ISRAELI IDENTITY: THE JEWISH COMPONENT

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Our essay addresses a troublesome question first alluded to in a book Choosing Survival coauthored by one of us.[1] Every survey of Israeli Jews suggests that the overwhelming majority observe many Jewish rituals. In addition Israeli Jews report that Judaism and the Jewish people are important to them. Yet, anecdotal evidence suggests that many Diaspora Jewish leaders think that Jewishness is of little importance in the lives of Israelis. Their impressions would seem to be confirmed by its secondary role in Israeli culture. That portion of the population who define themselves as religious (between 20 and 25 percent of the Jewish population) and live their lives in accordance with its ritual demands, and the media which caters expressly to them are obvious exceptions. This essay is devoted to documenting the extent of religious observance and the strength of Jewish identity among the "non-religious", the absence of a significant Jewish dimension in Israeli culture and how one explains this apparent paradox.

Attitudes Toward Jewishness and Observance of Jewish Practices

Positive attitudes toward Jewishness and the observance of Jewish (religious) practices are not the same thing. Among the pioneer settlers who came to Palestine in the first decades of this last century there was, generally speaking, a positive attitude toward Jewish ethnicity, i.e. membership in the Jewish people and concern for Jews throughout the world, a nostalgia for many traditional Jewish practices but a principled objection to "religion" and hence to many Jewish rituals. The solution of these settlers was to transform and transvalue many traditional rituals and ceremonials imposing a Zionist-socialist ethos upon them. Nevertheless, all but the most ideologically oriented settlers retained positive sentiments toward the religious

tradition. There was probably more observance of "religious" rituals than many scholars acknowledge. In an interesting letter from Chaim Weizmann to the American Jewish leader Louis Marshall in 1924, Weizmann, as an afterthought, perhaps to reassure Marshall that the *yishuv* (the modern Jewish settlement in Palestine), was not totally atheistic, notes the following:

> The picture of Jaffe on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur was divine. I was told that 17,000 of the 27,000 thousand Tel Aviv residents went to synagogue. The large synagogue of Tel Aviv (there are three such synagogues) was filled all day and every day. I saw this myself. Halutzim from all over Eretz Israel, came to the cities to pray, just as in the past, and at the end of Yom Kippur, after the fast, the joy, the Hebrew songs were like a hymn rising to the God of Israel as a thanks for the great privilege.[2]

This is surely an exaggerated picture. It is unlikely that 17,000 people could have found a place to worship in Tel Aviv even if private places of worship were established for the holidays. We must also recall, that a good portion of the yishuv (the modern Jewish settlement in Palestine) were not pioneer settlers but petty bourgeois. But the letter also points to an atmosphere that may be as close to the truth as the opposite image -- the settlers as atheists in rebellion against established religion. As a recent essay on the subject of Jewish art among the early Zionist settlers notes, "apparently, when immigrating to Palestine, Zionists did not cut their ties with the Jewish religious tradition in the diaspora."[3]

Zionism was an effort to renew Judaism and the Jewish people, and in this respect to introduce radical changes, but it was also a return to the past. Hence, as Canaani notes,[4] the attitude to tradition and many traditional concepts, the notion of redemption in particular, were endorsed by the settlers. A few like A.D.Gordon and Shlomo Schiller, affirmed traditional religion but they were the exception. Berl Katznelson, the preeminent labor leader and in many respects of equal status with Ben

Gurion loved the Jewish tradition, ate only kosher meat, respected rabbis, liked to study a page of Talmud from time to time, and favored using the language of religion.[5] Those not caught up in the web of nostalgia, even those who remained militantly anti-religious, nevertheless, affirmed their Jewishness in other ways; if by no other way than in the consciousness of antisemitism.[6] On the whole, as Anita Shapira points out, the generation of pioneer settlers, influenced by the culture in which they were raised but attracted by western culture, sought to build a new value system based on national rather than religious elements. As we noted, they developed a panoply of rituals and ceremonials whose symbols, however, were drawn primarily from the Jewish religion adjusted to fit the Zionist Socialist credo.[7] Even if this had had little effect on the degree to which the new settlers practiced religious ritual it did meant that the dominant discourse, the language in which all matters including Judaism and Jewishness was described and discussed, was a secular discourse.

Yaacov, I'm not sure I understood what you meant in your note. Is this it? If so, it strikes me as unnecessary.

The decline of the Labor movement ethos, the decline of Zionist socialism as an overarching cultural value in the *yishuv*, was accompanied by an atrophying of those ceremonies and rituals which, though they built upon Jewish symbols also came to celebrate an alternative value system. This atrophying was accompanied by a return to more traditional frameworks of observance though, according to Shapira, this framework was bereft of any meaningful belief system.[8] The creation of the state of Israel, however breathed new life into the Jewish tradition as Jewish symbols were now adapted to serve national identity and loyalty. Israel's civil religion was built upon traditional Jewish symbols. It still is. The problem is that the civil religion itself no longer evokes the allegiance and the emotion which it once did.

Over and beyond the presence of Jewish symbols and transformed rituals in the national celebrations, there was probably more observance of religious ritual at the private level than scholars have credited. This was certainly true of *mizahim,* new immigrants from Arab speaking countries, but of many *ashkenazim*, especially the displaced persons from eastern Europe who arrived in Israel following the establishment of the State. Just as recent studies, described below, surprised many Israeli observers by the ubiquity of traditional Jewish practices and the strength expressed concerning Jewish affiliation, so it is possible that in the pre 1967 period for which there are hardly any survey studies, observers may have been mislead about the level of religious observance due to the ignorance, indifference, and even hostility of the cultural and intellectual elite to religious traditions. The Six Day War of 1967 War and the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and the events that succeeded them definitely strengthened Israeli Jewish identity. A discussion of the purported impact of these events takes us beyond the limitations of this paper.[9] We confine ourselves, therefore, to more recent surveys of the Jewish identity of Israelis and the analyses of these surveys.[10] Many of the studies rely heavily on Simon Herman but they were all conducted subsequent to his own summary study of Jewish identity.[11] Almost all were conducted in the late eighties and nineties, all before the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2,000.

All the studies, yield, more or less, the same conclusions. We divide them into four major finding. First, although there are significant differences between groups of Israeli Jews in terms of both their Israeli identity and their Jewish identity the two identities, Israeli and Jewish are related except in the case of the ultra-Orthodox (*haredim*). Jewish identity was measured by questions such as ties to the Jewish people, how proud one was to be Jewish or wishing that if one were to be born again

one would be born Jewish. Israeli identity was defined by measures such as the wish if one were reborn to be reborn again as an Israeli, and how certain one was that one would continue living in Israel. Auron found that the attitudes of the non-religious toward the Jewish people and the self image of the non-religious as part of the Jewish people is much less meaningful to them than other identity components such as their attitudes toward the State of Israel or to the land of Israel. Stephen Sharot, on the other hand, in his review of identity studies conducted through the mid nineties concluded that the extent to which Israelis distinguish their Israeliness from their Jewishness is not always clear. This may well be true for the majority of Israelis. We shall have a great deal more to say on this subject in the section which follows.

The correlation between the strength of the Israeli and Jewish identities suggests the second major finding. Respondents who define themselves as religious have stronger Jewish and Israeli identities than respondents who define themselves as traditional and these in turn have stronger Jewish and Israeli identities than those who define themselves as secular. But, it seems to us that the category of "religious" or Orthodox is far clearer both objectively and to the respondent him/herself than are the terms traditional" or "secular". In many respects the term secular is the least clear. In the as yet unpublished study by Kopelowitz and Franco that surveyed a group of secular college students at a small Israeli college, many not only reported some observance of Jewish ritual (a quarter are careful to eat only kosher outside their homes) but testified to the depths of their own religious beliefs.

The third and perhaps most important finding is that whereas secular Jews have the weakest identity both as Israelis and as Jews, the vast majority of them do observe at least some traditional Jewish practices, do see themselves as part of the Jewish people, and do feel loyalty to the State of Israel. Ninety percent of the secular college

students in the Kopelowitz and Franco study reported that they were proud to be Jewish. Seventy nine percent of the non-religious respondents in the Auron study reported that being Jewish played a very important or a very very important role in their lives. In the broadest set of studies of Israeli Jewish attitudes toward religious practice and religious beliefs, studies conducted by the Guttman Institute, a majority of non-religious reported that they would like their children to be more observant than they themselves. The overwhelming majority felt some attachment to the Jewish tradition; celebrated at least some Jewish holidays, and some customs and rituals. Even among the Russian immigrants who arrived in the last decade from the former Soviet Union, immigrants who continue to define their Jewishness in ethnic rather than religious terms, there is evidence of adaptation to the Israeli pattern of Jewishness. Twenty two percent report they are more religious today than in the past, only nine percent report they are less religious, and seventy six percent want their children to observe the tradition in one form or another. There are exceptions. Among young Israelis Jews who identify themselves as secular a minority express negative attitudes toward religion and the Jewish tradition and alienation from Diaspora Jews. But such feelings have declined since the Six Day War. Auron points out that the war marks the beginning of a crises of Israeli identity.[12]

The fourth major finding is that there are few differences by age or gender but marked differences by ethnicity, i.e. country of origin. *Mizrahim*, those born in Arab speaking or predominantly Moslem countries, or those whose fathers came from such countries have stronger Jewish and Israeli identities than *ashkenazim,* those born in European or North American countries or those whose fathers were born in these countries. According to the latest (2000) Guttman Report, the most comprehensive survey of Israeli attitudes toward Judaism and Jewishness, 50 percent of the *mizrahim*

define themselves as traditional and 9 percent as non-religious or anti-religious. Comparable figures for *ashkenazim* are 19 percent traditional and 34 percent non-religious or anti-religious.[13]

When we try to get behind these identities and ask what they really mean to the respondents themselves, the survey data is less helpful and the authors of these studies less confident. Yair Auron, whose studies of students in teachers' seminaries is most instructive, feels that for his secular respondents, the Holocaust is the central element in their Jewish identity. Attitudes toward the Jewish people, he says, are mediated by way of the Holocaust and the tie to the Jewish people is a tie to a dead people. His analysis recalls that of Amos Elon who, in the 1970's stressed the importance of suffering and victimhood in the Jewish identity of Israelis.[14] Laura Zarembski describes this crisis in terms of a lost sense of defining characteristics – what it means to be an Israeli. She contrasts the insecurity of the secular community to the self-confidence of the religious community.[15] What this suggests to us is that the root of the problem does not lie in the dissociation from religion or from tradition but a loss of belief, by significant numbers of secular Israelis, in secular Zionism – an ideology that until now had nourished their sense of identity with Judaism and the Jewish people. Yet, this crisis to the contrary notwithstanding, the majority of Israelis continue to report high levels of traditional behavior and strong ties to the Jewish people.

Judaism and Jewishness in Israeli Culture

In this section we are interested in tracing the attitudes of the cultural elites, those who dictate the dominant symbols of Israeli society, expressed through the agencies that reflect their attitudes. As we shall see, there is a substantial difference

between our understanding of the dominant culture and our understanding of the behavior of the majority of Israeli Jews.

The key to appreciating the attitude of Israeli culture to Judaism and Jewishness rests on the weakening and gradual replacement of the Zionist meta-narrative with what we term the universalistic-humanist narrative.[16] By the Zionist meta-narrative we refer to the conception of how Zionism and the state of Israel came to be established. We use the term meta-narrative because there is no formal text which expresses this narrative. But the various stories about this or that national hero, this or that event or series of events, all conform to a common set of basic values and all fit into a common pattern of historical events which we call the meta-narrative. If a history of the Jewish people, of Zionism and of the State of Israel was written sometime in the 1950's or 1960's for young children, that history would probably reflect the meta-narrative. The loss of confidence or belief in the Zionist meta-narrative and its replacement by a humanist-universalist narrative during the eighties and the nineties of the last century was accompanied by the growing dissociation between "Israeli" and "Jew".

The Zionist meta-narrative served the ethno-national Hebrew culture as a kind of substitute for traditional Judaism. Traditional Judaism, the religion of the past was conceived as suitable only for the "exile". It was conceived of as old and degenerative. The Zionist meta-narrative constructed an image of the "new Jew" and represented him/her as embodying an authentic national-Jewish identity centered around the independent existence of a Hebrew speaking society in the Land of Israel.. But this defacto transformation of Judaism and Jewishness, in which the authentic Jew now became the pioneer settler, allowed the Israeli Jew to identify Iosraeliness with Judaism-Jewishness. Many Israeli Jews, including those who did not identify

themselves as "religious", continued to observe some traditional religious rituals even though the dominant Zionist culture was indifferent and sometimes hostile to such observance. But this hostility has been emphasized and even exaggerated by those who have rejected the meta-narative. In the somewhat gross formulation of one prominent Israeli journalist (written as a response to an article, by Admiel Kosman, criticizing the dissociation of Israeli culture from its Jewish sources), "the Zionist enterprise" that produced Israeli culture "by a brutal passage from the culture of the ghetto to the culture of the wider world," "…was nothing if not a challenge to the culture, images and beliefs [that Kosman] describes as 'the Torah of Israel' in either its European or its oriental form."[17] Judaism, according to this conception, is "the greatest barrier" to Jewish integration into the western world. The generation of founders, the Zionist pioneers, he goes on to say, "fought the ghetto culture i.e. the religion of Judaism from an implicit assumption that their descendents would follow in their footsteps and build a secular Jewish state". This statement, as we suggested, is an oversimplification of the past but is a fine example of what has happened with the dissolution of the Zionist meta-narrative.

The first and second generation of native born Israelis, whose Israeli identity was constructed under the inspiration of the Zionist meta-narrative, resolved the paradox of being a secular Jew by redefining Judaism in Israeli Zionist terms. The retention of traditional ritual, more powerful we suggest than the literature acknowledges, was done despite the Zionist culture and was therefore, as we shall elaborate below, culturally trivial. But the Zionist meta-narrative provided a coherent system of holidays, rituals, symbols, myths, values and beliefs that were interpreted as Jewish without the stain of the Diaspora. The Zionist meta-narrative identified Israeliness (Zionism) and Jewishness. To be an Israeli was to be a Jew.

The significant change has been the dramatic weakening of the Zionist meta-narrative and the discourse surrounding it. This process began with the Yom Kippur war when those basic beliefs upon which the Zionist narrative was built now began to be questioned. Historical, social and cultural "truths" that were heretofore unquestioned were now challenged. The "shattering of myths" that became a national pastime in the late eighties and early nineties was but a symptom of the broader collapse of the Zionist meta-narrative.[18]

Without the Zionist meta-narrative Israeli Jews remain without an unmediated tie to Judaism and Jewishness and without a narrative that will help formulate their Israeli identity. Judaism and Jewishness as a construct of Israeli Zionism has ceased to exist and the dominant narratives which have replaced them – at least insofar as one can identify them at this stage of the development of a collective Israeli identity – have abandoned the effort to construct a Jewish-Israeli identity. At the cultural level with which we are dealing, the dissociation of Judaism and Israeliness leaves Judaism as the property of the Orthodox and the rabbinical establishment. This condition, it should be noted, is quite satisfactory to the Orthodox and rabbinical establishment. They now have a monopoly on the definition of Jewishness and since the realm of secular culture is void of Jewish content it is far less threatening.

The manner in which Israel's major newspapers treat the Jewish component in the Israeli national identity illustrates our contention.[19] With the Six Day and Yom Kippur Wars we reach the apogee of a process in which, under the influence of the Zionist narrative, the press portrayed Judaism and Jewishness as an integral component of Israel's ethno-national identity. The soldiers of the IDF were pictured as the ultimate heroes of the Israeli collective and as the model of authentic Jews. It is not too far fetched to say that they were portrayed as the ultimate *religious* Jews. The

soldiers, dressed in "the prayer shawls *[tallitot*] of khaki"[20] took part in the fulfillment of the Jewish-Zionist and universal vision of redemption. Granted, these soldiers were far from representing the classical notions of Judaism, but they were, in the minds of cultural elite, representatives of authentic Judaism and its guardians.

As we suggested, this meta-narrative gradually lost is hold in the seventies and eighties of the last century. It was replaced, certainly in the press, by a post-national narrative, built around the values of universalism and humanism. In the framework of this narrative both the Jewish-religious identity and the Israeli-Zionist ethno-national identity (with its accompanying Jewish component) were perceived as anachronistic identities that only served to isolate Israelis from the rest of the world. The Zionist meta-narrative was viewed as a threat to both individual and collective self-realization and as an obstacle to peace. The new narrative, which emphasized the motif of peace and the consequences of peace contained messianic and eschatological elements and some interpreted this too as a reinterpretation of Jewish messianism. There were even those who, under the cry for a "return to the Jewish book shelf" sought a new interpretation of Judaism in which the values of universalism and humanism became the major values of the Jewish tradition. But these voices were a minority among the cacaphony of voices which emphasized the tie between Judaism-Jewishness, religion and the Orthodox establishment. These were now portrayed as the obstacles to truth and peace. Judaism (or Orthodoxy) became a symbol of extremism, violence and ultra-nationalism. In their private lives Jews continued to observe some Jewish ritual (folk practice might be a better term), and in their minds and hearts continued to harbor feelings of association with Jewishness and the Jewish people, but the public culture provided neither a language or symbol system for its expression.

The consequence of all this was the bifurcation of Judaism-Jewishness and Israeliness. Israel is still, whether the cultural elite likes it or not, a Jewish state and Judaism-Jewishness continues to play a role in its public culture – in the media, in art, in music in literature. But at the risk of oversimplification we think it fair to generalize and say that in the eyes of the cultural elite and the agents of cultural transmission, Judaism-Jewishness is now distinct from "real" Israeli culture and while it has an assigned place in the cultural agenda, it is not to be confused with "real" culture. For example, in both Israeli cinema and television, the Jewish tradition does not appear as a natural, daily, "normal" element in the life of the Israeli protagonist. We can compare this with the manner in which daily life is portrayed in the American media. The Simpson family is a good example. Church attendance on Sunday is a regular part of the family schedule. The Simpson's are not a religious family. Homer can't stand church attendance. He presents a constant challenge to the pastor whenever the pastor extends his sermon. The pastor in turn represents corruption and religious close mindedness. The religious character in the show, Ned Flanders, is grotesque and negative. In other words, the show hardly caters to organized religion. But this is our point. Religion is part of the American scene whether one likes it or not. Homer, the average American, does go to church. There is no counterpart in Israeli television serials. Despite the fact that the surveys to which we refer above (the Guttman surveys are outstanding in this respect), all note that a Jewish-ritualistic element plays some role or other among the vast majority of Israeli Jews, it has little place in the behavior of those portrayed on Israeli television screens or the Israeli cinema. The notable exception is the portrayal of the older generation of *mizrachi* Jews. Scenes that depict *mizrahim* are likely to express some form of religious traditionalism. Some will wear skull caps (kippot), the family might sit around the

Sabbath table and hear the patriarch invoke traditional blessings, and one even finds scenes depicting a visit to the synagogue. But these scenes are played out by the older parental generation. The media makes clear that the protagonists are uncomfortable in such settings that they find inappropriate, and unsuitable. Their participation in religious ritual might be done out of love and/or pity for their parents or in recognition of the gulf that separates them.

We are not arguing that Jews, Judaism and even religion are ignored. They have their place in both television and the cinema, indeed in literature as well, but they are representative of the "religious other". Of "them" and not "us". In the nineties, when the dichotomy "religious-secular" became so critical in the construction of the Israeli identity, one finds a greater maturity in the handling of the Jewish-Judaic element. But Judaism-Jewishness continue to be identified as "religious" and generally represented by a stereotypical character.

The manner in which the director of the movie Avanti Popolo treats the tension between Israeliness and Jewishness provides a good example. The movie takes place in the last moments of the Six Day war and the heroes are Israeli and Egyptian soldiers. In fact, however, the movie's underlying theme is the conflict between Israelis and Jews.

"the Israelis in the film are represented by the Israeli soldiers (…) and the Jews are represented by the two Egyptian soldiers. At the climax of the film, one of the Egyptian soldiers, who is a theater actor by profession, recites Shylock's well known monologue from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (…).[21] In other words, when an Israeli production does contain a Jewish element, it is expressed by Arabs, the ultimate "other" in Israeli-Jewish identity.

The television series "The Bourgeois" provides a nice illustration of the manner in which Israeli culture distinguishes Israeliness from Jewishness. The series pretends to deal in an extremely realistic way with the lives of the Israeli middle class. In one of the chapters, one of the protagonists'neighbors plans to open a synagogue in the building in which they lived. The matter reached crises proportions. The series hero militantly opposed turning the neighbor's apartment into a synagogue. His stance was one of "us or them". The protagonists in the series are ostensibly the most average Israelis one can find, and for them the establishment of a synagogue brought about an identity crises. It sharpened the point that, in the minds of the writers of the series, the average Israeli doesn't even come near a synagogue. The relationships between the hero and the "religious" who seek to establish the synagogue is carried out via the brother who became a religious penitent (*hozer b'thshuvah*) and who represents the irresolvable tension between the world of the "bourgeois" (i.e. the world of Israelis) and the world of the "religious" (i.e. the world of Jews).

The attitude of Israeli culture to the notion of penitence or becoming a born again Jew (*hazara b'tshuvah)* is another illustration of our point. Dan Urian, for example, found that during the eighties Israeli television portrayed *hazara b'tshuvah* in a positive light, but the description of the penitent was that of a secular, anti-religious, leftist, drug addicted suicidal criminal. Such persons turned into righteous, family living, quiet positive people. However, during the nineties, television adopted the stance of the Israeli theater. *Hazara b'tshuvah* was now depicted as a questionable and grotesque act based on a culture of lying whose outcome, for example undermines the family and destroys the world of the individual as well as the world of the Israeli collective.[22]

We see in the treatment of *hazara b'tshuvah* by the cultural elite (or the disseminators of Israeli culture), a representative case, exemplifying the attitude toward the Jewish components in Israeli identity. The notion that lies at the heart of this treatment is the binary distinction, as we have argued, between Israeli culture and Jewish culture, and *hazara b'tshuvah* becomes a ritual act of crossing lines and abandoning one camp, the camp of "us", the Israelis, for another camp, the camp of the "other", the camp of the "religious" which is identical with the camp of Jews and Judaism. Israeliness and Jewishness become mutually exclusive categories and their integration becomes impossible, undesirable and unnatural. Any in-between category such as traditional rather than religious Judaism is presented, in the best case, as an anomalous identity that will inevitably dissolve in a process of identifying with one side or another. In the worst case, it is hypocritical and disloyal.

In this regard, the ecample of Uri Zohar (the prominent actor who became a *hozer* b'tshuvah) has become a foundation myth among the cultural elite. A great deal of attention is paid to the manner in which Zohar's *hazara b'tshuvah* serves the ultra-Orthodox *haredi* community as a myth and symbol to attract more penitents. Zohar himself plays an active role in the confirmation and continual reconstruction of this myth and has placed himself at the service of those who would mobilize him for political purposes .We are not arguing that the manner in which Zohar, the individual, is perceived by the cultural elite does any injustice to the truth of the particular case. What we are saying is that by focusing on Zohar as the paradigm for the Israeli-Jewish dichotomy the truth becomes twisted and only serves the purpose of *haredim on the one hand* and the cultural elite. In their eyes Zohar's *hazara b'tshuvah* means that he is "lost" to the world of Israeli culture and further demonstrates of the notion that one must choose between "us" and "them" – Israeliness or Judaism-Jewishness.

Zohar's *hazara b'tshuvah* provides the ostensibly perfect model of the choices that an Israeli faces. Either you are an Israeli or a religious Jew. There is no melding of the two identities. Either you are not really religious, just pretending to be so, or you cannot be a true artist or intellectual because your Judaism is a permanent obstacle. The fact is that one could point to contrary examples where the artist has successfully melded the two identities. Not surprisingly, this is especially true of artists from a *mizrahi background.* The case of the musician Ehud Banai is instructive. Banai has gradually turned to greater religious observance, and has reached the point where he openly adopted a traditional life style. Nevertheless, he did not cross any red lines but continued to conduct one of the most successful musical careers in Israel in tandem with his growing affirmation of tradition. The manner in which the Israeli media treated this illustrates its difficulty in accepting the combination of Jewishness and rock. Banai was asked again and again if he was a *hozer b'tshuvah* and "are we losing you"? Banai, in turn, adopted an apologetic stance. He presented his increased traditionalism as a personal matter, of a return to his Jewish roots that does not require him to cut himself off from Israeli music or western rock. He reassures his listeners that they are not losing him.

The treatment of the Jewish holidays is an example of the changing manner in which the media treat the Jewish component in Israeli identity. A glance at the newspapers of the fifties, sixties and seventies reveals that the holiday issues of the papers are just that. In addition to their coverage of the news they concerned themselves with the traditional aspects of the holiday as these aspects were transmitted via the Zionist prism. This was also true of the Friday (i.e. the Friday-Shabbat) issues. This accent on the traditional nature of the holidays has declined dramatically in the last few decades. It has almost entirely disappeared from the two

most widely read Israeli dailes. On the contrary, as witnessed by the effort of some dailies to report on the empty shelves of the video stores, or on the bathers on Yom Kippur, it sometimes appears as though the press was presenting the Jewish holidays as non-Jewish.

A similar treatment of the Jewish holidays is found on television. Israeli television made its appearance after the Six Day War and Channel Two only began airing in 1994 when the undermining of the Zionist meta-narrative reached its peak. Except for those programs specifically intended for the religious public, it is difficult to identify the place of Jewish holidays on Israeli televisions channels. The most prominent expression of the holiday spirit, with the exception noted above, is the filming of a Hollywood movie on the festival eve. The most prominent characteristic of the holidays, as reflected in the listings of Israeli public television is familyness. Programs are those that the whole family can enjoy together. In some cases the program decision makers air historical docu-dramas on biblical personalities who might bear some connection to the holiday. These are programs produced in the United States with a Christian perspective. Only rarely does one find television programs relevant to the holiday from a Jewish perspective – then it will usually be a learned round table discussion of the holiday by scholars, rather than some original production. The ninth of Av (*Tisha B'Av*) lends itself to this kind of treatment. This is not true of the national holidays, specifically Holcaust Memorial Day and Independence Day. On those occasions, the television channels devote themselves entirely to the significance of the holidays.

Channel One, the first public channel, the channel with no commercial advertising, has an independent department, alongside the news sports and leisure departments, whose function it is to deal with the "tradition". Its listings, which are

best described as "ghetto programming" are the dumping ground for everything that might be defined as Jewish-traditional and the programs of this department are generally assigned the most problematic time slots.

The way in which Channel One airs the reading of the *megillah* on Purim is an example of the concession, which Israeli culture offers to Judaism. The public channel feels obligated, or is obligated by its charter, to provide some coverage of the most traditional holidays. Coverage of Purim should be easy because its carnival like nature offers the least tension between secular and religious values. But Purim does have its strictly religious moments and the reading of the megillah is the most important of them. Channel One positions television cameras in some Orthodox synagogue, and covers the event in the most formal manner possible as if it were saying "we are obliged to handle this topic, we have no idea how to do it, so we turn the production over to those to whom it belongs, i.e. the religious."

Friday radio broadcasts also reflect the absence of Judaism from the cultural life which the media reports. The public radio stations interrupt the weekday routine and provide special programs that deal with leisure time activity. The nature of the leisure time activity is neutralized of any Jewish content. On weekends one goes to a show or a movie, or a hike, one reads a book or listens to music or cooks – nothing that is specifically Jewish. Indeed, nowadays, the press preceded the radio stations in this regard, is to provide astrological predictions for the coming week.

A similar segregation between what is thought of as Jewish or religious and what is considered real culture is reflected in the guides to leisure time activity in the Israeli press. Ahbar Hair, which advertises itself as "the Bible of leisure", is a good example. Judaism, Jewish culture, and events of a Jewishly traditional nature have no place in this catalogue of leisure. Jewish matters are not ignored because of a

distinction between highbrow and popular culture. The guide covers events of both high culture and popular culture. The picture that emerges from the guide is that Jewish events are not part of the world of Israeli culture

What we are witnessing in the relationship between Judaism and Israeli culture has an ethnic component as well. As we have seen, there are differences between the attitudes of *ashkenazi* Israelis and *mizrahi* Israelis to the Jewish component of their Israeliness and this too is reflected in Israeli culture. *Ashkenazi* Jews are far more likely to adopt an understanding of Judaism which imposes sharp distinctions between secularism and religiousness and leaves little space for what is best termed religious traditionalism – religious behavior based on custom and family tradition tied to a sense of ethnic or national identity rather than religious behavior which is dictated by authoritative interpretations of sacred text. Jews from Islamic countries have retained a strong measure of traditionalism rather than scripturalism but *mizrahim* are minor voices within the ranks of the cultural elite and many of them have adopted the regnant attitudes of *ashkenazim*.

The field of popular music is a good example. Under the dominant influence of western-*ashkenazi* motifs, Israeli music is identified with pop music of a western style rather than Jewish music (a term now associated with *ashkenazi* cantorial music) or *mizrahi* music. *Mizrahi* music represents an alternative to the dichotomy between Israeli and Jewish music because it reflects a continuing dialogue between ritual texts, modern music, and traditional rhythms. The connection between popular music and tradition which *mizrahi* music represents is double edged. In many *mizrachi* synagogues, popular *mizrachi* music has been incorporated into the Orthodox prayer[23]. This kind of relationship is rarely found in what is known as Israeli music.

Attitudes toward Judaism-Jewishess is more complex in modern Hebrew literature. From its inception, modern Hebrew literature was a key agent in the "revolution of modern Judaism".[24] It was an agent in both identifying and documenting the "ripping" Zionism from the history of persecution and pogroms and in serving as a major agent in the process of national renewal and redemption -- a process generally described as the secularization of Jewish identity. In its capacity of returning the Jews to history, Hebrew literature conceived of itself as under obligation to a cosmopolitan agenda. As described by a sympathetic critic, Benjamin Harshav:

> …The essence of Israeli literature today is not "Jewish" other than in its language and its readers – just as the essence of any other literature is not necessarily national…The framework is "Jewish" but the content is human, or better put, it is "literary". And to the extent that one can speak of literature as representing, in the wider sense of the word, the consciousness of its authors and readers, this cosmopolitan viewpoint also represents then.[25]

Harshav thinks that the opposite is true of Jewish authors writing in other languages. They remain tied to the tradition of a particularistic identity, and "are identified as Jewish authors only if one can find 'Jewish' signs in the style of content of their writings – something which does not obligate the Israeli author."[26]

Nevertheless, it would be an oversimplification to argue that Israeli Hebrew literature, despite it s cosmopolitan orientation, totally ignores traditional Jewish components. Its scope is too broad to allow for such generalizations. Thus, for example, the familial attitude toward the Jewish tradition (even if at its core rests a sense of resistance and dissociation) characterizes large segments of the "canonical" literature of Israel.

This is not the place for a general review of contemporary Israeli Hebrew literature but it is worth noting the retreat to the personal in the last few decades. There are those who see the concentration of the younger generation of Hebrew

writers on the personal and the private (to the point where there is avoidance of narrative writing in the customary sense), a sign of the crises of meaning that has overtaken contemporary Hebrew literature. "One gets the impression that in this artistic revolution of young writers there is nothing new…not so much a withdrawal of an embattled artistic vanguard from some dominant cultural community but a colony of forced exiles trying to create for minimum space for itself in what appears to be a cultural vacuum."[27]

This vacuum, we believe, stems, at least in part, from the decline of meaningful frameworks of collective identity (the decline of the meta-narrative is a key factor here) that had previously existed. It is clear that in the "cultural vacuum" there is no place for Judaism-Jewishness whether in its traditional or in its Zionist, ethno-national formulation.

Conclusions: Explaining the Paradox

Our essay has pointed to two aspects of Judaism and Jewishness. The scholars upon whom we have relied do not always distinguish between them. First is the element of ritual (religious) observance that for the most part involves behavior at the private and familial level. Second, there is the element of Zionist or ethno-national Judaism that for the most part involves behavior at the public level. Zionism may have undermined the observance of Jewish ritual but it provided a public forum for the celebration of a new form of Judaism. What we have noted is that, Zionism to the contrary notwithstanding, some aspects of religious ritual continued to be observed at the private and familial level, even among those who did not define themselves as

religious. With the undermining of the Zionist meta-narrative and the loss of faith in Zionism as a meaning system, the public celebration of ethno-nationalism has dramatically declined but the celebration of private ritual seems to sustain itself, perhaps with a slight decline.

We turn now to an explanation of why despite its widespread observance among the majority of Israeli Jews, Jewishness and Jewish observance in Israeli culture appear as secondary and compartmentalized. We mention a number of factors in brief and devote a more substantial discussion to one factor, which has received little attention. None of these factors are mutually exclusive. In fact, some of them say the same thing in a slightly different voice.

The first explanation is methodological in nature. The absence of Judaism and Jewishness Israeli culture do effect private observance but people don't change their behavior over night. Precisely because ritual behavior and a sense of Jewishness are deeply imbedded in the behavior of the Israeli Jew, he/she carries on with this behavior and the same attitudes even though the underlying basis is atrophying.

Second, it is possible that whereas attitudes toward Judaism and the practice of Jewish religious observance have declined dramatically, respondents are reluctant to admit that changes have taken place in their own lives; that they no longer observe as much or care as much as they once did. It might take a few decades or another generation before the changes, which our analysis of Israeli culture suggests, finds expression in survey data. We cannot dismiss the opposite possibility. In light of the absence of Jewishness and Judaism and even the negative attitudes toward Judaism and Jewishness by the cultural elite, respondents may report less Jewish practice than is truly the case.

A third explanation has to do with the fact that Jewish identity, i.e. calling oneself a Jew and acting out basic Jewish ritual, is a consequence of an absence of real alternatives. The alternative to being Jewish may be unacceptable to our respondents. Despite the secondary and segmented place of Judaism and Jewishness, Israel remains a Jewish state. This is reflected in a number of ways. The symbols of the state are Jewish, it is the Jewish holidays which are celebrated as national holidays, it is Jewish history, not the history of Palestine, which youngsters learn as their history, it is the Holocaust which continues to serve as the central myth of Israeli society and forms the prism through which the present is understood. Israel is also, as Smooha calls it, an ethno-national state[28] in the sense that public policy favors the Jewish sector of the population. The stark reality of one's Jewishness and the importance of one's Jewishness are reinforced by growing demands by Israeli Arabs for greater benefits and demonstrations of empathy with the Palestinians in the occupied territories. The alternative to being Jewish in Israel, is not the same as it is in the U.S. or many parts of Western Europe. Israeli society, even middle class high tech globalized Israeli society hardly recognizes a neutral or a cosmopolitan or global identity – the real alternative that strikes everyone but a small coterie of intellectuals as the alternative to being an Israeli Jew is to be an Israeli Arab. This is a powerful force in maintaining the Jewish populations' sense of Jewishness in the face of other tendencies that act to trivialize it.

A fourth explanation is that the observer of Israeli society is mislead about the absence of Jewishness because Israeli culture is described and defined by a small group of Israeli Jews who are indeed distanced from and dissociated from Judaism and Jewishness but who represent only the cultural and academic elite. According to one study, the most secular are least aware of how small a percentage they constitute

of the Israeli Jewish population.[29] This would not be the first time that the patrons of Israeli culture, out of enmity to the Jewish tradition have distorted the reality around them. Dalia Manor argues that Israeli artists in the twenties who portrayed Jewish themes were criticized for doing so by the art critics and the work embodying these scenes ignored.[30]

Fifth, the fact that the majority of Israeli Jews report an unanticipated level of traditional practice may be understood, by way of analogy, to other forms personal practices. Respondents, after all are being asked a question about their behavior and beliefs. Whereas they may be responding truthfully, the fact that they are responding to a *question* posed by an outsider may mislead us about the significance to them of what they report.

Related to the previous explanation is our final one, the dissociation of religion and culture that also helps account for the slow decline of religious observance. At the risk of oversimplifying a complex historical picture it is fair to say that until the 19th century most Jews in Eastern Europe and Islamic countries lived within the confines of a religiously traditional culture. That is, the norms and the values and the beliefs, the very rhythms of the society with which they identified themselves and with which they were identified by others was imbued with a Jewish-religious aura in the same way that the society in which the vast majority of Muslims lived was imbued with a Moslem aura. Some (many) Jews, especially in Eastern Europe, strove to enter into the broader culture, a condition made possible by the release of the Jews from many legal constraints and the fact or at least the appearance of the fact that that culture was becoming religiously neutral.

The break out from the confines of a strictly Jewish culture meant the necessity to think through what being Jewish meant. Here we find the seeds for the

representation of Judaism or Jewishness as a religion with a precise set of demands in one area of life but with little or no relevance to another area of life. This is what fundamentalists of all religions (in the case of the Jews we mean the Orthodox, the religious party which emerged out of the dissociation of religion and culture), mightily resisted. That association of religion, culture, Judaism and Jewishness (i.e. religious obligation and ethnic tie), which had been so natural in the pre-modern society, now became an artificial construct. As far as the Orthodox were concerned, this required the reconstruction of a religious Jewish society, which was self-consciously insulated from the larger society. The vast majority of Jews, however, rejected this effort and the Orthodox were left as a distinctly minority party. Some groups of Jews developed alternate ideologies to that of the Orthodox. Even many member of these ideological groups, and certainly the mass of Jews who belonged to none of the ideological camps, persisted in living and in some cases even advocating a pattern of life which recalled though did not replicate the older Jewish tradition. This is what we mean by religious traditionalism. Holidays were observed more or less, synagogues visited, at least on the holiest of days, home rituals recalled but without the punctiliousness or the sense of obligation or even the sense of the divine, which the Orthodox demanded. It is impossible to say whether this stemmed from a desire to preserve custom, nostalgia for the manner in which one was raised, family obligation, as a mode to teach the young about their Jewish roots, or simply because many looked to ritual and holy days to impart a sense of order into their own lives. This was the pattern of life which the first modern settlers brought with them to the land of Israel (though this was to change with subsequent waves of settlement) and this was the pattern of life which the masses of eastern European immigrants brought with them when they arrived in Israel between the end of the War and the first years of

statehood. Zionist ideology, once it shed it socialist overtones, strengthened this pattern of behavior. Although Zionism was a secular movement, it incorporated Jewish symbols in its public celebrations and in most cases left room for observance of private ritual . Nevertheless, in the decades following the establishment of the State, it would appear that the pattern of traditional living slowly declined among the *ashkenazim* because it bore little relationship to the new Israeli culture, a Hebrew speaking western consumerist culture conducted in the Hebrew language. It was not so much challenged by that culture, although as we noted the cultural elite insist that one is either with us or with the religious, as it was rendered irrelevant. The more recent disappearance of Zionism as the culture of Israel further contributed to that process. Only Orthodoxy, what in Israel is called "religion" offered an alternative. In the case of the *haredim*, it offered an alternative culture. In the case of the religious Zionists it offered a partial culture but provided an ideology that made participation in Israeli culture religiously legitimate. In other words, religious Zionism defined Israeli culture in its own terms thereby rendering it compatible with religious observance. But Orthodoxy, whether of the *hared*i variety and even of the religious Zionist variety challenged the traditionalists and their behavior. To the Orthodox, the behavior of the traditionalists was religiously incoherent. The Orthodox made clear to the traditionalists that their pattern of Jewish living was illegitimate. That traditional behavior constituted a watered down version of "authentic Judaism" and no substitute for what Judaism required. Pressed between the temptations of the consumerist culture and the admonitions of the rabbinic elite, some traditionalists joined Orthodoxy. But the greater number, with no ideology to buttress their traditional mode of behavior, no rational justification for continuing the practices of the past,

appear to be abandoning them (albeit slowly), when they appear onerous or bothersome or inappropriate to other cultural patterns.

The pattern among the *mizrahim,* those who come from Islamic countries, is slightly different, perhaps no more than a slower process compared to which took place among *ashkenazim*. But *mizrahim* are different because they not only acquired an Israeli identity; they also acquired, after arriving in Israel, a *mizrahi* identity, a result of their unique experiences in the Israeli context. Behaving in a religiously traditional, albeit non-Orthodox manner was built into *mizrahi* identity, thereby attenuating the process of decline. Iraqi, or Tunisian, or Moroccan Jews did not identify themselves or were they identified by others as Iraqi or Tunisian or Moroccan Jews in their country of origin. They were just Jews. So they retain the notion that their Iraqi, or Tunisian or Moroccan Jewish identity is simply Judaism. Indeed, when they speak of their Jewish identity they may mean their ethnic identity. This, in turn makes their Jewishness more encompassing than their Israeli identity and it is no surprise therefore, that they feel themselves more Jewish than Israeli. Hence, the strengthening of *mizrahi* identity was accompanied by attenuation in the process of decline in traditionalist religious behavior. This is likely to change for two reasons. First, the pressures or temptations of the consumerist culture. Children of *mizrahim*, according to the latest Guttman Report, are even less traditional than their parents than are children of *ashkenazim.* Secondly, traditional mizrahim find themselves under increased pressure from ultra-Orthodox *mizrahim* (Shas) and Rav Mordecai Eliyahu of the religious Zionist camp, who delegitimates traditionalist behavior.

It is instructive to compare what has happened and is happening in Israel with what happened in the other great center of Jewish population, the United States. The masses of Jews who arrived from Eastern Europe at the turn of the last century and

until World War I were also traditionalists in their behavior. A minority was aligned with some ideological camp -- Bundists, Anarchists, etc.—a majority had no particular ideological affiliation. But among all of them, traditional Jewish behavior, transplanted from Eastern Europe and adapted to the exigencies of life in the urban ghettoes of the United States, dictated the rhythms and patterns by which they lived. The ideological parties disintegrated under the impact of American life. But those who continued in their traditionalist patterns of behavior and certainly those who had no previous ideological home could find one in the newly established movement of Conservative Judaism. This took time. The Conservative movement grew slowly and it wasn't until the end of World War II that one can speak of its rapid expansion. But as Marshall Sklare has demonstrated[31], the movement was home to the ethnically sensitive traditional Jew of Eastern European origins almost from it very beginning. Jewish leaders, the rabbis and the elite of the Conservative movement developed an ideology, which need not concern us. What is important is that the Conservative movement deliberately sought to lessen the tensions between the religious demands, which it raised, and the behavior of its adherents. In other words, it welcomed into its synagogues the traditionalist Jew and offered a kind of legitimacy to traditionalist behavior. Actually, the process described here was more often reversed. The traditionalist Jews established synagogues and then sought to employ Conservative rabbis who would conduct their own lives in the manner expected of elite religious figures but who would minimize the demands made upon the traditionalists themselves and would focus their major attention on ethnic issues, combating antisemitism and later in support for Israel, issues with which traditionalists were in full sympathy. The point is that the Conservative movement provided a home that offered an alternative to Orthodoxy. In many cases this was a *de facto* "ethnic" or

"cultural" alternative though it called itself "religious". They were able to reestablish a tie between Jewish culture and religion, albeit a partial culture in the context of the larger American culture. This may have slowed the process of declining traditionalist observance, perhaps it did not, but it did offer the sense in which being Jewish, carrying the label and identity of a Jew, fit into acceptable patterns of American culture. It was impossible for the vast majority of the immigrants and their children to be Orthodox. Indeed, Orthodoxy is a pattern of Jewish life, which was foreign not only to them but even to their parents and grandparents. What Conservative and later Reform Judaism did was to legitimize the Jewish religion in American terms and offer a framework into which the immigrant and his/her descendants could fit their own pattern of Jewish behavior. Effectively speaking there is no such home, no such alternative in Israel. The reasons that this is the case are beyond the purview of this article.

ENDNOTES

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[2] I am grateful to Dr,. Zvi Zameret, director of Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi, for calling my attention to this letter.

[3] Dalia Manor, "The Dancing Jews and Other Characters:Art in the Jewish Steelement in Palestine in the 1920's", Journal of Modern Jewish Studies, 1 (April, 2002), p. 84.

[4] David Canaani, The Second Aliyah and its Attitude Toward Religion and the Tradition (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, in Hebrew, 1976).

[5] Anita Shapira, Berl: The Biography of Socialist Zionist, Berl Katznelson, 1887-1944 (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[6] See, for example, Zeev Tzahor, Ya'akov Hazan – A Biography (Jerusalem; Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi, 1997).

[7] There are many descriptions of this phenomena. See for example, Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, The Civil Religion of Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), Anita Shapira, "Religious Notions of the Labor Movement," in Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira (eds.), Zionism and Religion (Jerusalem: Mercaz Zalman Shazar, in Hebrew, 1994) pp. 301-327 and in that same volume, Shmuel Almog, "Religious Values in the Second Aliyah," pp. 285-300; Moti Zeira, Rural Collective Settlement and Jewish Culture in Eretz Israel During the 1920's (Jerusalem: Yard Yitzhak Ben Zvi, 2000); and Nili Aryeh-Sapir, Shaping an Urban Culture: Rituals and Celebrations in Tel-Aviv in Its Early Years (Tel Aviv University, Ph.D. dissertation, In Hebrew, 2000).

[8] Shapira, op. cit. , p. 327

[9] For an extended discussion see Liebman and Don-Yehiya, op. cit.

[10] Shlomit Levy, Hanna Levinsohn, Elihu Katz, Jewish Israelis: A Portrait (Jerusalem: Avi Chai and the Israel Democracy Institute, in Hebrew , 2002); [the highlights of the study appeared as a separate booklet under the same name as the Report. We cite the Highlights unless otherwise noted]; Shlomit Levy, Hanna Levinsohn, Elihu Katz, Beliefs, Observances and Social Interaction Among Israeli Jews (Jerusalem: The Louis Guttman Institute of Applied Social Research, 1993) [the Highlights of that Report are reprinted in Charles Liebman and Elihu Katz , op. cit. which also contains an analysis of the 1993 Report]; Yair Auron, Jewish-Israeli Identity (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim Publishing House, 1993); Michal Shamir and Asher Arian. "Collective Identity and Electoral Competition in Israel," American Political Science Review 93 (June, 1999) pp. 265-277; Uri Farago, "The Jewish Identity of Israeli Youth, 1965-1985," Yahadut Zmanenu 5 (in Hebrew, 1989), pp. 259-285; Uri Farago, National identity and Regional Identity in Israel," Azmi Bashara (ed.), Between I and We (Tel Aviv: Van Leer Institute and the Kibbutz Hameuchad, in Hebrew, 1999), pp. 153-168; Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Stephen Sharot, Ethnicity, Religion, and Class in Israeli Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Yochanan Peres and Ephraim Yuchtman-Yaar, Between Consent and Dissent: Democracy and Peace in the Israeli Mind (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, in Hebrew, 1998); an unpublished study by Ezra Kopelowitz and Hadar Franco of 160 students in Rupin college in 2001; Jacob Shamir and Michal Shamir, The Anatomy of Public Opinion (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000); Stephen Sharot, "Jewish and Other National and Ethnic Identities of Israeli Jews," Steven M. Cohen and Gabriel Horenczyk (eds.), National Variations in Jewish Identity (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), pp. 299-316; Eliezer Leshem, "The Aliyah from the Former Soviet Union and the Religious-Secular Cleavage in Israeli Society," Moshe Lisak and Eliezer Leshem (eds.), From Russia to Israel: Identity and Culture In Transition (Tel Aviv: Hakkibutz Hameuchad, in Hebrew, 2001), pp. 125-148; and Alek Epstein, "The 'Russian' Road to Being Jewish; Thoughts Following the Research Report

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[18]Uriel Dan, "Zionism in the Israeli Theater," Israel Affairs, 8 (/autumna/Winter, 2002), pp. 43-55.

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[20] Maariv (July 10, 1973), p. 1.

[21] Uri Klein, "National and Personal Cinema". Kesher 31 (May 2002) pp. 47e-55e

[22] Dan Urian. "Touch the Sky: Jewish identity in Modern Israeli Culture," Kesher, 30 (November, 2001, in Hebrew), pp. 31-41.

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[24] Benjamin Harshav, "The Modern Jewish Revolution: Notes Toward Its Understanding," Alpayim 23 In Hebrew, 2000) pp.9-75.

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[28]Sammy Smooha and Theodor Hanf, "The Diverse Modes of Conflict: Regulation in Deeply Divided Societies," International Journal of Comparative Sociology 33 (1992), pp. 26-47.

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