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Connecting Israel to Jewish Life1

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How do we teach honestly and fully about the Jewish state — a place so sanctified by some, so vilified by others, and so sketchily understood by even those Jews who say they care about it deeply? This issue of *Sh'ma* explores the pedagogical and philosophical underpinnings of teaching about Israel — in day schools, university classrooms, on Israel trips, and elsewhere — and it asks tough questions about how informal and formal educational programs might rethink their assumptions about educating a new generation to more deeply understand the complexity of the State of Israel. — SB

Connecting Israel to Jewish Life*Lisa D. Grant*

For centuries, Israel has been embedded in the hearts and minds of Jews as a spiritual homeland, an idealized place where dreams are fulfilled. The language of prayer is saturated with references to the ingathering of the exiles from the four corners of the earth, the realization of a “rebuilt” Jerusalem to herald the Messianic age and, more recently, the actualization of statehood as the “first flowering of our redemption.” Yet, the powerful spiritual and symbolic force of this idealized Israel has lost a great deal of its resonance for many American Jews in light of the complex political, social, cultural, and religious realities of Israel today. As a result, Israel does not figure greatly into the way American Jews make personal meaning from being Jewish today.

Teaching Israel is certainly one of the greatest challenges of Jewish education in American communities. Indeed, for decades educational researchers and thinkers have observed that few Jewish educators are truly reflective about why, what, or how they teach Israel. Even among those individuals and institutions at the forefront of Jewish educational innovation, few are able to articulate a clear vision or their reason for teaching Israel that extends beyond vague and implicit expressions of Israel being a core component of Jewish identity formation.

At least in part, our inability to develop a compelling vision for Israel education lies in our inability to define why Israel should matter to American Jews comfortably at home in American society. We also are ambivalent about which Israel to teach. Is it a political narrative about the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict? Is it a romantic portrait of a land flowing with milk and honey? Is it a story about rescue and refuge for Jews in danger around the world? Is it about a society of modern miracles and technological marvels, or a society of corruption, dysfunction, and tension among rich and poor, religious and secular, Arabs and Jews? Or is it all of the above?

Basically, the content and experiences of Israel through formal and informal educational experiences (including trips) remain largely on a symbolic or even “mythic” level for most American Jews. And we seem comfortable with this approach. Anything more would conflict with the not-so-hidden curriculum of American Jewish education, which is how to function as an American Jew. Inasmuch as Israel education can be used as a way to reinforce

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American Jewish identity, it is viewed as a positive. We avoid over-complicating matters in order to ensure a “love” of Israel. Yet unless and until we dive into the complications, I believe we will remain at best with a symbolic understanding of why Israel is or should be significant in American Jewish life.

One of the core ideas I teach my students is that you cannot teach anything well until you know its meaning for yourself. My own lifelong reflection on why Israel matters has shaped how I negotiate between my American life and my Jewish self; how I live my life as a Jew; and how

timate goal may still be “love of Israel,” we should cultivate a mature love rather than a naïve one. We should neither whitewash nor ignore the complexities of contemporary Israel. While teaching the old “myths” as ideals, we must do so in a way that makes them usable in tension with current realities.

It seems that the most powerful way to foster a deep sense of connection with and commitment to Israel is to foster a deep sense of connection with and commitment to Jewish life. This means integrating Israel as an essential element of Judaism wherever one lives. This is not so much about Israel being central to Jewish life, but about Israel being an integral/inseparable piece of a larger whole.

To do this, we must begin with aspects of Jewish life that people already connect with and know something about. Three significant domains include prayer, social and cultural interactions, and social justice. Each of these experiences can be enriched through conversations, texts, and images of Israel.

We also need to build connections with people and place, with the visions and realities that encompass Israel both as a sacred symbol and as a dynamic, modern state. We need the myth, but we also need the reality. We must explore the plurality of voices in Israeli society.

Ultimately, Israel education should be about strengthening bonds of connection that cut across time and space, the sacred and the profane, personal and collective, particular and universal, Jew and other. And this multi-layered approach is not solely a one-way engagement with Israel. Rather, Israel education should be built on a sense of reciprocity. We are enriched by Israel and enrich it in turn through our active relationships with *am*, *Torah*, *medinah*, and *Eretz Yisrael*.

To foster a deep sense of connection with Israel means to foster that sense of connection with Jewish life.

I teach not just Israel but Jewish education as a whole. Just as I navigate between the many other dualisms that are part of Jewish existence — the tensions between universal and particular values, religion and peoplehood, the individual and the community, the sacred and the profane, tradition and change — so, too, do I navigate the dualisms inherent in Israel in all of its manifestations, symbolic and real. To me, Israel “engagement” means the continuing participation in this unresolved discourse. It is what keeps my relationship to Judaism and to Israel dynamic and alive. This relationship, like most, takes work. I see this work as a form of *tikkun* — working toward repairing and improving an imperfect world. I also understand it as a partnership, a *brit l’olam*, a covenant for all time.

This philosophy recasts Israel education, shifting the symbols of what could be described as a “dead past” into a usable past that is integrated into Jewish living. Though our ul-

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Teaching Israel: A More Effective Strategy

Kenneth W. Stein, Tal Grinfas-David, and Anna R. Hartman

Standing in stocking feet on a giant, 30 x 13 foot floor map of Israel, 75 Jewish educators explored the strategic land decisions made by Zionists involved with the Jewish National Fund (JNF) in Palestine in the late 1930s. During an experiential text study recounting a meeting of Zionist leaders, teachers began to discover the valuable lessons and big ideas embedded in the history of the founding of the State of Israel. What's more, they glimpsed the potential of bringing sophistication, nuance, critical thinking, best practices, and primary sources to the study of modern Israel. What challenges face educators in providing such opportunities for their students?

Writing for JESNA in 2004, Barry Chazan articulated three core components of the historical challenge to Israel education in the U.S.: fostering individual meaning related to Israel, making a trip to Israel standard for all Jews, and reversing the decline in Hebrew language competence.

Since the publication of Chazan's assertions, Taglit-Birthright and Hebrew language programs such as Tal Am and early childhood immersion have begun to address the latter two challenges. But the first challenge remains: fostering an environment in which learning about Israel is meaningful and relevant.

For every organization, the first step is gathering laypeople and educators who believe the story of Israel is one worth telling. What then are the steps necessary for endowing the future of American Jewry with a compelling and germane understanding of modern Israel? The following suggestions emerge from nine years of data culled by Emory University's Institute for the Study of Modern Israel (ISMI) during 20 teacher workshops.

Identify the message. What is the relevance of the State of Israel to American Jews? Every organization should determine enduring understandings that answer that question, but many have not considered the following: How did Jews acquire and maintain sufficient power and authority to create and sustain a state of their own? How did Jews outside of Israel use the support and defense of a Jewish state to cement their own Jewish identity and develop influence in the U.S. and elsewhere?

Jewish youth who are unsure of Israel's relevance need to understand how Israel's existence strengthened their own existence.

Invest in a learning community. By the teachers' own admission, one prominent factor limiting student achievement in the area of Israel studies involves the knowledge of educators. Surveys of workshop participants indicate that while nearly all teachers agree that teaching about Israel is important, the large majority perceive themselves as possessing only limited or basic knowledge of Israel and Zionism. Fewer than one-third reported having taken at least one college course on the subject. In order to educate these teachers, we should train them intensively in person and also utilize long-distance teaching tools to inform and connect interested educators.

As for the donors who are needed to invest in this field, these individuals rightly look for the measurable outcomes of their donations. Such individuals may feel more comfortable investing in a political action group than in an educational process whose results will only be evident over time. Laypeople and professionals must work together to determine satisfactory barometers for success in education.

Reconsider time allocation. When teachers are asked why they do not teach more about Israel, most answer "lack of time." Instead of focusing years of Jewish education exclusively on prescribed bar/bat mitzvah preparation, how might communities reimagine the time and place for further study of Israel? In a school, this could mean more time devoted to Jewish values and life lessons in Israel's history; the integration of the subject into multiple disciplines; the empowering of educators from different fields of study (not merely Judaic and Hebrew teachers); and innovative family educational opportunities.

Procure high-quality educational materials. The nature of teaching contemporary politics, international relations, or history requires regular updating of materials. Many of the best materials about Israel are unfortunately outdated, out of print, or in Hebrew. Regrettably there are few qualified individuals taking the time to produce and revise curricular units. Moreover, while more

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and more Web sites collect data, few provide teachers with the context, enduring understandings, essential questions, and suggested pedagogy to teach age-appropriate, meaningful and innovative units.

Make pedagogical methods and materials age appropriate. In his recent landmark study for the Israel Project, communications expert Frank Luntz recommends that Israel educators “get real,” since young adults will reject anything that appears one-sided. If our brightest students, in our best programs, feel they are getting half the story, what will happen to them when they begin to hear a different perspective upon reaching the college campus? Getting real

does not mean turning Israel studies into a dominant concern for the “other,” but it does mean answering questions with an earnest effort to tell students how the current state of affairs came to be.

Standing on the giant map, we learn that Jewish nation builders — much like Jewish leaders today — had big dreams for the future. Examining the story of the State of Israel, we can learn how to grapple with limitations, overcome adversity, and think strategically to achieve success, both for Israel and for our children. This is a story to learn from and one that is worth telling and retelling until it is as familiar as the “Four Questions.”



Israel Education: An Ironic Failure

Peter Geffen

I think we have trivialized the teaching of Israel. Years ago we convinced ourselves that the only way our students would remain “loyal” was if we convinced them of the absolute rightness of our cause, the total perfection of our experiment, and the unacceptability of criticism from within. In 1967, together with the other young faculty of the Park Avenue Synagogue High School, I doubted the wisdom of this approach. Today, 40 years later, I am convinced that this approach has not and will not work. Yes, of course we can all point to many young people who are deeply committed and loyal to Israel. But the facts of Jewish alienation from Israel make clear that our “successes” are in the minority. For the vast majority of the members of our Jewish community, most of whom are products of our Hebrew Schools and day schools, Israel is increasingly irrelevant at best and a negative force at worst. This situation is intolerable and presents us with major negative implications for the Jewish people in the 21st century.

In *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel offers an enigmatic challenge that goes directly to the heart of this issue:

“The integrity of our lives is determined by seeing ourselves as part of the historic context in which we live. Failure to be open to the demands of our historical situation liquidates one’s own position of meaning. In order to be responsible, we must learn how to be responsive.” (page 223)

To be “part of the historic context in

which we live” means to face reality in a straightforward and honest way. There is no nation-state that has or will reach perfection. Israel’s democracy is imperfect; its foreign policy sometimes flawed; its social policy increasingly inadequate to meet the needs of the weakest members of its society; and on and on. Is acknowledging these facts a bad thing? Heschel makes clear the astounding and troubling implication of wearing rose-colored glasses: “Failure to be open to the demands of our historical situation liquidates one’s own position of meaning.” Could it be stated more strongly? If we ignore the realities of our situation and paint for ourselves a self-fulfilling fantasy, we will actually endanger the very thing we seek to preserve.

The Zionist movement that made possible the emergence of the State of Israel was one of conflict and intellectual challenge. Zionist conferences were filled with strongly stated opposing points of view. Why must the Zionism of today be one unified voice? Why are we only teaching “Israel Advocacy” courses in Jewish high schools and youth groups when we could also be teaching “peace advocacy” or Arab-Jewish coexistence? Within the State of Israel there is a wide range of views about issues of war and peace; of the status and rights of the Arab minority; of racism and the black Ethiopian Jews; of Israel’s social contract on the one hand and the galloping capitalism and its contributions and challenges to Israeli society on the other. Why do we in the North American Diaspora as-

Peter A. Geffen, founder of The Abraham Joshua Heschel School in NYC, is the founder and director of KIVUNIM, The Institute of Experiential Learning for Israel and World Jewish Communities Studies, which believes that by educating young Diaspora Jews and instilling in them an openness and appreciation of Israel’s grand and historic achievements, together with its unfulfilled goals and aspirations, we will give voice to a Zionism for the 21st century.

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sume that bringing these issues into our classroom will be “bad for the Jews?”

We will more powerfully accomplish our shared goals when we become comfortable with and committed to telling our students the complex reality: that the Arab–Israeli dispute is, as Chaim Weitzman said, a moral conflict because it is a “right” set against a “right.” Questions about how to be both a Jewish state and a democratic state abound: Is it possible that 20 percent of a country’s population are unable to sing with pride the verses of the (Jewish) national anthem, “Hatikvah”? How might the imposition of ultra-Orthodox Jewish law on a highly secular Jewish society affect the future of the Jewish people as one people? Shouldn’t our children hear about and discuss these questions within the school’s walls, even if resolution may appear elusive in today’s tense climate?

The greatest potential offered by a more open presentation of Israel to our children and ourselves is that it might prove to be more, and not less, engaging. Presenting the perfect Israel reduces the possibility of young Jews seeing themselves in Israel’s ever-unfolding story.

On the other hand, sharing Israel’s blemishes and flaws commands more of our attention and gives us a role in imagining and even fashioning the country’s future. Our children need creative assignments that envision a Middle East in peace instead of war. Experiences and lessons might explore if and how Israel would maintain its goal of a Jewish majority. Could the borders of the Middle East become as porous as Europe’s? How might Israel pioneer the building of socially conscious businesses that serve the needs of the region’s poor? How will an Israel at peace relate to Jews living around the world?

Teaching Israel would include teaching the story of the Jewish people in the Diaspora. Zionism must be recognized today not as denying but rather affirming Jewish culture from around the world. We need to recreate a Zionism for the 21st century that appreciates rather than denigrates the costumes, music, art, architecture, languages, and religious life of Jews from the proverbial four corners of the earth. We might, then, all play a role in fulfilling the Zionist promise. 

Strengthening a Complex Connection

Tzvia Berrin-Reinstein

About to return home after three months on a high school program in Israel, I was handed a registration form for AIPAC. I was sitting in my classroom, taking care of some last minute details. I didn’t know that much about the organization, but I did know that it expresses one voice in its lobbying effort on behalf of Israel; it’s a voice with which not everyone agrees. I also knew that I did not want to join AIPAC — for me, it was not the way to support Israel. Unfortunately, most of my classmates knew little more than I did about the organization, and welcomed whatever the teachers or program handed out about Israel. Probably, many of my friends will therefore accept AIPAC’s offer of a free year’s membership. And although our high school at home tries to offer a range of voices about Israel, most students gravitate to a simpler notion of how to support the state.

Peter Geffen asks “why are we only teaching ‘Israel Advocacy’ courses in Jewish high schools?” I have been in Jewish day schools all my life and most often have been taught the same basic lessons about Israel. I know that even within a Jewish school the topic of Israel is a touchy one. Although some teachers are

open to discussing the many aspects of Israel, it seems that many teachers find it easier to teach one side, rather than the many sides this conversation deserves.

Geffen asks why people in the North American Diaspora “assume that bringing these issues into our classroom will be ‘bad for the Jews.’” Sadly, I wonder if school administrators and teachers think that Jewish high school students cannot understand the complex situation in Israel. But, in fact, our schools should be places that model (and teach) how to be members of Jewish communities. For me that means learning how to live with many viewpoints about the things that matter most — including Israel.

Everything has multiple viewpoints. When I traveled in Israel, I wish I had spent more time learning — and arguing — about Israeli politics, about the disputed claims to land, and how different cultures make up our people. Discussing challenging issues regarding Israel won’t alienate me from the land and country of my people; rather, learning about Israel’s complexities and how to deal with them will strengthen my connection to our land. 

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A More Robust Education

Marion Gribetz

How might Jewish children engaged in some form of Jewish education emerge with a sophisticated and articulated love for the state, the land, and the people of Israel? Although in our current system educators are often given inadequate time and resources to meet the demands of an educational vision, we must start by creating Jewish communities where discourse and opinion about Israel are welcomed and nurtured. Only in such an environment can students develop the “muscle” for comfortable debate and the exchange of ideas. Only then will our 18 year-olds arrive on college campuses without being bewildered and confused when they are confronted with criticism and rhetoric against the politics and policies of the modern state of Israel.

Just as our children enter adulthood with a foundation of love and appreciation for their family of origin, just as they face moments of conflict and agitation in making sense of the world, just as they create their own patterns and rituals for meaning making — so too with their relationship with Israel.

The young adult needs to have been exposed to an array of loving encounters with Israel — its people, history, culture, geography, politics, and society.

Immersion in a robust Jewish education — history, religious texts, politics, literature and language, and the arts, film, music, and dance — should prepare our children to encounter conflict from a solid base of love. Opening our hearts to creative possibilities for living with confusion will help our children express their love for an Israel situated in complexity.

The responsibility of our educational system (schools, youth groups, synagogues, camps, families) should be to create laboratories where experimentation and study are nurtured. Only then will our children be able to hear the resonance of the Tanakh and rabbinic tradition in the poetry of Yehuda Amichai, the music of HaDag Nahash, and the artwork of Adi Ness. From those laboratories children will emerge standing firmly on a platform from which to soar into the adult world. Our children are worthy of nothing less. 

Marion Gribetz is associate dean of the Shoolman Graduate School of Jewish Education at Hebrew College in Newton, Mass., and managing director of Gribetz Men-cow Consultants, an independent consulting firm specializing in improving Jewish education. She facilitates the PEJE Israel Engagement Community of Practice.

Redrawing the Maps, Rethinking Education

Hannah Weitzer

In revolutionizing Israel education, I would start with the maps. (I’d do the same if I were revolutionizing Palestine education.) For those of us Diaspora Jews born and educated in the post-1967 era, maps depicting greater Israel without demarcating the disputed territories of Gaza, the West Bank, and the Golan were the norm. In high school I decided that I believed in the idea of two states, but it was some time before I felt comfortable with the visual representation of this concept. Drawing in the internationally recognized border between Israel proper and the occupied territories is not a quick fix for all of the issues surrounding Israel education. But teaching with maps that lack the green line is indicative of a larger gap between fact and myth that runs rampant in teaching Israel to Diaspora Jews. A distorted Israeli map is only one example of how Diaspora Jews are taught about Israel in ways that oversimplify its history.

As Peter Geffen writes, Jewish schools,

camps, and Israel trips have trivialized the teaching of Israel. By teaching the myths rather than the realities, we allow the subtle shades of gray that pepper the landscape of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict to become black and white. Teaching that the Arabs fled from Israel in 1948 will not ensure a secure and stable future for Israel any more than teaching that they were all expelled will spell the destruction of the Jewish state. Rather, we must attempt to delve into the nuances of the conflict and teach a multifaceted Jewish narrative that can be truthful, loving, and critical. When we simplify the issues in our educational approach, we do a disservice to our students and ourselves.

Let’s redraw our maps to include all of the lines and blemishes, as difficult as that may be. Our ability to digest all of the facts will give us a more honest relationship with Israel and a stronger basis from which to move forward toward a peaceful future. 

Hannah Weitzer, with a BA in Middle East Studies from Brown University, has been living in Jaffa, Israel, for over two years working with several Arab–Jewish partnership organizations and teaching Diaspora Jews.

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Contested Space: Maps in Teaching About Israel

Derek J. Penslar

I have a colleague at the University of Toronto who teaches a course called “How to Lie With Maps.” Supporters of Israel might well suggest as required reading for this course Palestinian maps that show a unitary Palestine from the Mediterranean to the Jordan with no sign of Israel’s existence. Yet Israeli maps, and those produced by and for Diaspora Jews, rarely mark the Green Line that constitutes the country’s internationally recognized borders.

This was the case even during the height of optimism during the Oslo years. A map from 1999 by the Israeli Nature Reserves and National Parks Authority displayed Israel as reaching from the Jordan to the sea. (map 1) “Israel” includes not only the Golan Heights and greater Jerusalem, which Israel has annexed, but also the West Bank, which it has not. The territorial integrity of Greater Israel is emphasized by the empty, white space surrounding it and connoting foreign lands. A map from 2000 produced for the Israeli National Tourist Office just before the outbreak of the Second Intifada, is somewhat more sophisticated; it shades the urban areas on the West Bank that, at that time, were under full Palestinian control but the rest of the West Bank blends imperceptibly into Israel proper.

Jewish youth in North America are not well educated about the barrier between pre- and post-1967 Israel. A map currently available on the Web site of the American United Synagogue Youth* depicts a Greater Israel in which the northern West Bank is presented as part of “Tel Aviv and the Sharon Valley,” and the southern West Bank is divided between “Jerusalem and Area” and the “Coastal Plain.” This classification is topographically illogical, since the West Bank is a hilly spine, but it is ideologically satisfying for Zionists as it attaches the territory to familiar Israeli spaces.

In Israeli schools, textbooks often excise the Green Line and include the West Bank in maps of Israel. In December of 2006, Education Minister Yuli Tamir declared that future textbooks must depict the Green Line, and the Education Ministry was asked to implement a new high school curriculum on the delineation of Israel’s borders. The issue,

according to Tamir, is educational, not political: as part of their training to be informed citizens, Israeli youth need to know how and when Israel assumed control of the territories in which its population currently lives. This knowledge is a necessary precondition for intelligent debate over the feasibility of border adjustments as a component of a sustainable Israeli–Palestinian peace accord. Tamir’s proposal set off a firestorm of protest from the Israeli right, which will not countenance any challenge to the legitimacy of the conquests of 1967. But underneath Tamir’s proposal is a sound pedagogical issue: the need to educate young people that borders are artifacts, not works of nature or God. The concept of “natural boundaries” (seas, mountains, and rivers) has always been more of an ideal than a reality. Borders change constantly, in both the course of war and the negotiations that lead to peace.

Modern cartography is a manifestation of the state’s assertion of sovereignty within its borders and the nationalist idea that each people should dwell within its own land. But reality rarely conforms to the ideal. The world is filled with porous borders and autonomous regions under nominal state jurisdiction. Most states, even the most zealously nationalistic, are multiethnic. The modern map is an assertion of what historian Thongchai Winichakul calls a “geo-body”: a coherent, integral nation realized in space. It is an abstraction and a fantasy, simultaneously a legitimization for domination and a denial of hegemony’s limits.

The early Zionists imagined a Jewish national geo-body. The Yishuv was a new entity, projected onto not only the small, venerable Jewish communities of the four holy cities (Jerusalem, Hebron, Tiberias, and Safed) but also the hundreds of Arab villages that dotted the Palestinian landscape. An accurate map of Mandate Palestine would depict more than a thousand places of settlement, mostly Arab. In 1914, after two waves of Zionist immigration, Jews made up a tenth of Palestine’s population. By 1948, they were a third. But old Zionist maps depicted only the Jewish settlements and mixed cities, with the occasional large Arab town as a point of reference, al-

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* <http://www.usy.org/yourusy/israel/map/>

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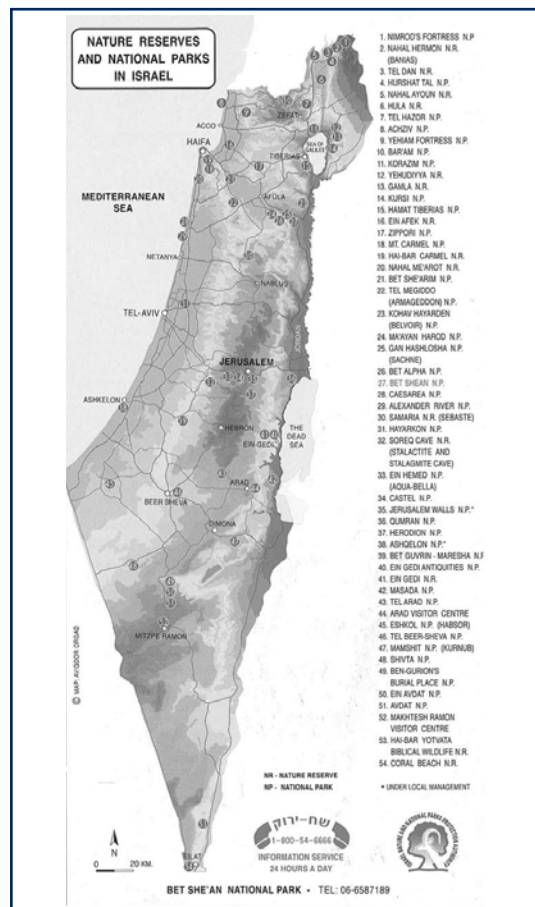
though most Palestinian Arabs lived in the countryside.

Even recent books on the history of Zionism reproduce this point of view. The maps in Howard Sachar's *History of Israel*, revised and republished in 2000, show just a handful of Arab communities. My first book, a 1991 study of Zionist settlement in Ottoman Palestine, features a detailed map of Jewish settlements, but Arabs are represented only by a few cities. (map 2) At the time I thought that my approach was justified because my topic was the Zionist enterprise, not Palestine's native population, but I have come to believe that the two cannot be separated. I have been convinced by two decades of scholarship that presents the history of Jews and Arabs in Palestine holistically, with each people constantly influencing and shaping the other.

The best way to illustrate this new approach would be through maps that faithfully depict the constant presence of Jews and Arabs in the same landscape. (Overlaying film transparencies is an old-fashioned but effective technology. In PowerPoint, one can create transparency overlays using maps in .gif or

.jpeg image format.) Superimposing maps would display the geographic structure and distribution of each community along with the points of intersection between them. By displaying change over time — say, at ten-year intervals between 1917 and 1948 — one could see how Palestinian settlement patterns were influenced by Zionist immigration and the British administration. Overlaying maps would display rupture and absence as well as continuity and coexistence. A map of Israel in 1953, superimposed on one of Palestine in 1947, would show new Jewish towns, suburbs, and agricultural settlements where hundreds of Palestinian villages had been. The same could be done for the post-1967 West Bank, where Jewish settlements have profoundly affected Palestinian landholding and population distribution.

Maps can also trace changing borders, both in pre-1948 Palestine and post-1948 Israel. The Green Line is but one of these borders, but it is of vast importance. It cannot be wished away. The truth, be it about intermixing of Jews and Arabs or division between Israel and its neighbors, must never be erased.



Map 1: Israel's Nature Reserves and National Parks Reprinted with permission of the author



Map 2: Jewish Settlements in Palestine 1870-1918 Reprinted with permission of the author

Roundtable on Teaching Israel

Few recent issues touching on Jewish life have been as contentious as how to teach Israel on the American college campus. Teaching Israel touches on an array of controversial subjects — the convergence of identity issues in teaching Israel, and how to do so in a scholarly and dispassionate manner, the conflict of Israel and the Palestinians, and the impact of the Jewish communal agenda on a discipline whose faculty positions are heavily communally funded. *Sh'ma* asked some of the leading scholars in the area of Israel Studies to talk about how they've confronted these and other issues and what might challenge the field in the near future.

Susan Berrin: How has the content of your courses on Israel changed over the past five or ten years?

Ilan Troen: Today's bibliography of materials is far richer than a decade ago, with a flood of resources that continues to grow because interest in the field is so very large. There's a cacophony of diverse materials, an enormous competition to get out one's message, one's truth, because the subject is imbued with moral passion and moral judgment, which makes it a very intense field.

Ronald Zweig: In the last five years, as archives that were closed for 30, 40, and 50 years now become available, research and scholarly writing on Israel has increased. The huge public interest in our subject is not just a question of moral interest in what's happening in Israel. There is an immense curiosity about Israel and courses on Israel are popular among non-Jews as well as Jews, which is a fairly new phenomenon.

Yael Zerubavel: The field — inside and outside Israel — is much richer, with a larger diversity of voices. And there is more room for the interplay with multiple disciplinary perspectives and literatures, which broadens the field. For example, when studying the development of Israeli national culture, we also look at it in relation to other national movements, and not only to its unique place in history.

Troen: The study of Israel is not only political history nor is it obviously only the study of the conflict. And Yael has led the field in exploring how roots and symbols and mythologies are applied to the Israeli case, which makes for a far more exciting historiography than politics. Twenty years ago, most Israelis writing dissertations about Israel dealt with politics. There was no biography and not much in cultural studies. That — at least in part — was a byproduct of the triumph of the Zionist movement

and how it engaged with the obstacles that had been encountered. And that is a minority focus today. The range of topics is much broader. The study of Israel happens within a wide number of disciplines, which would have been anathema to an earlier generation.

Zweig: The generation who researched Israel during a period when Israel was conceived as being beleaguered and embattled has now passed and has been replaced by a generation of younger scholars for whom the continued existence of Israel is not a daily concern. I'm not saying that Israel doesn't face any dangers, but the nature of Israel's battle to survive in the international arena is not something that scholars obsess about within the field any more. We can allow ourselves to be more critical, more open. Israel, warts and all, is now very much on the table.

Zerubavel: While the majority of my students in courses about Israel are Jewish, there are also non-Jewish students. Interest in Israel has grown, in part, as a result of media attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And out of that interest has emerged curiosity about Israeli society. At Rutgers, therefore, we offer a diversity of courses that explore different aspects of Israeli history, society, and culture. We insist that these courses are not for "insiders," and therefore, we do not speak, or teach, in terms of "we." And we strive to present an academic and nonpartisan approach to the study of Israel and its place in the Middle East. Sometimes that's not so clear to some students who expect courses on Israel to be different. But it's the academic responsibility of scholars involved in Israel Studies to ensure that there is a clear distinction between the academic field and the experiences that might interest students beyond the classroom.

Troen: Brandeis's Summer Institute trains academics from around the country to teach

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courses on Israel. Interestingly, we have a large number of academics who come from Catholic and Protestant institutions. We've had Muslims and Mormons as well. In short, it's not Jews alone who are teaching Israel. This isn't an insular topic; non-Jews want to understand and think about Israel and its culture and for their own reasons and out of their own curiosities.

Zweig: This year NYU is offering a course on Israel and China, and over 50 percent of the students are Asian. But the majority of courses are 60 or 70 percent Jewish as far as anyone can tell. We are not doing advocacy or reaching out specifically to the non-Jewish world with a conscious intention of propagating information on Israel. I'm sure you're aware of this problem, but there is always the danger of adopting an advocacy role that would undermine our efforts to make Israel Studies a proper subject for the university campus.

Zerubavel: In some measure, Israel Studies is growing out of greater interest in Jewish Studies. It is also growing because of a new philanthropic interest in developing this field. We're at a turning point, and while philanthropy offers tremendous potential for the field, it also carries a certain risk. We can benefit enormously from philanthropy, but we should also be careful to separate the donors' intentions from our academic rigor. While we want Israel Studies to flourish as a field, as academics we must ensure that our courses are not perceived as, or don't become, vehicles for Israel advocacy. Although there might sometimes be pressure from communal organizations or donors to move in this direction, from my experience I know that it is possible to be firm and explain that while we are creating awareness and expanding knowledge about Israel, we're not playing an advocacy role. In fact, our credentials as dispassionate scholars are critical for the academic standing of the field.

Zweig: Though I initially came to New York concerned about the pressures we'd face from donors and the community, I'm finding that most potential donors understand that for us to be effective teachers we have to be absolutely rigid — our credibility rests on not being political or Israel advocates. The students become much more receptive to learning about all aspects of Israel and that's ultimately what donors want.

Troen: I find a problem not with donors

but with my colleagues who assume that because I'm teaching Israel I'm an advocate. And that's where I think the real challenge is: Are you going to teach about the suffering of the occupation, about checkpoints? Are you going to invite scholars from Bir Zeit? In short, the pressure coming from inside the university is far greater than that coming from outside the university.

Zweig: We're not considered objective unless we include the political positions of left-wing Jewish intellectuals. We should be confident in the narrative we are communicating, in the facts that we are presenting, and we should open up debate as widely as possible.

Zerubavel: As long as our work is not ideologically oriented and we present the complexity of the situation and a diversity of views, we maintain our integrity. Part of what we tackle is the view that Israel Studies, or Jewish Studies, is only relevant to people who are particularly interested in these issues. But isn't French society or British literature relevant to a broader audience? That same principle should apply to Israel Studies. We need to establish our credentials and our credibility as an academic field and not become parochial or insulated. At Rutgers, we cross-list most of our courses with other academic programs, such as Middle Eastern studies, history, or comparative literature, and this allows us to attract more students to the study of Israel and to avoid being seen as a ghettoized field.

Troen: And we must have placements in art history, anthropology, business, and social policy — to embed the field in a variety of disciplines and not just Jewish Studies. We in larger universities can do that. However, when only one person holds an appointment in Jewish Studies, it's much harder to offer that kind of diversity.

Zerubavel: I'm teaching now a course on the Jewish immigrant experience, and in this framework we try to explore what it means to be a society of immigrants and to compare immigrants' experiences in Israel, the U.S., and other countries. When I lecture about national myths and collective memory, I address the tension between the desire to look at Israel as a special case (and, of course, every society has its unique characteristics) and the desire to view it with the knowledge that similar phenomena occur in every national society. As a democracy, Israel can be reduced to neither just one political viewpoint nor even

two main viewpoints while the society is so diverse. Our challenge is to bridge the somewhat mythical or popular vision of Israel with its complex reality; by doing this we can effectively engage more students and faculty.

Zweig: I often wonder to what degree our generation's experiences color our understanding or beliefs about the situation in Israel. How different are our donors' experiences from ours, and what part do those differences play in determining their understandings of today's Israel? Our experiences are different from those of our students. I wonder what our students really think and know about Israel before they come to our classes.

I've been surprised to find some Israelis in my classes who are not registered as students but come and listen with great interest to their own history.

Troen: This is important because the field will change. Many children of German Jewish or East European Jewish immigrants to the U.S. wound up as scholars of the communities from which their parents and grandparents came. They come to class without much knowledge. Israeli students often know very little about Israel's history or culture beyond a superficial symbolism learned in their school assemblies or from their inadequate textbooks. We have opportunities to take these students (even those Israelis who think they

know their parents' experiences) and teach them the wonderfully, humanly complex study of Israel on all levels — not just the conflict, but also the integration, assimilation, identity, religion, faith, and how one expresses oneself through a variety of cultural forms.

Zerubavel: The study of Israel was promoted to a great extent within Israel itself and became ingrown. But the field has opened up to students and scholars outside of Israel. If Israelis can become experts on Chinese, American, or French society, then, along the same lines, French or American scholars may study Israel, and one cannot dismiss them just because they are not Israelis.

Troen: The people who are helping export Israel Studies are Israelis themselves. There are about 40 Israelis teaching as visiting professors in U.S. universities like Tulane and Tulsa, as well as Harvard and Stanford. This effort is subsidized by donors but grows out of the natural interest of universities. There aren't enough people in the U.S. who can do Israel Studies. So where's the next generation coming from? Some will be the children or grandchildren of Israelis, or students who've gone on birthright Israel, or the non-Jews who are attracted to the topic even as Jews might be interested in Chinese Studies. That's part of the cultivation of curiosity that is taking place in American institutions.

Israel in the Academy

Moshe Naor

At Tulane, where I presently teach, Israel Studies provides yet another example of what Yael Zerubavel suggests is the interdisciplinary nature of this study. It is fraught with the tension between academe and identity. As in other North American universities, here Israel Studies are taught in the framework of Judaic Studies, in collaboration with other academic programs, particularly history. Thus, the Israeli case is presented in its complexity; culture, identity, ideology and politics are understood within the context of Jewish history, Middle Eastern history, and general history.

Emphasis on identity issues that typify Israeli young people today — such as culture in Arab countries or languages such as Ladino and Yiddish — as well the question of Israel's image and national identity as a "Jewish state" are concerns that parallel the identity ques-

tions with which young Jews in America also wrestle. I've found that some of my students choose to study Israel not only as an academic matter, but also as a personal matter, because of issues arising from their family and community backgrounds. And some of these students go on to study in Israel on summer seminars or specific language programs emphasizing Hebrew or Arabic. A portion of my students have visited Israel under the aegis of Jewish organizations, and others seek to broaden and deepen their command of Israel Studies in preparation for advanced studies at Israeli universities. Among this group, and as Ilan Troen noted, the number of young people born and raised in North America and whose parents (one or both) hold Israeli citizenship, is particularly prominent. Identity is-

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Dr. Moshe Naor, a Schusterman Visiting Assistant Professor of Israel Studies at Tulane University, received his PhD in History from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Naor has taught history at the Hebrew University, the University of Calgary, and at the University of Toronto.

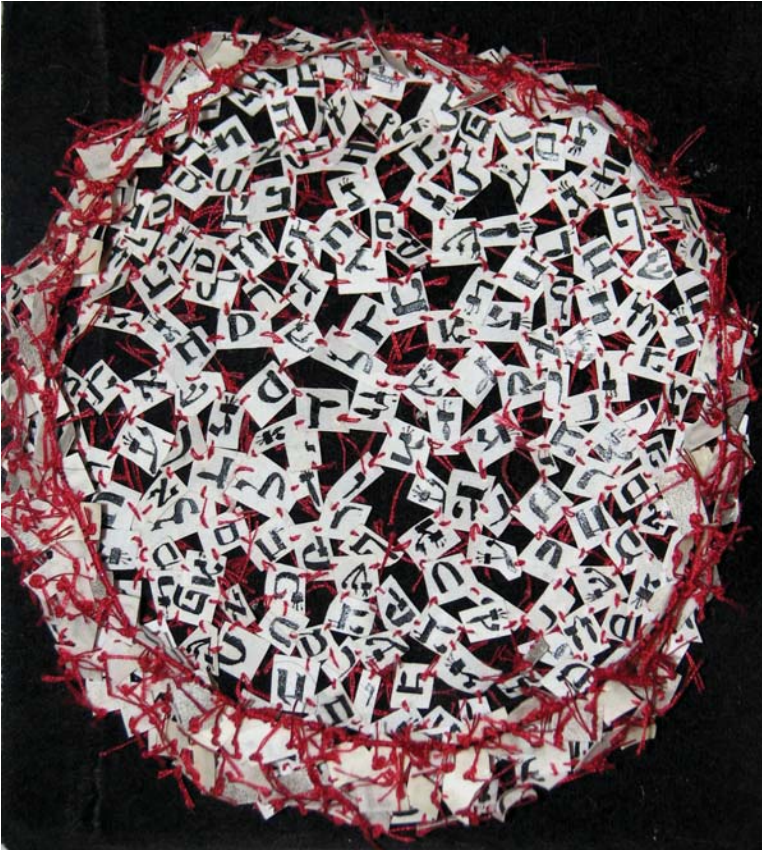
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Vessel
5" diameter x 1" deep
parchment, thread, ink, wire



Shirah Rachel Apple

I made this piece with letters I wrote when learning with a *sofer*, a scribe, in Israel. A year or so after my return, I cut the parchment into pieces and stitched the *otiyot*, the letters, into this vessel. Each letter is connected to the next with one stitch; the red thread references *kabbalah* and healing, and is reminiscent of threads given in gratitude for *tsedakah* at the *kotel*. In this “vessel” I see the complexity of my nearly two years as a temporary resident in Israel — the weaving of close bonds with people, land, art, and text; a sense of blood and soul connection — as well as the inevitable re-shaping of that experience from the perspective of a later time and a different place.

Untitled
acrylics and pencils
4' x 5'



Yehudit Feinstein

My art reflects the mixed emotions that rise from being an immigrant — the ambiguity between staying close to my origins and embracing my new surroundings. In my search for a “home,” I explore language and history, unfolding layer after layer. To create art, I always start from a place that I do not know, and use a code of symbols, letters, and language.

Responding to the Aleph-Bet Yael Krieger

In Israel words have power. When I say "The Wall," do I mean the *kotel* or a separation barrier? When I say Israel, am I speaking of a geographical location or a national people? Sometimes one needs to step back in order to move forward. Break down words to letters...can this dissolution create a stronger re-building? *yod, shin, reish, alef, lamed*...disconnect, rearrange, construct...*shin-alef-lamed...sha'al*, which means ask; *lamed-yud...li*, to me; *alef-reish...or*, light. When it comes to Israel, we must step back, ask for ourselves, and through this process, see things in a new light.

This shoe was created with a smoke-blackened ceramic shoe to represent children who have experienced war. I added something to symbolize what children might need to begin to heal. (see www.globalshoe-project.page.tl) Because lovingkindness is a fundamental teaching in Torah, I emblazoned the shoe with the word "Lovingkindness" on the top and small hearts on the sole.

Penny Tennenhouse



Red Sea Photograph
24" x 36" photograph

Yoav Horesh

It is said that the Hebrew *aleph-bet* is the source code with which God made the universe. Language as the physical act of creation. This might explain the close relationship between *mayim*, water, and *shamayim*, sky/heavens.

The close visual relationship between the water and the sky is what appealed to me in photographing this ambiguous landscape of rocks 30 feet underwater.

"And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas; and God saw that it was good."
Genesis 1:10

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sues are particularly evident among this group.

At Tulane, a course on the Israeli–Arab conflict draws a significant number of students who are not Jewish and have never visited Israel. Among the most noteworthy, although their absolute numbers are small, are students of Palestinian or Muslim origins and students with a strong Christian affinity. Moreover, in contrast to those universities where the military and academe are separate spheres, like a host of other American universities, Tulane has a Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) program designed to groom commissioned officers for the U.S. Army and the National Guard; a portion of these officer cadets choose to take courses in Israel Studies, particularly the Israeli–Arab conflict. During this course, which is in demand among students, I always try to present Israeli history through a social and cultural lens. This approach is possible, as Ron Zweig noted, thanks to the broad development of research in recent years and the corresponding growth of source material in English.

While some students are seeking a strong

identification and search for identity in these courses, others are feeling alienated. But even in cases where Israel Studies is pursued as a way of strengthening Jewish identity, there is a clear expectation among students that courses will exhibit sensitivity for the “other,” be balanced and critical, and provide the foundations for comparison of narratives and tools that allow students to better examine various aspects of Israeli society, state institutions, and policy. A similar position can be found vis-à-vis issues of Israel’s position in American foreign policy or questions regarding the relationship between the nation-state and a multicultural society. At Tulane a significant part of the student body speaks Spanish as a second language and the primary focus in these students’ academic studies is Latin America, international relations, political science, history, and literature. Such an interdisciplinary approach, entwining the personal and the academic, the current and the historical, can explain the growing interest in Israel Studies and why it is becoming such a relevant, even an essential, topic of study. ●

Funding Israel Education: An Interview with Lynn Schusterman

Lynn Schusterman is Chair of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, an organization she and her late husband, Charles, z”l, established in 1987. In 2006, the Schusterman Family enhanced its philanthropic impact by establishing the Schusterman Foundation-Israel and the Center for Leadership Initiatives, Inc. Lynn spoke recently with Jo-Ann Mort, CEO of ChangeCommunications, about her vision for Israel education.

Jo-Ann Mort: What is your vision for the place of Israel in the educational sphere?

Lynn Schusterman: My dream is that our children learn about modern Israel as part of every aspect of their Jewish education; that their understanding is reinforced at summer camps, in youth groups, at JCCs, and at synagogues; that they are taught by teachers who have visited Israel as part of their training; that they themselves visit Israel on an educational trip; and when they enter college, they find a campus lively with debate and rich in course offerings on Israel taught by professors who are experts in a range of disciplines.

Mort: How did you come to define this vision?

Schusterman: Israel is central to my life and personal philosophy. I live part of the year in Jerusalem and recently opened the Schusterman Foundation-Israel to expand our activities and to deepen our connection with the Jewish homeland.

I also think it is vital that young people have the opportunity to study about Israel, both because of its centrality to the Jewish people and because of its strategic importance to the United States.

Mort: Why the particular interest in Israel Studies at the university level?

Schusterman: The history, culture, political science, and sociology of Israel are fascinating and, provided the courses are fair

and rigorous, Israel within the context of the Middle East should be examined, understood, and appreciated. We can see that there are a growing number of universities that are offering courses on Israel and undergraduates are filling those classes. Over the past couple of years we've begun to sponsor the training of a new generation of scholars to fill the growing demand. We're now supporting both graduate and postgraduate fellowship programs. And, of course, there's room for expansion. Roughly half of the college campuses in the U.S. do not offer any courses on Israel, and another 25 percent offer only one course, which is often focused on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Mort: There is also a precollegiate component to your work. Why is that important?

Schusterman: First, young people deserve to be exposed to and taught about modern Israel; it is part of their heritage. Second, when students arrive on university campuses they should already be comfortable engaging in conversations about Israel; for that, they need to have background knowledge. Finally, such exposure will encourage some students to pursue an academic path down the road, swelling the pool of scholars of modern Israel. To those ends, we are exploring ways to help schools develop interesting, imaginative, high-impact curricula

about Israel. For example, we fund Kivunim, a project that sends day school and congregational school educators to Israel as a way to enhance their own learning, which they will then share with their own students.

Mort: Your goals are ambitious. How do you see attaining them?

Schusterman: No single funder can change the culture of Israel education. This needs to be a community-wide effort. Parents, teachers, school administrators, and camp and youth group directors need to believe in the importance of including Israel in their curricula and programs. Graduate students need support, and we should enable more professors to offer relevant courses.

A wealth of opportunities is open to donors that will make a difference — like funding scholarships in Israel Studies or offering Israeli academics opportunities to teach in the U.S. for a year.

Mort: Any parting thoughts?

Schusterman: As a people, we have always believed in the power of education. This is no less true when the subject of study is Israel — its culture, society, systems of justice and government. Education deepens our bonds and enriches our lives. I hope more philanthropists will experience the joy of enabling present and future generations to learn about this vital country.

Hearing Multiple Voices: *Midrash* as Text

Jeffrey A. Spitzer

Rashi famously begins his commentary to the Torah with a question adapted from the *midrash*: Why does the Torah begin with Genesis? The *midrash* imagines the nations of the world confronting Israel saying “you are bandits in that you have conquered the land belonging to the seven nations.” But because of the creation narrative, Israel can respond that the whole land belongs to God and that God gives it to whomever God wants. In my high school class, we take the challenge of the nations seriously. Have the people of Israel conquered the land? Does possession of the land indicate God's decision to let that people own it, at least temporarily?

Several years ago, students at the Boston area Jewish high school Gann Academy participated in a class on Israel advocacy. Al-

though some students welcomed the class, many responded negatively to what they perceived to be indoctrination or propaganda. At Gann, students expect analysis and open-ended inquiry. With this in mind, I challenged myself to create a curriculum that taught Israel with subtlety, nuance, and complexity. Taking the voice of the nations in Rashi's first comment was part of the answer.

Another text we study is a parable from Numbers Rabbah about the scouts episode (Numbers 13–14). A king arranges a marriage for his son to a bride who is wealthy, beautiful, and from a good family, and the son asks to see her. The king, who thinks his son doesn't believe him, punishes his son by not letting him marry the bride; rather, the son's own son will marry her. The parable draws the analogy to God (king) punishing

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A January essay, "At the Center, Is Gender Still Peripheral?" mistakenly identified the creators of Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing. The program was created by Kolot, RRC's Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies and is now run by Moving Traditions.

the people (prince) because they want to see the land (bride), demonstrating their disbelief in God's claim that the land is good (rich, pretty, etc.).

The king's message is clear: questioning Israel is faithlessness. But is that the message of the parable as a whole? The Talmud requires a groom to see his bride before betrothal, and the Israelites who wanted to send in scouts were simply looking for the best way to conquer the land. And why did the king neglect to praise the bride as chaste? Indeed, the bride seems to have seven boyfriends! How are we to understand God's blindness to the presence of other people in the land? Is it legitimate to inquire about Israel's security situation, or is that faithlessness?

By studying *midrash* with its multiplicity of voices and interpretive gaps, students feel that the dissonant voices that grow out of their own experience are not only legitimate, but in some deep way, traditional. Students engage traditional claims about the centrality of Israel while the alternative voices of the *midrash* provide a safe context in which to explore and question Israel, its actions and its policies, and our relationship to it (and learning valuable text skills at the same time!)

This summer, the range of teachers engaged in Israel education at Gann — from the Tanach, rabbinic literature, Hebrew, history, and experiential education departments

— gathered to discuss how we might instill in our students a sense of commitment to Israel. I had to admit that though the *midrash* curriculum nurtures a fertile ground for engagement with Israel, it does not necessarily deepen one's commitment to Israel. Throughout the first trimester, I looked for ways to adapt my teaching of these *midrashim* so that the history, spirit, dreams, and ideals of Israel might be more inspiring to my students. What I found is that no single text did this for them as a group, but that different themes drawn from the *midrashim*, such as the sense of God's presence in the land, or the experience of exile, or what it means to relate to minorities in the land, did speak to the students. Even more, the subtlety of *midrash* with its multiple voices was in and of itself compelling.

Fortunately, the students learn about Israel in many different contexts — a trimester of study in Israel, a class on the history of Zionism, and heavy doses of Israeli culture in Hebrew classes — so the ambiguities and complexity created by the rabbinic literature department do not stand alone in our Israel education strategy. But I hope that the subtlety and complexity of the conversation that exists within rabbinic texts will help keep our students engaged in productive, thoughtful, Jewish discussions of Israel and its centrality to the people of Israel.

Commitment and Critique: A Paradigm Shift

Lee Perlman

Education about contemporary Israel is dominated by two approaches: the *hasbara* or advocacy paradigm and the solidarity paradigm. Jewish educators, academics, and community leaders attribute the traditional difficulties in Israel education to two core causes: Israel's lack of inherent centrality in the historic and current ethos of North American Jewish life and the State of Israel's and Zionism's unending battle for legitimacy. These conventional wisdoms have resulted in a reliance on either the advocacy or solidarity paradigms. The former, the most prevalent, gives education and the Jewish educational establishment a way to promote various advocacy and fundraising agendas. The latter constitutes a necessary but ultimately

insufficient approach to fostering the long-term connection and commitment of North American Jewry to the people, land, and state of Israel. Continuing to dress up advocacy or so-called "pro-Israel" approaches as Israel education is both deceptive and ultimately ineffective. Is there a viable alternative? Why are these two existing paradigms so widespread?

Though Israeli advocacy and quasi-governmental organizations could be accused of cynically exploiting Israel education to ensure a pliant base of Jewish supporters, this stance overlooks the inconvenient reality that Israel's legitimacy is still questioned worldwide. Whether one identifies with them or not, through advocacy, these institutions are ful-

filling their organizational missions in an arena of heightened competition with an ever-growing number of Jewish groups offering alternative visions for Israel's future.

The problem arises when educational institutions that are not in the business of advocacy and fundraising adopt the advocacy approach to Israel education. In doing so, they essentially offer their learners nothing more than sound bites and debating points. They provide one-sided answers about the "myths and facts" — the "truth" about Israel.

The solidarity paradigm creates an emotional bond based on our joint membership in the Jewish people — an ethnoreligious commonality where unity, especially in the face of threat, is one of the highest ideals. Yet this solidarity paradigm is too often compromised by the advocacy paradigm, whereby solidarity with the people and land of Israel becomes blurred with lining up behind the actions and decisions of a given Israeli government (or organization acting ostensibly on the government's behalf). No term better encapsulates this blurring than the group-think phrase, "pro-Israel."

Here's a paradigm shift: a "commitment and critique" approach that assumes there is no educationally responsible way today to engender commitment to Israel without helping learners build a critique. It challenges and ultimately complements the solidarity paradigm by realigning the universalistic/human and particularistic/Jewish dichotomy, by positing that we, the Jewish people, are not the only ones grappling with these tensions. It attempts to strengthen the Jewish learners' identification with the Jewish people by enabling them to understand and empathize with others' pain. This approach fosters an active engagement with both the pain Israel suffers and the hope Israel represents. It seeks to nurture the participants' intellectual, emotional and behavioral commitment to the Jewish sovereign presence in the land of Israel in terms of its uniqueness, moral imperative, and the commitment Israel brings and bears. It tries to imbue learners with a sense of responsibility and empowerment, to replace their feelings of alienation, passivity, and the disappointment that "Israel is not living up to my expectations." It embraces both the inherent and subjective complexities of the State of Israel, offering these challenges as

vital ways to engage with Israel. It educates toward a supportive but critical approach to the Zionist endeavor, as opposed to a blind endorsement of all of Zionism's historic decisions, current policies, and enduring institutions.

Recent polls point to a worrying increase in the disconnect of North American Jews with Israel, compounded by the Middle East morass that puts off the uninitiated and can even confuse the committed if platitudes are served up as education. The commitment and critique approach is not merely a pedagogical

The conceptual shift will demand a rigorous re-articulation of educational goals around contemporary Israel issues and their concomitant application.

policy corrective. Indeed, the demanding and nuanced nature of this conceptual shift requires more than just applying a few new methodologies, whether in a specific educational institution or a broad community framework. It will demand a rigorous re-articulation of educational goals around contemporary Israel issues and their concomitant application.

One illustration of this would be our educational treatment of the relations between Jewish and Arab citizens in Israel. In both the advocacy and solidarity paradigms, one central objective in our depiction of Israel as the only democracy in the Middle East is to highlight the full voting rights and equality under law enjoyed by Israel's Arab citizens. The commitment and critique paradigm would go beyond this and feature, for example, an examination of the tensions engendered by Israel's attempt to be both a Jewish and democratic state and how this in turn conditions Jewish majority–Arab minority relations.

The rabbinic sages taught that there are many valid interpretations of the Bible: *shivim panim la'Torah*. We pride ourselves on engaging in the intricacies of our texts and canonical myths, on not being deterred from exploring their multilayered meanings and significance in our lives. In short, Jews are rightly proud of our rich tradition of deep and sustained intellectual inquiry. This should be our approach to Israel education as well.

Lee Perlman is a lecturer at Tel Aviv University, where he serves as coordinator and instructor of JESNA's Lainer Interns for Jewish Education program. He has been a course instructor at the Genesis at Brandeis summer program at Brandeis University since 2003, where he has developed and taught, along with Rabbi Bradley Solmsen, Joshua Yarden, and Prof. Jeremy Pressman, the commitment and critique approach to Israel.

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Measuring the Success of an Israel Trip

Ezra Kopelowitz

Travel to Israel is an expensive form of educational programming. And yet, increasing numbers of Diaspora Jewish organizations are sending their members or constituents to Israel. Programs range from birthright Israel trips, synagogue and federation missions, school trips, and high school semester programs in Israel. Why are hundreds of millions of dollars invested to send tens of thousands of people to Israel? Might the money be better invested in local educational programming? Why the Israel trip? What is the benefit?

I'll try to answer these questions by focusing on the following: first, the goals of the Israel trip, that is, why we send people to Israel; second, how the goals of the trip are translated into a coherent travel program; and finally, what the payoff of the trip is to the individuals and organizations involved.

Organizers of Israel educational travel tend to have three primary goals. These include the personal growth of participants; strengthening participants' connections with Israel; helping Jewish educators develop professionally through the trip experience, that is, translating the trip into their work as Jewish educators.

All organizers want participants to have an enriching personal experience, broadly defined. They do focus, though, on how the trip will help create stronger and more positive feelings about the participants' Jewish identities — for most trip organizers, this is constructed through strengthening connection with Israel. Within this category, the following are common educational goals:

- Increasing participants' emotional connection with the history, land, and people of Israel.
- Increasing participants' knowledge about Israel.
- Providing participants with Israel advocacy tools. Participants should feel that they come away from the trip with the ability to talk about Israel, debate with others, and advocate for Israel.
- Exposing the travelers to Israeli society — that is, to living Hebrew language and culture, and to Israeli politics. Networking and building personal connections with Israeli Jews, often around similar professional interests, is also important.

Whether we are looking at a birthright Israel program, a teen summer trip, or an in-service training program for Jewish educators, almost all will regard as vital for success, "personal growth," and "strengthening the participants' connections with Israel." Other goals are specifically aimed at Jewish professionals in general and Jewish educators in particular.

Translating these educational goals into a coherent travel program involves many factors. First are the needs and motivations of the participants. Who is traveling and what are their motivations in visiting Israel? What needs to be done to synchronize participant expectations with organizers' goals? The second issue involves preparation and follow-up. Are participants prepared for the trip? Are they aware of the organizers' goals and the relationship of the trip to their professional work or personal life? Are the skills and knowledge gained during the trip explicitly connected to life after the trip? If so, how? Is there a formal follow-up program to capitalize on the potential benefits of the trip? The third issue focuses on the travel sites and how they are chosen and integrated into the learning process. Which sites are most appropriate for realizing the goals of the trip? How should participants interact with the site and with each other at the site? Who will guide participants? Will connections between sites and phases of the trip be concretely articulated? If so, when, by whom, and how? Finally, do the various organizers (some inside Israel, others outside) synchronize their expectations and work with one another?

What is the payoff for individuals and organizations that sponsor Israel trips? The first, and arguably most critical, is the development of human capital. Beyond the personal benefit of those participating in the travel, will the investment (many sponsoring organizations subsidize or fully fund the cost of the trip) pay off for the larger, at-home community? Despite the financial investment, the trip is rarely used as a springboard for concrete action back home. The result is a tremendous loss of potential for community building and the development of human capital.

Assessment is a critically important feature of using Jewish communal funds wisely. Assessing how the goals of the trip are met,

Dr. Ezra Kopelowitz, a sociologist of American and Israeli Judaism and Jewish education, is a senior partner in the Platforma Consulting Group and CEO of Research Success Technologies (ReST), a company specializing in data management solutions for Jewish nonprofits. Ezra's most recent publication is the book, Cultural Education-Cultural Sustainability: Minority, Diaspora, Indigenous and Ethno-Religious Groups in Multicultural Societies (2008), of which he is co-editor.

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and if the goals and motivations of participants are synchronized with those of the organizers and funders, is important. In part, this can be accomplished by administering a short questionnaire to participants before and after travel.

Without an organized program assess-

ment, the benefits of the Israel trip are left to the realm of intuition and happenstance evidence. Familiarity with the above-mentioned parameters will help the communal institutions that are considering organizing, funding, or assessing an Israel trip to think through the issues involved in measuring success. 

An Ancient Dream & Modern Reality

Robbie Gringras

Whether we call it critical commitment (Perlman), a rejection of the perfect Israel (Geffen), or robust grappling with complexity (Gribetz), one thing is clear in this *Sh'ma* collection: The drive to reach Israel through a Jacob-like wrestling, is in the ascendancy. Israel education can no longer avoid addressing the fascinating and troublesome complexity of an ancient Jewish dream crashing into a modern Middle Eastern reality.

Yet this begs another more fundamental question: If critical engagement is so straightforward, if the philosophical and pedagogical answer is so obvious, why does it appear that so little has changed? After all, ever since the first Lebanon war broke out, we've all known that things in Israel were more complicated than we'd been teaching. Yet this was over 25 years ago, and still we are "banging on" about getting more complex in our education (Peter Geffen mentions how he has been of this opinion for the last 40 years!). Why do we feel we are making so little headway?

I would offer three main reasons for resistance to our approach, and make two suggestions for our further development.

Change is painful.

We underestimate at our peril the pain involved in surrendering one's fantasies of Israel the Golden. An entire generation of Jews built their core identities around an Israel that represented the hope and redemption of a nation. Questioning this is a terrible (if necessary) wrench. We must strive to be gentle in our advocacy for nuance and critique. We need to accept that some resistance is not political at all, but deeply, genuinely personal.

Grey is not a nice color.

As we know, the complexities of Israel are invigorating for those who care about them. But for those yet to be initiated into this world,

problems and difficulties can be unattractive. We must work hard to ensure that the gulf between black and white is not grey, but multi-colored, flickering, and endlessly changing.

Israel is still elsewhere.

We have yet to make the case convincingly that Israel is an issue for Judaism and not just for internationally minded Jews. As long as Israel remains a foreign country to which we travel but, as Kopelovitz points out, do not ensure it lives in our community on our return, change will remain out of arm's reach. At MAKOM Israel Engagement Network, a collaboration between North American communities and the Jewish Agency, we refer to Israel as the Jewish people's laboratory of sovereignty. The results that emerge include: how Jewish ethics clash with military power, how Jewish creativity is galvanized and transformed by its majority status, and how Judaism might dictate the public space. These discoveries are the true birthright of all Jews throughout the world.

Critique can also be right-wing.

Too often we find ourselves pointing out Israel's imperfections from a distinctly left-wing, liberal perspective. In so doing, we once again risk reducing Israel education to another form of mono-dimensionality, and creating yet another misrepresentation of the many realities on the ground. We must not forget that most Israelis are not involved in peace work, that coexistence projects though blessed are by no means a majority or even a consensus pursuit. Engaging with the complexity of Israel means giving room for all views and not only those that we feel might resonate with our students' (and our) liberal consciences.

Wrestling is good, but so is hugging.

Marion Gribetz writes of involving communal discourse, arts, and experimentation to incul-

Robbie Gringras is the artist-in-residence for Makom Israel Engagement Network, www.makomisrael.net. Robbie is a British-born Israeli playwright, performer, and educator.

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cate a “sophisticated and articulated love” of Israel. As Gribetz knows, this is a sophisticated idea! The pedagogy of critique is so rich and demanding that we often find ourselves focusing too little on how “love” might fit into this approach. Just as we do not halt the wedding even though we haven’t eliminated world poverty, so while marking Israel’s faults and

shortcomings we still must find ways to celebrate that we are no longer stateless. We need to find answers to Yom Ha’atzmaut, for example: How might we celebrate Israel while still holding on to a nuanced, high-resolution perspective of statehood? Where can we find room for celebration without “leaving our brains at the door”? 

Discussion Guide

Bringing together myriad voices and experiences provides Sh'ma readers with an opportunity in a few very full pages to explore a topic of Jewish interest from a variety of perspectives. To facilitate a fuller discussion of these ideas, we offer the following questions:

1. How is your identity as an American Jew tied to the State of Israel?
2. Can a reimagining of the teaching of Israel recreate a new Zionism for the 21st century?
3. Why have many millions of dollars been spent to send young Jews to Israel? Does a trip to Israel definitively instill something in a young Jew's soul?

Upcoming in Sh'ma

NeoConservatism
& the Jews

Israel through the Eyes
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Sh'ma—a journal that invites a plurality of voices to thoughtfully engage matters critical to contemporary Judaism.

Our Vision

Each month, *Sh'ma* creates a “conversation-in-print” — that is, 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 — 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

Who are *Sh'ma* Readers?

“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, Fellow at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem.

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AMERICAN FRIENDS OF MAGEN DAVID ADOM OPENING NEW SDEROT MDA STATION IN MARCH



Architectural rendering of the new Sderot MDA Station

While rockets continue to pound Sderot and the western Negev every day, American Friends of Magen David Adom has kept faith with the people of Sderot by building a new, reinforced 2,500 sq. foot state-of-the-art MDA Emergency Medical Station. AFMDA will dedicate this facility in March 2008.

This new Station will house standard and Mobile Intensive Care Unit (MICU) ambulances as well as the staff and volunteers who serve the 25,000 people of Sderot and the entire western Negev Region.

Less than a mile from the Gaza Strip, Sderot has endured seven years of Qassam rocket attacks. Magen David Adom is a vital and essential part of the city, responding to every incident to treat the wounded and bring injured and ill patients to Barzilai Hospital, 13 miles to the north.

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The current MDA Station in Sderot is a single level structure built in the 1950s. It is outdated and in such poor condition that the municipality has declared it a hazard.



New Sderot Station is nearing completion

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HOT IS THE NEW COOL

Jay Michaelson

A few months ago, in these delightfully uncool pages, I did my best to eulogize Jewish hipster cool: the kitsch of wide-collared bar mitzvah photos, the frisson of gefilte fish sushi – all that heebilicious, ironic, omigod-yesh Jewish cultural production. Its moment passed because all cool things decay and die, and because lame Jewish organizations learned how to ape its forms in order to better proselytize to wandering, “unaffiliated” young Jews.

That doesn’t mean, obviously, that there are no cool Jews anymore. But most of the cool Jews I know have turned to the very opposites of ironic/kitsch cool: to sincerity, spirituality, and adventure. Hot is the new cool.

The forms vary widely. Spiritual cool may be found in independent prayer groups that feature goddess imagery, or Chabad Hasidism, or long Buddhist meditation retreats. Social justice may take the form of eco-kosher intentional communities, or hard-nosed political activism, or “divrei tikkun” instead of divrei Torah at services. And culturally, it may be fun poetry slams and music performances, or Jewish poems read at a funeral. Best of all, since my generation is repelled as much by 1960s/1970s narcissism (my feelings, my journey, my truth) as by 1950s/1980s materialism, there’s a refreshing lack of indulgence. It’s seriously cool because it’s serious.

As I run through my mental rolodex of the founders of the New Jewish Culture’s leading institutions, I can think of only one or two who don’t have some kind of intense spiritual or ethical commitment in their lives. Not religious, necessarily, and also not necessarily in a touchy-feely, naked-in-the-woods/mikva/bonfire kind of way. But in some form or fashion, they are pushing the boundaries of personal experience.

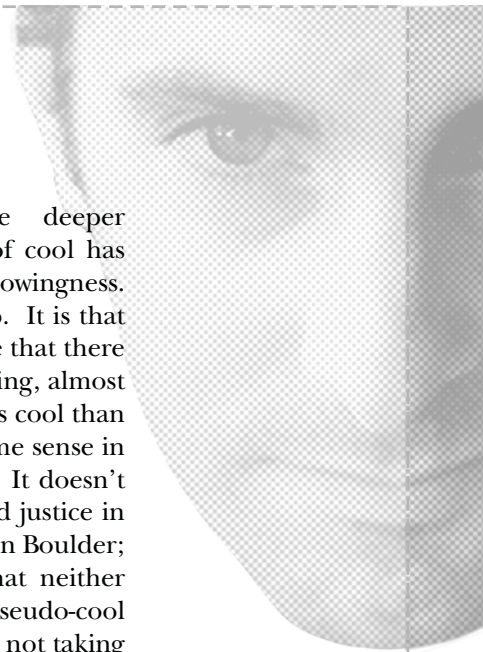
I think this is because if one is interested in being a “cool Jew,” i.e., someone for whom Jewishness is an important, rather than incidental, part of one’s sense of self, then Jewishness has to speak to the fundamental stuff. If you like Jewish art but when the chips are down you turn to non-Jewish sources for support, is Judaism/Jewishness the foundation, or the window-dressing? Sure, Jewish cool can be merely an aesthetic hobby, and there’s nothing wrong with that, but for the cultural creative, culture is more than just style.

It’s also because of the deeper significance of cool. The power of cool has always been its truthfulness, its knowingness. Cool is real; it’s authentic; it’s deep. It is that magic, the mojo, the ineffable sense that there is life percolating deep inside, brewing, almost boiling. Although seemingly far less cool than Williamsburg hipsters, I get that same sense in today’s fringe Jewish communities. It doesn’t matter if they’re organizing for food justice in Boston or parsing Integral Judaism in Boulder; they’re alive, dammit, in a way that neither sleepy mainstream mega-shuls nor pseudo-cool urban mating grounds are. They’re not taking anything for granted – religion or gender or class or the social conventions that pass for “identity.” They’re mixing and matching; their lives are a perpetual iPod of new playlists and juxtapositions. And in the same way that Jewish hipster cool was new and surprising eight years ago, I find I am constantly surprised by the new, postmodern mixes of identity and growth and vitality that I encounter among these disparate and different communities.

Like the original hipster cool, this Jewish neo-Romanticism is a boutique, not a mass-market phenomenon. But here’s a hypothesis: because religion is optional, Judaism’s future is boutique. Religion isn’t not like McDonald’s (you have to eat) or Wal-Mart (you have to shop), and so we’re seeing is the emergence of multiple, different, and contradictory forms of voluntary Judaism, created by people who actually want to do it.

That, in a way, is scary; there are venerable institutions, doing important work, which depend on the old forms of affiliation and support. But it is also, I think, pretty cool: that, as Greil Marcus said of punk rock, this is actually happening. It’s for real. Admittedly, this “cool” is less about the right clothes to wear than the nakedness underneath. But really, which is cooler: how you get dressed, or how you get undressed? What makes you chuckle, or what makes you shout? How you talk, or how you love?

I don’t know about you, but I know which “cool” I’d rather have in bed with me at night. Or on the bimah. Or both.



JAY MICHAELSON’S new book of poetry, *Another Word for Sky*, was published this fall by Lethe Press. His most recent retreat, the Nehirim Queer Shabbaton, sold out the JCC in Manhattan with over 150 attendees. See www.metatronics.net for more information.

Sigi Ziering Ethics

This year our Sigi Ziering column will focus on the ethics of silence. Each month an esteemed guest columnist will wrestle with questions concerning silence and its impact on Jewish life and the world around us. The 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 of columns with responses.

Naomi Graetz has been teaching English at Ben Gurion University of the Negev since 1974. She is the author most recently of *Unlocking the Garden: A Feminist Jewish Look at the Bible, Midrash and God*.

Silence is Deadly

Naomi Graetz

After much soul-searching and polling among my friends, I came up with a title for my book on wife beating: *Silence is Deadly*. The victim has no place to turn if the topic is not discussed. A woman is truly victimized if she thinks she is the only one in the world who is being beaten by her husband.

Every now and then there are headlines, a period of time or event dedicated to eradicating violence against women. But what is not mentioned is how dangerous the message is, that women's voices should not be heard, and that women can be silenced with violence.

The evidence that Jewish wife beating exists is strong. The estimated minimum figure is 100,000 battered women in Israel (with 40,000 hospitalized); the maximum number is 200,000 (which includes the Arab population). There are between 150 to thousands of *agunot* — it depends on whom you ask, the rabbinical court or the activists.

Where does the attitude come from that physical and mental abuse against women is acceptable? Does it start at home, in school? Is it supported by the rabbinate? What gives some men the right to think that silencing women is permissible? Is it because, as our sages say, a woman would prefer any marriage to not being married at all?

Some religious leaders choose to ignore the distress of battered women; family stability and obedience to rabbinic law trumps the suffering of the individual. These sages are silencing women's voices. In Israel, jurisdiction in matters of personal status is given to the Orthodox rabbinical courts, which means that all

matters of marriage and divorce are adjudicated according to the interpretations of Jewish law. Although ample precedents exist for interpreting halakhah in a way that might favor women, rabbis who sit in today's rabbinical courts have no such incentives.

The Quebec Court recently upheld the right of an *agunah* to attain a *get*. The judge wrote that the husband's refusal "represented an unjustified...impairment on [her] ability to live her life in accordance with this country's values and her Jewish beliefs." A judgment like this can serve as a countermodel to society's apathy. The Israeli judicial system could learn from their Canadian counterparts.

Recently, there have been some changes in Israel — safe houses and shelters for Orthodox and Haredi women in Jerusalem, and some rabbis who don't automatically side with the husband. I hope this change is a result of a new *weltanschauung*, new coalitions against the rampant abuse by the Israeli rabbinate, and less acceptance of the silence of those who sweep abuse under the carpet. What ethical questions are raised by this silence?

We still have much to do: demand prenuptial agreements; learn our rights; ask hard questions; and demand legislation to dismantle the rabbinate's monopoly on divorce. Outside Israel, the Jewish community should support human rights organizations that are part of the international coalition for *agunot* and trafficked women. This might change the face of Israeli society and return to us our voices.

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