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Social Movements

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“Ten days that shook the world” is the way Oregon-born radical and journalist John Reed famously described the Russian Revolution of 1917. Some events and movements shake the world and seem to tear it apart; others pass from the scene at the speed of light. How do we explain the difference? This issue of *Sh'ma* is pegged to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the massive D.C. rally that propelled the Soviet Jewry movement into its final triumphant years. With that movement, arguably the most powerful of all social movements to shake the Jewish world in the last few decades, and its significant impact in mind (it resulted in 2 million people leaving the FSU), we tour a wide range of activist initiatives that have arisen and, in some instances, disappeared rapidly, such as Tel Aviv’s tent city of the summer of 2011. We examine what happens to a movement, such as “Save Darfur,” that experiences fatigue and loses momentum — even when the issues that launched it persist. We take a look at these and other movements to learn what they teach us about social organization, about change, and about their impact on contemporary Judaism. What are the movements of change that continue to capture the minds and attract the hearts of Jews?

We open the issue with an exploration of the power of song, and of how and why it is that the tunes of Woody Guthrie, Shlomo Carlebach, or, more recently, the enigmatic musician Jeff Magnum, can fuel generations; we also examine why a movement often depends on song — an anthem (“We Shall Overcome,” for one example) — for its existence.

Some of us are movement activists; others fight change. Still others take note of or foster change quietly. This issue offers a glimpse at what we might learn about these options.

—Susan Berrin, Editor-in-Chief

Sideways and Upward

LILI BEN AMI

Instead of the oft-heard question, “Where did the energy of last summer’s tent protest go?” one should be asking, “Where did the energy of last summer come from?”

The Israeli tent protest movement of the summer of 2011 was a thrilling and exceptional historical phenomenon. For the past decade, I have been active in social issues in Israel. I led (volunteer) struggles for workers’ rights, for improving the status of women, and for strengthening the educational system. I coordinated hundreds of conferences, demonstrations, and petitions and founded and directed two social organizations and four nonprofit institutions. But it was only in front of an audience of tens of thousands, after only two days of organizing, that I stood amazed at the awakening of the nation. Finally, I saw the mass exit from a state of apathy, and the coalescing of groups that took to the streets to set up tents. The message was

an appeal to the government: “Enough Erosion of the Middle Class” and “The Nation Demands Social Justice.”

For the entire summer, it was clear to me that this phenomenon was temporary and rare, and at any moment the tents might fold up and disappear. But the protest was authentic and

The protest translated economic issues, such as the inability to purchase an apartment, into an accessible social agenda.

heartfelt, even if it was chaotic and disorganized and it sometimes offered unclear messages.

After a month or so, we were able to articulate an agenda and formulate reasonable demands based on research data, statistics, and

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the experiences of academics, professionals, and practitioners. Though today questions are being raised about the extent of the protest's success — and though the government never answered all of the demands and has, to the contrary, placed difficult levies on the middle class, such as raising the value added tax (VAT) and the price of gas — we should not ignore the fact that certain historic decisions have been made. For example, the government has promised a longer school day that will help working families and provided a budget to cover these costs.

Beyond the response of the government, the protest altered the lives of thousands of people. Changes can be seen and heard on the street and among the decision makers. The social voice floated in from the activist field and spread sideways and upward. This is why it is not surprising to see that the movement has projected itself onto the turbulent Israeli electoral system. As expected, many of today's politicians are trying to gain political power from the social protest. For example, in the election campaign for chairman of the centrist Kadima party last spring, Shaul Mofaz promised to lead the next summer's tent protests. The language of the protest and its slogan (*ha'am doresh tzedek chevrati*, people demand social justice) have entered into the parties' platforms, and the demands of the protest — such as lower prices for apartments and other family needs — are being addressed. The Labor Party, under the leadership of Shelly Yachimovich, has been strengthened because it demands that social-economic

issues will be at the center of the discourse in addition to security issues. Likud Party member and Minister of Communication Moshe Kahkon's recent decision to break the monopoly on cell phone service and decrease cell phone prices, which benefits all families, garnered attention because of the recent discourse. And at least three new parties, with roots in the protest movement, are vying for seats in the next Knesset: *Mifleget Ha'am*, The People's Party, *Eretz Hadasha*, A New Land, and *Or, Light*.

In addition to other young tent activists, I am entering the political fold and running as a Labor Party candidate in the upcoming election. I am 33 years old, a teacher, and a mother of two young children. For the past decade, my activism has focused on educational reform and gender issues. Several significant successes since my years as a student have taught me that change is possible. Last summer's protest showed Israelis that the time is right to advance an agenda of change, not only among a grassroots group of activists, but also among the epicenter of the Israeli government.

During the protest, we successfully changed the discourse to focus on welfare, education, medicine, and social justice. This is the real accomplishment of the tent protest: The protest translated economic issues, such as the inability to purchase an apartment, into an accessible social agenda. We demonstrated enormous political power and found that change is possible. As Mahatma Gandhi said: "Be the change you want to see in the world." 

What You Want to Hear?

EITAN KENSKY

On October 6, 2011, Jeff Mangum, the musician behind the legendary indie rock band Neutral Milk Hotel, played a surprise concert for the Occupy Wall Street protesters in New York's Zuccotti Park. Until earlier that year, Mangum was modern rock's most famous recluse. He practically disappeared in the years following his band's second album, "In the Aeroplane Over the Sea." He made few public appearances and granted fewer interviews, and the long articles that were written about him during this time, the ones that actually had something to say about Jeff Mangum, seem to have disappeared from the Internet entirely. It is possible I imagined them.

But even before he disappeared, there was a mystique around Mangum and his music. His cryptic and grotesque lyrics are haunted by desires that cannot fully be explained. The songs are also haunted, almost literally, by Anne Frank. Mangum read *The Diary of a Young Girl* shortly after the release of his band's first album and he found himself devastated by Anne's story and tormented by nightmares. The album is filled with facts about her life, but it's also exceedingly difficult to know where the facts end and his machinations begin. While the lyrics can be impenetrable, the emotions never are. Mangum exhausted himself in the performance; nothing was omitted. The album

sold hundreds of thousands of copies, despite almost no marketing. His disappearance only made the album seem more like prophecy.

After occasionally performing with friends, Mangum decided to tour again. In 2011, he played small venues around the country, each chosen for its acoustics. There is no way to describe those shows other than intimate; Mangum, his guitar, and his voice. He used as little amplification as possible, and most concerts became sing-alongs. Thinking about it now, the sing-alongs seem like the point of the tour: Mangum wanted to give the audience the experience of connecting through music.


But a strange thing happened to Jeff Mangum at Zuccotti Park: He stumbled into the longer history of protest music. Social progress movements in both the 1930s and 1960s memorably and indelibly used music to voice their messages. Woody Guthrie became an American legend; “Ohio,” a perfect blend of rage, melody, and message, reached 14 on the Billboard charts. And Neil Young instantly became one of the leaders of the 1960s counterculture.

Today, it should be even easier to use music for political purposes. Guthrie frequently had to choose between performing political music about working conditions on site and performing on the radio. Today, technology allows artists to bypass the “culture industry” entirely: Bands don’t need a record label to upload their music to YouTube. Their work is accessible to millions; and yet, none of the music from Zuccotti Park has had any sort of mass impact. The two most widely reported concerts, Mangum’s and that of former Rage Against the Machine guitarist Tom Morello, have garnered only 50,000-80,000 views each

on YouTube — respectable numbers for a clip of a cute kitten. If a Pete Seeger was born in Zuccotti Park, we haven’t yet heard his music.

Mangum may have been playing at a protest, but he wasn’t performing protest songs. He saw himself as an entertainer, not a leader: “I’m here to serve you,” he said. “What do you want to hear?” If there is something that categorizes music, perhaps all media, in this era of change, it is the hesitancy toward serving politics through art — and an audience suspicious of hearing those messages. We no longer expect our culture to be a commentary on the world.

In a sense, we’ve traded mass-consciousness for intimacy and personal connection. The dominant literary genre is the memoir. Radio shows have been reinvented as podcasts, more than ever directed at the listener alone with his or her headphones. Groups like “The Moth” are dedicated to live storytelling. Performers enter the stage to tell their stories to a small group of people in attendance and a larger group of people spiritually connected via their headphones. It’s true that established artists such as Bruce Springsteen remain political and outspoken. But many of the younger generation of singer-songwriters who compose music about homelessness, the environment, and poverty, do so as autobiographic and personal narratives. Their songs tell us about their lives, not their politics. We’re brought together by the confession. Presence and closeness matter.

Mangum is only a singer-songwriter. We no longer expect him to change the world; we *only* hope his music will tell us something new about humanity. He was there to entertain the protestors, and maybe to share with them new feelings of hope. 



Eitan Kensky is the preceptor in Yiddish at Harvard University, where he is a doctoral candidate focusing on American Jewish literature and culture. To view Jeff Magnum performing at Occupy Wall Street, go to www.YouTube.com and search for “Jeff Magnum at Occupy Wall Street.”

Start Composing

SHAUL KELNER

NASHVILLE — I futz around on guitar. Strum a few chords. Pluck simple scales — enough to entertain myself. Every Nashvillian who can do that much will eventually step onto a stage. My performing debut (which doubled as my farewell concert) came at the conclusion of a Jewish conference several years ago where I had been teaching a retrospective on the movement to free Soviet Jews. The class session unlocked a trove of stories from former activists. Inspired, I borrowed a guitar and an erstwhile Reform movement summer camp song-leader,

and, in a darkened ballroom at the final evening’s cabaret, offered a rendition of the band Safam’s “Leaving Mother Russia,” an anthem of the Soviet Jewry movement.

“They call me Anatole, in prison I do lie.” I had stood in crowds singing this line many times, but not since my teenage years. “So stand up now and shout it to the sky!” And as would have happened three decades ago, the room — more than 100 people — stood and swayed and indeed shouted: “We are leaving
continued on next page

Mother Russia. When they come for us, we'll be gone." The reenactment was surprisingly powerful. How strange to experience again the actual feelings of being in the movement during its peak. If there were still a Soviet embassy to protest in front of, we would have marched. Such is the power of song.

A suggestion to today's activists: If you want to transform your cause into a full-fledged social movement, start composing. Movements do more than just hammer away at a policy agenda. They also do more than sound alarm

Songs embody and encapsulate the experience of a social movement. Even after a movement recedes into the mists of history, its songs remain as spores.

bells to raise awareness about burning issues. Movements create full-blown cultures that immerse people — body and soul. Imagine the civil rights movement without "We Shall Overcome" or the Jewish feminist movement without "Miriam's Song" ("And the women dancing with their timbrels..."). Yes, one needs a hammer and a bell, but, as Pete Seeger teaches us — in lyric, no less! — one also needs a song.

Songs communicate a movement's message in concise and compelling ways, provide rousing calls to action, foster solidarity among activists, and bolster morale. But what makes for a good movement anthem?

First, the success of a movement anthem is never solely attributable to its musical qualities. As the saying goes, "All hits are flukes." Activists don't have as much control as they think. The Israeli peace anthem "*Shir Lashalom*" was propelled to classic status not by any peace activist's choice but by an assassin's bullet.

And one needn't compose new melodies. Hit songwriter Sam Lorber, who is also an expert in Yiddish socialist protest music, notes that verse written by the sweatshop poets — a group of Yiddish writers in America who wrote during the 1890s and 1900s — became popular protest songs set to the tunes of familiar Russian marches.

Beyond the musical qualities, what about context? With whom, when, and how will the songs be sung? For movement anthems, eschew the solo performance. Through communal song, individuals recreate themselves as a collective acting in unison.


Where? Movement songs are often sung in spaces that already belong to a movement, as

when workers sing "We Shall Not be Moved" in a union hall. But singing in public places and in someone else's "territory" can transform a venue into movement turf. Sing "We Shall Not be Moved" on the factory floor and you have claimed the space.

How will the song engage the body? Will activists cross arms and link hands, as with "We Shall Overcome"? Will they dance to "Miriam's Song" with timbrel in hand as at feminist seders? What choreography will serve as the anthem's trademark and enable one-time activists to reexperience the embodied sensations of the movement decades hence?

A movement for social change requires a vision for a better future. After Anatoly Sharansky received his freedom and changed his first name to "Natan," Safam recorded a new version of "Mother Russia" written in the past tense: "They called me Anatole, in prison I did lie." But the Sharansky of the song is not just the individual who inspired the anthem. Safam's "refusenik" represents all Jews who might ever confront the weight of state oppression. As a cry against injustice, Sharansky's fight against imprisonment needs always to remain in the present tense, just as "We Shall Overcome" always remains in the future simple.

Songs embody and encapsulate the experience of a social movement. Even after a movement recedes into the mists of history, its songs remain as spores. Under the right circumstances, they can sprout new life. They can regenerate emotions of the past or rouse people to action for new causes.

So, start composing or scouring the Smithsonian Folkways catalog. If a movement is creating feelings that can be felt again by reenacting its anthem 30 years later, it is doing the work of mobilization well. 

Shaul Kelner directs the program in Jewish studies at Vanderbilt University. He is the author of *Tours That Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism* (New York University Press, 2010).

The Smithsonian catalogue can be viewed at Folkways.si.edu.

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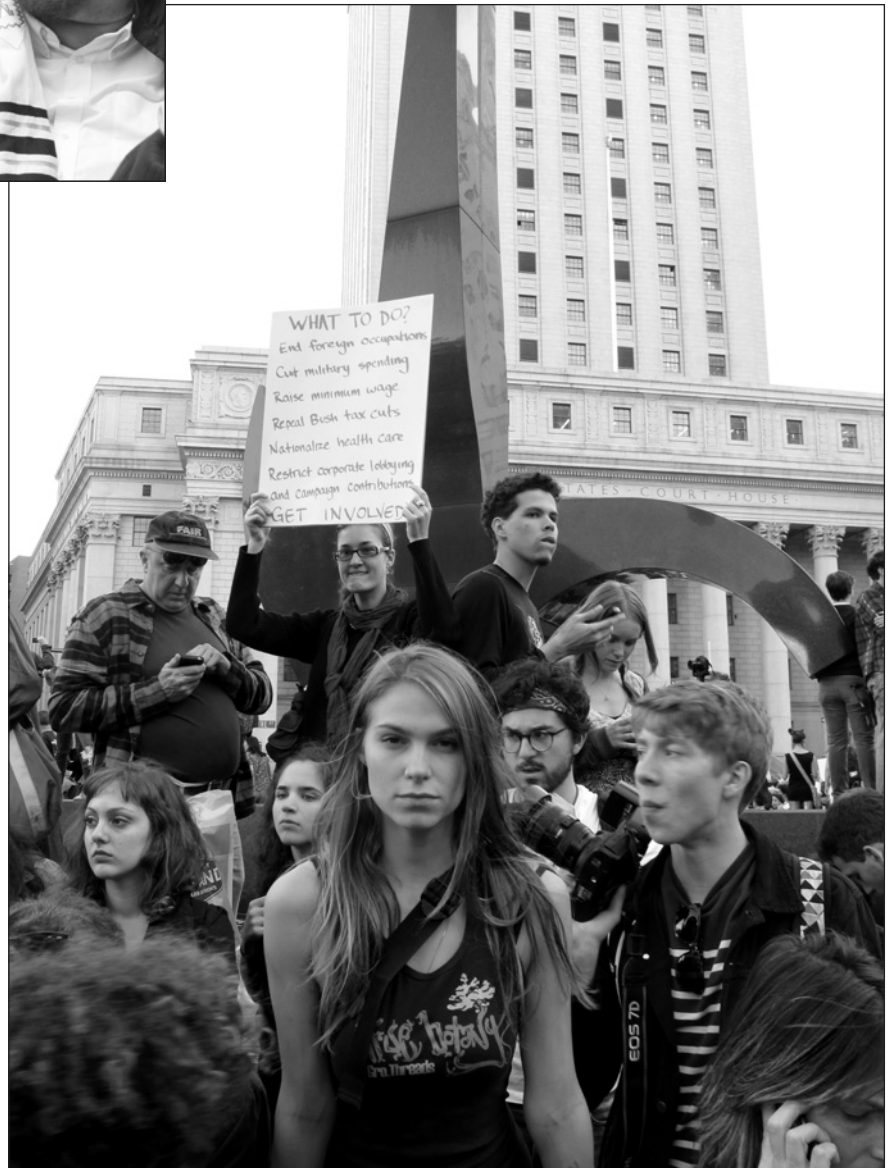
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Images and Commentary

JULIAN VOLOJ

Photography has long been a means to capture not only a moment in time but also a message and a movement. **Julian Voloj**, who immigrated to the United States from Muenster, Germany, by way of Brussels in October 2003, captures the scene at Occupy Wall Street in 2011.



Contentious Politics and the Jewish Community

ERIC LEVINE

"Hell, no, we won't go!" "Let my people go."

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These are familiar chants, shouted in protest on behalf of two compelling causes: the anti-Vietnam War and Soviet Jewry movements, respectively. The "Occupy" movements, the Arab Spring, and Israel's tent city demonstrations in 2011 have given greater visibility to the subject of social movements. Historically, people have mobilized for institutional, policy, and cultural change over a range of political, social, religious, self-help, and social justice causes. And they have targeted governments, corporations, religious institutions, social attitudes, and more. Well-known causes have included movements and counter-movements to promote or oppose women's liberation, black power, reproductive rights, civil rights, immigrant rights, gay and lesbian rights, protection of the environment, economic justice, and peace.

The Jewish experience, too, has been rich with social, political, religious, and sectarian movements that have changed the course of Jewish history and altered the texture and fabric of communal life. Historically, some movements have focused on internal Jewish issues, such as Israeli settlement policy, religious pluralism, rescuing Ethiopian Jews, or new immigrant rights in Israel, while other efforts have focused externally against an occupying or oppressive authority.

The rapidly growing body of social science literature and social movement theory¹ provides important theoretical and methodological tools that help to deepen our understanding of Jewish collective action, potentially covering cases as diverse as those mentioned earlier, as well as messianic movements such as that led by Shabbetai Tzvi in the 17th century; the Eastern European ethicist Musar movement; the emergence of Hasidism; the 2nd-century Bar Kochba-led rebellion against the Roman Empire; socialism; Zionism; the Warsaw Ghetto uprising; and the Israeli peace and settler movements, to name only a few. Scholars have developed several models to analyze precipitating grievances as well as the contexts, dynamics, modes of participation, and outcomes of social movements. In one approach, social movements are collective challenges to

systems or structures of authority — collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity partly outside institutional or organizational channels, often displaying both conventional and unconventional tactics, for the purpose of challenging or defending authority.²

Another approach views social movements as but one manifestation of "contentious politics" among various forms of protest, such as revolutions, rebellions, terrorism, civil wars, strikes, and interest group politics. Contentious politics represents interactions in which actors make claims bearing on the interests of others; a government or another source of power or authority is targeted. A social movement, then, is a sustained campaign that uses repeated performances to advertise a claim; it includes an array of tactics such as the creation of new organizations, marches, rallies, demonstrations, public statements, petitions, and lobbying.³

For all the sensational, even romantic media treatment and dramatic repertoire of public performances, social movements tend to be infrequent and most people never participate in them. There is, even, a tendency to exaggerate their ubiquity and impact. The changes sought by movements often happen, if at all, because of the interplay of numerous forces and actors.⁴ Still, movements in the Jewish community and beyond have produced noticeable impact and serve as harbingers of change. The jury is still out on the Israeli tent protest, the Occupy movement, and the Arab Spring (a much more complicated and precarious case), although they offer hope for a brighter future, seeking greater equality, prosperity, democracy, and justice. Clearly, there are significant differences in the grievances, contexts, participation, dynamics, and outcomes of different cases.

On the American Jewish scene, while there are periodic mobilizations, and many Jews have participated in several movements mentioned in these pages, there is less current public movement activity. However, the nascent innovation ecosystem — with its focus on social entrepreneurship and the dynamic building of diverse

¹ The academic journal *Mobilization – The International Quarterly Review of Social Movement Research* is an excellent resource. For further reading, see a list posted on shma.com.

² See David A. Snow and Sarah A. Soule (2010), *A Primer on Social Movements*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company; and David A. Snow (2004), "Social Movements as Challenges to Authority: Resistance to an Emerging Conceptual Hegemony." *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 25, 3-25.

³ See Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (2007), *Contentious Politics*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

⁴ See Doug McAdam and Hilary Schaffer Boudet (2012), *Putting Social Movements in Their Place*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

organizations and communities — might qualify as a social movement.

While organizing to produce social change is normally to be celebrated and supported, some movements can be unconstructive — even dangerous, such as the Weather Underground of the 1960s and 1970s, neo-Nazis, religious cult movements, and racist supremacy or right-wing extremist groups.

At their best, social movements not only

have the potential to produce needed change, they have a unique capacity to bear witness and represent a moral response to a shattered world. I especially find the passion and vision framed by social movements to be powerful and inspiring, as illustrated by a slogan employed in the recent protests in Israel.

“*Ha’am doresh tzedek chevrati.*” “The people demand social justice.”

We shall overcome — some day. 

Roots of Radicalism

TONY MICHELS

What explains the prominent and disproportionate role of Jews on the political left? It’s an old question, dating back more than a century, but one that scholars and political commentators continue to puzzle over. For even though the Jewish romance with radical ideologies has waned, Jews continue to lean to the left compared to most other Americans. The majority of Jews still support the Democratic Party as well as a host of social issues, from reproductive rights to environmental protection — despite millions of dollars spent by the Republican Party to disabuse them of these ideas.

Analysts have advanced various explanations as to why the majority of American Jews have been drawn to liberal and radical politics. The most common and persistent one has to do with religion. As a system of beliefs and practices inherently concerned with social justice and ethical behavior, so goes the argument, Judaism has predisposed Jews toward the political left. Reform rabbis were among the first to describe Judaism as a religion of social justice in their Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. A century later, the magazine *Tikkun* enshrined the kabbalistic concept of *tikkun olam* on its masthead with the words “to heal, repair, and transform the world.” Soon thereafter, journalists and historians began to identify *tikkun olam* as the key idea behind a Jewish tradition of social justice.

Orthodox rabbis have historically ignored the notion of Judaism as a religion of social justice. In 1898, the Orthodox Jewish Congregational Union was more focused on condemning improper conversions to Judaism than rectifying “the labor question,” which defined urban Jewish life between the 1880s and 1930s. Labor organizing and political activism fell to the socialists. During the 1910s, a quarter of a million Jewish workers joined socialist trade unions, the *Forverts* dominated the

Yiddish newspaper market, and the Socialist Party was the favored choice in New York City’s predominantly Jewish electoral districts.

A host of social and economic factors further radicalized Jews. Economic exploitation, usually at the hands of Jewish employers, heightened the appeal of socialism’s class-war message. In a situation where Jews worked mostly with and for other Jews, the potential for interethnic conflict diminished. An important structural factor further strengthened the socialists. Jews dominated the production of readymade clothes, the largest manufacturing industry in New York City. This strategic economic position enabled socialists to wield, via the mighty garment unions, real power — not only inside the Jewish community but also in local, state, and national politics.

Influences from abroad, especially from Russia, played a major role. From the early 1900s to World War I, thousands of Bundists, socialist-Zionists, Mensheviks, and even a few Bolsheviks immigrated to the United States and brought with them preformulated ideologies. In the five years following the war, many young men and women who had been radicalized by years of war, revolution, and pogroms, arrived as part of the final wave of mass immigration. A good many of these postwar arrivals were fervent supporters of the Bolshevik regime and, after settling in America, gravitated to the Communist Party. Like socialists the world over, they were inspired by the first workers’ revolution, but they also viewed the revolution through a specifically Jewish lens. The horrific slaughter of Jews by anti-Bolshevik forces convinced Jewish leftists across the board, and many liberals, that the Red Army was the only thing that stood between Russian *continued on next page*


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Jewry and death. A similar feeling resurfaced during World War II, when, once again, the Red Army assumed the role of protector.

The roots of radicalism among second- and third-generation American Jews are to be found, though, not in Russia directly but in locales such as Harlem, Brownsville, the Lower East Side, and the East Bronx. Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin, and other memoirists have eloquently described Jewish neighborhoods, thick with Yiddish-language socialism, as cradles of radical politics. At the same time, harsh external realities — antisemitism, economic depression, and the international threat of fascism — steered many second-generation American Jews toward the left.

Circumstances shifted again during the 1960s, when middle-class Jews flocked to that decade's social protest movements. Though they had little direct exposure to poverty and antisemitism, young Jews — instilled with

liberal values from their parents, Jewish summer camps, and Jewish communal agencies — were disgruntled that the United States failed to live up to its professed values. The conviction that one must not remain silent in the face of injustice, a “lesson” learned from Holocaust commemorations, also informed the consciousness of New Left Jews.

There's much more — good, bad, and otherwise — to American Jewish politics than abiding attachments to social idealism. But the close relationship between Jews and the left, across decades and generations, is one of the more remarkable features of Jewish political history. If radical and liberal ideologies no longer hold sway as they did in the 1960s, 1930s, or 1910s, they haven't entirely lost their purchase, either. A majority of Jews — 69 percent — voted for President Obama, and commentators will, once again, try to explain this. They would do well to turn to history. 

Jews and Their Isms: A Convergence of Two Historical Moments

EDDY PORTNOY

The number of isms to which Jews attached themselves during the first decades of the 20th century was quite remarkable: bundism, communism, yiddishism, zionism, diaspora nationalism, socialism, trade unionism, and territorialism. Some Jews were drawn to a movement's political orientation, while others made choices based on a group's sports club or library, or on the attraction of a group's comrades. The reason one joins a movement, after all, may not always be based on its founding ideology.

The success of a political or social movement often depended upon how much noise was made or how powerful it was on the street. An example: Esteem for the Bund rose enormously in 1905 after members took to Warsaw's streets, pummeling the pimps and criminals who had for years been terrorizing poor Jewish neighborhoods. Around the same time, Zionists were accused of failing to achieve much at all, anywhere, fiddling with ideas like the Uganda Plan while Bialystok burned. Zionism had been birthed as a movement whose goal was “over there,” and that required the demure intercession of the movement's leaders with politicians and heads of state. So, while it received support from a fair chunk of Eastern Europe's Jewish masses, it wasn't particularly clear to these

same masses what, exactly, their Zionist leaders were doing. With the violent convulsions of World War I veiling their activities, the behind-the-scenes engagements of political Zionism were not well known to most Jews.

This is why publication of the Balfour Declaration (the first governmental recognition of Jewish national rights in Palestine, issued by Great Britain) at the end of the first week of November of 1917 was such a startling surprise. Though it received some attention in London's newspapers, it was scantily addressed in the news cycle of the Yiddish press, even by papers like Warsaw's *Haynt*, which was staunchly Zionist. And while some cities — notably Odessa — held large demonstrations in support of Zionism, the reality of Jewish sovereignty in Palestine didn't seem tangible at the time. News of the Balfour Declaration was also obscured by that week's other big event, the Bolshevik Revolution. Because the former Russian Empire held the world's largest Jewish population, the revolution became the major news story for Yiddish readers.

While Balfour was major, Bolsheviks were truly the big news — and also the Jewish story — of the day. While the declaration was a Zionist success, Russia's second massive

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revolution in the span of nine months took precedence. The Jewish press was particularly intrigued by the appointment of a Jew as foreign minister in the new Bolshevik government's regime. Discovering that a number of major players in Lenin's first cabinet were also Jewish, in spite of the "non-Jewish Jew" nature of their identities, was simply astonishing.

After the Bolshevik consolidation of power in Russia in 1918, all political parties other than the Bolsheviks were banned, the free press was dismantled, and the teaching of religion was prohibited. The People's Commissariat of Nationalities was created to spread communism among the various Russian nationalities — including the Jews. Thus the Yevseksia, the Jewish section of the Communist Party, was created to administer Jewish life in the new Soviet Union.


As Bolshevism morphed into communism, the Yevseksia created state-sanctioned and financially supported Yiddish press, literature, and theater to serve Soviet Jews. A state-funded Yiddish school curriculum was developed and instituted in areas with large Jewish populations. This was nothing short of astounding. On the other hand, Yiddish had to be stripped of religious references and positive portrayals of anyone who couldn't be identified as a proletarian. Hebrew culture and, especially, Zionism, were also forced to disappear.

By 1930, the Soviet state eliminated Yevseksia and, during the second half of that decade, major purges removed many of the early Jewish Bolsheviks from public life — and, actually, from life itself. By the end of the decade, the Yiddish press, literature, theater, and school systems had all been shut down. The Jewish honeymoon with Bolshevism had come to an end (with a brief reconciliation during and after World War II). Twenty years

later, large numbers of Soviet Jews began to make their way to the West, and 20 years after that, Soviet Jews became "Zionist" and immigrated to Israel en masse. Bolshevism was done.

Zionism, however, was not. From that chaotic week in November of 1917, when Balfour and the Bolsheviks met on the front pages of London's broadsheets, the ideology to create a Jewish state in Palestine surpassed Theodor Herzl's wildest dreams. One might have thought, with the creation of the State of Israel, that Zionism — the ideology that fed the movement — would have withered. After all, if the state exists, hasn't the ideology completed its mission? Was Zionism supposed to be a form of permanent revolution, constantly renewing itself, or was the creation of the state the endgame? What does it mean to be a Zionist in 2012 as opposed to 1947? The State of Israel has been shlepping "Zionism" around for the past 60 years like the Jews once shlepped *goles*, exile. Does it need it?

Perhaps "Zionism" should be retired from the popular lexicon. It seems, at this point, to be superfluous. It earned its gold watch; send it to Miami to retire. Removing it from use might also have an interesting effect on politics: Anti-Zionists would have to openly admit their desire to dismantle a functional state instead of hiding behind the linguistic fig leaf of opposition to a vague ideology. They would have to become "anti-Israelis," surely a more honest phrase.

The Soviet Union wasn't able to exist without Bolshevism. It simply broke apart without its founding ideology. But Israel, even if it retires the ideology that birthed it, will remain. It will simply be a state with a Jewish majority in which official holidays happen to be Jewish holidays and in which the government's bureaucracy functions in Hebrew. One hardly needs an ideology for such mundane things. 

Upcoming in Sh'ma

- Works in Progress
- The Multi-dimensional Jew: Whole Jewish Learning
- Jewish Taxes
- Networks of Jews
- Leaders-by-choice
- Time Out
- Intra-preneurship
- Active Covenanting

What Jewish conversation would you like to have? Send suggestions for future *Sh'ma* topics to SBerrin@shma.com.

The Zionist Movement: A 'Sh'ma' Roundtable

Is Zionism re-emerging as a central concept for the next generation of American Jews? Over the past two decades, Zionism as a movement to rally Jews and explain the meaning and significance of the State of Israel has diminished. Recently, however, a growing number of young Jewish leaders in the United States and Israel are re-embracing the term. Below, we share the voices of three passionate Zionists to learn what Jewish nationalism means to them and how they think Zionism can remain relevant in the 21st century.

Noam Pianko: *The term "Zionism" is far less popular today, even among supporters of Israel, than it has been in the past. Is the term itself still important for you? What is at stake in*

whether you call yourself a "Zionist?"

Elisheva Goldberg: *The term "Zionism" is as important as ever, if only because there* *continued on next page*

Kenneth Bob is the national president of Ameinu, the Labor Zionist organization of North America. He is also a member of the board of the Jewish Agency for Israel, the executive of the World Zionist Organization, and the board of the J Street Educational Fund. In his professional life, he is an entrepreneur who serves as president of RenewTricity, a solar energy development company.

are those who claim it from whom I wish to retake it. If I were to stop calling myself a Zionist, it would be akin to an Orthodox Jew announcing that the word halakhic no longer meant anything to them. To be a Zionist is to identify with the historical, cultural, and political tradition of the Jewish people, and for me to disavow it would be a form of heresy.

Many liberal Diaspora Jews incorrectly associate the disenfranchisement of the Palestinians and the objectives of Zionism.

Elisheva Goldberg works for Molad, a new think tank devoted to the development and promotion of a progressive vision for the State of Israel. She previously worked as the assistant editor of Open Zion, a blog about Israel, Palestine, and the Jewish future edited by Peter Beinart of the Daily Beast. A 2011 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, she has lived in Israel, Egypt, and Morocco.

Aharon Horwitz is co-founder, former co-director, and, currently, a board member of the Presentense Group. He spent his youth in the Zionist youth movement Betar. Horwitz now leads a technology start-up that helps connect people to quality content (40nuggets.com). He lives in Jerusalem with Alieza Salzberg.

Noam Pianko, a *Sh'ma* Advisory Board member, is associate professor and the Samuel N. Stroum Chair of Jewish Studies at the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington. In addition, he serves as chair of the University of Washington's Jewish studies program. He is author of *Zionism and the Roads Not Taken: Rawidowicz, Kaplan, Kohn* (Indiana University Press, 2010). He moderated the conversation.

Kenneth Bob: I call myself a Zionist, as I still believe in the international collective of the Jewish people. Historically, Zionism has always been a “hyphenated identity”; I call myself a progressive-Zionist. The 21st-century version of the ideology that A.D. Gordon, David Ben-Gurion, and others brought from Russia to then-Palestine links *tikkun olam*, the world’s mending, with Jewish values, and recognizes that secure and just peace with Israel’s neighbors is an essential element of the mending.

Elisheva Goldberg: The phrase “international collective” implies that you believe all Jews should make *aliyah*. But doesn’t a hyphenated Zionist identity allow for a Jew in America to believe that she or he is an American-Zionist without being compelled to move to Israel?

Kenneth Bob: For me, Israel sits at the center of the Jewish collective, and people — wherever they are — can identify as Zionists. They can express their connection in their own countries or through travel to Israel. As a friend of mine says, “if you commute, there is no *galut*.”

Aharon Horwitz: The Jewish people have a duty to act as a force for good in the world. Zionism simply updated that imperative for the age of nationalism. And, today, some folks, like our organization Presentense, are trying to update it for a very new age. Zionist thinkers across the spectrum saw Zionism as a force for good in the world. Ze’ev Jabotinsky, who founded Revisionist Zionism and its youth movement, Betar, spends an enormous amount of time on that imperative.

Then, as now, some people who don’t understand the value of a particular collective coupled with the value of action for the greater good will fall off the spectrum; they are ultimately not part of a Jewish mission and should be rejected by those who consider

themselves Zionists.

Elisheva Goldberg: Aharon, are you referring to people who would see your argument that the “Jewish people have a duty to be a force of good in the world” as potentially dangerous and imperialist? If you are, then you’re telling much of American Jewry today that they “are not part of a Jewish mission and should be rejected by those who consider themselves Zionists.”

Aharon Horwitz: I’m saying that acting for the greater good of the world as a collective — that is, acting as the Jewish people rather than merely as individuals — is a key piece of what it means to be Zionist. This also implies responsibility for investing energy in the Jewish people. I think many American Jews fall into this categorical definition of “Zionist” even if they are not engaged with what happens in Israel. It’s an expanding definition. That said, many Americans — and Israelis — are not acting as a force for good in the world as part of our collective.

Noam Pianko: *Historically, to be a Zionist meant taking risks, advocating for radical innovations, and passionately arguing with other Jews about the meaning of Judaism. Can Zionism once again come to mean the commitment to debating pressing questions about the meaning of Jewish identity and collectivity at a moment of great political and cultural transformations? In particular, how do you see Zionism remaining relevant in a world increasingly shaped by a number of powerful processes of denationalization — such as globalization, large-scale immigration, and technological interconnectedness?*

Elisheva Goldberg: Although nationalism may be on the decline, we still speak in nationalist parlance; it’s our lingua franca. What this means is that, at least for the time being, we’re going to need to address international concerns with national language, Twitter notwithstanding. There may be a time in the future — if, say, globalization makes nationalist conversation *functionally* irrelevant; if borders, anthems, flags, and ethnoreligious ties to specific places no longer factor into how we divide up land — Zionism as we know it will cease to exist. But for now, most people still care about those things.

Aharon Horwitz: There is not much left of the classic revolutionary Zionist infrastructure. Over the past 30 years, the youth movements were kneecapped by a combination of

mismanagement, Jewish communal politics, and cynical exploitation by Israeli political parties. Though the few remaining sparks are awesome, they are like living fossils.

Being pro-Israel is only residually connected to being a Zionist (even AIPAC [the American Israel Public Affairs Committee] was originally the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs). Zionism is about translating Jewish truths into action as much as it is about creating a safe and secure state. Zionists should be the first to call for change in Israel if its leadership fails in the Zionist imperative. This is best done by living here — by acting and ultimately voting!

We have to realize that change is painful. We should expect to be very uncomfortable over the next 20 years. Israel will be the locus for change and the site of the creativity that will help us chart a path forward — a path where our collective identity will impact the world for the better.

Elisheva Goldberg: Aharon, while living in Israel — that is, being an engaged citizen — may be best, in an age of globalization, we may need to reevaluate your premise.

Noam Pianko: *What has influenced how Diaspora Jews think about Zionism over the past couple of decades?*

Elisheva Goldberg: I would argue that the most powerful influences on American Jews, when it comes to Israel and Zionism, have been: Taglit-Birthright Israel, which aims to inject both love of Israel and love of Judaism simultaneously, with mixed results; Jewish summer camps, which often contain very strong (mostly Labor) Zionism elements and generally take their campers to Israel to reinforce and encourage such Zionism; and campus Hillels, which, though they claim to remain “neutral” when it comes to Israel, function as loci for Israel advocacy groups, Israeli cultural societies, etc. American Jews often express their Judaism through their “love” of Israel — and while I find this troubling, given the American Jewish institutional setup, I think it’s easy to see how and why this happens.

Kenneth Bob: Sadly, Israel’s ongoing occupation of Palestinian territories has distorted the meaning of Zionism for many liberal Diaspora Jews; they incorrectly associate the disenfranchisement of the Palestinians and the objectives of Zionism.

Aharon Horwitz: “Zionism” was an irrelevant


term to most of my friends in the public school I attended in Cleveland. Even at the Jewish day schools, it was more something to learn about rather than live. I’d rather put my energy into mobilizing people around a mission than a term. And let’s not compromise in asking them to contribute to that mission; we don’t need to pay or woo them. We need to lead, to act our values, and inspire them.

Noam Pianko: *What do you see as Zionism’s greatest success and failure?*

Elisheva Goldberg: Greatest success: the establishment of a state where the official language is Hebrew. This has made the country a cohesive cultural body. Greatest failure: I’m torn between two things, though they’re interconnected. First, the “land without a people for a people without a land” mentality that Herzl had, which persists to this day (see, for example, Newt Gingrich’s comment on the Palestinians). The second failure is the fact that the average Israeli does not speak basic Arabic.

Kenneth Bob: The establishment of a sovereign Jewish homeland as a result of the efforts of the Zionist movement should be seen as the prime Jewish success story of the last century. The failure thus far is to fulfill the commitment made in the state’s Declaration of Independence to “ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants, irrespective of religion, race or sex.” The inability to make peace with her neighbors makes Israel, and, by extension, Zionism, a work in progress.

Aharon Horwitz: In addition to creating a Hebrew-speaking sovereign Jewish state, the perception of a mass movement of the people (through the Jewish National Fund blue-box) to “own a piece of the campaign” (regardless of its historical reality) was a wonderful achievement. I always think about this picture: a dreary day in a Polish *shtetl*, but on the table is a bright blue and white box filling up with hard-earned zlotys. It is an awesome example of crowd-funding.

The greatest failures include problems with *klitah*, the absorption of immigrants, and also with making the transition to become a people with a state and the responsibilities of sovereignty, which both limits the “Jewish” interests and also expands the opportunity to achieve the Jewish and Zionist imperative we talked about earlier. 



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Crippling God's Plan

TOMER PERSICO

In Christian theology, the days of the Messiah often involve great upheavals and calamities, giving birth to the Messiah through great pain and suffering. That's the reason "apocalypse" has come to mean not vision, as it does in Greek, but "catastrophe." Ironically, this grand messianic scheme has played out in actual 20th-century Jewish history, as two major messianic movements erupted out of the post-Holocaust Jewish world — movements that color significant aspects of it to this very day.

These movements, Chabad and Gush Emunim, exemplify two different genres of messianism. While the former centers around the charismatic figure of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the latter is a headless creature conceived from the richly optimistic teachings of Rav Kook (Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, 1865–1935) combined with the high-octane energy of modern nationalism.

An extremely creative mystic and thinker, Kook wedded a Hegelian view of history (in which events, both positive and negative, are all divinely directed toward reality's ultimate, supreme, and self-aware perfection) with a pantheistic vision of God; and he interpreted the breaking away of significant numbers of Jews from their religious tradition, followed by their adoption of Zionism and efforts to found a Jewish state, as an indispensable and foreordained stage in the path to Jewish redemption. The "uppity bound-breakers" (his words) are to do the dirty — but momentarily paramount — work of rebuilding the Jewish kingdom in the Holy Land.

Kook did not live to see the founding of the

state, but his son, Zvi Yehuda Kook, was blessed to witness it. For Zvi Yehuda, not only the land but the state itself was holy (indeed, he considered it to be "the Seat of the Divine on Earth"). He therefore understood the military and political control of more and more of its promised territories as the very steps on which the Messiah would ascend toward final redemption.

With this in mind, we can understand why, after the Six Day War, Judea and Samaria's coming under Israeli control was construed by Zvi Yehuda and his followers as a clear sign that the messianic momentum was shifting gear. In Kookist circles, it was a given that *geula* (redemption) had clearly begun and that it was irreversible: "There is not an End clearer than this!" proclaimed the younger Kook, and his followers announced, "The Third Redemption [after the Exodus from Egypt and the return from Babylon in Ezra's days] is without a stop!"

After the Yom Kippur War, the first settlements were founded by Gush Emunim, then a young and spirited messianic-but-pragmatic movement organized and peopled by Zvi Yehuda's followers, but supported by many secular Israelis and quietly encouraged by elements from within the government.

Gush Emunim started populating the hills and the occupied cities (such as Hebron) of the West Bank, sometimes by state permission and sometimes using trickery and lies.¹ The Gush's messianic ideology occupied the hearts and souls of leading figures and large numbers of the Religious Zionist public, imbuing it with renewed pride and the exhilarating feeling that its members were finally moving to the head of the Zionist enterprise. Not many years passed, however, before the first crisis of faith erupted.

A messianic vision's weakness lies in the very thing that allows it to generate so much hope: its unabashed and uncompromising confidence. With the signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in 1979, the vision of an ever-advancing redemptive plan was shattered, as the Israeli government promised to hand back the Sinai Desert to Egypt. Rather than continuing to acquire more of the promised land, the State of Israel was now breaking parts of it away. Kook's followers found themselves in a theological quandry: It was the same Israel that they believed to be holy that was crippling God's plan.

Tomer Persico has just completed his doctoral dissertation, "Jewish Meditation": *The Development of a Modern Form of Spiritual Practice in Contemporary Judaism*, at Tel Aviv University. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and 3-month-old son, and he blogs at tomerpersico.com.


¹ For one of many examples, see Chaggai Segal, *Achim Yakirim*, page 237. Rabbi Yehoshua Zuckerman says that "while settling the Shomron we did some illegal things." On the same page, Ze'ev Hever, one of the leading figures among the settlers, says: "The dry law in itself is not holy to us, is not holy to any of the people sitting here."

Settlement Statistics

- Of the 350,000 settlers in Judea and Samaria, 85 percent live in the three major "blocs": Gush Etzion, Ariel, and Maale Edomim; most are not particularly ideological. Fifteen percent live in scattered settlements across the West Bank and in approximately 80 illegal outposts (illegal, according to Israeli law; other settlements are disputed according to international law). These settlers are more fervent.
- Gush Emunim gradually dissolved in the 1980s.
- The Yesha Council, made up of the municipal heads of the settlements, lost its authority after its failure to successfully oppose the governmental withdrawal from Gaza.

The withdrawal from Sinai, handing over Palestinian cities after the Oslo Accords, the retreat from south Lebanon and then, most devastating, the razing of the Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip — these have become an almost insurmountable challenge to the settlers' messianic worldview. Its adherents today are experiencing a major crisis of faith, and their response to this crisis divides them into a number of distinct groups. Some, like Rabbi Shmuel Tal, have given up all hope for the State of Israel. They no longer see it as divinely ordained, and they have, for all intents and purposes, joined the Haredi world, thus allowing them to shift the center of their religious life from Zionism to halakhah. Some, led by the prominent Rav Tzvi Tao, have delayed redemption indefinitely, and, while still sure it's on its way, have transferred progress toward it to the dimension hidden from the unlearned eye. At

present, they concentrate their efforts on strengthening halakhic observance and education, while waiting for the masses to embrace their tradition.

Other messianist settler groups, like the Jewish underground (early 1980s) or the Bat Ayin Underground (2002), have turned to acts of violence in an attempt to force an apocalyptic event (or simply an all-out war) that will force the state to conquer its forsaken lands. And some, led by the post-Zionist and deeply kabbalistic teachings of Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburgh, aim to overthrow the secular government in a revolution of consciousness that will reconnect every Jew to his or her innermost soul. Most Religious Zionists, however, are simply living their bourgeois life, hoping for the best, somewhat less convinced of the state's divine status, and ever more wary of sweet-talking prophets bringing tidings of the End. 

The Many Movements of Chabad

MAYA BALAKIRSKY KATZ

Chabad, a tiny minority among world Jewry, is Judaism's most recognized public face. To a large degree, the religious outreach of Chabad has replaced the mid-century focus on Diaspora Zionism with a proudly religious diasporism. Under the leadership of its last rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994), Chabad in America evolved its leadership to include a geographically scattered group of followers, turning a necessary response to dislocation into a *modus operandi* of modern Chabad. Institutional Chabad consciously used modern media (lithography, museums, celebrity photography, the Internet, satellite television) to construct a broad social network, binding its devotees to God, to their rebbe, to each other, and to their public. At the same time, other ultra-Orthodox groups have avowedly rejected these same media.

Chabad's relationship with media has enabled the movement's efforts to globalize; its controversial messianism has also garnered media attention to the movement. Consider Chabad's attitude to docu-videography and the display of ceremonial objects. Schneerson, known simply as the "Rebbe," is the single most video-documented leader in history. The world knows the Rebbe through his public image — his portraits, sound recordings, and filmed appearances. But the construction of this celebrity figure has little bearing on the way most of his followers interacted with him during his lifetime. Chabad's embrace of

modern media saw many innovations, such as the traveling emissaries (*shluchim*) who spread the Rebbe's religious revival campaigns (*mitzvoyim*) around the globe. The Chabad movement saw a means to advance its presence through a proud — and often controversial — visual culture. For example, its spirited defense of some civic displays of religious life — such as the lighting of Hanukkah menorahs in the public square — became a way for Chabad communities to participate in, criticize, and attempt to reform American Jewish life.

Chabad's leadership has historically shown itself to be flexible in the face of change. When the sixth dynastic rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1880-1950), was separated from his Hasidim in 1927, the exchange of portrait photographs (a potentially dangerous practice in Soviet Russia) helped bridge the distance. Subsequent to his immigration to America in 1940, the theological regionalism of the Belarusian Court, once considered sacred and immutable, needed to be rethought. Chabad Hasidim purchased a building for Schneersohn in the typical model of the privately owned *shetibl*, hundreds of which already existed in New York. A tri-peaked, red brick home on Eastern Parkway, the building signaled Chabad's revitalization in a country that Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak promised would be a final resting place before the coming of the Messiah. In an unprecedented move in the mid-1980s, *continued on next page*

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though, the Rebbe initiated a mission to replicate the Brooklyn *shtibl*; he directed his followers to build an exact replica in Israel as a satellite chapter. Intended to defend the Brooklyn *shtibl* from a property claim by Barry Gourary, the last living heir of the deceased Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, the replica would bolster the legal (and revisionist) claim that the Brooklyn building and its holdings belonged to an institutional Chabad rather than to any private owner.

With his decision to replicate his dynastic court (known simply by its Crown Heights, Brooklyn house number: “770”), the Rebbe transformed Chabad from a dynastic leadership model to an international, corporate-style, Jewish religious organization. Just as the Rebbe



“Emissaries/ Shluchim
in front of ‘770’”
by Julian Voloj

succeeded in dispatching photo-mechanical reproductions (portrait photographs and videography) to maintain a dynastic movement in the face of immigration, he used the same media practices (in the form of architectural replication) to put an end to the very same dynasty, proliferating the movement’s teachings through a more effective, institutional organization. During the height of the property dispute in New York’s federal court, the Rebbe urged his followers in the Israeli settlement Kfar Chabad to raise a building within the year, a request that inspired speculation on the imminent arrival of the Messiah. The court ruled in favor of the institutional model of ownership in 1987 (a complete revision of historic Chabad) and the Brooklyn building was replicated in sites as anomalous as the desert landscape in Israel, the university campus of Rutgers in New Brunswick, N.J., and urban Brazil. Concretely, the 1940 purchase of a Chabad court in Brooklyn shifted Chabad’s historic attention from the Belarusian court in Lyubavichi to an American-centered identity. With a second phase of dislocation through the Rebbe’s replication of the Brooklyn building in Israel in the mid-1980s, the building(s) signaled the corporate nature of the movement. Chabad shifted the focus from what it saw as a failed Russian history to an optimistic and proudly American religious identity and, in this shift, and with an adeptness that could be seen as very modern, Chabad transformed its institutional identity from a Hasidic dynasty to a religious corporation. When people ask me why the Rebbe never appointed a successor, I say that he did: 770.

For Chabad, the line between congregation and audience is thin; the movement’s keen awareness of itself, with its very media-oriented sensibility, is one of its greatest survival skills. The late-stage messianism that transformed the Brooklyn building brings up interesting questions of religious content but should not preclude attention to the perhaps more interesting question of religious form. Chabad’s transformation in attitude and its comprehension of new forms of communication enabled the extension of the movement past the Holocaust and the passing of its last dynastic leader in 1994. Less relevant is how Chabad has set itself apart from other Jewish religious movements, based as it is on a media-centric model of community. Chabad’s most controversial image — that of a dead Messiah — facilitates the creation of independent Chabad communities around the world and keeps their distinct brand of *Yiddishkeit* in the public eye.

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Lessons Learned: The Soviet Jewry Movement

PHILIP SPIEGEL



A *m Yisrael chai!* The people of Israel live! These words were joyously chanted by Jews in Moscow when they witnessed the Israeli flag flying in 1948.

Almost 20 years later, Shlomo Carlebach composed a melody for those words. Inspired by Jacob Birnbaum, who founded the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, Carlebach put to music three essential words of hope, and at a 1965 rally in New York, thousands of supporters joined him in singing what became the movement's "We Shall Overcome." Having an anthem was one of the principles of activism the Soviet Jewry movement learned from the civil rights movement.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. were kindred spirits, and both urged nonviolence as a method for political struggle. Addressing the American Jewish Conference on Soviet Jewry in 1966, King described the oppression of Soviet Jews as "a kind of spiritual and cultural genocide." On the other hand, the Jewish Defense League and its leader, Rabbi Meir Kahane, supported violence as an action against oppression (they perpetrated bombings of offices of companies doing business with the Soviet Union). Ultimately, the leaders of the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union (UCSJ) — an umbrella group formed in 1979 of grassroots activists from Cleveland, Los Angeles, and San Francisco — prevailed as its president, Harold Light, declared, "Confrontation? Yes. Violence? No."

Like the civil rights movement, the Soviet Jewry movement had plenty of opportunities to make headlines through nonviolent confrontation and civil disobedience. In 1985, 25 rabbis and a Lutheran minister were arrested after demonstrating with Torah scrolls and shofars within 500 feet of the Soviet embassy in Washington, D.C. After refusing to promise that they would not return to the scene of their crime, Rabbi David Oler and four other rabbis were sentenced to fifteen days in the Federal Correctional Institution in Petersburg, Va.

The movement quickly learned essential publicity tactics. For example, naming the prisoners, offering a human face and story — plastering a "Free Boris Kochubievsky" poster

around a rally or in a newspaper — would get more attention than mind-numbing statistics, such as, "Some 3 million Jews are trapped in the Soviet Union" or "Only 100 Jews got exit visas last year."

The Soviet Jewry movement did not remain parochial; it gained valuable support from Christian clergy who were moved by the Holocaust-inflected slogan, "Never Again." The work of Christian clergy — particularly of Sister Ann Gillen, executive director of the national Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry, and Father Robert Drinan, the first Catholic priest to serve in Congress — was essential. In 1973, Drinan and 318 other members of the House voted for the Jackson-Vanik Amendment that made favorable trade conditions with the Soviet Union contingent on free emigration. Support for passage of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment was vehemently opposed by the Nixon administration, which wanted no impediments to détente. Yet support for the bill came not only from activists, but also from Jews and dissidents like Nobel Peace Prize-winner Andrei Sakharov in the Soviet Union.

In the early years of the movement, some of the Jewish communal leadership cautioned Jewish activists to keep quiet — to not even send greeting cards to Soviet Jews. But when leaders of the UCSJ consulted with their contacts in Russia, they were emboldened by the reply, "Please send cards; we're not afraid."

The UCSJ encountered other issues with established Jewish organizations. They were criticized for having ties to human rights groups rather than focusing solely on support of free emigration. And Israelis were critical of the UCSJ advocacy for allowing émigrés to choose whether to go to Israel or America.


The courage of Soviet Jews, some of them who waited nearly two decades for an exit visa, combined with the perseverance of their supporters in the West, culminated in a massive rally in Washington on December 6, 1987 on the eve of the Gorbachev-Reagan Summit. Out of that summit came the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, increased bilateral trade, and a 150-percent increase in the emigration of Soviet Jews over the previous

continued on next page

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year. With the demise of the Soviet Union, 2 million Soviet Jews emigrated, the greatest Jewish exodus in history.

According to former Secretary of State George Shultz, who was a key player in that summit and a strong advocate for Soviet

Jews, “The best reason to record and remember how Soviet Jews were saved is to be prepared to act again when the need arises... We must not only preach the doctrine of human rights, we must learn how actually to be our brother’s keeper.” 

Keeping the Personal Political

JUDITH ROSENBAUM

Though “the personal is political” did not become a slogan of the women’s movement until feminism’s “second wave” in the 1960s, the slogan aptly describes the continuous impulse of feminism from its origins more than 100 years earlier. Even the first women’s rights campaigners, who fought primarily for political and civil rights, understood that the personal circumstances of women’s lives were shaped by larger social and political structures and therefore provided conditions around which to organize a movement. Though their focus was on suffrage, they addressed a broad range of concerns, from the property rights of married women to the constraints of women’s fashion.

Second-wave feminists were mostly ignorant of their movement’s history and certainly of the ongoing strands of women’s activism between the passage of the suffrage amendment in 1920 and the re-emergence of a vital women’s movement amid the social revolutions of the 1960s. They were also far from a unified movement. Activists like Betty Friedan (author of the landmark *The Feminine Mystique*)

and her compatriots in the National Organization for Women focused on rights for women in the workplace and the public sphere, aiming for equal access. The younger, countercultural women’s liberationists sought more radical social and cultural changes rather than access to the mainstream institutions. These feminists challenged society’s understanding of nearly all gender relations — including sexuality, marriage, violence against women, domesticity, and reproductive rights — and built new institutions, such as rape crisis centers, women’s centers, women’s music festivals, and women’s health clinics.

The second-wave feminists’ slogan, “Sisterhood is powerful,” was an aspirational goal if not always true in practice. While some women experienced gender as their primary identity, other women — particularly those who experienced oppression along other axes, such as race or class — pointed out that sisterhood had often failed them (for example, in the racist appeals made by suffragists, or in the blindness of white feminists to the experiences of women of color). Though sometimes perceived as a failure of the women’s movement, this painful and often angry conversation — present in every phase of the movement — has sparked feminism’s continued evolution. Beginning as a movement devoted to the analysis and redefinition of power structures, with an initial focus on gender, feminism has developed an ever-broadening perspective that recognizes the intersection of power and identities and rejects an analysis of power along one axis only.

Reports of feminism’s death, heralded in nearly every decade, have been (to paraphrase Mark Twain) greatly exaggerated. Yet feminism has also suffered from its own success; the remarkable changes in women’s opportunities in the past 40 years have sapped some of its urgency. Many young women today take for granted their access to education, careers, sports, and financial independence, and — ignorant of the role of feminism in achieving these gains —

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The Jewish Feminist Movement: A Few Highlights

The insights of feminism have transformed the Jewish community:


- Creating access to public roles as rabbis, prayer leaders, and participants in a minyan; Ezrat Nashim’s “Jewish Women Call For Change” (jwa.org)
- Bringing women’s experiences and perspectives into Jewish practice through ritual and liturgical innovation; Marcia Falk’s “A Blessing for this Day” (jwa.org)
- Generating new interpretations of Jewish texts through feminist midrash; Merle Feld’s “We All Stood Together” (jwa.org)
- Expanding Jewish conceptions of spirituality and the Divine through feminist theology and spirituality; B’not Esh Jewish Feminist Spirituality Collective (jwa.org)
- Challenging the injustice of women’s powerlessness in Jewish divorce; “Freedom for Agunot Now” (jwa.org)

feel no connection to the movement. This may not be solely a 21st-century problem; Susan B. Anthony famously said, “Our job is not to make young women grateful. It is to make them ungrateful so they keep going. Gratitude never radicalized anybody.” One challenge the women’s movement faces today is how to cultivate the energy arising from that ingratitude while acknowledging the movement’s successes.

New challenges are impacting the movement: The deconstruction of the category of “woman” and the devolving gender binary raise questions about whether the women’s movement needs “woman” to be a stable category. The women’s movement also struggles with the word “feminism.” Statements that align with feminist principles often begin with the disclaimer, “I’m not a feminist, but...” Can the movement reclaim this label? Is it necessary to do so to move forward as a movement? The other language problem revolves around the concept of “choice” — as in “feminism is about choices,” a (mis)interpretation of feminism heavily promoted by popular culture. (Viewers of “Sex and the City,” for example, will never forget Charlotte insisting, “I choose my choice! I choose my choice!” when made to feel defensive about giving up her career). The word “choice” is problematic, because it elides all power and context, representing an imaginary world in which all choices are equally accessible, valued, and supported. The notion that “feminism is about choices” is a total rejection of the dictum, “The personal is political.” This

version of feminism maintains that all choices are personal, with no political context or structural basis for how they are made.

Finally, the nature of organizing in the 21st century is fundamentally different from that of previous generations of activism. Older feminists often bemoan the absence of younger women on traditional activist front lines of political rallies and marches, and interpret their playfulness as frivolity; young feminists scoff at their predecessors’ ignorance of social media and its organizing power, and perceive their focus on partisan politics as an unsophisticated neglect of popular culture’s influence. The Internet necessarily redefines the nature of a political act. For example, feminist blogging has connected communities of younger women and given them a forum for expressing a new version of “The personal is political.”

These differences in style and approach among generations of feminist activists are played up in the media and sometimes, too, by the feminist reliance on the “waves” metaphor to define its phases of activism. Many have debated whether “waves” remains a useful model or whether the movement should seek a new paradigm. Though it necessarily divides generations of feminists from one another (and leaves some of us, who feel we are between waves, a little confused about our location), it remains a powerful metaphor: Waves are, after all, a relentless, natural force whose constancy and insistence reshape the landscape. What more could feminism hope for? 

Has the Tent Become Too Wide?

JAYSON LITTMAN

Ten years ago, an Internet search for “LGBT Jewish organizations” would turn up few results. Slowly, though, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) voices from within the larger Jewish community have pushed for recognition and equality in every religious denomination and Jewish organization, making the LGBT social movement the most talked about “Jewish social issue” in recent memory.

Today, the flourishing LGBT movement means that most Jews no longer need to choose between their religion and their sexual orientation. And, as the Jewish community has tried to make itself more inclusive of the LGBT population, it has also begun to grapple with how best to accommodate a number of other

individuals who identify outside the traditional LGBT classification. But in attempting to be welcoming to these new identities, I wonder: Has the tent become too wide?

Growing up in an Orthodox home made “coming out” challenging. When I finally accepted myself as a gay man, I knew I wanted to find my place in a Jewish community that would both welcome and affirm every part of me. But finding LGBT Jewish spaces where I felt comfortable was difficult, not because the space wasn’t LGBT-friendly but because it too broadly defined Jewish practice. Once I did find a place that suited my Jewish and LGBT identities, I realized that I needed to understand more fully *continued on next page*


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the idiosyncrasies of the LGBT community I lived within.

Coined in the 1990s to reflect the widening umbrella of identities represented by what was originally referred to simply as the “gay community,” “LGBT” originally referred to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. Over the years, other letters have been added to include additional marginalized identities — Q (queer or questioning), I (intersexed), T (transsexual), GQ (genderqueer), GNC (gender non-conforming) and A (allies) — resulting in an alphabet soup acronym of LGBTIQQTGNCA.

In an attempt to be inclusive of each of these groups that are excluded from the traditional “LGBT” moniker, many in the LGBT community have started using the term “queer” to reference the community as a whole. But this solution is not without its problems. To many, including myself, “queer” has its roots in political radicalism and a set of beliefs to which many of us don’t adhere. The effort to create inclusive spaces for the more marginalized comes, sometimes, at the expense of others. For example, through my

work as a producer and promoter of parties for gay Jewish men in the New York City area, I am often told that as gay Jewish men, they do not feel welcome in “queer” or mixed LGBT spaces. Some gay men — myself included — feel that these spaces emasculate them, or make them feel guilty for fitting into a gender binary or for feeling comfortable in the gender they were born into. Repeatedly, we hear that, as “white men,” we are privileged and our masculinity represents the historical oppression of the LGBT community. While many gay men are accused of misogyny, many men feel that they are victims of the opposite of misogyny — misandry. At times, the accusation of misogyny stems from a conscious as well as a subconscious misandry in the queer Jewish community.

It is not clear that it is the responsibility of a movement to make everyone who feels part of it feel welcome. But here is an abiding question: Must the LGBT movement evaluate its language and practice to ensure that all who hold up the LGBT umbrella feel included and safe — those both at the center and on the periphery? 

The Art and Science of Interfaith Cooperation

In the following interview, Or Rose speaks with Eboo Patel about building an interfaith movement and its implications for American civil life.

Or Rose: *What is your definition of religious pluralism?*

Eboo Patel: Drawing from Harvard scholar of comparative religion Diana Eck, I understand religious pluralism to be the active engagement of religious diversity to a constructive end. Diversity is a mere descriptive fact; pluralism is, as Eck notes, an achievement. At Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC.org), we break down this definition into three essential components: First, respect for individual religious or nonreligious identity; second, mutually inspiring relationships; and finally, common action for common good.

It’s important to point out that this is a civic definition — an articulation of how people and communities who orient around religion differently ought to live together on earth — rather than a set of theological claims.

Or Rose: *How does IFYC translate this vision into building an interfaith movement?*

Eboo Patel: We are trying to make interfaith cooperation a social norm, in a way similar to

how multiculturalism, volunteerism, and environmentalism have become social norms. Our strategy at Interfaith Youth Core is threefold. First, we want to advance a discourse about engaging in interfaith cooperation in the broader culture. That happens through books, public talks, media interviews, and the like; second, we want to partner with higher education to help campuses embody and model interfaith cooperation, in the same way that they have embraced movements like service-learning. And finally, we want to inspire, train, and network a critical mass of interfaith leaders. We do this by running interfaith leadership institutes for college students, and support those students as they run campus interfaith “Better Together” campaigns, and then work with them as they graduate and take their interfaith leadership skills into the broader society.

Or Rose: *In developing a theory of religious pluralism, you speak of two foundational concepts: “the science of interfaith cooperation”*

Eboo Patel, a Muslim of Indian heritage, is founder and president of Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC.org). He is author of *Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America* (Beacon Press).

Or Rose, a *Sh'ma* Advisory Board member, is the founding director of the new Center for Global Judaism at Hebrew College, and a co-editor of the volume *My Neighbor's Faith: Stories of Interreligious Encounter, Growth, and Transformation* (Orbis).

and “the art of interfaith leadership.” Please briefly explain what these mean.


Eboo Patel: The image we use for the science of interfaith cooperation is a triangle, the sides being attitudes, knowledge, and relationships. We know from recent social science data on religious diversity that these three are closely linked. When people have a positive, meaningful relationship with someone from a different religious community, their attitudes toward that whole community improve. And when they have some appreciative knowledge of another religious tradition, their attitudes toward that whole tradition improve. An effective interfaith program, then, is one that facilitates positive, meaningful relationships between people from different religious backgrounds and teaches the participants appreciative knowledge about different traditions.

Good interfaith programs depend on leaders who value interfaith work. And interfaith leadership is developed through transformative and engaging personal experiences.

Or Rose: *In your efforts to help build an interfaith movement, you have chosen to focus your energies on the American college campus, why?*

Eboo Patel: In founding IFYC, we looked at the history of social movements in this country and saw that college students and college campuses have played profound roles in making positive societal change, from civil rights to environmentalism. We want to tap that youthful energy for the interfaith movement. I think all sectors of society — from preschools to neighborhoods to hospitals — are ripe for building interfaith bridges. And different organizations should emerge to start such efforts. We have found that we are a much better organization when we focus on a particular population.

Or Rose: *Part of the motivation for writing your new book was your experience of the controversy around the building of the Cordoba House in Lower Manhattan (the so-called “Ground Zero Mosque”). What did that episode teach you about the ongoing project of building the interfaith movement in this country?*

Eboo Patel: I learned that my initial anger and despair about the Islamophobia of that particular moment was not helpful. It’s much better, when faced with a burst of outspoken prejudice, to focus on the long arc and to mobilize the forces of pluralism to bend that arc toward justice. 



Eric Cohen is the president of the nonprofit Massachusetts Coalition to Save Darfur. He retired from a 30-plus-year career in information technology, where he served in a variety of roles at the corporate vice president level. Cohen now works full-time, on a volunteer basis, as a Sudan and anti-genocide activist. A co-founder and chair of Investors Against Genocide, Cohen has testified before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus and the House Financial Services Subcommittee on International Monetary Policy and Trade on “Investments Tied to Genocide: Sudan Divestment and Beyond.”

Naama Haviv, who holds an MA/ABD in genocide studies from Clark University, is assistant director at Jewish World Watch (JWW.org), which fights against genocide and mass atrocities. Before joining the JWW team, Haviv created and managed international educational programs for Relief International and held research positions with the Institute for the Study of Genocide, the Middle East Media Research Institute, and the American Anti-Slavery Group.

Cohen and Haviv are two of the co-founders of *Act for Sudan* (actforsudan.org), a nonprofit dedicated to advocacy for the Sudanese people who urgently seek protection, justice, and peace.

What about Sudan?

ERIC COHEN AND NAAMA HAVIV

The level of public concern for ongoing mass atrocities in Sudan has markedly declined. Leaders at all levels of civil society and government should be asking themselves why this has happened and what their roles should be in changing it.

Public attention on Darfur exploded in 2004 with prominent newspaper articles; the formation of several coalitions to end genocide such as Save Darfur Coalition, STAND, and GINet; declarations of genocide by Congress, the State Department, and President Bush; large rallies; and millions of people contacting the White House and Congress. This attention was largely driven by the faith community — notably by the Christian community, continuing activism that began with stopping atrocities and slavery during Sudan’s North/South war, and by the Jewish community, sparked by recognition of the genocide.

By the time the 2008 presidential campaign got underway, far-away Darfur had become a household word to tens of millions of

Americans. Sudan was a major topic in the 2008 primaries and general election campaigns for both parties; major candidates advocated strong measures — including military interventions, such as a no-fly zone and even boots on the ground — to stop the genocide in Darfur. In stark contrast, U.S. policy on Sudan received no attention in the 2012 presidential campaign or the debates. Similarly, press and public attention have dramatically fallen off.

Today, Sudan’s President Bashir is committing yet another genocide, now in the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan and the Blue Nile state. According to the U.N., more than 900,000 people have been displaced or severely affected by the conflict in these border regions, with 420,000 civilians on the brink of a government-orchestrated famine, intentionally cut off from their fields and food aid by the army and militia and the persistent, indiscriminate bombing since June 2011. A recent letter to President Barack Obama signed by 67 genocide scholars *continued on next page*

stated, “This critical situation largely mirrors what the same regime perpetrated in the 1990s, a case of genocide by attrition.”

The government in Khartoum has learned that there are little or no consequences for their actions; the United States condemns but does not stop them. Impunity reigns. What has the United States learned?


U.S. policy on Sudan has been a bipartisan failure. Both President Bush and President Obama powerfully stated their opposition to genocide, but neither set a policy on Sudan to do what was needed to stop it.

Similarly, too many leaders in the Darfur/Sudan movement spoke powerfully and worked hard to publicize the genocide crisis, but did not embrace the strong measures needed to stop it. As a result, the leaders attracted millions of followers who dutifully focused on idealistic but ineffectual measures, such as the deployment of U.N. peacekeeping troops, the appointment of U.S. presidential special envoys, the convening of high level U.S. and U.N. meetings on Sudan, and the passage of weak U.N. resolutions on Sudan.

Some leaders, notably Franklin Graham, the head of Samaritan’s Purse, an international relief organization with projects in Sudan and South Sudan, and *New York Times* columnist Nicolas Kristof, have continued their activism on Sudan unabated and they have called for strong action, significantly escalating expectations of U.S. policy. Overall, however, much of the national leadership has melted away and criticism of the current administration on Sudan has been muted,

particularly in comparison to the withering and sustained criticism of President Bush for failing to act to stop atrocities in Sudan. Some attribute the difference to “Sudan fatigue,” or to lack of interest from the press, or to the unwillingness of activists from the left to criticize a Democratic administration. None of these theories excuse leaders who had claimed to be motivated by principles, and no excuse should be acceptable to the faith communities that led Sudan activism for a decade or more.

Without the scale associated with the national leadership from the many established civil society groups, the result has been a severely diminished voice and impact for Sudan activism. One interesting development resulting from the lack of national leadership is that many grassroots Sudan activist groups along with American activists have self organized, creating the Act for Sudan alliance, which advocates for an end to genocide and supports escalated action on Sudan. However, this diminished voice has been insufficient at moving a presidential administration that has learned that there is only a small political risk for declining to take strong action against mass atrocities in Sudan.

In August 2011, President Obama declared that the prevention of mass atrocities and genocide was a “core national security interest and core moral responsibility” of the United States. To make that declaration meaningful, leaders at all levels of civil society and without regard for political allegiance must hold the president to account on Sudan policy and demand that the United States end the mass atrocities there. 

Jews and the Tea Party Movement

STEVEN WINDMUELLER

Galvanizing support over the past couple of election cycles, the Tea Party consists of a number of groups that have coalesced around a shared ideology: “*The Tea Party is an American populist political movement... It endorses reduced government spending, opposition to taxation, in varying degrees, reduction of the national debt and federal budget deficit, and adherence to an originalist interpretation of the United States Constitution.*”¹ The Tea Party movement grew out of the history of American conservatism. More directly, it drew on the popularist tradition framed in late-19th- and early-20th-century America, where groups

sought to redefine the respective roles of government and citizen. Today, there are four Senators and 62 Representatives affiliated with the Tea Party. Additional members of Congress identify with the movement and its ideas but have not formally joined the Tea Party Caucus, founded in 2010 and chaired by Congresswoman Michele Bachmann of Minnesota.

Are Jews involved in this movement in any significant way? There is anecdotal and some preliminary statistical evidence, based on a 2010 Pew Research Center study, that while American Jews by and large remain liberal, there is a small subset of Jews that, while not

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¹ <http://tea-party-news.android.informer.com>

necessarily identifying with the Tea Party, express strong support for Tea Party ideas — specifically, their thoughts on economic and social issues.² Among the economic elements, the size and performance of government and with reference to the social indicators, same-sex marriage, abortion, and gun ownership.

Freelance writer Bill Berkowitz, who has monitored right-wing movements, confirmed that “There is no doubt that there are Jews involved with the Tea Party movements.” But given the group’s posters (one depicts tax money disappearing into a funnel with a Jewish Star of David on it) and comments heard at its events, Berkowitz suggests that “[If] Tea Party organizers are as politically savvy as some of its Religious Right forebears, it might try to tamp down its more virulent anti-Semitic participants while at the same time keeping an eye out for a handful of charismatic Jewish personalities to point to as Tea Party allies.”³

A 2011 study I headed surveyed a cohort of about 2,300 Jewish voters and showed some 880 individuals who identified the Tea Party platform as “refreshing.”⁴ The research affirmed a political division among American Jews; especially among Republican Jews, differences in values and policy ideas about what is important to Republican Jewish voters was observed. The research also noted the growing divide of discourse between Jewish liberals and conservatives.

Findings confirm that the more religiously conservative or traditional a person is in his or her practice or belief, the more likely that that individual would resonate to the views and values of the Tea Party movement.

Two measures examined within the Pew study and replicated in my research confirmed that Tea Party advocates adopt a conservative approach to the economy and tend to take socially conservative positions. Tea Party backers also heavily endorse the rights of gun owners. Jews are politically more complex than simple party labels. There has always been a small cohort of Jews who have endorsed libertarian ideas. Now, not only has this group felt more empowered, but also other Jewish voters fearful about their financial future and that of the nation have found common cause with the Tea Party ideology. As Jews have become more deeply embedded in the mainstream of American society, their politics now emulate, to a greater degree, the diversity of ideas that define the broader culture.

Yet, as Washington, D.C. journalist James Besser reported, quoting Fred Zeidman, a

longtime Jewish Republican leader in Texas, “The idea of the Tea Parties scares the hell out of the Jewish community, and I can’t tell you it’s unjustifiable in some cases. There are some candidates out there that are clearly unqualified.”⁵

While it is difficult to calculate the strength of Jewish involvement with the Tea Party, there may be a growing base of political interest in the economic and social principles of this movement.⁶

The neo-isolationism of some Tea Party ideologues would run counter to the intense commitment that binds many Jews — especially within the Republican ranks — to the pro-Israel agenda.

Judaism and American liberalism are understood to be compatible: Why not also Judaism and conservatism? American Jews want to feel that their Jewish identity is aligned with their political passions. As some begin to question the size and direction of government, and, more directly, specific social policies, they are finding themselves outside the liberal community and looking for a better fit. The neo-isolationism of some Tea Party ideologues, though, would run counter to the intense commitment that binds many Jews — especially within the Republican ranks — to the pro-Israel agenda. Whether this movement’s foreign policy ideas and social extremism serve to drive a wedge between Tea Party activists and conservative Jewish voters, remains to be seen. 



² Scott Clement, “The Tea Party, Religion and Social Issues,” Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, February 23, 2011

³ <http://www.truth-out.org/buzzflash/commentary/item/8640-the-tea-party-movements-jewish-problem>

⁴ [ejewishphilanthropy.com/survey-confirms-the-depth-of-the-political-divide-among-jewish-voters/](http://www.ejewishphilanthropy.com/survey-confirms-the-depth-of-the-political-divide-among-jewish-voters/)

⁵ http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/national/jewish_republicans_seen_edge_about_tea_party

⁶ <http://www.truth-out.org/buzzflash/commentary/item/8640-the-tea-party-movements-jewish-problem>

Discussion Guide

1. What role have social movements — Jewish or not — played historically in Jewish collective identity?
2. Can Zionism, as a movement, regain a place in raising questions about the meaning of Jewish identity and collectivity at a moment of great political and cultural transformations?
3. How have music, photography, film, and other genres of art influenced social transformation?
4. Have today’s “change movements” relied on earlier models or has the paradigm for change shifted fundamentally? How so?
5. Do movements need to last, or can they make a brief appearance and still have some lasting impact?

Janice Kamenir-Reznik is president of Jewish World Watch, an organization she co-founded with Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis as a Jewish response to genocide. JWW's mission is to educate and mobilize synagogues and the community to advocate against genocide and to aid victims of genocide and mass atrocities. jewishworldwatch.org

Ari Brochin, founder and former executive director of the Union of Progressive Zionists, is a defense attorney specializing in human rights. He has worked on litigation challenging Bosnia's postwar constitution before the European Court of Human Rights and the United Nations special rapporteur on minority issues. Most recently, he defended activists arrested while protesting at a Harlem police precinct against stop-and-frisk laws.

Glenn Richter is co-founder and former national coordinator (from 1964 to 1990) of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry. He later worked for the New York City Housing Authority. He is an active volunteer in several synagogues and Jewish organizations.

Rabbi **Sarah Bassin** is executive director of NewGround: A Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change in Los Angeles. She is the recipient of a Joshua Venture Group fellowship.

Steve Eisenbach-Budner is the founder and executive director of Tivnu: Building Justice, which enables Jews from across the spectrum to integrate their Jewish identities with their commitment to creating communities in which the basic needs of people are met. Eisenbach-Budner was just awarded a Joshua Venture Group fellowship. He and his life partner, Deborah, and their three children, Tamir, Lev, and RozaBess, make their home in Portland, Ore.

Janice Kamenir-Reznik's central analogy casts all of today's Jews in the role of European citizens during the Nazi era who "stood by apathetically" — who did not resist the Nazis' accession to power. There is little question that the Nazis relied on this sort of acquiescence in order to achieve their genocidal aims. However, the analogy to contemporary Jews elides the difference between the obligations of citizens and the obligations of people anywhere. The obligation to protest wrongs committed by one's home country is, and ought to be, different from the obligation to protest atrocities throughout the world, because citizens of a country have particular knowledge of that country's dynamics.

States and international institutions have a legal and moral obligation to act in the face of mass atrocity. But acting on one's individual conscience is different. Individuals cannot be relied upon to identify situations abroad that call for intervention. It is misguided to cast the political need to create robust institutions to resist genocide as a matter of personal virtue.

—Ari Brochin

My late father used to ask me: "Why do you want my shul to announce your rallies (for various Jewish causes)? You know the people are not going to attend." And I would respond, "But if we don't announce the rally, your fellow congregants won't even feel guilty for not showing up."

Today, when the allotment of time for work is so enormous and the capacity to pay attention so diminished, it is more difficult to get people to register any protest — beyond a sympathetic mouse click or smartphone tap on an online petition. Thus, family — our collective Jewish family from Israel, the former Soviet Union, Europe, Ethiopia, and the Americas — should be first in our prioritized concerns. And yet, if we fail to at least consider the plight of so many others in distress, we've failed our moral responsibility to acknowledge God's dominion over all His creations.

—Glenn Richter

"The world is too dangerous to live in — not because of the people who do evil, but because of the people who sit and let it happen."

— Albert Einstein

Since the Holocaust, Jews the world over have asked: How could the people of Europe have allowed the extermination of 6 million Jews? We are perplexed that people who otherwise might have been upstanding Europeans morphed into genocidal perpetrators. More interesting is our deep disgust with those Europeans and others who stood by apathetically. While I am deeply disturbed by bystanders who enable genocidal demagogues, I recognize that most people — including most Jews — have been and continue to be bystanders to the 47 genocides that have taken place since the Holocaust.

Our ancient texts admonish us to take responsibility for those who are vulnerable and victimized. Yet many Jews not only refuse to support organizations that are dedicated to combating contemporary genocide and providing aid to survivors, they also argue against Jews using Jewish resources to help non-Jews: Darfuri genocide survivors or Congolese survivors of massive femicidal rapes.

Every Jew should be among those leading the charge against genocide and mass atrocity. If we are not leading the charge, if we are not protesting loudly against genocidal behavior, then we are — for all intents and purposes — bystanders. Or, in Einstein's words, we are sitting and letting [bad things] happen.

—Janice Kamenir-Reznik

Appealing to scripture within a moral debate treads on difficult territory. For most moral claims, texts exist to both support and contradict the claim. For example, biblical texts that enable genocide parallel those that affirm the value of all human life. Particularly in Jewish social justice circles, we find ourselves tempted to select and cite isolated texts that support our moral inclination.

But if our use of scripture is to have integrity, we must be able to respond to those who challenge us with competing texts. We need to articulate general rules that guide how we use scripture to explain why we favor one text over another — something scholars call "hermeneutics." I favor the system of Dr. Charles Cosgrove, who offers five principles in his book, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate*. His system brings a comprehensive rather than a selective search, in which we enhance the strength of the moral claims we make and our ability to answer critics.

—Sarah Bassin

Implicit in Kamenir-Reznik's call to action is a difficult question: What is the scaffolding that enables individuals to move from a bit of knowledge on a subject to action? This shift eludes most of us most of the time on most issues.

Many of us verge on feeling overwhelmed "just" from meeting the demands of our work and personal lives. Add to this that the number of issues meriting paramount attention is enormous and we have a serious situation of overload and possible paralysis.

Here are three antidotes:

- Foster a personal, emotive response to the people affected by an issue. Meeting, listening to, and engaging with a live human being is worth a thousand virtual articles.
- Build a community with whom you commit to act on an issue. Be missed if you don't do your part.
- Be accountable to your community and track yourself! Keep a written record of what actions you perform, including "small" ones. Recognize that the energy you expend will help get you "unstuck," paving the way for more energy and more action.

—Steve Eisenbach-Budner

Sh'ma — An independent “think tank” of diverse ideas and conversations published online and in print to incubate issues of significance to Jewish community conversations.

Our Vision

Each month, *Sh'ma* creates a “conversation” — in print and online. It brings together an array of voices that cross the spectrum of Judaism: secular and religious, communal and nonpartisan, engaged and dispassionately scholarly. We raise relevant questions thoughtfully and wrestle lovingly with Jewish concerns as we attempt to navigate the intellectual, communal, and spiritual challenges of contemporary Judaism. Our focus is on ideas — their complexity, their range, and their power. *Sh'ma* is a vibrant intellectual arena that hosts intelligent and creative conversations about ideas that reside outside of any particular institution. Our readers open *Sh'ma* to find what they cannot find elsewhere — the concise, accessible, informative, and intelligent discussion of Jewish issues. Sometimes focusing on personal belief, other times on communal policy issues, we look to *Sh'ma* for incisive articles that illuminate a range of opinions.

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“They are deeply committed to Jewish tradition and Jewish continuity; spiritually curious and at times adventurous; at home, at least to some extent, with the world of Jewish texts and the texture of Jewish rituals; appreciative of the many genuine intellectual, ethical, and political benefits of secular modernity, though not unaware of its fraught relationship with Jewish life; people for whom their Jewish identity is a vital component in an ongoing process of self-creation and expression by the light of their understanding of morals, community, and spirituality, a process they share with other families of humanity, and with concerned individuals everywhere.”

Yehudah Mirsky, Brandeis University

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religious tolerance, legal equality, freedom of expression, and a constitution that mentions religion respectfully but is otherwise secular. They look to Western or moderately Islamist Turkish political models, while rejecting those of Saudi Arabia and especially Iran. And they want Western help, while not requesting any boots on the ground.”¹

What is required now is American leadership that is willing to work with our allies and punish our adversaries. Looking further ahead, democracy promotion should focus on the development of secular, nationalist, and liberal political organizations that could eventually compete with Islamic parties. The United States should not push for quick elections; democracy is not defined by elections alone.

Make no mistake: A Jeffersonian democracy is not in the offing in the Middle East. But there are some common themes that the United States should encourage. In the region, democracy can be defined as a government that reflects the will of the people, has an independent judiciary, upholds the rights of minorities and women, has a free press, and allows its citizens to own property. Most important, people should have the right to express their opinions free from threats and intimidation. All of this takes time, and no matter who comes to power in the near term, the United States should continue to work with the regional moderates to organize — they will be our allies in the future.

For decades the people of the region have been taught that their problems were because of Israel, the United States, and a host of outsiders. That façade is now collapsing, and it is important to promote the idea of individual responsibility — to look inward for the answers. The pathway forward will not be an easy one. But decades of authoritarian rule have proven to be an unmitigated failure for the people of the Middle East. It may take decades more before they realize that Islam is also not the answer. The Iranian people appear to have learned this lesson; the Arab world may not be too far behind.

Blood in the Arab street should not be necessary to remind us of our principles and values, or to confirm our interest in promoting democracy abroad. Even if the “Global War on Terrorism” has been abandoned, there still exists a war of ideas in the Middle East. And the most important front in that war lies not between Islam and the West, but between radical Islamists and secular Muslims who see liberalization rather than indoctrination as the most promising path forward. Collectively, the Arab world has to want democracy and liberalization more than we do. And where they do, the United States has a role to play in guiding the outcome. Syria is a start. 

Upcoming January 2013

Works in Progress

- **Ruth Weisberg** on art
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- **Menachem Creditor** on community
- **Aliza Mazur** on nonprofit management
- **Dorothy Richman** on endings
- **Margot Stein** on parenting
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Ethics Sigi Ziering

This year, our Sigi Ziering column focuses on the ethics of democracy. Each month, an esteemed guest columnist will wrestle with what Jewish texts and our interpretive tradition teach us about democratic imperatives: How are we to reconcile Jewish law and Israeli law? What happens when democracy fails? What are the limitations of democracy? What is the relationship of money to the democratic process? Must citizens accept all decisions set by a democratically elected government? This column is sponsored by Bruce Whizin and Marilyn Ziering in honor of Marilyn's husband, Sigi Ziering, of blessed memory. Visit shma.com to view the series and responses.

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¹ Reported in the *Washington Post*, September 21, 2012; David Pollock, "Among Assad's Opponents, Moderation Reigns."

Should Washington Promote Middle-East Democracy?

MATTHEW RJ BRODSKY

The role America should play in Syria's current uprising is a deeply contentious issue in Washington on both sides of the political divide. It has given rise to a debate over what became known as America's "Freedom Agenda" during the George W. Bush administration. Does the United States have an obligation to help those who seek freedom from tyranny? Should Washington promote democracy in the Middle East even if free and fair elections could produce governments even more hostile to U.S. interests?

To answer these questions, policymakers must have a clear understanding of U.S. interests in the Middle East and then match our objectives with the correct strategy and tactics — all of which requires a realistic reading of what is happening on the ground. To date, we have not done so.

Since the Arab uprisings began in December 2010, the American government has adopted inconsistent and rudderless policies for each country: While President Obama worked to remove President Hosni Mubarak after a week of Egyptian protests in Tahrir Square and joined NATO forces with Libyan rebels to defeat President Muammar Qaddafi, the Obama administration has done little to end President Bashar Assad's brutal suppression of Syrian protestors, to push Assad from power, or to provide the opposition with the kind of decisive support it seeks.

Many in Washington are internalizing selective and general lessons from the U.S. experience in Iraq, Egypt, and Libya in order to assess how best to handle the Arab uprisings — especially in Syria — moving forward. The lessons appear to give U.S. policymakers who wish to

intervene in Middle Eastern affairs the choice of spilling a lot of American blood and treasure (Iraq), bringing the Muslim Brotherhood or those inspired by them to power (Egypt, Tunisia, and beyond), or increasing al-Qaeda's offensive capabilities (Libya, and now Syria, where the bloody conflict continues with the daily death toll topping 200, and the total body count reaching more than 35,000).

But such outcomes don't have to be the result of U.S. intervention and a desire to promote democracy.

Generally speaking, the countries of the Middle East do not possess the preconditions for a successful democracy — namely, a vibrant civil society, state institutions, a strong middle class, respect for the rule of law, concepts of individual liberty, and an independent judiciary. Where they are lacking, radical Islamists have filled the vacuum after Arab dictators have fallen. Egypt provides the clearest example, and while the Muslim Brotherhood does not rule Libya, Qaddafi's fall provided al-Qaeda-affiliated groups the opportunity to mount the well-planned attack against the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi on September 11, 2012, resulting in the deaths of four Americans — including U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens.

While a survey of Syrian opposition attitudes demonstrates that the rebels are not the Islamic extremists that Western media paints them to be, radical Islamists could come to power if Washington doesn't intervene. The rebels, according to the survey, "solidly support *continued on page 23*