The Israeli Ad Campaign and Some Essential Truths

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The imbroglio over these videos should not obscure some essential truths.

One is that massive numbers of American Jewish people and families are indeed being lost to the Jewish People, both through cultural challenges and to the downstream impact of intermarriage, as it seems that less than 10% of the grandchildren of marriages between Jews and non-Jews identify as Jews.

Second, the Israeli Jewish public is convinced that high levels of assimilation characterize American Jewry.

Third, that perception is a matter of national pride among Israelis, one rooted very deeply in the classic Zionist ideology that undergird the Yishuv and then the State in its early days.

There's a flip side. American Jews are convinced that Israelis exhibit tendencies that are anti-democratic, super ethnocentric, excessively nationalistic, and borderline theocratic (some Israelis would agree). For their part, Israeli Jews take offense when American Jews give voice to their critique of Israeli society.

In short, (many) Israeli Jews think American Jewry is excessively universalist and cosmopolitan. And (some) American Jews think that Israeli Jewish society is excessively particularist and parochial.

A good and honest dialogue around these issues would be helpful and healthy. We Jews, despite our cultural penchant for discourse and disputation, haven't quite figured out how to conduct that dialogue.