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Editors: Ernest Krausz and Gitta Tulea

JEWISH IDENTITY - OPINIONS OF SECULAR JEWS IN ISRAEL

Edith Elchanani

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Editors' Note

In the postmodern globalized society the relation between secularism and religion, and how this affects collective identity, appears in new and sometimes unforeseen connotations, thus opening an area of renewed sociological research, which is likely to lead eventually to theoretical developments. The paper below by Edit Elchanani, is part of a larger project on Jewish identity in Israel which is being carried out at the Sociological Institute for Community Studies, Bar-Ilan University. It reports on research concerning a particular group of outstanding Israeli writers, media personalities and other professionals, who declare themselves as having a secular Jewish identity. Elchanani highlights their definitions of their own identity and the way they perceive their place in the Israeli national culture and society. The paper contains a great deal of valuable raw material, meaningfully arranged in sections relating to the various aspects of Jewish identity. Further analysis will integrate this facet into the overall framework of the research project on Jewish identity in Israel.

Jewish Identity – Opinions of Secular Jews in Israel

Edith Elchanani *

"My point of view is that of a secular Jew who is not ashamed I have no shame in being Jewish and no shame in being secular." (Yair Zaban, in D. Zucker, Ed. *We, Secular Jews: What Is Secular Jewish Identity?* p. 113.)

Introduction

When Judaism came into being, it emerged like a pair of Siamese twins – religion and nationality intermeshed to the point of being difficult to separate if not impossible. Throughout history, and at times among different groups in the same period, the balance between the religious and national components has been in a state of flux. Generally speaking, during the period of the First and Second Temples, religion and nationality were more or less equivalent components in the makeup of the People of Israel, and were strongly intertwined ¹.

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Two millennia of living in the Diaspora had taken their toll on the national component, removing two central elements – land and common language. However, strong historical awareness, and the ongoing belief in Redemption and returning to the ancient homeland, had accompanied the Jews throughout centuries in exile, and these compensated for the missing elements and preserved the Jews as a nation (Katz, 1970). The religious component of Jewish identity was dominant during the years of exile, and was manifested in the uncontested rule that *Halakha* (Jewish law) held over all realms of Jewish life, wherever Jews lived (Enam, 1996).

The European Emancipation movement of the second part of the eighteenth century, brought about the breakdown of a single, uniform Jewish identity. The Emancipation was, in effect, the Big Bang that destroyed the monolithic Jewish identity, creating in its stead a broad range of identities held by different groups and movements. The unsettling of European Jewry by the Emancipation and the wave of nationalism that followed about a century later, created a mosaic of Jewish identities - some old, others new. Some emphasized the religious component, others emphasized the national component, and yet others represented various combinations of the two. Here, as never before¹ in Jewish history, an attempt was made to draw a line between the religious and national components².

Although this experiment was never fully successful, one outcome was the emergence, for the first time in Jewish history, of "secular" Judaism. It may be noted that Orthodox Judaism has many interpretations of *Halakha*, and also that many secular Jews observe some religious laws. The two

groups do not differ in degree but in essence – these are "two cultures within one nation" (Brinker 1989). Brinker claims that the difference between a "religious" Jew and a "secular" Jew is that the lifestyle (and by extension, the beliefs and opinions) of the former are dictated exclusively by *Halakha*. Orthodox Judaism accepts *Halakha* as the sole source for defining "Jewish" lifestyle. Therefore, it cannot accept any lifestyle that is not *Halakha* as Jewish, even if the deviation from the letter of the law is minimal. Consequently, Orthodoxy cannot accept the possibility of multiple "Jewish identities." "Secular" Judaism, according to Brinker, sees the source of Jewish identity in the Jews themselves, and therefore does not recognize one binding Jewish identity, but rather sees a practically unlimited variety of identities, all equally legitimate. The extreme version of the secular approach claims that a certain lifestyle, opinion, belief, or cultural creation is sufficient to make something Jewish, if it is espoused by Jews. As Brinker says, a secular Jew's perception of the attributes of Jewish culture are, per force, "minimalist" when compared with that of an observant Jew, and the "Jewishness" of this culture requires a smaller number of attributes.

We have addressed so far the religious component of Judaism. Its complementary component is the national one. Jewish nationality, insofar as it referred to ethnic affinity, has existed for millennia. However, with the birth of secular Judaism, "modern" Jewish nationality was born³. Actually, it was "secular" Judaism that gave birth to the various national and collectivist movements. The main movement – and to this day the most nationally radical – was Zionism (Eisenstadt, 1996). The creators of the Zionist movement, and the first to

fulfill its vision, were secular Jews, some of whom came from assimilated families. The essence of the Zionist national ideology was rejection of Jewish life as it existed in the Diaspora, and the desire to create a new Jewish identity in the Land of Israel. (Although at a later stage the movement was joined by part of Orthodox Judaism, it was, fundamentally, a secular movement.) As the research described here refers to Israeli society only, we will now focus solely on secular Judaism in Israel and on Zionist nationalism. The Zionist movement created a rich secular national culture in Israel, known as the "Hebrew" culture, for the Hebrew language was its foundation (E. Schweid, 1986). Despite its secularity, and despite the fact that it had created, from the very beginning, a solid, self-sustaining culture, Zionism was characterized, from its very onset in Israel, by certain ambivalence toward "religious" Jewish tradition. On the one hand, as Schweid states, Zionism wanted to break away from *Halakhic* tradition, while on the other hand, it expressed a desire to preserve the historical continuation of national consciousness, its identification with the Jewish People, and its belongingness to this people. Eisenstadt (1996) notes similar ambivalence – alongside a negative attitude to the cultural creation of the Diaspora, Zionism adopted primordial elements of Jewish identity, this being its early, historical foundations. This was expressed in the positive attitudes Zionism held toward history, the Land of Israel, the Hebrew language, and the nation's forefathers.

Ben-Rafael (1996) says that Zionism derived its cultural symbols and hallowed texts from Jewish tradition – the Hebrew

calendar, the Sabbath, holidays, and the Bible .

Krausz (1977) thinks of this as "nationalization" of religious culture, and shows that the process also exists in the other direction – imbuing with a religious form the secular, national symbols, such as Memorial Day ceremonies. "Religious" Jewish elements have also been integrated into the personal arena. Many secular Jews observe some religious customs such as ritual circumcision (*brit milah*), bar mitzvah, or fasting on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Based on the customs and behaviors described here, Liebman (2001) writes about a "tri-partite description" of Israel's cultural map. This perception seemingly questions the dichotomous division between "religious" and "secular" Jews, and places a large group between these – a group evincing "Jewish secularism." Ben-Rafael (1996) regards the complex described here as evidence that Jewish nationalism has not completely detached itself from Jewish religious sources, and concludes that there is no Jewish identity that is totally separated from religion.

Secular Jews are the majority of the Jewish People (and this is true for the worldwide Jewish community as well as for Israel). Therefore, it is they who, to a large degree, bear the onus of the continuation of Jewish identity. As discussed above, secular Jews have a national consciousness and an affinity to Jewish tradition. However, there are other attributes of secular Judaism, which, combined with processes that have taken place in Israeli society in the last three or four decades, pose a question as to the chances for the ongoing existence of secular "Jewish identity."

First, as mentioned at the beginning of this discussion, the "religious" component of secular Jewish identity is rather

limited, and is not firmly based in commitment to a deeper foundation. It is, therefore, in danger of becoming diminished and shallow, and could turn into a symbolic decoration, devoid of all contents. We could, in this context, discuss "symbolic Judaism," a term borrowed from H. Ganz's (Alba, 1990) "symbolic ethnicity"⁴. This is particularly true, as Schweid (1986) comments, regarding the generation of native-born Israeli Jews, who, unlike their parents or grandparents, are not familiar with the original traditions on which these "symbols" are based.

Second, alongside the diminution of the "religious" component in secular culture, there is the growing influence of outside cultures, especially American culture, on secular Jewish culture. This is part of worldwide cultural "globalization." "Religious" Judaism is more resistant to such "assimilating" influences.

Third, in marked contrast to the situation during the *yishuv* [the local Jewish population in the pre-state period] and the first years of statehood, Israeli society has been undergoing a broad process of heterogeneity. This process, which has spanned the past three decades, is threatening to obliterate the boundaries of the collective identity of Israeli society (Eisenstadt, 1996). Pluralism, which is positive in and of itself, has reached proportions that prevent any type of consensus regarding a common Jewish identity: "At times it seems that the only ecumenical Jewish attribute of culture in Israel is the clash, friction, and quarrel between various patterns of Jewish identity" (Schweid, 1996).

Fourth, Israeli society has been transformed from a society with a collective orientation to one with an individualistic

orientation, with emphasis on values of private freedom and welfare rather than national, collective values. This, too, contributes to the disintegration of collective identities.

Fifth, in recent years, Israeli society is beginning to witness a post-Zionist ideology. Although only a fraction of the public shares this ideology today, should it become more prevalent, this, too, would erode the national component of secular Jewish identity.

Sixth, there is growing polarization and alienation in Israel between religious and secular Jews. The combination of religious beliefs and political orientation adds to this polarization to the point that the country may be facing *Kulturkampf* (not outright civil war).

The factors we mentioned may weaken the Jewish identity of secular Jews. It is clear that while the Jewish identity of religious Jews is more stable and resistant to change, the Jewish identity of secular Jews is shakier, and is more vulnerable to social, cultural, and political changes. Voices have been heard in recent years, warning against a crisis in which Jewish identity is supposedly found, even in terms of its national expression. The possibility has been raised that the danger of "assimilation" could exist even in the Jewish state itself. The study presented here will attempt to gain a better acquaintance with secular Jewish identity, examining its various components and attributes. The results of this investigation may help determine whether the danger to this identity is real, or whether it is still too early to eulogize secular Jewish identity.

Data

The following is part of the data gathered for the study on "Jewish identity" in Israel:

The study addresses the range of groups that compose Jewish Israeli society. However, the data presented here refer only to the secular population, and to a partial sample only – which may not be representative of the whole.

The findings which are brought together here are based on an analysis of texts by writers, poets, literary critics, members of the academic world, media (written and electronic) professionals, and politicians, all of whom are secular. The texts are taken from books and articles or from interviews that have appeared in print. This small and non-representative sample includes 17 writers, poets, and literary critics, 11 academicians, 6 journalists and media professionals, 3 politicians, and 3 persons belonging to other professions.

The texts vary in length. Some references are to a book, or several books, and others are to articles or a short interview. Therefore, some people will be more widely quoted than others. The study is based on textual analysis, and not all writers refer to each and every topic examined. (However, the topics were examined, to a large degree, according to what appears in the texts.) This should explain the diversity in the length of discussion regarding different topics by different writers.

Personal Jewish identity: "A secular Jew who is not ashamed"

One of the first issues we examined in the various writings was the way the writers define themselves regarding their

national identity. We found that most writers use the word "Jew" as part of their personal definition, some do so directly, and others are more circumvent. Some add the word "secular" to "Jew," and most clarify that their "Jewishness" is national, cultural, or historical.

Some emphasize the voluntary element in their Jewish identity, namely, the fact that they *chose* to be Jews. We shall try to give examples from the writings themselves. Thus, author Amos Oz (1979) expresses some of the elements we have mentioned: "I choose to be Jewish, that is, to share the collective experience of my forefathers and my people throughout all generations" (*Under This Blazing Light* [henceforth *Light*], p. 77). Choosing a Jewish identity, as well as referring to the cultural aspect of Judaism, is a motif in the words of poet Shimon Adaf: "I'm a Jew by choice, a Jew as a mental attitude, as a way of looking at the world, a culture in which I see my spiritual world" (in Rosenthal, p. 188). As mentioned, some writers emphasize their secularity as part of their personal definition, as does poet and literary critic Menachem Ben: "I am a secular Jew, primarily because I prefer personal moral purity to rabbinical and religious ceremoniousness" (in Zucker, 1999, p. 51)⁵. Former Knesset Member Yair Zaban defines himself as a "secular Jew who is not ashamed I have no shame in being Jewish and no shame in being secular" (Zucker, 1999, p. 113). Yisrael Segal, a television reporter whose background is Haredi (ultra-orthodox) expresses his secular Judaism when he says, "Yes, I am a Jew with every particle of my being, but my Judaism is secular. It is different than and separate from theirs [religious Jews, E. E.] (Zucker, 1999, p. 140), and

Yael Tamir, Knesset Member and former minister says, "My secularity has deep Jewish roots" (Zucker, 1999, p. 176).

As we mentioned earlier, these writers base their "secular" Judaism on the history, culture, and language of the Jewish People. We find a general approach to Jewish culture in the words of Elazar Strum, another television personality from a Haredi background: "The essence of my Jewish experience is in that somewhat ambiguous something which my teacher and mentor Eliezer Schweid calls 'Judaism as culture'. This means I am a person who has actually chosen not to observe *mitzvot*, I am a child of Jewish culture, which is my primary culture and the culture to which I am obligated, being its son and its creation. Jewish culture has profoundly influenced my life" (Zucker, 1999, p. 204). (It is important to note that Strum's background is religious, he is not a "native secular person.")

As stated, all the writers emphasize the place of Jewish history. Nissim Kalderon, author and journal editor says, "I am interested in collective Jewish history, as it is this history that has left its imprint on me and I have a desire to continue it" (Zucker, 1999, p. 76). Yair Zaban perceives himself as being at the crossroads of temporal and spatial continua: "Standing at this crossroads, the convergence of these two lines, meetings of histories and existence of the here and now that are woven and tied into it... for me this is the basic meaning of being a Jew" (Zucker, 1999, pp. 113-114).

Others accord a central position to the Hebrew language as a component of their Jewish identity. Thus, Amos Oz writes, "A man like myself, who does not want to live according to *Halakha* ... faces, therefore, everything that has come down

through the conduit of the Hebrew language: lullabies, grandma's stories, Bible lessons, ... scrolls, books, poetry and its resonance, and all the words without which you are not yourself but someone else" (*Light* p. 155). Media personality Yaron London writes, "Culturally I am a product of the new Hebrew language..." (Zucker, 1999, p. 36).

Some writers, such as Yael Tamir, emphasize ties to the Land of Israel as the basis for their Jewish identity: "My secularity is very much tied to the Land of Israel" (Zucker, 1999, p. 176). Yosef Ben-Shlomo, Professor of Jewish philosophy writes that "my identity as a secular Jew is that I am a Zionist who is tied to the Land of Israel, not necessarily to the State of Israel" (Samet, 2003, p. 58).

It seems that these writers do not view their "secularism" as diminishing their "Judaism." The compound "Jewish-secular" does not, in their opinion, indicate Judaism that is lacking in something or is somewhat damaged, but rather Judaism that is not based on religion but on culture, history, territoriality, etc. Somewhat unexpectedly, most writers *do not* adopt the term "Israeli" to replace "Jewish" as the designation of their national identity.

One exception is author A. B. Yehoshua. Yehoshua objects, on principle, to using the word "Jew," and states, "I am Israeli" (Zucker, 1999, p. 19). Yehoshua views "Jew" to be an incomplete term, one which suited Diaspora conditions, and that the term People of Israel is the original, all-engulfing concept for the nation. (He also reminds his readers that there is no "Jews" entry in the *Hebrew Encyclopedia* – the entry is "People of Israel" (Zucker, 1999, pp. 19-20).

Amos Oz (2002) also concurs that the concepts "Jew" and

"Judaism" are included within the concept "People of Israel," and that the contrary is not the case (*Actually, What We Have Are Two Wars* [henceforth *Two Wars*], pp. 8-9). Poet Menachem Ben, despite describing himself as "a Jew," says he prefers the adage "Israeli." In his opinion, "Israeli" is a "marvelously Jewish word" ([emphasis mine, E. E.], Zucker, 1999, pp. 49-50).

Author Aaron Meged espouses both identities – "Jewish" and "Israeli": "I am Israeli by virtue of living on this land, which is my homeland; and I am a Jew, not only as heir to an ancient Jewish culture, but also because my fate is a Jewish fate" (Samet, 2003, p. 174). As we said above, most writers have no reservations about the term "Jew," and prefer it to "Israeli" to describe their national identity. They do not perceive their secularism as contradictory to their definition of "Jews" or as diminishing in any way their Judaism.

Who is a Jew? What is a Jew?

In addition to examining personal definitions, we also sought to examine how our writers define "Jew" in general – who they consider to be Jewish. In addition, we wanted to know how they define a Jew, or what, in their view, is Jewish.

As was the case with the personal Jewish definition of the writers, in the general definition of Jewish identity, many of them attribute a central role to the element of *choice* in Jewish identity. Amos Oz (1979), for example, writes, "I call a Jew anyone who sees himself as one, and anyone who is forced to be one" (p. 77). "According to this non-*Halakhic* view I call a Jew anyone who chooses to share the fate of other Jews or is destined to share this fate" (*Light*, p. 74).

Oz (1998) sees the preservation of Jewish identity throughout the many generations to be a result of a choice made by Jews to continue maintaining their Judaism: "The People of Israel have existed for thousands of years by the power of millions of personal decisions made by millions of Jews over dozens of generations, Jews who chose to sustain their identity" (*All Hopes* [henceforth *Hopes*] p. 56).

In *Speaking Up for Normality* A. B. Yehoshua also maintains that "a Jew is a person who identifies himself as a Jew" (p. 110), and "It is the act of identifying that matters" (p. 113). He asserts that: "Consciousness is the decisive factor in determining nationality. Jews who live thousands of kilometers from each other, speak different languages, live in a variety of national situations, and are even alienated from specific religious or cultural contexts, have the right to see themselves as belonging to the Jewish People only by virtue of their consciousness" (p. 104). Nissim Kalderon, author and journal editor, espouses Brenner's definition that a Jew is "a person who defines himself as a Jew... and one who had deemed it necessary to maintain contact with others who defined themselves as Jews" (Zucker, 1999, p. 74).

Clearly, basing Judaism on choice is contrary to the *Halakhic* definition of Judaism. Nonetheless, the writers recognize that their definition is not totally self-sustaining, and they cannot completely ignore the "religious" definition of "Jew." A. B. Yehoshua says that a true secular position should, seemingly, recognize the fact that a Jew can be a Christian or a Muslim, although, he maintains, most secular people would have difficulty with "allowing" a Jew to convert and still remain Jewish. "This," he writes, "is where there is some essential

weakness in our secular position... it is still subordinated to tradition and religion, even if you constantly try to give it an ethical interpretation of its very own. We still cannot say 'Jew' the way we say 'French,' 'English,' or 'Norwegian'" (Zucker, 1999, pp. 18-19). Journalist and media personality Yaron London concurs: "The fact that we are a nation-religion prevents us from including in our midst members of other religions who live in this country. We cannot begin to fathom the idea that a Muslim could also be part of our nation" (Zucker, 1999, p. 28). As Ben-Rafael (1996) says, even the most confirmed heretic would not agree to accept a person of another religion as being Jewish. This indicates, again, that there can be no total separation between nation and religion in Judaism.

In an attempt to *characterize* Jews, some of the writers point to social-cultural attributes. Thus, A. B. Yehoshua who prefers, as mentioned earlier, "Israeli" identity to "Jewish" identity, says that the former characterizes Jews who live "in the totality of Jewish existence." The attributes of this total existence are land, language, and an independent social setting. In his opinion it is possible, though not necessary, to include the religious component of identity in the definition (*Speaking Up* p. 126). Yaron London also maintains that faith or observing *mitzvot* are not necessary conditions for belonging to the Jewish People. "A common language, common history, and ownership of a share in the organization called State are sufficient to make an Israeli citizen feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish nation" (Zucker, 1999, p. 30). These definitions include elements that are part of sociological definitions of "national identity" (e.g., Smith,

1991).

Other writers point at emotions that are meant to characterize members of the Jewish People. Amos Oz writes "... to be a Jew, means, for the most part, to have an emotional relationship to the Jewish past. Be it a relation of pride or distress, be it shame and be it rebellion, and be it pride or longing" (*Light* p. 24). Yaron London writes of a "national feeling" that unifies those who belong to the Jewish People (Zucker, 1999, p. 30). Journalist Amnon Dankner writes about an elusive, hard-to-define feeling which he describes as "a single place that reverberates, with varying degrees of intensity, toward every reading, opinion, or melody that has an essence of what they would immediately define as 'Judaism'" (Zucker, 1999, p. 82).

Other writers try to describe personality attributes that are characteristic of Jews, something akin to "the Jewish soul." Amos Oz (1998) describes "certain behavioral lines and modes of reaction that are related to a common memory: perhaps this is a distinct form of humor and banter, a clear propensity toward being critical, having self-directed irony, self-pity, pessimistic euphoria, melancholy, joviality, and a sort of suspicion toward any authority, and a modicum of opposition to injustice,... there are sensitivities that are not difficult to identify, but are difficult to set into definitions" (*Hopes* pp. 48-49). Author Aaron Appelfeld tries to understand "the Jewish soul and all its transmutations", and claims that the desire to escape Judaism is a central motif in the Jewish soul (interview in *Ha'aretz*, 13 February, 2004).

Religion and Nationality in Judaism

The writers address the combination of religion and nationality in Judaism, and see it as problematic to the definition of Jewish identity. Surprisingly, only few of the writers view the two elements as inseparable. One member of this small group is Amos Oz who claims that in Judaism, total separation between religion and nationality is impossible, as is their total fusion. This "open" situation, says Oz, is one of tension, but also one of "creativity and fertility," so long as it does not create conflict (*Two Wars* pp. 10-11).

Similarly, A. B. Yehoshua sees the coupling of religion and nationality in Judaism as the source of tension in Jewish identity – "the Jewish People has androgynous characteristics. It is a nation that contains within itself national elements and religious elements. However, it is neither a nation nor a religion, but rather something problematic between the two" (Zucker, 1999, p. 13). Yehoshua continues, "It is quite plausible that this problematic situation is the reason for the basic, essential restlessness of Jewish identity. This restlessness can be very creative spiritually, but is also accompanied by acute existential problems regarding everything related to their ability to conduct sovereign independent life in their own country, and regarding the way Jews continuously clash with their non-Jewish surroundings, both in their country and outside of it" (Zucker, 1999, p. 14).

Yair Zaban is the only one who is explicit in voicing an opposing view. In his opinion, the overlapping of religion and nationality in Judaism – which Orthodox Judaism views as "eternal, immanent to Jewish existence and the reason for Jewish existence" (Zucker, 1999, p. 116) is not necessary.

His proof is the Zionist movement which "gave a *non-religious* [emphasis added, E. E.] expression to Jewish culture and to the love of the Land of Israel" (Zucker, 1999, p. 117). The national alternative to Jewish identity, according to Zaban, saved many Jews from an identity crisis, by providing them with a national secular foundation for their "religious" Jewish identity (Zucker, 1999, p. 118).

Although they do not directly address the connection or separation between religion and nationality in Judaism, other writers describe the Zionist movement as an attempt to base Judaism on nothing more than the national component. Author Gadi Taub thinks that "the national religion should be endowed with renewed legitimization" (Zucker, 1999, p. 62).

According to philosopher Yossi Yonah, Zionism called for "exchanging Jewish identity, which used religious parameters to define itself, for a national identity that is defined by secular parameters" (Rosenthal, 2002, p. 328). Philosopher Yosef Ben Shlomo sees the Zionist movement as an expression of Jewish identity in national terms (Samet, 2003, p. 57-58). Yacov Malkin, a member of the movement for Humanistic Judaism, claims that Jewish identity is not contingent nowadays on religious identity, and can be formed on foundations of national elements such as common history, common destiny, and unique language and culture.

Jewish identity or Jewish Identities?

Despite attempts to arrive at a general definition of what constitutes a Jew, many of the writers are aware of the myriad faces of Judaism and of Jewish identity. Amos Oz (1999) thinks that "Nowadays, there is no significance to the

concept 'Jewish nature' as used in the singular. At most one can, perhaps, talk about 'Jewish characteristics' in the plural.... This is an outcome of the multifaceted being of the Jewish People and of modern Israel" (*Journeys in the Land of Israel* [henceforth *Journeys*], pp. 101-102).

Nissim Kalderon quotes Brenner who said that there is no such thing as Judaism. According to him "there have been Jews, and there are Jews. They have a very important past, they have a history.... But this history did not form one corpus of opinions and beliefs, but many. Not always – and not necessarily – is there a significant common denominator between the various corpuses. In this sense, there is no common spirit that can be called 'Judaism'" (Zucker, 1999, p.74).

Yacov Malkin (2000) claims that Judaism contains a wide spectrum of "Judaisms," and this spectrum is manifested in relation to religion, lifestyle, and the various forms of cultural creation – "pluralism is the heart and soul of Judaism" (*What Do Secular Jews Believe In?* [henceforth *What?*], p. 62).

Many of the writers view the source of the many colors of Jewish identity in the conflicts and rifts that have always been part and parcel of Jewish life. Thus, Oz writes "The history of the People of Israel over thousands of years is a chain of bitter conflicts" (*Hopes* p. 43).

Former Knesset member Deddi Zucker writes, "It is neither consensus nor agreement that fueled the Jewish engine – it was conflict that did this. (Zucker, 1999, p. 162). Similarly, Poet Hava Pinhas Cohen writes that "there is no Jewish experience that does not contain, *a priori*, tension and conflict between several polar possibilities waiting for decision... being

a Jew means being in constant spiritual motion between conflicts..." (Rosenthal, 2001, p. 88). Journalist and author Rosenthal wonders "whether the rift is part of Hebrew-Jewish-Israeli DNA since the inception of this people?" (Rosenthal, 2001, p. 7).

Most of the writers agree that the conflicts and disputes are not necessarily negative, although they do have a destructive aspect. However, under some circumstances they might even enrich Judaism. Thus, Amos Oz (1993) writes that "At its best, the culture of the People of Israel is one of negotiating and bargaining, of seeing things in different ways, of the sharp power of conviction in conflicts that are 'for the sake of Heaven' – in the name of God, of struggles "to magnify Tora, and to make it glorious" (*Isaiah, 42:21*), (*Hopes* p. 45). Oz says that he believes "in pluralism as a desirable state: a plethora of streams, approaches, traditions and opinions and lifestyles... is a possible source of fertile spiritual tension, proper soil for creative life" (*Journeys*, 102).

Philosopher Yossi Yonah also sees the positive side of pluralism and of a multitude of cultures and identities: "... the unity of a heterogeneous society does not depend on its uniformity. For that matter, such heterogeneity is possible when we respect the variety of the communities of which that society is composed, and ensure the conditions that will allow them to thrive" (Rosenthal, 2001, p. 334). Yacov Malkin (2000) continues to extol the virtues of pluralism and claims that "lack of uniformity in Judaism is a condition for the unity of the Jewish People" (*What?*, p.65). He explains that recognizing pluralism people are free to belong to different streams and maintain different viewpoints, while at the same

time feeling that they belong to one nation – the Jewish People.

"A Special People" – Blessing or Curse?

The idea of "a special people," which means that the People of Israel are "the Chosen People" and have qualities that make them unique and exalted compared to other nations, is central to Jewish theology. Some of the writers address the idea of the Chosen People, and usually point out the negative aspects of this status.

According to Amos Oz (1998), "There is no chosen nation and there is no chosen individual. Every individual is a chosen person, and every nation is the chosen people – because each person is unique and each nation is special" (*Hopes* p. 19). Oz especially objects to the "feeling of superiority" that this idea can elicit in the Jewish People. It is his opinion that the Bible should be interpreted as a letter of liability, which places obligations upon the "chosen," but does not endow them with privileges. Oz views the idea of "Io, the people shall dwell alone" (*Num.* 23:9) – which is somewhat akin to that of the idea of the Chosen People – as a curse, not a blessing.

A. B. Yehoshua (1984) is also opposed to the idea of the Chosen People. He opposes it on principle – he does not believe that there can be an additional difference to that which exists by virtue of the special attributes of each nation. He also maintains that the desire to be different from other nations has had an adverse effect on Jewish history. He further rejects the idea that Israeli society should be a model society (a "secular" translation of "a light unto the nations").

Such a desire, Yehoshua claims, will only create frustration and self-accusation – "The State of Israel is unique in that it is a Jewish state with a specific national content, just as Albania has a uniqueness of its own" (*Speaking Up* p. 63).

Yair Zaban also rejects the concept of the Jewish People as the "Chosen People," and supports the Zionist aspiration for "normalization" of the nation, "so that it might maintain its national uniqueness the way other nations maintain theirs – by having its own homeland, sovereignty, language, and its own national culture" (Zucker, 1999, p. 123).

The idea of "Chosen People," according to Zaban, is rooted in the Diaspora. It is part of the "anomaly" of the Diaspora experience, a part which the Zionist movement sought to eradicate.

Jewish Culture

Previously we saw that the personal Jewish identity of the writers, and their general concept of Jewish identity, accord considerable place to Jewish culture. It seems that, for them, Jewish culture is one of the main foundations of their Jewish identity. As their words reveal, the writers quoted here see Jewish culture as composed of several components: Jewish religion and "the Jewish Bookshelf," Jewish morality teachings, the Hebrew language, Hebrew literature, and Jewish holidays, ceremonies, and customs. We will now turn to address each of these components:

A. Jewish religion and "the Jewish Bookshelf"

When the writers address Jewish religion, they generally

perceive it as one component of Jewish culture and not as the first and foremost component of their Jewish identity. Schweid (1988) calls this concept "Judaism as culture."

For Orthodox Judaism, religion is obligatory, whereas for secular Judaism religion is part of a broader Jewish culture. As expressed by Amos Oz (1982), "Judaism is a civilization, one of the few civilizations that have imprinted on all of humanity. Religion is a central part of Jewish civilization, and could even be its source, but Jewish civilization cannot stand solely on religion. Jewish civilization created spiritual phenomena that sprang from a Jewish source, fertilized religious experience, changed it, and rebelled against it: language and customs and ways of life and typical sensitivities... as well as literature and art, ideas and opinions. All this is Judaism. Rebellion and heresy – in former generations and in recent ones – also constitute Judaism. It is a broad and great legacy" (*Journeys*, p. 108).

The writers are not observant Jews, and therefore their relation to religion is expressed, for the most part, in their attitude toward Jewish religious literature. This includes the Bible, the *Mishna*, *Talmud*, philosophy, and the entire gamut of Hebrew writing, referred to in Israel as The Jewish Bookshelf. Many of these writers see this literature as the root of all Jewish culture, including secular Jewish culture.

A. B. Yehoshua claims that "as secular people, we must make an effort to connect to those things related to religion, as they touch upon culture. We have no cultural sources that have been preserved in our past...; everything appears in texts that were originally religious. This is difficult and

complicated and problematic, but it's all we have – that is where the seeds of our culture lay. If I want to connect to the past, I must peel off their religious cover, and discover the cultural-historical seed within" (interview with R. Rosenthal, in Rosenthal, 2001, p. 110). Similarly, Yisrael Segal writes that "the roots of my identity, my secularism as a man and as a Jew who rebelled against the world of *Halakha*, political and social positions – are all within the Jewish Bookshelf (in Zucker, 1999, p. 137).

In Yosef Ben-Shlomo's view, religious Jewish literature is the foundation of secular Hebrew literature. "Secular literature and poetry, which originated in the nineteenth century, are laden, at their finest, with layers of Jewish tradition, connotations, and symbols, all of which have religious origins. One cannot understand Bialik or S. H. Agnon, without the Bible, the *Mishna*, *Talmud*, Jewish philosophy and mysticism" (Samet, 2003, p. 57).

Those referred to in this study are aware of the cultural importance of the Jewish Bookshelf, and express their desire to pass on the knowledge of this world to future generations. Yair Zaban writes that "the challenge is great and complex – providing the younger generation with its national cultural legacy" (Zucker, 1999, pp. 128-129). Yaron London laments the younger generation's ignorance of its Jewish sources: "My sadness about the break with our sources is like that of a person who has a large treasure hidden beyond his doorstep, and who, due to laziness or prejudice, will not take that one step to pick it up. The very thought that my grandchildren will not be able to read Agnon, Bialik, A. Z. Greenberg, and even Amos Oz, because they will not understand the cultural-

linguistic connotations in these works, makes me very sad. Why are we cultivating Israeli culture from the leaves down instead of from the roots up?" (Zucker, 1999, p. 37). Amnon Dankner shares this lament that "Things that are supposed to be simple have become obscure to generations of ignoramuses who lack the mental and emotional key to important cultural treasures that are our very own" (Zucker, 1999, p. 79).

The writers view religious Jewish sources as the foundation for their cultural world. They insist that these sources should be known and studied, and wish to pass them along to future generations. However, they also reserve their right to treat them selectively – choose the texts that suit them, reinterpret texts, change them, and adapt them to their own worldview.

Yael Tamir writes "*But it [secular Judaism, E. E.] does not accept this load as is, but rather seeks to interpret and shape the way it is received, and influence it ... continuity does not mean avoiding change*" (Zucker, 1999, pp. 181-182). Ruth Kalderon, founder of Alma College, refers to the possibility of giving a new interpretation to Jewish sources, using the word *midrash*, itself anchored in age-old Jewish study: "In order to create a *midrash* there is need for something classic as a point of reference." "Generally speaking, a beautiful *midrash* is one that preserves a measure of fidelity to the classic concept, while imbuing it with a novel statement." "*Midrash* is a tool that lets us feel comfortable in the millennia-old Jewish culture. We can feel at home – wear comfortable clothes, use words that are right for us and our authentic values" (Zucker, 1999, pp. 195-196).

Some of the writers who espouse a selective approach to the "Jewish Bookshelf" strongly criticize some of its contents that is unacceptable to them. Thus, Menachem Ben declares that "I greatly love our common denominator – Hebrew and Hebrew spiritual sources such as the Bible and other exemplary Hebrew texts... However, I advocate a totally open reading of these texts – loving the beloved and marvelous part, and hating the hated, dark one" (Zucker, 1999, p. 54).

Yisrael Segal is considerably more explicit and scathing: "It was when we discovered that on the same Bookshelf, among the many books, a venomous snake lurks, one whose bite is a death sentence; It was when we discovered *din rodef* of the endangering pursuer which was hinted at or whispered in synagogues... only then did we raise an outcry" (Zucker, 1999, p. 134). Segal, too, condemns secular ignorance of Jewish sources, but his approach is different – he fears that secular Jews will relinquish these texts to the ultra-Orthodox and to their dangerous interpretation of them. In his opinion, secular Jews must study Jewish texts and expropriate the Jewish Bookshelf from Orthodox Jewry: "If we do not arm ourselves with ammunition from the Bible, the *Mishna*, the *Talmud*, we will not be able to fight back... Only if we gather forces and reclaim Judaism, do we stand a chance of succeeding in maintaining its free and humanistic power" (Zucker, 1999, p. 141). Playwright Anat Gov concurs, although she is less blunt. She believes that only secular Jews "can free *Halakha* from its prison, ... rescue it from the dark, dank, cell, take it out into the fresh air, and return the color to its cheeks" (Zucker, 1999, pp. 45-46).

In conclusion, we might say that there are three characteristics

of the writers' "secular" approach to the Jewish Bookshelf: First, the writers see it as their cultural roots and foundation, but regard it as history and culture, not religion. Second, the non-religious perception of the Jewish Bookshelf allows the writers to assume a selective and critical approach to its contents. Finally, some of the writers are very critical of religious interpretation of these sources and – paradoxically – view secular Jews as the proper guardians and interpreters of these texts.

B. Religious ritual versus "the prophets' morality"

As seen previously, some of the writers are critical of the religious interpretation of Jewish sources, and some are even more critical about the priorities set by observant Jews regarding observing *mitzvot*. As we know, these religious laws are divided into ritual laws – relations between people and God, and human laws – relations between and among people, also known as "the prophets' morality." The former are uniquely Jewish, the latter universal.

The writers repeatedly criticize the fact that religious people over-observe ritual laws and ignore those that have to do with human relations. Although the interpersonal laws are universal, the writers view the lack of adherence to interpersonal laws as running against the "true" spirit of Judaism.

Amos Oz (1988) lashes out at those who "Now sully not only the State of Israel and Zionism, but Judaism itself (*Hopes* p. 63)." The time has come to set up a new agenda, one in which poverty, social injustice, exploitation, abuse, and spiritual decline will be considered much more 'Jewish' than

matters of holy graves" (*Hopes* p. 90). Menachem Ben, too, writes, "I prefer personal moral purity to rabbinical and religious ceremoniousness," and uses the words of the prophet Isaiah to substantiate his position (Zucker, 1999, p. 52). Rafael Valdan, a surgeon and member of a Jewish Reform Congregation, writes that "Jewish tradition emphasizes the importance of protecting the rights of minorities and individuals.... This exalted value, inspired by Judaism, was espoused by enlightened humanity and completely abandoned by Haredi Judaism" (Zucker, 1999, p. 159). Tamir Greenberg writes, in the same vein, "We preserved the holy writs with love so that we know good and bad and not to use them as an excuse for ongoing exploitation" (Samet, 2003, p. 93).

These and similar statements indicate that the writers "accuse" religious Jewry of preferring ritual laws over moral ones. Furthermore, these writers claim that at times observing laws of ritual entails breaking moral laws. One such example is the law of living in Israel and inhabiting it, which causes the denial of the rights of those who lived there before.

The writers "attack" religious Judaism *in the name of the Jewish religion itself*. They claim that abandoning the moral religious laws goes against the spirit of the Torah and the prophets, creating inequity, discrimination, and injustice. Thus, observing ritual laws, seemingly done in the name of religion, actually damages its very heart and soul. Again we see that the writers perceive themselves, despite their secularism, as better guardians of the spirit of Judaism than "observant Jews."

C. The Hebrew Language: "If you live in Hebrew, you're In"

Language is considered one of the main characteristics of "the nation" (Anderson, 2000; Smith, 1991). Schweid (1986) accords Hebrew an important role in shaping the new Jewish nationalism, especially because of its secularity.

The writers are well aware of the central position of Hebrew in Jewish culture. Thus, Amos Oz regards Hebrew as the primary cultural component and as the basic foundation for Jewish culture, writing "... that the culture of the People of Israel does not reside in the synagogue, nor does it reside in holy tombs, but in the generations of our language. The culture of the People of Israel does not reside in any *Shulhan Arukh* [code of Jewish law] but resides in the Hebrew language" (*Two Wars* p. 81). In addition (1979), "... language is neither the 'center' nor the 'framework' nor the 'vehicle' of culture. It itself is the culture. If you live in Hebrew, think, dream, sing Hebrew songs in the shower and lie in Hebrew, you are 'In' even if you haven't got an iota of 'Jewish awareness' or Zionist view, or anything. If you live in Hebrew – you're 'In'" (*Light* p. 215). According to Oz, language creates identity, "... and all the words without which you are not yourself but rather another person" (*Light* p. 155). Yaron London, too, sees Hebrew as a central component of his cultural identity: "Culturally, I am a product of the new Hebrew language" (Zucker, 1999, p. 36). Author Dan Benaya-Sari also views language as a central element of national culture: "The outlines of each language are the cultural porthole of their holders. The almost primary tool with which a nation's culture is

perceived" (Rosenthal, 2001, p. 276). Benaya-Sari continues, "Any nation's healthy language is nothing but its' historical ripening... the sum total of all its generations" (Rosenthal, 2001, p. 277).

Poet Nathan Zach sees language as the base for the existence of the nation and the state. "Let us never forget. The State of Israel was born not only because of Herzl and Ben-Gurion. Had it not been for Eliezer Ben-Yehuda who gave it a language, it may have never come into being. One thing can be said with certainty: that its population – gathered from all corners of the earth – would have not turned into anything that resembles a nation" (Rosenthal, p. 273).

Indeed, the writers view Hebrew as one of the center posts of Hebrew culture, which is, in and of itself, a central component of their Jewish identity. They view Hebrew as the embodiment of the culture and history of the Jewish People, which Schweid (1998) calls the national "spirit."

D. Hebrew Literature – "heir" to religious literature

Naturally, literature is related to language, and is also considered an attribute of nationality (Schweid, 1986; Smith, 1991). Only a few of the writers address Hebrew literature, and we will present the essence of their thoughts.

Yosef Ben-Shlomo views secular Jewish literature as the successor to religious Jewish literature: "Secular literature and poetry at their best are loaded with layers of Jewish tradition, associations, and symbols that are originally religious" (Samet, 2003, p. 57). Amos Oz (2002) also views the new Hebrew literature as heir to religious literature: "Authors and poets carried the live, religious core of Jewish

culture from the holy writs to secular writing, and they now belong to this writing" (*Two Wars* pp. 112-113). Hebrew literature, according to Oz, is "the real religion of the People of Israel. It is the live religion, not the fossilized (*War* , p. 113).

Author Aaron Appelfeld quotes T. S. Eliot who said that literature is a nation's collective memory. However, Appelfeld believes that Hebrew literature has not yet been able to see "the collective Jewish soul," a task he is trying to fulfill in his writing (interview in *Ha'aretz*, 13 February, 2004).

E. Holidays, ceremonies, and customs

Holidays, ceremonies, and customs are among the behavioral expressions of every culture, and as such they play an important part in shaping national identity. A significant portion of Jewish ceremonies and holidays are religious, or have a religious origin. Although some have undergone a degree of "secularization" in Israel, most holidays are still observed in one shape or another. Surprisingly, only a few of the writers addressed this aspect of Jewish culture.

Two trends emerge among the writers who did discuss these matters. First, imbuing religious holidays and ceremonies with new, secular meaning. Thus, Yael Tamir says that the Zionist movement wished to preserve Jewish holidays but give them "modern contents – secular and relevant to the national endeavor" (Zucker, 1999, p. 182). Yacov Malkin also addresses changes and reinterpretation of ceremonies and holidays, saying that family holidays and ceremonies, originally religious, turn into family and community celebrations among secular Jews, and uses one of the "new"

versions of the Passover *Haggadah* to illustrate his point. The second trend expressed by the writers is preservation of a limited number of religious customs or ceremonies that serve as "Jewish symbols" within secular life. Thus, Amos Oz (1998) tells how his parents' secular neighbors used to light Sabbath candles "to keep some sort of spirit of Jewishness" (*Hopes* p. 235).

Rafael Nudelman, physicist and journalist, tells about his parents' home in Russia. This was an assimilated home where some points of Judaism were kept, such as lighting the Sabbath candles and eating *matzot* on Passover (Rosenthal, 2001, p. 197). Playwright and author Gavriel Ben-Simhon tells about Jews of North African origin who are not religious, yet feel comfortable in the synagogue, observe some domestic Jewish customs such as lighting the Sabbath candles, wearing special clothing for the holidays, and singing special holiday chants. They also respect rabbis and hold pilgrimages to the tombs of holy men (Rosenthal, 2001, p. 194).

Amos Oz (1979) expresses this approach to Jewish customs: "We are not willing and able to live according to *Halakha*, we are also not willing to give it up together with all the good things that it entails – holidays and their songs, customs, and other things that the tribe – for the most part – sees as the ties (and sweet ones at that), without which the tribe might fall apart (*Light*, p. 155).

Shared Historical Memory

Continuity is a necessary condition for the existence of any identity. Knowledge of the past, sources, and roots is,

therefore, inseparable from any national identity. Smith (1991) says that we must know whence we came in order to know who we are (p. 29). National continuity and shared historical memory are, therefore, basic conditions for any national identity. (Whether the shared past is true in all its details is insignificant – what is important is that the collective believes in it.)

As we learn from the writers, most of them view the shared past and the knowledge of this past to be one of the most important – if not the most important – component of Jewish identity. They maintain that without the memory of a shared past, there cannot be any Jewish existence. Amos Oz (2002) writes, "Collective memory is the common platform for human co-existence. Even a family could not exist for a single day if its memory disk were erased, both good memories and horrible ones" (*Two Wars* p. 114).

Yael Tamir writes: "My secularism has deep Jewish roots. It has no existence and no significance without a Jewish past, without a Jewish background" (Zucker, 1999, p. 176). In a tone that is somewhat "Canaanite," she clings to the distant past, the ancient Biblical life of the Jewish People, with a "... yearning to live in the place our forefathers lived, to know the Mountains of Judea and the Hills of Samaria" (Zucker, 1999, p. 176).

Deddi Zucker places knowledge of the past at the very heart of Jewish and Israeli identity: "... one can be a Jew without territory and God, but not with scorn for the past" (Zucker, 1999, p. 188). Furthermore, "The new Israeli... must study, read, know and also see himself in the perspective of Jewish history. In addition to his affiliation to general human history,

the new Israeli must also integrate himself into the history of his Judaism" (Zucker, 1999, p. 191).

Dan Yardeni, an industrialist, also emphasizes the great importance of a shared past for Jewish existence: "Centrifugal forces in Jewish society face a single, unique centripetal force – the collective memory gathered, guarded, and transferred in Jewish consciousness from one generation to the next. This collective memory has been the glue that held the Jewish People together, regardless of their location, especially since Jews lost their territorial homeland some 2000 years ago" (Zucker, 1999, p. 213). A. B. Yehoshua expresses the same sentiment in his own way: "The question is whether in the year 2050, when everything here will be nothing but high-risers and McDonalds' restaurants, we will be able to make films about Jews who lived 300 and 400 years ago, and make a connection between several codes that are entrenched in a national identity, just as Italians, French, and Icelandic people can do. I'm not saying that this is the total essence of an entire culture, but I am saying that culture cannot exist without some sort of continuity, without an awareness of the past, without focus, and without examining codes" (Rosenthal, 2001, pp. 110-111).

Aaron Appelfeld laments the lack of sufficient awareness of Israeli society to its Jewish past. "There is no organic, evolutionary development from Jewish past to Israeli present. There is no understanding of the Israeli and the Zionist narrative within the larger context of the Jewish narrative. What we have here is too much localism, too much here and now.... A society without real roots is also one devoid of a future (interview in *Ha'aretz*, 13 February, 2004).

In this chapter we addressed the Jewish "past" as a monolithic entity, as if all the writers have the same "past" in mind. A closer look at these writings reveals that some of them refer to the Diaspora "Jewish" past of the Jewish People, and others also refer to the ancient, Hebrew, Biblical past, the one connected to the Land of Israel, the past that preceded the two millennia of Diaspora living. As the number of writers is relatively small, we cannot address this distinction. Suffice it to say that there is a degree of ambivalence among these writers as to the "Diaspora" past. This ambivalence is also manifested in their attitude toward the Diaspora, which will be discussed later in this paper.

A Shared Homeland - "Secular Judaism ... cannot exist outside of Israel"

Like culture and collective memory, a homeland is considered to be a basic national attribute (Gellner, 1983; Smith, 1991). In this respect, the Jewish nation is an exception, although it is not unique (Gellner, 1983). Although for most of its years, the Jewish People lived in the Diaspora, it began in a territory that is considered and it considers a promised homeland, a territory to which the Jewish People maintained a connection throughout all their years in exile, and in which they renewed their statehood.

Some of the writers address the question of the Jewish People's territory, and they emphasize the important role of territory in secular Jewish identity. Author A. B. Yehoshua (1984) discusses the special, problematic relationship between the People of Israel and their homeland, the Land of Israel, stating that "the primary, elementary relation between

a nation and a homeland is not a natural one for us" (*Speaking Up* p. 32). In a historical survey of the Jewish People since its very beginning, Yehoshua demonstrates that according to Jewish theology, the existence of the people is not territory related, and "the nation precedes the land" (*Speaking Up* p. 33; in this context, it is interesting to note Gurevitch, 1997). One of the claims Yehoshua makes in an attempt to explain this "anomaly," is that it has to do with a lack of equilibrium between the relatively weak national element, and the strong religious element in Jewish national identity: "The might of the religious-spiritual base allowed for a very effete national existence" (*Speaking Up*, 47). According to Yehoshua, effete national existence means existence without territory and without national sovereignty, an existence he totally rejects. Yael Tamir supports Yehoshua's claim (although they were not written in direct response to him). Tamir points to the special importance of territory for secular Jews: "The secular-Jewish experience is primarily the experience of the Land of Israel because it must be public and territorial. ... The secular Jewish experience also requires territory, because it cannot be detached from the area where the formative events, the ones that turned us into a nation, took place. Yearning for Zion is not just religious yearning, it is a secular, national one" (Zucker, 1999, p. 176). Furthermore, "Secular Judaism, of the type that is the foundation for Zionism, cannot exist outside of the Land of Israel and the State of Israel. It cannot be carried around and moved.... Religious people can observe many religious laws wherever they are.... Secular Zionists need much more than that... and they need the Land of Israel so that they can relate to their past without religion as

mediator" (p. 177). The very existence of Jewish identity depends, according to Tamir, on living in the Land of Israel, so that "if I want to raise children who have a meaningful secular Jewish identity, I can do so only in Israel" (p. 175).

Amos Oz (1979) does not discuss the need for territory but rather turns to examine why the Land of Israel was the territory chosen by the Jews to build their renewed State. His answer is that "the Land of the Jews could not come into existence, and could not continue existing, in any place other than this... because this has been the place to which all prayers and longing have flowed" (*Light* p. 75).

These writings indicate that the national identity of the writers – as any other "normal" national identity – includes a common homeland as a self-evident component. With their national identity being a secular identity, the writers have no common religion (which includes yearning for a homeland) to act as a "homeland substitute".

The Holocaust

The Holocaust left an indelible impression on Jewish history and consciousness. Historian Yigal Elam (Gesher, 1996) maintains that it is one of the two key events on which contemporary Jewish consciousness is based (the second being the founding of the State of Israel). The Holocaust has replaced the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai and all other fundamental experiences that were instrumental in forming Jewish consciousness throughout the centuries.

Most writers who address the Holocaust recognized its detrimental impact upon shaping Jewish identity, although they differ in their interpretation as to the way it affected

Jewish identity and as to the lessons they seek to learn from it. Some, such as A. B. Yehoshua (1994), relate the Holocaust to the Diaspora. Yehoshua views the Holocaust as the highest point in the conflict between the Jew and the world, a conflict that continues today, and began when the People of Israel went into exile. "We have this tendency to madden non-Jews.... First we maddened Europeans, now we are also maddening the Arabs. There is something in our nebulous existence that causes this madness" (interview in *Ha'aretz*, 19 March, 2004). Yehoshua views the Holocaust as the final proof that the Diaspora is wrong and that Zionism is right.

Amos Oz (1979) concurs, viewing the Holocaust as inseparable from the Diaspora and a final – and consistent – conclusion of "the ancient status of Jewish man within Western culture." Jews are "a deep, underlying sand cast" of Western spirit, and a "primal archetype in the deep cellars of Christian spirit" (*Light* p. 75). Appelfeld has a different approach. Although he views the roots of the Holocaust in the hate of the People of Israel, a hate shared by all nations, he does not tie this hate to the Diaspora only. He claims that hate did not abate with the founding of the State of Israel, and the Arab (including Muslim) hate of Israel was merely added to preexisting European hate (interview in *Ha'aretz*, 8 February, 2004). Unlike Yehoshua and Oz, Appelfeld, along with historian Moshe Zimmerman (*Gesher* 1996), do not see the creation of the State of Israel to be an answer to anti-Semitism, nor is the state "an insurance policy" protecting against a new Holocaust.

The writers express a variety of opinions regarding the way in which the Holocaust affected their own Jewish identity or

Jewish identity in general. Some formed a positive attitude toward Diaspora Jewry. Thus, Amos Oz (1982) writes that the Holocaust softened his basically negative attitude toward the Diaspora experience: "You are not allowed to feel revulsion, because since then this entity was killed, strangled, and burned by Hitler" (*Journeys*, 9). Similarly, Deddi Zucker criticizes the scorn that many Israelis tended to express toward Diaspora Jewry, for seemingly going to their death "like sheep to the slaughter." Zucker defines this scorn as the "pinnacle of Israeli-Sabra arrogance" (Zucker, 1999, p. 186). Appelfeld (interview in *Ha'aretz*, 2004) shows understanding toward Jews who, following the Holocaust, tried to escape their Judaism. He maintains that it is difficult for a non-believing Jew to withstand the suffering that the Jewish experience entails. Yacov Malkin (2000) says that Holocaust studies should include not only the physical annihilation of Jews, but also the annihilation of the rich Jewish culture of the Diaspora. Other writers address the negative effects of Holocaust awareness on Jewish identity. A. B. Yehoshua (1984) worries that our moral sensitivity to others will become dull, and claims that one challenge of the Holocaust is a deliberate honing of our moral sensitivity. There are writers, such as historian Ariyeh Gertner, who object to over-basing Jewish identity on the Holocaust. Gertner fears that Holocaust-based Jewish identity will become "an impoverished Jewish identity, characterized by fear, hate, vengeful aggression and a horrific feeling that Israel is the only safe haven for Jews" (*Gesher*, 1996, p. 50). Similarly, Moshe Zukerman fears that victimization would become the center of Jewish identity, and, "if they hate me, I must be Jewish" (*Gesher*, 1996, p.

92). Indeed, we see that the Holocaust occupies a pivotal position in the writers' Jewish awareness. At the same time, the Holocaust is controversial, and brings forth different attitudes in different writers, and consequently each one learns a different lesson from it.

The Diaspora – "The Jewish Disease"

The Diaspora plays a major role in Jewish history and in the religious and national consciousness of the People of Israel. Jews are members of a nation who, for most of its existence, lived in exile yet never stopped expressing its yearning for its ancient homeland. Zionism, the movement for national renaissance was based on negation of the Diaspora, although the Holocaust and historical affiliation never allowed it to totally sever itself from the very same Diaspora. The Jewish people view Israel as their homeland, yet some legitimize living in the Diaspora. It is not surprising, then, that Israel's attitude to the Diaspora is complex and multifaceted.

Most of the writers view the Diaspora as a powerful formative force for Jewish identity. Diaspora is not just "lack of territory and being scattered among Gentiles.... It is a profound disease, a mental and a social one. (Oz, 1970, Light p.126). The writers claim that the Diaspora shaped a "Jewish soul" whose positive and negative attributes (and most writers view them as primarily negative) reach far beyond the period of Jewish existence in the Diaspora. The Diaspora and its ramifications shaped a Zionist ideology which negates its very existence, affected the form assumed by the State of Israel, and continues to affect us to this very day. As Amos Oz says (1979), "The Diaspora continues to raise its head"

(*Light* p. 148).

A. B. Yehoshua (1984), who often addresses the Diaspora issue, claims that this issue is the most important and profound that Jews must face when they ponder the meaning of the People of Israel. "Understanding the Diaspora is the key to understanding the People of Israel" (*Speaking Up* p. 28). Yehoshua claims that the Diaspora cannot be viewed as "an accident or a catastrophe. Rather, it is a profound inner distortion" (*Speaking Up* p. 20). "For us, the primary and elementary connection between nation and homeland is not a natural one. We were melded as a nation in the Diaspora, and the Diaspora, our mother lode, entered the very fabric of our being" (*Speaking Up* p. 32). Yehoshua reviews Jewish history and sees it as characterized by the duality of clinging to the Diaspora (even during those times when Jews could have settled in the Land of Israel), while totally rejecting it on grounds of principle. Yehoshua further claims that the Diaspora experience created a condition of partial identity among Jews. "I am afraid of the partial identity of Jews..." They enter other national identities and create "sick interactions" with them. The epitome of such "sick interactions" is, of course, the Holocaust (interview in *Ha'aretz*, 19 March, 2004). Yehoshua (1984) complains that even the Holocaust did not eradicate the "Diaspora virus" within Jews, and that even in Israel people cannot rid themselves of it: "Only thirty years have elapsed since the State of Israel came into being, and it already shows worrying signs of Diaspora revival... In Israel itself the Diaspora is turning into a viable alternative to living here" (*Speaking Up* p. 62). In Yehoshua's view, then, the Diaspora is an "anomaly," if not an outright "pathology"

in the center of Jewish existence, and it continues to threaten national existence even after the Jewish People achieved independent statehood in its own land.

Amos Oz (1979) also perceives the Diaspora as a disease, "the Jews' Disease" (*Light* p. 126), and he, too, sees it as a condition with adverse effects which influenced – and continues to influence – Jewish identity. Oz's "Jews' Disease" has several symptoms. First is the *petit bourgeois* the "merchants' and shopkeepers' mentality" which the founders of Zionism expected to vanish when Jews return to their land. Zionism expected to create a new person: "No longer a Jew, but a tanned Hebrew man, strong and brave, free of Jewish complexes and neuroses, a lover of work and a lover of the land" (*Light* pp. 127-128). However, "with statehood, like a curse that had been floating overhead and finally materialized, a *petit bourgeois* state descended upon us" (p. 130). A second symptom that Oz feels we are still carrying is the feeling of "the whole world is against us." He writes "... there is yet another tendency to return to Jewish reflexes, into the warm and blurry myths of 'a nation unto itself,' to the fellowship of the pursued,... the 'sheep among seventy wolves,' to self-righteousness and self-pity and the ancient, hysterical Jewish fusion of whining and arrogance". "Zionism has barely succeeded in spreading a thin coating of being a nation, and under this coating a terrified tribe breathes heavily, together with the exile, the ghetto, the desire to just drop this game and go lock ourselves behind our walls..." (p. 147). Oz lists another symptom of the disease, a symptom of exogenous origin – the Diaspora – but one which came into full bloom and expression in the State of Israel. This symptom

is the worship of power. Oz (1979) claims that there are those who view Israel as an "overall retaliation against our historical humiliation" (*Light* p. 53). According to this approach, the role of the State of Israel is to teach other nations a lesson, to visit our wrath upon them, so that we may prove to them "that we are not 'dirty Jews' but a new race; we are true robbers, we are horrible wolves" (p. 53). The origin of this approach, according to Oz, is self-hate: "Because who other than a person who hates himself ... would present himself as a strong and ruthless warmonger who is not detached and spiritual? In other words: Down with our forefathers! let the Gentiles respect us because we are not like our forefathers, but are more like those who persecuted them" (p. 53). Oz sees this supposedly "anti-Diaspora" approach as a true product of the Diaspora, as it is propelled by the question, What will the Gentiles think of us?

Another negative attribute of the Jews, according to Oz (1982), which may not be a direct result of the Diaspora but is certainly one of its causes, is our "talent" for destruction: "The Jewish people have a great talent for destruction. We may even hold the world record for destruction... but our talent for destruction is not a Divine decree. It is, perhaps, the product of our character. I'll mention one component of the talent for destruction – our typical demand for perfection, for totality, for seeing every ideal all the way to its fullest summation, or until our head cracks against the wall – it is all or nothing, 'Reach the summit or die!'" (*Journeys*, 112).

Oz attributes most of our national ills to the Diaspora experience, and at the same time has a somewhat ambivalent attitude toward it, as he cannot reject it out of hand. When

he describes Geula, a Jerusalem neighborhood which is becoming increasingly Orthodox, he says, "Were not for the stone and the olive tree and the pines, were it not for the Jerusalem light, you might feel here as if you were standing in a small Jewish town in Eastern Europe, (p. 8). "You are not allowed to feel revulsion, because since then this entity was killed, strangled, and burned by Hitler" (p. 9). "You will not be able to hate them and you will not be able not to hate them" (p. 10).

Poet Shimon Adaf also shared the view that we have not yet freed ourselves from the Diaspora "Disease": "Anyone who thinks that Jews have left the Diaspora behind them is making a grave mistake. The Diaspora was merely processed dangerously into the fabric of Israeli life" (Rosenthal, 2001, p. 187). Adaf "agrees" with Oz that "This 'Muscular Jew' joke is nothing more than importing the relationship of Jew-Gentile, with Jew and Gentile trading places... It seems that the model of the persecuted Jew is still being ingested with mother's milk" (p.187).

Tamir Greenberg also describes the maladies of Israeli society, and he, too, attributes them to harsh Diaspora experiences. Greenberg claims that we will never live a "normal" life as do other people, "let us not delude ourselves," he says (Samet, 2003, p. 94). Yair Zaban speaks up against "neo-Zionism clinging to Jewish anomaly," thus distorting the goals of original Zionism which had set out to change the Diaspora existence and experience (Zucker, 1999, 123). "Jewish anomaly" is also the expression used by Aaron Meged, who concurs with the other writers that even in our own land we cannot shake it off. Like Yehoshua, Meged

views this "anomaly" as the reason for ongoing anti-Semitism (Samet, 2003, p. 173).

Aaron Appelfeld expresses clear ambivalence toward the Diaspora. Appelfeld criticizes Zionism for its fight against Yiddish, against the Diaspora, and against the wealth of Judaism. The price of that fight was "a limiting of the Jewish soul" and the creation of "cultural cripples." Israeli culture, with its partial disclaiming of Judaism, is a culture with identity deficiencies. "Identifying Judaism with a religion from which one tries to disassociate creates a serious vacuum here. Therefore, we have an identity black hole (interview in *Ha'aretz*, 13 February, 2004).

At the same time, Appelfeld addresses the negative implications of the Diaspora. Like Oz, he regards us as an "armed ghetto," albeit a weak one, and adds that as a reaction to negative world opinions toward us we have developed self-hate. We internalized our persecution and the hate toward us, and this internalization is worse than the persecution itself. Another facet of Appelfeld's ambivalence toward the Diaspora – and one where he differs from the other writers – is in his empathy toward the "ills" of the Jews. He asks that we show ourselves some compassion, "Yes, we may have compassion for the Arabs, but we can also have some compassion for the Jews. They, too, deserve a good word once in a while. It is OK to like them too" (*Ha'aretz*, 13 February, 2004).

It seems to us that the difference between Appelfeld's ambivalence toward the Diaspora and the unequivocal negative attitude of the other writers (excluding a degree of ambivalence found in Oz), reflects the biographical difference

between Appelfeld and the others.

Yehoshua, Oz, and all the other writers are "Israelis," native-born people who express "classical" Zionism's total rejection of the Diaspora. Appelfeld, born in the Diaspora and a Holocaust survivor, expresses a "Jewish" approach, which is, therefore, more empathic toward the Diaspora.

Secularism as Part of Israeli Culture

In the first chapter we addressed the writers' "Jewish" self-definition. We mentioned that some added the adjective "secular" to their definition, and we said that, in their opinion, their secularism does not detract from their Judaism, and they even believe that it enhances it. We did not expand upon the "secular" component of their identity, although it occupies a place of honor in their personal Jewish identity and in their approach to Judaism in general. This section will fill in the missing parts.

Much of the writings about secularism are at odds with religious Judaism. The argument is that secular Judaism is not inferior to the Judaism of religious Jews, and may even be superior to it, and that their "cart" is well-laden, quite contrary to the religious claim that secularism is "an empty cart." The writers strongly object to secular Jews' tendency to see themselves as inferior to religious Jews and view them as more "Jewish" than themselves. Amos Oz (1998) criticizes this self-effacing approach. Despite the length of this text, we will quote it here in full:

"*Shulhan Arukh* Judaism is no closer to the 'source' than are secular people. It is neither less "Hellenized" nor does it follow "Gentile paths" in any lesser way. This is why I am

upset by the self-effacement of several secular people who abase themselves against the 'authenticity' of the various types of observant Jews. Supposedly, the Satmar Rabbi, and the Lubawich Rabbi, and Rabbi Shach and Rabbi Yosef are the most Jewish of all Jews – the 'Super League.' The supposed 'Second League' are the murderer Baruch Goldstein and his band, and around them, also very very Jewish, people who fight non-Jews. Despite the fact that they don't wear *kapottas* and *streimels*, still do a great job oppressing Arabs and lash into them in the grandest tradition of Moses and the Law of Israel. According to this view, the next lower tier is occupied by Lewinger's people, those who wear crocheted yarmulkes. Below the *kappota* and below the oppressors of Ishmael seem to be the 'traditionalists,' those who maintain some *yiddishkeit*, – at least until noon – on the Day of Atonement, drive on the Sabbath – but not to a place that serves pork. Below these are 'plain folks' – good, simple Jews who have lost their way, 'babes who've been captured,' raw material for proselytizers. The lowest of them all, the worst, the most Hellenized, the most Gentile – are the left wingers, who do nothing but pursue peace and unrelentingly protect human rights and will just not allow the carrying out of a little quiet injustice or nationalistic inequity, and will not stop screaming constantly 'altogether just shall thy follow' – where on earth did they come up with this phrase?"(*Hopes* p. 53).

Many of the writers are chagrined by the "hold" that religious Jews seemingly have on Judaism. Amos Oz (2002) writes about "a number of people who took over the ritual of and assumed a monopoly on Judaism... This is a shame, as this

heritage is the legacy of all of us, not only their" (*Two Wars* p. 8). Zvia Valdan echoes this thought: "Judaism is the cultural property of all Jews, regardless of the degree to which they observe *mitzvot*. In the last few years we have witnessed an ever-growing, encroaching possessiveness of values and symbols, writings and traditions that are part of the Jewish heritage, as if it were possible that there were those who can be their sole owners" (Zucker, 1999, p. 91). Yisrael Segal asks, "And really, why is it so? Why, in the name of all God, do we grant an exclusive title to the spiritual treasures from the Babylonian Exile to this very day to the proponents of strict adherence to *Halakha*?" (Zucker, 1999, p. 138).

The comparison of secular Judaism to an "empty cart" is a cause for debate for the writers. (This comparison is based on an exchange between Rabbi Karelitz, known as *Hazon Ish* and Ben-Gurion.)

Amos Oz (1998) states: "A spiritual dialogue between a 'full cart' and an 'empty cart' is impossible. Only those who are willing to recognize that Jewish culture consists of quite a number of full carts is a potential partner for dialogue" (*Hopes* p. 50). Yaron London also argues with this "accusation": "Indeed, religious Jews often challenge atheists with the question, What, in fact, makes you a Jew? The rebuttal is easy – a feeling of belonging does not rest on objective standards, and this feeling is certainly not in need of someone else's confirmation" (Zucker, 1999, p. 29). Similarly, Nissim Kalderon quotes Y. H. Brenner who asked "What makes you Jews if you do not adhere to the Jewish religion?" and answered. "We are Jews in our everyday, real life, in heart and feeling, without intellectual definitions, without absolute

truths, and without any written commitments. Everything we now hold precious, everything that is of value to us, everything that emerges from our free essence, without force and coercion of whatever type – that is our Judaism" (Zucker, 1999, p. 76). The last two quotations refer to a feeling of belonging to the Jewish People as an important component in secular Jewish identity.

However, secular Jews do not base their Judaism solely on a feeling of belonging. A major portion of the writers view secularism not only as an anti-religious position, but as a separate, independent stream in Judaism, one with its own substance and values. Poet Sheva Salhov says, "A Jewish spiritual stream, a move within the spiritual movements of Judaism" (Zucker, 1999, p. 146). Amos Oz (1982) writes that unlike the way they are viewed by religious Jews, secular Jews are not superficial, hedonistic, greedy, defeatists, or Hellenistic, but rather, they have "a different perception of Judaism and Zionism" (*Journeys*, 107).

Other writers point to the contribution of the secular "stream" to Jewish cultural creation. Amos Oz (1998) writes that "It seems that in the past hundred years, most dynamic and creative expressions in Jewish culture have taken place outside of the realm of *Halakha*, have a dialectic relation to it, others aim to shatter it" (*Hopes* p. 48). Oz views the creations of Jewish secular Zionism as at least equal to those of *Halakhic* Judaism, referring both to collective creations such as the kibbutz and to individual creations in philosophy, literature, and art. Deddi Zucker refers to a "huge secular creation... encompassing many disciplines" (Zucker, 1999, p. 192). Some of the writers even claim that at times,

secular philosophers outdo their religious counterparts when addressing religious matters, as the former enjoy greater intellectual flexibility and are unencumbered by *Halakhic* precepts. Anat Gov says that in recent years more and more secular Jews have begun approaching Jewish sources, and that they are the only ones "who can, nowadays, approach this material without prejudice, without fear, objectively, out of liking and respect" (Zucker, 1999, p. 46). Similarly, Ruth Kalderon writes that "only a free person is capable of facing a classical text... and finding new meaning in it" (Zucker, 1999, p. 196). She also writes that religious Jews face Jewish sources as "curators, not creators," whereas secular Jews are able to see "the Bible as raw material" for life creations" and once again begin writing *Midrash* (Zucker, 1999, p. 198). Many of the writers point to the moral superiority of secular Judaism over religious Judaism, as the former emphasizes interpersonal religious laws (as seen above in the section on Religious Ritual versus the Prophets' Morality). Amos Oz (1987) holds that secular Jews have a superior moral attitude towards their fellow Jews when compared with those religious Jews who sometimes act violently against Jews who in their eyes are not fulfilling all the Jewish religious laws. Liova Eliav's concept of Judaism does not require justification or lowering one's gaze, quite the contrary. This Judaism has no reason to be ashamed or to cower in the face of religious people" (*The Slopes of Lebanon* pp. 198-199). Anat Gov thinks that secular Jews have recently begun to study Jewish sources out of a desire to "rescue Judaism from the heathenism that has taken over, and bring it back to the spiritual, moral, and humanistic level that is its foundation"

(Zucker, 1999, p. 44).

Other writers see secular Judaism's strong nationalist affinity as its great advantage. Author Gadi Taub aspires to "pour back substance into the concept secular Jew, substance that we had never truly managed to chase away... renewed legitimacy for Judaism as nationalism" (Zucker, 1999, p. 62). Yael Tamir emphasizes secular Jews' love of the land, "The yearning for Zion is not a religious yearning, it is a secular-national yearning, a yearning to be in the place where our forefathers walked" (Zucker, 1999, p. 176). Tamir thinks that it is erroneous to attribute the detachment from roots, culture, and past to secular Jews, and she says, "In the life of secular Jews, Judaism plays a pivotal role as a national, cultural, and linguistic context" (Zucker, 1999, p. 180). According to Tamir, nationalism can be a substitute for religion, because it, like religion, offers context, future, and a way to interpret a person's actions. Eliezer Strum claims that he, and other secular Jews like himself, are those who created a new Jewish nationalism, "everything that is the here and now of the Jewish People's agenda: creating the State of Israel, the return of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel, renewal of the Hebrew language, bringing back national independence to people on their land, eradicating the Jewish anomaly of a nation that lives outside of its country, and assuming full responsibility for the life of the Jewish People – its economy, science, medicine, and culture" (Zucker, 1999, pp. 208-209). Religious Judaism claims that the secular abandonment of religion will cause eventual assimilation, even within the State of Israel itself, as it is observing religious *mitzvot*, all, that is unique to the Jewish People and makes it stand apart. Some

of the writers counter this claim with the argument that the mere existence of national and cultural life in the Land of Israel is sufficient deterrent to "prevent" assimilation. Thus, Yaron London writes, "There are those who fear that the dwindling of Jewish culture will be the cause of assimilation into the surroundings or mass emigration from Israel.... I have no fear of such processes, because I believe that secular Israeli civilization is equipped with enough powers to make it distinct from anything else" (Zucker, 1999, p. 37). Furthermore, "The fact that a Jewish-Israeli atheist belongs to his nation is quite similar to the belonging of all atheists in the world to their nations. Just as a French person can be Catholic... so can an Israeli Jew be religious and adhere to the *mitzvot* or traditional – one who observes some *mitzvot* believing in the existence of God, or an atheist who is devoid of any outward Jewish signs. A common language, a shared history, a number of shared underlying myths, and ownership of a share in the organization known as The State are sufficient to make a Jewish citizen of Israel feel like part of the Jewish nation. The existence of national feelings, which are essentially subjective, is a firm objective fact." (Zucker, 1999, pp. 29-30). London's words are reminiscent of Brenner's, as quoted by Nissim Kalderon: "We are the living Jews, whether we fast on the Day of Atonement or eat meat cooked in milk on that day, whether our worldview makes us faithful disciples of Epikourus - we do not cease to feel like Jews, live our Jewish life, work and create Jewish ways of working, speak our Jewish language, receive our spiritual sustenance from our literature, work for our free national culture, protect our national honor, and fight our battle of existence in all its manifestations"

(Zucker, 1999, pp. 76-77). We quote these two writers at length because they clearly demonstrate how self-explanatory their Jewish identity is, and how deep and unshakeable is their adherence to it.

Conclusions

In the eyes of the writers whose words we presented here, "secular Judaism" is a consistent, well-formed, self-aware worldview, one that is convinced that it is right. The writers' "Jewishness" is not a random collection of feelings, opinions, or customs, but rather a solid, organized ideology. Their "secularity" is not merely a negation of "religious" Judaism, but rather a clear, orderly theory.

The writers are not detached from their Judaism, which is how religious people often portray secular ones. Rather, their perception of Judaism is totally different from that of religious Jews. It is not by chance that they "obstinately" insist on describing themselves as "Jews" and not use the convenient alternative "Israelis." They view themselves as "true" Jews, and although their Jewishness is not religious, in their opinion it is not less authentic or legitimate than religious Judaism (A.B. Yehoshua, one of the few who use the term "israeli" does not consider the term "Israeli" as an alternative to the term "Jew", and argues that "Israeli" is the original and correct term). As opposed to religious Judaism the writers present a different model, not less "Jewish" - a national cultural Judaism. The writers' national affinity is based, primarily, on a strong feeling of belonging to the Jewish People, and on a relationship of closeness to its sources and past, a deep connection to the Land of Israel and a

commitment to the continuity of the nation and to the form of its national identity. In a word, the writers' national worldview can be defined as "Zionist." Against this background one may explain their negative attitude toward the Diaspora and their criticism of the Jewish character and lifestyle that developed there.

The writers' cultural identity is manifested in the great importance they accord to Hebrew, and to anything and everything created in Hebrew, past and present – literature, poetry, philosophy, art, and even daily life. Within the framework of their cultural Jewish identity, the writers allocate prime space to religious Jewish creation, and see themselves (to coin a phrase by Amos Oz) as the "legal heirs" of this creation, aware of the need to study it, know it, and interpret it. However, they do so from a secular perspective, and as secular Jews they also view themselves, as we have demonstrated, as having an advantage in interpreting Jewish sources. The writers also recognize the need to preserve some of the religious customs, turning them into general national symbols. They also report that to a limited extent they preserve some of these customs in their own home. It is our opinion that there should be no misinterpretation of these characteristics – they indicate neither an affinity to religion nor coming closer to religious Judaism, as Liebman (2001) interprets these domestic observances. Rather, the attitude toward all such characteristics is cultural, and any preserving – if such preserving exists – is done, for the most part, for reasons of national identity.

From a religious aspect, their Jewish definition is, indeed, "minimal," although this is irrelevant to them. It is their

conscious choice to be secular. (Even though at least some of them are aware of the fact that it is impossible to totally sever Jewish religion from Jewish nationalism). As we have seen, the writers do not feel inferior to religious Jews, nor do they view themselves as any less Jewish than religious Jews. On the contrary, there are several aspects in which they view themselves as more appropriate representatives of the Jewish spirit, especially when concerning interpersonal *mitzvot*.

Secular Judaism, as reflected here, is self-aware, confident of itself and of its identity, proud of its superiority in certain aspects, and perceives itself as an authentic and legitimate representative (albeit not the only one) of Judaism.

If any "danger" lurks in the wings for this Judaism, it would be, in our opinion, in the "post-Zionist" trends apparent in recent years in Israeli society, since the form of Judaism we described here is based primarily on Zionist nationalism, and its other elements are an outgrowth of this foundation. Thus, any weakening of this foundation might jeopardize secular Judaism.

In the "Introduction" we pointed to the growing heterogeneity of Israeli society, which poses a risk to its fragile wholeness and unity. At this juncture it would behoove us to seek the common denominators between the secular version of Judaism and other versions.

It seems that there are common points between secular Judaism and national-religious Judaism in Israel. However, in recent years there is much political strife between these groups. Without such strife, there are commonalities. This discussion is beyond the scope of the present paper.

One must also bear in mind that secular Judaism is not monolithic, despite the fairly uniform voices of the writers presented here. Most likely there are other groups of secular Jews, on the far "left" and "right" of the political spectrum, whose attitudes and views differ from those presented here. Even "middle-of-the-road" secular Judaism may be misrepresented here, as we studied that which was most accessible (e.g., collections of articles); quite possibly the writers who had been selected to appear in these texts, or those who chose to contribute to them are not a representative sample of secular Judaism.

Another question which will not be addressed here is the degree to which these writers, who are part of a certain elite – intellectual, political, or social – represent the general public of secular Jews. Is it their voice we hear, or are these writers their public-opinion leaders? Or perhaps neither one nor the other?

Clearly, for our findings to be supported (or modified) further study must be undertaken concerning the writings and views of other secular groups.

Notes

1. Although "nation" is considered a modern term, A. Smith (1991) claims that during the period of the Second Temple, the Jewish people came very close to the modern meaning of nation. In its narrowest meaning, it can be said to refer to ethnic belonging.
2. The Emancipation Movement and the Reform Movement both tried, for a limited time, to cancel out the national component of Judaism and base it on solely on religion. The Zionist Movement and other national movements attempted to base Jewish identity primarily on the national component.
3. It is important to mention that "modern" Jewish nationalism was based, to a large extent, on ethnic-cultural identity that preceded it (Eliezer Don-Yihya, Bernard Susser, 1999).
4. Y. Tamir (1996) claims that what we call "symbolic ethnicity" is not necessarily shallow or "inauthentic." According to her, "authenticity" is not expressed by proximity to the source but by being the individual's free choice.
5. The issue of personal morality versus religious ritual will be dealt with later in this paper.

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