provide a meaningful draw. This transition from an “oppressed” group to what we call a “power elite” often occurs alongside a loss of Jewish identity and community. But, as evidenced by the Golden Age of Spain and other periods in history, the emergence of economic prosperity among Jews can also bring about a renaissance in Jewish life and learning.

While statistics demonstrate the rise in intermarriage, the Chabad movement is opening up a new center approximately every ten days. Rabbi David Eliezrie, a Chabad Schaliach in Yorba Linda, CA, insists that the success of the movement is based on Jews looking for “something real and substantial. We are opening people up to the world of Jewish learning, inviting them to open the books, and find what speaks to them.” Rabbi Eliezrie explains that the secularized, “feelings-based” Judaism of the American Diaspora today is dangerous, among other reasons, because of its finite nature. “Today, the 25- to 50-year-old group maybe had a grandparent that looked like me

— with a long beard — and parents who were warm and fuzzy, maybe kept a Kosher home and made good kugel. But the next generation is growing up without knowing what it all means; when grandma dies and there’s no one to make kugel, all that is left are feelings of nostalgia, which don’t last more than a generation or two.”

My brother, Dr. David Elcott, U. S. Director of Interreligious Affairs for the American Jewish Committee, suggests that Jewish communal institutions must think about what is meaningful for next generation Jews. “They are accomplished and successful professionally and are now thinking about finding meaning. Our institutions need to reflect that there is less and less interest in affiliation and more interest in meaningful episodic encounters.”

Rabbi Stuart Altshuler, of Congregation Eilat in Mission Viejo, CA, observes that people are no longer identifying with something bigger than themselves. “Religious philosophical values and commitment to something other than the material is losing ground.” But people are touched by personal experiences and lifecycle events as well as programs that are functional and impact their children, such as a Jewish preschool. According to some observers, being Jewishly affiliated “is a matter of benefits, enhancement, and enrichment.”

But in today’s world where there are more choices and less time, more personal tempta-

continued on page 8

Shalom C. Elcott is the Chief Executive Officer of the Orange County Jewish Federation and previously President of the Ted Arison Family Foundation.

December 2004
Tevet 5765
To subscribe: 877-568-SHMA
www.shma.com

The Balcony

This year, in celebration of 350 years of Jewish life in America, *Sh'ma* is featuring a monthly column by Israeli Ruth Calderon. Launched in October, Calderon shares her perceptions of Jewish life in America — from A to Z, America to Zionism. The full reflection will be posted on www.shma.com.


EXPRESSIONS — Conversations are structured around stock phrases. Thus you will hear “I can’t wait” in connection with almost every meeting, and every meeting ends with “It was great.” At a business meeting, someone will almost certainly say “to be on the same page” and any creative idea will be described idiomatically as “out of the box.” To a foreign ear, all of these expressions sound as if all the partners in the conversation have accepted rules for translating their thoughts into a few dozen common phrases and have agreed not to say anything unique.

FLAG — It is impossible not to notice that this country is covered with flags. I can’t get used to how Americans degrade it: a flag tablecloth, a pair of clogs — the left in stripes, the right in stars — and flag bathing suits. If someone in Israel wore a blue and white bathing suit with a Star of David, he would probably end up in the hospital, if not in court.

I ask myself: what are Americans trying to prove? Who are they trying to convince? Is there such a great lack of confidence in America’s nationalism that so many flags must be displayed? Nationalism has been suspect ever since the Second World War. National identity remains, but with a tinge of ambivalence. To an intellectual Israeli, flying a flag seems like a vulgar, unrefined, and dangerous activity. It raises suspicions of sacrificing the individual’s identity to the masses of the nation.

Last year, at a lecture in a synagogue sanctuary, the speaker stood between the Israeli flag, on a mast topped with a Star of David, and the American flag, on a mast topped with an eagle. To an Israeli, an eagle is a symbol that the Roman Empire wanted placed in the Temple to demonstrate their rule over the Jews. In Israeli public school, I learned about our refusal to submit to the eagle; Jewish independence and national honor depended on it.

I found it difficult to concentrate on the lecture. Viewing the two flags, I began to understand that American Jews do not believe that their acceptance of the imperial identity makes them less Jewish and, to my surprise, after the initial shock, I agreed. Now I see

the beauty in American patriotism — how it coexists with independent cultural identities in positive and non-threatening ways. The stars and stripes serve mainly as the rules of the game and the government refers to itself without embarrassment as an administration. Public servants are perceived not as prophets or thinkers but as people of action. There could be something to this. 



Chair, *Sh'ma* Advisory Committee,
Rabbi Neil Gillman
Editor, Susan Berrin
Publisher & Executive Editor,
Yosef I. Abramowitz

Founding Editor, Rabbi Eugene Borowitz
Art Director, Janet Krasner Aronson
Proofreader, Amy Rea

Subscription Manager, Heather Holmes
Chair, Jewish Family & Life! Board,
Martin Kaminer

COO, Jewish Family & Life!, Barbara Weener
Sh'ma Committee, Sandee Brawarsky,

Jeremy Burton, Sharon Brous, Nina Beth Cardin,
Aryeh Cohen, Sharon Cohen Anisfeld,

Shoshana Boyd Gelfand, Hadar Harris, Caroline Harris,
Shai Held, Richard Hirsh, Steven Jacobson, Phil Miller,

Adam Mintz, Yehudah Mirsky,
Jonathan Schreiber, Carl Sheingold

Contributing Editors: Michael Berenbaum, Elliot Dorff, Arnold Eisen, Leonard Fein, Barry Freundel, Rela M. Geffen, Neil Gillman, Irving Greenberg, Joanne Greenberg, Brad Hirschfield, Paula Hyman, Lori Lefkowitz, Richard Marker, Deborah Dash Moore, Vanessa Ochs, Kerry Olitzky, Riv-Ellen Prell, Harold Schulweis, Elan Steinberg, Elie Wiesel, Arnold Jacob Wolf, David Wolpe, Michael Wyschogrod.

The opinions expressed in *Sh'ma* do not necessarily reflect those of the editors. Donations to *Sh'ma* are tax deductible. *Sh'ma* is available in microfilm from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI, and in audio format from the Jewish Braille Institute.

Address all editorial correspondence to: *Sh'ma*, P.O. Box 9129, Newton, MA 02464. Telephone: (617) 581-6810. Email: sberrin@jflmedia.com. Address all subscription queries and address changes to *Sh'ma*, P.O. Box 9129, Newton, MA 02464. Telephone: (877) 568-SHMA. Email: hholmes@jflmedia.com.

Sh'ma is published by Jewish Family & Life! monthly except July and August. Application to mail at periodical-class postage rates pending at Newton, MA 02464. Subscriptions: \$49 for two years in U.S.; \$29 for one year; \$39 for one year overseas; \$59 for two years; \$21.97 for one year senior/student. Bulk subscriptions are available at reduced prices. Please notify the subscription office in writing if you prefer that your name not be given out on rented lists.

Copyright © 2004 by Jewish Family & Life!
ISSN: 0049-0385 December 2004

A discussion guide for each issue of *Sh'ma* can be downloaded from www.shma.com



WITH ALL SPONSORSHIPS, SH'MA RESERVES COMPLETE EDITORIAL CONTROL OF CONTENT.

Ruth Calderon is Scholar-in-Residence at UJA Federation of New York and the founder of Alma College in Tel Aviv and Alma, NY. Her book, *The Market, the Home, the Heart, is being translated to English.*

Courage and Vision in Discussing Tolerance

Marc Gopin

Adam B. Seligman, *Modest Claims: Dialogues and Essays on Tolerance and Tradition*
(University of Notre Dame Press: 2004) \$40, 216pp.

FOR THE FOLLOWING two reasons, *Modest Claims: Dialogues and Essays on Tolerance and Tradition* is one of the most interesting books I have ever read. First, the book includes a cast of characters who have spent their lives pouring over the wisdom emerging out of the world's religious traditions who studiously avoid, at least in this book, an obsession with footnotes and small matters that so plague the minds of many academics (of which I am one). Second, the group is both respectful of religion and also aware of its dangers. The writers and their approach to this topic allows a critical discussion, namely, the question of the coexistence — or lack thereof — of world religions in modern times, to move forward. The group meets not as national security experts or counterterrorism specialists, but rather as an organic constellation of individuals with a deep knowledge of the essential crux of interpretation and change in religious traditions. The group understands the fundamental problem of clashing worldviews that can, while overlapping, be in conflict on at least a number of fronts. They come to this task with a sober awareness of the post-Enlightenment era, its successes, and its deep flaws that have spawned so much extremism in the 20th century with no sign of abatement.

No one is better qualified to assemble such a group and lead a dialogue than Adam Seligman, a tough-minded, profound scholar based at Boston University who has written some of the best work on the problematic legacy of the Enlightenment and its impact on religion and culture. Seligman's basic posture is that many of the axioms of Enlightenment-spawned society are untenable; they have generated a search for meaning that is leading toward major trouble for the future of human civilization unless we successfully address the boundaries of sameness and difference, as well as the requisite and indispensable notion of tolerance that will referee the profoundly different approaches to the search for meaning and value. At the same time, Seligman is a master at creating dialogue among visionary thinkers from a variety of cultures. Shlomo Fischer from

Israel is a fresh voice of pioneering thinking and education for the future of Israeli culture, while Rusmir Mahmutcehajic is a gem arising from the astonishingly resilient culture of Sarejevo and Bosnia.

This discussion inspires hope, not because the view of religion is optimistic or utopian; it decidedly is not. Rather it is because such depth of thought, generosity of interest, and humility of engagement is an interesting paradigm for how the interfaith relationships can proceed at a much deeper level than have been attempted until now. From my experiences in this field, I can say confidently that two things plague the well-intentioned religious dialogues of the past: knee-jerk hostility by those who refuse to participate and knee-jerk niceness of those who do participate. In *Modest Claims* one finds neither. While the participants respect each other, they waste no time with platitudes. After 9/11, I do indeed celebrate the modest claims of pro-social inter-religious platitudes, just as Seligman celebrates tolerance. In other words, given the state of global relations, even interfaith dialogue that is superficial is better than no dialogue at all, or a monologue of hatred and violence. I will take crumbs in an age of hatred and mass murder. On the other hand, no one is foolish enough to believe that we can survive primal hatred married to space-age technology unless we develop a deeper understanding of what is wrong and develop models of what can be made right in interfaith relations. *Modest Claims* is an excellent place to dive in, and Seligman is his usual brilliant self.

Seligman is a vital asset, by the way, to the future of Jewish theology in a crowded world. We Jews have the brains to develop theology and *halakha* that will help us survive, thrive, and be moral leaders in the larger world. The question is whether we have the courage and the vision to rise above past sorrows. Part of that courage comes from meeting the "other" in a deeper way, in a way that is firmly post-Holocaust, in a world where everyone is now imperiled without a deeper engagement with strangers.

שמעון
Sh'ma

Koret Book Review

The Koret Foundation – *Sh'ma* literary pages include literary essays, author interviews, and book, film, or art reviews that complement the Koret Jewish Book Awards and provide visibility and distinction to a wide range of Jewish books and authors. These pages feature an array of writers and others who bring our readers new expressions of Jewish thought, imagination, and spirit.

Visit JBooks.com for reviews, interviews, and excerpts.

Marc Gopin is James H. Laue Professor of Religion, Diplomacy, and Conflict Resolution, and Director of the Center on Religion, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution. He is also a Senior Researcher at the Fletcher School for Law and Diplomacy's Institute for Human Security. His most recent books are *Healing the Heart of Conflict* and *Holy War, Holy Peace*.

December 2004

Tevet 5765

To subscribe: 877-568-SHMA
www.shma.com

21st
Century
Judaism

THE DEBATE ABOUT whether Israel is or is not the center of the Jewish world is over. The good news for Israel is that it won: it is indeed the center of the Jewish world. The bad news is that it doesn't matter anymore.

Israel's victory was sealed in the midst of the Intifada. It happened in the most subtle ways – when Diaspora Jews who were otherwise uninvolved in Jewish life were asked for their opinions on the conflict by work colleagues; when CNN forced us to ask complex

our understanding of Israel as *medina* (state) or *eretz* (land) – a place, a resource, a classroom – to include the notion of Israel as *am* (people).

What does this mean? When we think about Israel experience programs, we should move beyond the Diaspora notion of sending young people to Israel to get their injection of Jewishness to bring back home, or the Israeli notion of bringing Diaspora youth to Israel to bolster tourism or *aliyah*. Instead, we have to think about how to bring Jews *together* from Israel *and* the Diaspora, in Israel *or* the Diaspora, to learn from one another and work together to strengthen the Jewish people.

When we think about *shlichut*, the emissaries Israel traditionally sends to Diaspora communities, we should no longer simply think of Israeli educators in the Diaspora teaching about Israel and encouraging *aliyah*. Instead, we have to start seeing *shlichim* as Jewish educators who come from any Jewish community and go to any other Jewish community. *Shlichim* could be American Jews in England and vice-versa, Canadian Jews in France and vice-versa, and Israeli Jews in the Diaspora, and, dare I say it, vice versa.

And when we think about organizational partnerships, we have to reach beyond our immediate community and beyond Israel, and strategize how our institution — our synagogue, JCC, seminary, or school — can both enhance and be enhanced by individuals, institutions, and communities throughout the Jewish world. The overarching principle is that every Jew matters, and every Jew — wherever he or she happens to live — has something to learn from and to teach others.

This new paradigm no longer positions the land or the State of Israel at the center of the Jewish world because, sociologically at least, that notion is becoming increasingly redundant. Rather, it positions the people of Israel — the social capital of the Jewish people as a whole — at the heart of the Jewish world, and asks all of us to strive to learn from and contribute to the collective task of strengthening the Jewish people. In this way, we will encourage a global cross-fertilization of ideas and build a real sense of commonality, not simply for the benefit of Israel, but for the benefit of Jews everywhere.

In a global world, nothing holds center stage.

questions about the nature of our Jewishness simply by beaming images of Israel into our living rooms; when new books about Israel – like Alan Dershowitz's *The Case for Israel* – had a habit of finding their way into our lives. Today, for good or for bad, Israel has a way of impacting the lives of Diaspora Jews.

And yet, wider sociological trends have simultaneously made the whole notion of centrality completely obsolete. However we may wish to construct the Jewish world in our hearts and minds, the sociological changes of the past decade are forcing us to redefine the way we see it. Globalization has created a radically different world to the one we are used to, and in this new era the very duality of Israel/Diaspora ceases to make sense.

In a global world, Israel can no longer be in the center. It can no longer even be *primus inter pares*. In a global world, nothing holds center stage. Instead, all places, all people are linked to one another in cyberspace, and all vie with one another for attention. No single place holds more significance or value than another. The potential for creativity and innovation exists everywhere and in everyone. In the new technological age, nothing is central and everything is central simultaneously. In short, today Israel is both as extraordinary and as extraneous as everything else.

In policy terms, we need to think in new ways and develop new methodologies to maximize the unique qualities of individual Jewish communities, educators, and thinkers and allow as many Jews as possible access to them. Conceptually, we need to reconstruct

Jonathan Boyd, a Jerusalem Fellow at the Mandel Institute in Jerusalem, is pursuing a doctorate in Jewish educational philosophy. He was Director of Research and Development for the United Jewish Israel Appeal in London (2000-2003) and Consultant to the North American Coalition for Israel Education (NACIE) in New York (2003-2004). He is the author of *The Sovereign and the Situated Self: Jewish Identity and Community in the 21st Century*. (Profile Books, UK)

Jonathan Ariel asks, “Will we recognize each other across the anthropological and ideological divides?” The question is: if we do recognize one another, and if we do succeed in entering into a healthy conversation that is not lost in translation, will this conversation fundamentally change us, or will we remain the same as before?

In the end, neither Joseph nor his brothers are truly transformed by their encounter. When their father, Jacob, dies, old hostilities and distrust return. Contrast this to the relationship between Ruth and Naomi, a woman from the Diaspora and a woman from the land of Israel, both of whom are profoundly changed in meeting the other, and out of whose encounter comes messianic hope.

In the relationship among Diaspora communities and between Diaspora and Israel communities, does each party challenge the other? Does each learn from the other? Do both leave the encounter transformed? Does the dialogue between the two produce something new and, perhaps, even lead us closer to redemption?

— Jill Jacobs

Last summer, 13,433 people from eight countries attended the Opening Ceremonies of the JCC Maccabi Games in Boston. Team “Boston-Haifa,” the first host-sister city team in JCC Maccabi history marched in, 400 strong, to tears and a standing ovation. Coach Yossi from Haifa later remarked, “I have fought in four wars defending my country and family.

Most unexpectedly, when the Israeli flag entered the arena and the singing of “Hatikvah” broke out, I began to cry.”

If conversation among our increasingly estranged but loving family is critical to our vitality as a people in the future, then only through shared experiences will conversation be possible. Settings for these common experiences – Israel, Eastern Europe, the Former Soviet Union, an arena in Boston – all offer healthy interaction; the centrality of the land is without challenge. Wherever they happen, these shared intense experiences for members of our extended Jewish family are critical.

Yosef did reengage his brothers in Egypt. “There was no one else about when Yosef made himself known to his brothers. His sobs were so loud that the Egyptians could hear...” (*B'reishit* 45:1-2) Healthy families gather in many places to cry – tears of sorrow and of joy.

— Mark Sokoll

I want to respond to one meaningful quote of Jonathan Ariel: “Toxic families get rules; healthy families, ultimately, get conversation.” In Jewish fiction and in real life, it is a common occurrence that after a fight between brothers, silence is the consequence. Years of silences. In the movie, *Avalon, Avalon*, brothers maintained a silence for the rest of their lives because one of them cut the turkey before the other’s arrival on Thanksgiving Day. It seems like the movie is drawn from a biblical episode rather than the experiences of an American secular holiday.

Silence is a better response than the behavior of Cain toward his brother Abel. Contemporary silence is, I think, a response to two fundamental facts: indifference and survival. The Diaspora is split into three segments: one group is indifferent to the fate of the Jewish people; the other two groups are split over a very bitter political debate. Some Jews believe that the survival of Israel depends on a more concessive attitude to end the conflict with the Arabs, and some Jews believe that Israel will, no matter what, continue to be attacked by its enemies. The breach of comprehension between these groups is so wide that apparently there are still no words to close it.

— Marcelo Birmajer

“And Yosef saw his brothers and he recognized them. And he made himself strange to them and spoke harshly to them....And Yosef recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him.”

B'reishit 42:7-8

וירא יוסף את אחיו ויכרם
ויתנכר אליהם וידבר אתם קשות ...
ויכר יוסף את אחיו והם לא הכירוהו:

—בראשית מב:ז-ח

The essence of Diaspora is familial recognition across space and time. With the documented decline in “public Judaism,” can a veteran global people reengage in family conversation? What have we to really converse about other than antisemitism? Will we recognize each other across the anthropological and ideological divides?

Yosef, from the pinnacle of Diaspora society, made himself *strange* and spoke *harshly*. Perhaps he sought revenge for his harsh treatment at fraternal hands. Perhaps he gazed longingly at his brothers’ rootedness — despite their hunger. Perhaps he hankered for a strand of his identity that was masked, even to himself, in the Egyptian politics of recognition.

Yosef’s family, with its traumas, found a way to re-engage; Yosef offers a clue to our predicament. He was prepared to speak both lovingly *and* harshly to his wandering siblings from the Land. He made himself strange and also unmasked himself after more than 20 years in the luxury of Diaspora. Toxic families get rules; healthy families, ultimately, get conversation.

Wary of getting lost in translation, we need a conversation as to what the Jewish people should strive for next. Can we talk with the emotional rigor, the sincere give and take, of healthy family encounters? Such a *tête-à-tête* across time and space will determine how vital and recognizable we are and remain as a people.

— Jonathan Ariel

Jonathan Ariel is
Deputy Director of the
Mandel Leadership
Institute in Jerusalem.

Marcelo Birmajer, an
Argentinian author
of more than twenty
books, wrote the
screenplay for the
film *Lost Embrace*, a
Jewish film nominated
by Argentina for an
Oscar.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs is
Director of Outreach
and Education for
the Jewish Council
on Urban Affairs in
Chicago.

Rabbi Mark Sokoll is
President of the Jewish
Community Centers of
Greater Boston.

Sigi Ziering Ethics

This year, the practical ethics column will focus on money and power. The column is co-sponsored by Shelley and Bruce Whizin and Marilyn Ziering in honor of Marilyn's husband Sigi Ziering, of blessed memory. The series of columns, with responses, is available on www.shma.com.

WHEN THINGS GET HOT in synagogue land, I find myself humming "If I Were A Rich Man" from *Fiddler on the Roof*, especially the line "when you're rich they think you really know." It is a perpetual pattern in Jewish history: wealth vs. spirituality and learning; lay leaders vs. rabbis. We cynically call it the Golden Rule: whoever has the gold makes the rules.

What do we do when money and ethics clash? How do synagogues establish reasonable and fair dues and fee structures? How do Jewish and spiritual values fit into those structures? Stories abound about rabbis losing jobs because they do not perform intermarriages or bring into the synagogue its "fair market share" of new members. When the market becomes god, we are dancing around a new and improved golden calf.

How does the synagogue react when a wealthy donor makes his or her own programmatic and ideological demands on the institution, with the assertion: "or I will take my money and go elsewhere"? Where is the ethical imperative in a community when donors start a private "boutique synagogue" with their own rabbi on call? Each of these situations presents ample opportunity for congregations and communities to violate the words of Leviticus 19:15 "...You shall not show deference to the rich."

A more difficult ethical issue is how we deal with the "kashrut" of donations to the synagogue. Jewish texts and responsa offer a clue. In June 1983 (coincidentally, as the Wall Street scandals were beginning to emerge), a Reform responsum addressed the issue of whether a convicted felon could be honored by a synagogue through a fund or a memorial plaque in his name. The responsum suggested that because it is a mitzvah to support synagogues, it would be wrong to refuse such gifts. We should

not prevent people from doing *mitzvot*; if we did, then only the indisputably ethically pure would be capable of Jewish living. Other authorities were leery about such gifts, because of the principle of *marit ayin* ("what will this behavior look like to casual observers?") and the possibility that such gifts would compromise the synagogue's honor.

On rare occasions donors have tried to exert too much influence on program and policy. At such times, the synagogue's lay leadership, along with the communal culture, history, and ethos, politely tells the donor that s/he is wrong. *This is essential*: Raise up leaders who are so well versed in Jewish ethics and decision-making processes that narcissistic macherarchies have little possibility to exist. There is a reason why the Yom Kippur liturgy contains this confession: *Al cheyt she-chatanu lifanecha b'chozek yad*. "For the sin that we have committed against You by the abuse of power."

Here, true to our name, Yisrael, we wrestle with the meaning of money and morality. Does the good that donated funds achieve override questionable sources? Are synagogues ever in financial positions to refuse donor money? And what about the issue of role-modeling? Would we want our children to grow up emulating and revering people whose funds emerged from unethical practices?

We must be ever cautious that the process of synagogue fundraising never damages the very mission of the synagogue. The Jewish community hurts itself more by sending mixed "meta-messages" about fundraising than it does by going without certain programs because of a lack of resources. If our actions wind up belying our words, then our words will ultimately and utterly fail as well. We can ill afford that, for compared to the tainting of our purpose, deficit spending is really not that big a sin at all.

Jeffrey K. Salkin is the spiritual leader of *The Temple, Atlanta, GA*, and the author of numerous books on personal spirituality, published by Jewish Lights Publishing.

December 2004 /Tevet 5765



To subscribe: 877-568-SHMA
www.shma.com
P. O. Box 9129
Newton, MA 02464
Change Service Requested

Non-Profit
US Postage
PAID
Permit No. 401
Frederick, MD