

Inside Israel

Basmat Hazan Arnoff
Individual Voices and
Collective History . . . 1

Eli Yassif
Jewish Folklore 2

*Ioram Melcer and
Michal Levertov*
It's About Us: 3

Aaron Bisman
More on
Nurturing Voices . . . 5

Esteban Gottfried
Jewish Renaissance
in Israel 6

Moti Zeira
Recreating Jewish
Community 7

Aliza Olmert
NiSh'ma 8

Adina Newberg
New Identities and
Connections 10

Ezra Kopelowitz
Who is the Secular
Israeli Jew? 11

Meir Yoffe
The New Secular
Jew in Israel. 12

Discussion Guide . . . 12

Sofia Solomonick
Russian Identity and
Language 13

Martin Ben Moreh
Culture as Compass:
Secular Israelis 14

Aliza Kline
Sh'ma Ethics 16

Benjy Maor
Naamah Kelman-Ezrach
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TODAY, the old, standard juxtaposition in Israel between Jews who are “religious” or “secular” is blurred and outdated. New, enticing forms of creativity and innovation among Israelis with regard to expressing and living Jewish lives — in addition to the indefinite and icy status quo with Palestinians, a growing resentment at the power of the Orthodox, and a swelling of the Russian immigrant community (now some 20 percent of Israel’s population) — are creating a spirited mood and thirst for experimentation. This issue of *Sh'ma* draws on myriad Israeli voices in an effort to explore, evaluate, and debate these new trends and what they mean for Jewish identity in Israel.

Individual Voices and Collective History

Basmat Hazan Arnoff

JUST AFTER I WAS DRAFTED into the Israeli army eighteen years ago, a young Israeli writer named David Grossman published a book about the Holocaust. The name of the book was *See Under: Love*. At the same time, a popular young rock musician, Yehuda Poliker, released the album *Dust and Ashes*. And Orna Ben Dor released her documentary *Because of That War* about Poliker and his partner Yakov Gilad making music about the Holocaust as descendants of Greek and Polish families murdered by the Nazis.

These were the artistic works that changed the lives of my generation. Coming of age in Israel in the 1970s and 1980s, living in a country that was still trying to understand how to experience the memory of the Holocaust, my friends and I were accustomed to relating to the Holocaust in grand, untouchable terms like “destruction,” “disaster,” and “martyrdom.” From first grade on, our teachers had struck our ears with the words of terrifying songs and stories. We had seen awful photographs. We had heard, often by accident, the shadow conversations of grown-ups describing medical experiments on human beings, how the Nazis had made soap out of Jews. Each year we sang anthems and prayers to commemorate unexplained and unexplainable losses.

Seemingly from nowhere came three fresh, beautiful, creative works offering a completely new perspective on the Holocaust. Grossman, Poliker, and Ben Dor wrote, sang, and spoke about the Holocaust in “our words” — a new vocabulary and sound that related the experience that had directly shaped our lives, but until then had never truly been discussed. The Holocaust had been the property of the survivors, not us. Then a few artists created an opportunity to actually feel the Holocaust after having lived with its invisible toxic heat, the aftermath of its radiation.

Many artists later joined this wave of creativity and strengthened and changed the ensuing dialogue, but I always remembered that *See Under: Love* had shaken me to the core.

I recently began directing a theatrical adaptation of the second of four sections of *See Under: Love*; it is called *Bruno*. As I began the project of bringing *Bruno* to the stage, I reentered the edginess and the madness of the book. Unlike the reading as a teen, I now saw the text from the perspective of an adult artist. I began to see new visions within the story, understanding for the first time that the journey undertaken by the hero of *See Under: Love* is a path toward redemption.

See Under: Love is a secular, Israeli book attempting to make sense of contemporary Jewish history. I began the process of adaptation — with a group of students from The School for Theater Arts at the Kibbutzim College (the Israeli equivalent of an MFA program) — by closely studying the book in a “theatrical *beit midrash*.” Through immersion in Jewish and non-

Basmat Hazan Arnoff, married to Stephen, is the mother of two girls, a teacher of Jewish text, and a theater director living in Jerusalem. Her first novel – Mayyim Hafuchim – will be published by Kibbutz Hameuhad Press in summer 2006. Translated from the Hebrew by Stephen Hazan Arnoff.

Jewish traditional and contemporary texts, we are building an aesthetic vocabulary that will serve the actors throughout the collaborative experience. Through the lens of pluralistic Jewish study, we intend to bring to the stage the journey of Shlomo Neumann, the hero of *Bruno*, a second-generation survivor of the Holocaust, as he moves toward his personal redemption. When I was a theater student, the idea of bringing Jewish text study to a group of secular actors would have seemed radical or distant. Today, secular students are excited to meet within a textual conversation for creative, rather than specifically religious, engagement.

A quiet revolution is slipping across Israel's secular/religious divide. Jewish study is now seen as a way of balancing and enriching contemporary creative dialogue. Slowly, divisions are breaking down, particularly in the realm of the arts, and it is becoming clearer that differences in lifestyle and understanding can enrich partnerships, that rigid identities stifle creativity. It is now possible to be a secular Israeli who is open to the study and influence of Tanach just as it is possible to be a religious Israeli and make good theater. Paradoxically,

in an Israeli society where ideological boundaries between political, social, religious, and racial groups are still apparent, some cultural divisions have blurred.

Living in Israel at the beginning of the 21st century is not simple; economic hardship, security threats, and political and social pressures sometimes leave people little room to breathe. But almost 60 years after the establishment of the State, there are growing cultural fusions that have never been here before. Israel emerged from a Zionist vision emphasizing the collective over the individual voice. Now individual voices seeking roots, identity, tradition, and family history and culture are louder, clearer, and more acceptable. Personal creative expression is retelling collective history in modes that urge all of us to replace the extremes of stereotypes and slogans and silence with a dynamic language breathing new meaning and soul into our public life. If conflict is the driving force behind all great theater and art, perhaps in Israel, where conflict exists on so many levels, the arts have a very special role to play: Israeli art forges beauty and meaning out of struggle and leads us to new ways of redefining ourselves. 

Jewish Folklore: Humanistic Values and Pluralistic Venues

Eli Yassif

Eli Yassif is Professor of Hebrew Literature and Jewish Folklore at Tel Aviv University. He has published extensively on Jewish folklore and medieval Hebrew literature. He is currently Director of OFAKIM [Horizons], the honors program for the study of Judaism as Culture at Tel-Aviv University.

FOLKLORE IS one of the richest and most interesting fields of human creativity and, at the same time, one of the most misunderstood. The term is used by all, for all purposes — as “low” culture, as a production of lies, as degrading artifacts. And yet we are all proud of the folklore of our ancestors: “Oh, in our village there was such a rich folklore, today — nothing survived” is a common parlance one can hear everywhere.

The sources of these controversies are mainly two-fold: the difficulty to define folklore and the fact that it exists in every community all over the world and existed always, wherever a human community expressed itself in tale, song, dance, sculpture, or ritual.

Folklore is the most pluralistic avenue of human creativity, providing an opportunity of expression to each and every member of society. Traditional communities officially bestowed individuals with communal authority to express themselves: religious leaders, the

learned, “ancient families,” elders, the wealthy and powerful (and of course, all males). But folklore, through its open, pluralistic, simple, and common means of expression — myth, tale, proverb, riddle, ballad, lullaby, dance, and costume — provides members of the community with a means of expressing their hopes, needs, tensions, fears, and wishes.

If we want to understand the hidden depth of a society, not only the thin layer of the learned that is documented, studying and understanding its folklore is a key tool. All layers of society struggle to express themselves, and human culture throughout history gave way to different, even opposing, means of expression. Embracing pluralism offers an opportunity to enter myriad gates of wisdom, expression, and creativity. This is particularly true in Jewish culture, because of its long history, diversity, and the animosity it suffered from other cultures and religions.

Jewish folklore has two major dimensions: historical and geographical. By historical we mean the continuous chain of folk creativity starting with the Hebrew Bible and continuing with the Apocryphal literature, the Mishna, Talmud (Palestinian and Babylonian), midrashic literature, Jewish culture of the Middle Ages, Hassidic literature, and ending with the rich culture of the Jewish communities, east and west, in modern times.

The geographical dimension of Jewish folklore addresses the fact that throughout its history the Jewish people were spread around the world, and in order to survive they became, culturally, part of the societies in which they lived. This made Jewish folklore one of the

richest, most diverse, and interesting treasures of world folklore.

Opening this cultural treasure to young adults could affect their sense of Judaism, community, and identity. By presenting the essential, continuous development of Jewish folklore to our young adults — high school and university students — we also emphasize the unity of Jewish peoplehood. Jewish folklore is an important tool in presenting the continuity of themes, motifs, beliefs, and myths of Jewish culture, those that built our collective memory and unite us as one nation — in spite of our differences and controversies. By examining the range of Jewish folklore, we observe many possible ways of practicing Judaism. 

It's About Us: An Exchange Between Ioram Melcer and Michal Levertov

Dear Michal,

At the age of six I had a lot of questions, and I had some answers too. I had a fairly good idea about the way babies are born, about the shape of the world and its continents, about languages being different and fascinating, about dinosaurs and the atom and about a host of other matters, all vital to me though some were trivial or strange in the eyes of the adults I knew. And then I asked the question: "Mum, why is it that we hear about the Jews in ancient times and then again only now?" My mother, by then well-versed in being my correspondent, answered after a second or two: "Because the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, and we went on exile for 2000 years until we returned to Israel." Back then, it was 1969, we were living in Honduras, since my father was working for an Israeli company that was building the main road there. I grew up bilingual, in Hebrew and Spanish, and this conversation about Jewish history was held in Spanish. I must have asked for further details, since in two or three sentences I heard that we were expelled from Spain in 1492 and that Hitler had killed six million of us just a few decades ago. The main point sunk in instinctively: it was all about "us" the Jews. We had seen the Temple burn, we had gone on exile, we had been forced to leave Spain, we had been massacred by the Nazis, and we were returning home, to our homeland.

More than 35 years after receiving my

mother's version of History 101 by shock treatment, my Judaism is still as clear and simple as ever: it's about "us." We, the Jews, are that group of people we speak of in the first person plural. And it doesn't matter if we speak of them across the millennia, for better or for worse, in sickness or in health, in the Land of Israel or in the Diaspora. All other matters are secondary, but they are also much more problematic. I wouldn't dare ask my mother about matters such as conversion, "Who is a Jew?," the future of Zionism, the Occupied Territories, the unity of secular and Orthodox Jews, and so on and so forth. I know we have problems. I am one of us.

— Ioram

Dear Ioram,

I can definitely relate to your "us" definition, this personal feeling that dives deep into the stormy, multi-currents sea of Judaism. But I need more than that. You see, my own childhood experience was, I think, very different than yours. Born and raised in a kibbutz — a strong, self-assured and, ideologically speaking, homogeneous society — the presence of Judaism as a lively, ongoing ingredient of life, has accompanied me from early childhood.

The message we received was that Judaism is an identity and, as such, it would be better to see it not as a passive thing, but rather as a subject for constant work, preservation, and — at the same time — innovation.

Ioram Melcer, born in Haifa in 1963, holds degrees in Computer Science, Linguistics, History, and Philosophy. He translates literature from Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, and Catalan and has published four books: Snow in Albania (stories), Does Lisbon Exist? (essays), Hibbat Zion (novel), and Pelé: A God in flesh and blood (socio-biographical essay). He writes a column about language in the literary supplement of Haaretz and is a regular contributor in Spanish to the cultural supplement of the daily El País in Uruguay.

Michal Levertov, a former journalist and strategy consultant for political and non-governmental organizations, lives in Tel Aviv.

This “work” can be practiced easily in such a community. Holidays, for example, were never just gathering and eating as experienced by many Israeli families. Holidays also had nothing to do with praying or attending a synagogue. (We simply did not have one.) Holidays were grand communal celebrations, intently representing a deep connection between historical events, nature’s seasonal circles (and their agricultural impact), and the holiday’s social-cultural implications as interpreted by the members of the kibbutz.

Pesach, for instance, was the primal holy day of freedom, revival, and emancipation. Purim was a celebration of artistic creativity and Sukkot a reflection on the equality of humankind. All festivities were accompanied by music, reading of old and modern Hebrew texts, dramatization of historical and biblical events, and other innovative activities.

I left the kibbutz many years ago. Many aspects of that life that were distasteful: the total lack of privacy, the monolithic thinking, the arrogance of a society as it tries to implement utopia. But the search for redefining Jewish identity is something I continue to value. My Judaism needs concrete content. I can’t seek it in synagogues, as I’m not religious. I won’t seek it in gestures of yiddishkeit, as they feel like empty symbols to me. I am seeking it in culture, in the Hebrew language, in idioms. I pursue it in my political activities, in my work, and in my endless arguments with friends who purport different views on the nature of Judaism. My Judaism has more questions than answers, and it is anything but clear and simple. But just as any other component in my circle of identities (Israeli, woman, Zionist, humanist), I want it to be like that.

Fondly, Michal

Dear Michal,

Though our childhood experiences were indeed different, that difference is less than might be construed given our different surroundings and social contexts. Reading your letter made me realize again that though the kibbutz is disappearing as a distinct phenomenon, it has influenced much of what is Israeli, including the Jewish quality of our upbringing. Yes, I can call it “our” upbringing — yours and mine — and I can say so from my present perch as an Israeli parent. Much of what you experienced on kibbutz as Judaism is what I — in the 1970s in Haifa — and my children today encounter in school beginning with kindergarten. Through both formal and infor-

mal education, my four children, ages five to seventeen, are breathing in a Judaism that is virtually identical to what you describe.

I only detect changes that reflect change in Israeli society — the treatment of minorities, the place of women, the handing-down of the Jewish canon, links between religious and national identity. This of course means that much of the “packaged” Judaism being taught is half-frozen. I suppose this is a natural process, allowing the next generation to weigh in and shape the discussion, thawing some parts and remoulding them while keeping other parts “as is.” This is the foundation of a living culture. In Israel, we tend to take it for granted.

Yet this does not summarize my Judaism. Far from it. Beyond approaching political, social, and moral issues with a set of tools influenced by Jewish sensibilities, my identity as a Jew is primarily based on connecting with the canon of texts and learning linked with the Hebrew language. I live in a constant state of thirst for Jewish learning, for absorbing the ancient texts, and for engaging in the ancient, perpetual discussion that stems from the text. Hillel, Honni, Rabbi Akiva, Spinoza, Yosef in Egypt, Isaac being sacrificed, the prophesies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, poor King Saul, Buber and Agnon, Freud and Einstein, Ruth the Moabite and Job scratching his flesh... the list could go on and on for pages. Some of these texts are part of our mythology; others are part of our history. All speak to us and invite us to engage. I will always yearn to discuss, argue, agree, laugh, cry, and be moved by them. They influence the fullness of Jewish discussion — from halakhah to humor. Our stories are our Judaism — regardless of any forced social, historical, or ethnic subdivision.

Warmly, Ioram

Dear Ioram,

Indeed the role of those texts and stories in shaping our agnostic or secular Jewish culture is huge. The yearning for them is a healthy, natural feeling; it’s a craving for the familiar, for a canon of thinking and writing whose echoes and melody we’re happy to find in different aspects and layers of our contemporary lives as Israeli Jews. They are embedded everywhere: in Hebrew discourse, in academic syllabi, in newspapers, jokes, or simply in the excavation of a phrase or thought. These stories and texts connect us to our legacy; they capture the heart and widen the mind. They

enable us to feel that although we live in a young state and although it sometimes seems that everything must be built from scratch, we actually hold, in our emotional and cultural warehouses, a huge and wonderful stock of building blocks with which to pave our own paths for the evolution of our culture.

However, as important and influential as those stories are, they are sealed. They were added to the canon by our ancestors, and while they might be great building blocks for our highways, it's for us to choose (and sometime build) the vehicles, the directions, and even the speed with which we ride these roads.

And here is a troubling question — what, in the vast variety of contemporary Jewish writing, really touches the core of our identity as Israeli secular Jews? Do the heroes in Philip Roth's books — with their sharp, complicated, stratified neuroses — touch our mental conflicts more acutely than the characters of the young author and journalist Sayed Kashua, an Israeli Arab whose struggle for self-definition lays solemnly on inquiring and mirroring our Israeli-Jewish perception? Does the vigorous debate on women learning, taking place today within growing Israeli religious circles, shake my perspective more than the abortion controversy taking place in the U.S.? Or, what embarrasses me more: Natan Shcharansky's "Town Square Test" theory, which has regretfully influenced George W. Bush, or Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's outrageous verdicts regarding women, non-Jews, and the authority of Israel's court of law?

I don't know what will enter my Israeli-Jewish

canon. I can say only that the heap of books laying on my night table includes novels by Auster, Rushdie, and Roth, a history book on Russia, and a provocative biblical research paper by a couple of prominent Israeli professors called "That's Not What the Good Book Says." And since my bed-time reading tends to be escapist, the history book and the three novels will be read first, as they illuminate distant worlds. The biblical research, in spite of its intriguing charm, will be read last. Clearly a Jewish text, it's not escapist enough to put me to sleep.

Yours, Michal



Aaron Bisman on Nurturing Voices

In my March *Sh'ma* essay, I neglected to mention two of JDub's funders who have provided support for entrepreneurial cultural endeavors in the Jewish world. The UJA-Federation of New York has been a JDub supporter since July 2004, through their Commission on Jewish Identity and Renewal. UJA-Federation of New York granted JDub a four-year award for its New York events and an annual promotional CD. Additionally, the federation recently awarded JDub, along with The National Foundation for Jewish Culture and Avoda Arts, a three-year grant for an Emerging Jewish Artist Fellowship. Likewise, the Jewish Venture Philanthropy of Los Angeles recently awarded JDub a grant to undertake a strategic planning process and expand its efforts into Los Angeles.



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Jewish Renaissance in Israel through Ritual

Esteban Gottfried

A LITTLE OVER a month ago, one could not travel around Israel without encountering a wide-scale publicity campaign — on billboards and television, at bus stops and in the daily papers. The words, *Parshat Hashavua* (weekly Torah section), in large and elaborate lettering, appeared everywhere. It was an advertisement for a weekly drama series called *Parshat Hashavua*, which broadcasts on a major television channel in Israel. The plot is divided into 52 segments, for the 52 weekly portions of the Torah; each segment attempts to draw its inspiration from the weekly Torah portion, weaving a modern exegesis into its story line. The show represents one of many examples of a wider phenomenon of creating contemporary Israeli culture among the secular population that is in dialogue with the Jewish sources.

Another setting: Keshet National TV headquarters, Friday, 10 AM. Approximately 25 artists, among the best of local talent — including screenwriters, TV directors, musicians, and even news broadcasters — are meeting, as they do every two weeks, with an open page of Talmud, studying in *hevruta* under the guidance of Rabbi David Singer and Ruth Calderon, founder of Alma Hebrew College. In simple math, the broadcasting time represented by those seated around the table adds up to thousands of hours. The majority of those present, who shape Israeli culture in their work, did not even know what a page of Talmud looked like and had never opened a Mishna (oral law) before they began meeting with Singer and Calderon. They are diligently studying stories and exploring how to translate these motifs and stories into the medium of TV. This unprecedented initiative (funded not only by Alma College and The AVI CHAI Foundation, but also by commercial TV) will resonate on the Israeli screen for years.

The same Friday, a few hours later, around 100 people, a cross-section of the city's population, get together in an auditorium in the heart of Tel Aviv to welcome the Sabbath in prayer "in their own way." Every other week, Beit Tefila Israeli — an independent synagogue without rabbi or cantor or any movement affiliation — meets. Participants sit in a circle with their musical instruments (piano, cello, violin, and percussion) trying to create a prayer ceremony

that synthesizes being Israeli and Jewish. Most of the people who attend these prayer gatherings are not graduates of the pluralistic study programs that have flourished in recent years. For most of this group, this is a first experience of active participation in a community based on ritual, around which social and educational circles are formed.

Each of the congregants of Beit Tefilah connects to the prayers from a personal place. Some participants wear a *kippah* when they enter, others are bareheaded; some participants find an answer to their search in the children's services while others feel spiritually elevated when they break into dance with the sounds of *lecha dodi*. Others find their kedusha in moments of silence and meditation before the Sh'ma or when listening to the cello playing an introspective solo. Even in matters of faith, there is not one overview uniting the community. Although God is present in most of the texts, there are participants who define themselves as atheists, but nonetheless participate regularly in the prayers.

But what exactly does it mean to welcome Shabbat "in their own way"? What is the "way" that characterizes a growing number of secular Jews who yearn for sanctity and prayer, despite their distance from religious ceremonies?

Of the many possible explanations, two appear most prevalent: first, the laboratory and experimental nature of this synagogue, and second, the freedom to personally express ritual in a communal framework. The first characteristic is explicit in the founders' declaration of intent, following the principle, "we will do and we will ask" (adapted from the biblical "we will do and we will listen"). This invitation to experiment with ritual aspires to add holiness to our lives and is evident in the community's loose-leaf, traditional-*nusach* *sidur*. Music, an important component shaping the prayers, draws on a wide range of styles and ethnic groups and combines — like the texts themselves — contemporary Israeli poems and *piyyutim*.

These projects, like many others, are riding the wave that has been developing in the last 10-15 years. The trauma of the Rabin assassination brought about a moral reckoning in both the religious and secular populations. The assassination provoked a sensation that

Esteban Gottfried is an Israeli playwright, screenwriter, director, actor, and two-time winner of the Israel Film Academy Awards. He is Co-founder and director of the new and independent congregation, Beit Tefila Israeli, in Tel Aviv. Translated by Felice Kahn Zisken.

Judaism had been appropriated and left to the religious zealots, which led to a desire to reclaim the tradition, study the sources with an eagerness to understand and interpret them, and bring them closer to our lives. Israelis found a desire to shape our lifestyle around a heritage that belongs to us and that many of us are discovering anew only now.

When I arrived in Israel 23 years ago from a community in Buenos Aires (the Beit El congregation of Rabbi Marshall Meyer, who later became the rabbi of Bnai Jeshurun in New York), I felt that I had come home; I did not, however, feel that I had come home spiritually. Without a doubt, if I were to make *aliyah* today, the transition would be much easier. 

Recreating Jewish Community

Moti Zeira

DURING THE FIRST DECADES following the establishment of the State of Israel (and also prior to this), the boundaries of the state and those of the community overlapped. The Israeli Jew fully identified with the state, and the state system provided individuals with the basic needs that any community provides for its members: a sense of belonging on one hand and a meaningful existence on the other.

Over the past three decades, the provision of these basic needs by the state has been rapidly deteriorating. Among the reasons for this are: social atomization, massive privatization of all systems, constant anxiety about security, development of tribalism within Israeli society, and political, ethnic, and socio-economic divisions.

Today, most Jews in Israel do not find strength and inspiration from knowing that they live in the only Jewish state in the world, that their spoken language is Hebrew, and that they live in the land of Israel.

The gap between the citizens and the state reveals a void within Israeli society. In order to give the individual a sense of belonging and a meaningful, connected life, a more intimate framework is required — renewing the idea of community and providing a new sense of belonging.

While the traditional Jewish Diaspora community environment served this role, creating such community within an independent Jewish state is more problematic. Community, in general, is based on a “treaty” that includes commitment and responsibility and is built by forming a network of opportunities for bonding: through learning and celebrating together and through the development of mutual responsibility and giving. A network that is too weak will not sufficiently answer the needs of the individuals within it.

Much of Israel’s general public (often, and problematically, referred to as “secular”) is

experiencing withdrawal, ignorance, hostility, rejection, anger, guilt, and maybe worst of all — indifference to everything “Jewish.” While the reasons for this are well known, almost everyone — including secular Israelis — at some point finds themselves suddenly questioning their existence. At that moment they are ready/willing/obligated to face the cultural, Jewish, social elements in life. The critical question is when and where these moments occur; it is not a coincidence that these moments occur at life’s stepping stones and special occasions: birth, death, marriage, maturity. The questions also arise when children ask questions that require parents to decide what kind of social, cultural, and emotional environment they create within their families. What is their link to their heritage, and what is their future?

Israelis conduct life according to the Jewish calendar. While Shabbat is the formal day of rest and during Jewish holidays there is no school, this is a source of confusion, embarrassment, and dissatisfaction. Zionist philosopher A. D. Gordon said that the Jewish holiday is “the essence of secularism,” but what is the correlation between my everyday life and the holidays? How is the celebration of holidays an expression of who I am? Should I celebrate holidays like the religious communities? What do I tell my children? Should I ignore the day? Should I, like many Israelis, spend Pesach in the Sinai?

These questions, and the underlying confusion from which they emanate, create ripe turf for building new Jewish-Israeli communities. As in the Diaspora, holidays and lifecycle ceremonies can create entry points to community and provide a sense of belonging and meaning for otherwise disenfranchised Israelis. Our Jewish culture, which revolves around family, study, and emotional connection, can evolve as a base for the renewal of community life among the Israeli secular public. 

Moti Zeira is one of the founders and current director of Hamidrasha Educational Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Israel. For the past two decades, he has been active in formal and informal education in Israel. Dr. Zeira has a B.A. in Hebrew Literature and Jewish Philosophy, a Masters in Eretz Israel Studies, and a PhD in Jewish History, focusing on the attitude of the secular Zionist pioneers toward Jewish tradition. He can be reached at saramoti@hamidrasha.org.il.

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Aliza Olmert, born in the displaced persons camp of Eschwege, Germany in 1946, immigrated to Israel in 1949. She received the Bachelor of Arts in Social Work from Hebrew University and studied Landscape Architecture at the Bezalel Academy of Arts in Jerusalem. Her sculpture, painting, installation, and photography have been widely exhibited in Israel and the U. S. She also writes for theater and film. Her husband, Ehud Olmert, is the Israeli Prime Minister.

Daniella Wexler Racine emigrated from France to Israel where she has worked for 30 years in the legal system, 18 years as a judge in Jerusalem. She works fulltime now as an artist painting and creating recycling art, on view at www.daniellawexler.com.

Aliza Olmert
Untitled from the
Tikkun Series
40 x 40 cm



Erga Heller
New design
30 X 30 cm
Mixed media



When I saw Olmert's image, I just heard in my mind a popular song from my childhood: "I was born to peace"

אני נולדתי לשלום שרק יגיע
אני נולדתי לשלום שרק יבוא

A diaper pin for my Hebrew-visual thinking is a "defense pin" (סיכת ביטחון). Olmert's image looks like an attempt to conserve fragments from a fragile situation. My image aims to our national happiness for one day each year; we are broken but alive, all wearing white and blue for Independence Day, looking for better days, forgetting the great sadness of the other day[s].

— Erga Heller

Erga Heller (1968) is a miniature painter, a prints artist, and a curator; Head of Arts Department at Kaye College of Education, Beer Sheba, Israel; a cultural researcher and a writer.

Jan Aronson's work has been featured in more than 30 solo exhibitions and many museum collections. With an M.F.A. from Pratt Institute, she has taught and created art and art history programs at several art centers, museums, and colleges. Critical reviews on her work have been featured in Art News, New Orleans Art Review, and Art in America.

Leora Brecher is a Bezael-trained ceramic artist living in Philadelphia. She teaches at the Abington Art Center and shows her work in numerous local and regional galleries. She has received several awards, most recently from the State Museum in Harrisburg.

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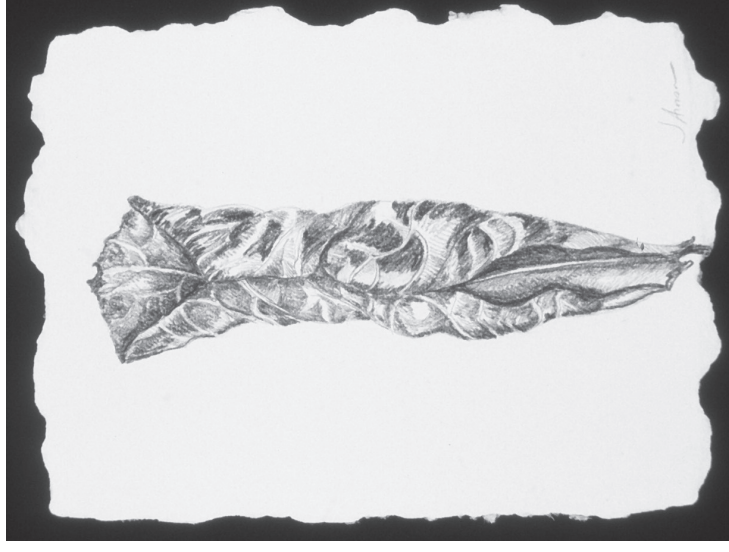


Leora Brecher
Bird's Nest with Eggs
Clay

Aliza Olmert's provocative photograph depicting an egg, broken and empty, held together with a safety pin, suggests the loss of a dream as well as the possibility of redefining and revitalizing the dream. The egg has always symbolized purity, a sense of wholeness, hope, and the cycle of life. That it is broken implies the loss of that hope, of that potential. For me that dream is the creation of the state of Israel and the fulfillment of the aspirations and values inherent in the dream of a homeland for the Jewish people. Why the safety pin? Is it there to keep together what remains of the original dream and perhaps to reshape it to encompass and reflect all that has evolved during the last 50 years? Is it there to enable the egg to retain its form and still hold hope in the future?

My work grows out of a deep connection to and observation of the natural world. I see the natural world as whole, pure, and full of hope and potential. This "Bird Nest" represents life as it is now while embodying the potential of all that it may become. Built into this potential is the unknown – how will the egg emerge and grow? The inevitability of the process is undeniable and wondrous. Like all things in life, the egg cannot remain an egg indefinitely. A new life must emerge with all its potential and uncertainty.

— *Leora Brecher*



Reflections on the Egg: A Leaf responsum.
My eyes can taste your delicate fractures. Adorned and held together with a pin that makes the gap in your sphere more pronounced and more profound. How can I not think of what you once held inside? Your yolk and white are screaming at me in their absence. You are no longer what you were made to be.

I am curled in and around myself, an haute couture made by accident and found on the beach. Not what I started out to be but how I ended.

Being so small and standing alone only adds to the enigma.

— *Jan Aronson*

Jan Aronson
Aguilla Leaf 2
graphite
8.5 x 6.5



Daniella Wexler
Racine
A box that opens and closes

The hat box was found and filled with dolls and colored wool. Stickers adhere all around. In contrast to Olmert's egg, this box can be opened and closed; the object has an "inside" part that is very different from its "outside." In both my box and Olmert's egg, the inside is life.

— *Daniella Wexler Racine*

AS AN ISRAELI living in the U.S. for many years, I have learned to admire and feel comfortable in both cultures and societies. I appreciate the varieties of spiritual and cultural connection that American Judaism offers, and I am excited and moved to see how the people often referred to as “secular” Israelis are grappling with new “identity” questions. Since 2000, I have been conducting research on this phenomenon; I have participated in study and prayer groups and have interviewed a number of leaders and participants. The desire for connection and the search for meaning have evolved as a result of changing perspectives toward contemporary Zionism and the sociopolitical situation in Israel. The creativity and multiplicity of voices and connections, which such innovations can generate, present possibilities for a renewed engagement with Zionism and for a lively, more complex, rich and Jewish/Israeli identity, as well as for deeply meaningful connections between Israeli and American Jews.

Answering a Need for Connection

Since the Yom Kippur War, and especially since Rabin’s assassination, secular Israelis have begun to ask deep existential questions about their life, about why and how they live in a country where they do not feel connected to the rich inheritance of the formational sources and values. Referring to the Lebanon war, one of the leaders of this movement said during an interview: “I swore to myself that if I came out alive of that hell, I would devote my time and energy to finding out who the people were who created Judaism, what the texts that they wrote were and how they wrote them, and what the connection is between them and the establishment of Israel.”

These questions have led to a search for meaning and connection to Jewish sources — a previously unprecedented part of the repertoire of “secular” Israelis. Rather than finding simple answers, the questioning uncovered a range of opportunities to reconnect, create meaning, and continue individual and communal exploration through intimate, creative, and open settings for study and prayer.

Breaking down Barriers

The commitment to deep ongoing exploration and reconnection challenges earlier stereotypes, labels, and dogmas about the

organization of Israeli society. In conversation, a leader of the movement who would have previously been labeled “secular,” defined himself as “*hiloni light*,” literally meaning “secular light”—not seriously secular.

This response points to an openness to a fusion identity. It is neither “*hiloni*” — detached from the Jewish past, living in a new country and culture disconnected from its roots — nor “*dati*” — living a life that follows the guide of halakhah. This new identity rejects the earlier model created by the founders of the secular State of Israel and reshapes it by incorporating attachment to Zionism, Israeli contemporary culture, pluralistic values, and connections to Jewish sources. This redefining renders the old distinction between secular and religious irrelevant.

Connections with American Jewry

Like secular Israelis, American non-Orthodox Jews are seeking ways to reconnect with Judaism while upholding their American 21st-century sensibilities. While avoiding pat labels, the search for meaning and spirituality is growing, and communal institutions are emerging as appropriate venues for exploring new connections in both Israel and America. Israelis and American Jews are exploring a common heritage and language. They share a common vision that entails connections with Jewish peoplehood, rejecting dogma, building Jewish community, and creatively exploring their heritage.

American Judaism is beginning to be understood in Israeli society and is influencing some innovative trends described in these pages. We have new opportunities for sharing and learning from each other. As we view Israel and Israelis in new non-stereotypical and open-minded ways, and as Israelis begin to blur their own identities, so too are we blurring distinctions between Israelis and Americans who are searching for meaning, community, and roots within Judaism. This points to new directions for creating a common vision fruitfully collaborating in making meaning and exploring our common heritage. 

Adina Newberg, an Israeli living and working in the United States, teaches at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia. Her research interests include contemporary expressions of connection to Judaism as well as issues of adult transformation through learning. The Israeli trend to reconnect to Jewish sources and traditions addresses all of these interests as well as her commitment and passion for a democratic, pluralistic, and vibrant Israel.

Who is the Young Secular Israeli Jew?

The Challenge for Jewish Education



Ezra Kopelowitz

There is much handwringing among the leadership of Israeli and Diaspora Jewry about the “Jewishness” of young Israeli Jews in general and their commitment to the relationship with Diaspora Jewry in particular.

There is reason to worry, but it is not because of a lack of commitment on the part of young Israelis to their Jewish identity. Relative to other Western societies, Israeli Jews, young and old, remain a highly ideological and Jewishly-identifying population. Data from the 2000 Guttman/AVI CHAI survey, the only comprehensive national survey on this subject, shows Israeli Jews expressing a high level of Jewish identification. Eighty-two percent of the Israeli Jewish public answered that given the chance they would choose to be born again Jewish, 95 percent feel that they are part of the Jewish people, and 70 percent state that Jews in Israel and abroad have a shared destiny.¹

While the Guttman survey has not published data comparing generations, in a 2002 study we asked 20- to 30-year-old secular, traditional, and religious Israeli Jews similar questions about their Jewish identity, with similar results.² Yet, when we asked, “If you were born abroad, would you choose to be Jewish?” the numbers dropped drastically, with only 35 percent of the secular respondents giving an affirmative response to the question.

Why did the secular participants in the study give positive answers to questions that touch on Jewish pride and identity but a largely negative response to the question about the ability to imagine being born a Jew abroad?

An answer: For most secular Israeli Jews, being Jewish is first and foremost associated with practices that occur as a result of living in Israel and are not easily replicated in the Diaspora context. Whereas the traditionalist and religious Jew practices “Jewish” rituals and customs at home or in a communal framework in a manner that is similar to Jews the world over, the secular Israeli Jew does not have a similar frame of reference. Being Jewish is about living in the public sphere of the Jewish state, which includes public holidays such as Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Day of Remembrance for Fallen Soldiers, the public aspects of the various religious holidays that mark the calendar year, army service, and the

nationalist aspects of soccer and basketball, among other possible examples. Enter the home or areas of life in which one has direct control, and little to no explicitly Jewish content informs everyday life.

This is the reverse of the well known Diaspora formulation of taking off a *kippah* when leaving home or being a Jew at home and a worldly person in public. Any attempt to reach out to the young secular Israeli Jew on issues of Israel-Diaspora relations must distinguish between the public and the private Jew. The public Jew is a unique Israeli phenomenon and requires a different conceptual framework and set of educational strategies.³

On one hand, the question of how to devise an effective educational strategy for the secular Jewish population is gaining increased attention. Institutions from the Jewish Agency to the Ministry of Education, the Community Center Associations, the Army, youth movements, and an increasing number of third sector organizations are investing heavily in educational outreach to secular Israelis. On the other hand, little systematic thought is being given to the defining features of “Israeli Jewish Education.” Many of the programs resemble their Diaspora equivalents, which focus on strengthening knowledge about Jewish ritual and sacred texts. Is this an effective strategy for a secular Jewish population who live in a world filled with rich Jewish associations that are rooted in the public Israeli experience? An alternative strategy, currently pursued by a very small minority of public figures and educators, is to focus on the lack of public discourse and debate among secular Jews concerning the Jewish character of the Israeli society and to create new forums and opportunities for this type of intellectual engagement.

What are the problems that Israeli Jewish education is addressing, and to what degree does the public nature of secular Israeli Jewish identity need to shape the nature of Jewish education? Hopefully, these questions will stand at the heart of the discussion about Israeli Jewish education that is still in its very early stages.

Dr. Ezra Kopelowitz, a sociologist specializing in Israel-Diaspora relations and issues of Jewish identity, education, and religion in Israel and the United States, is the founder and CEO of Research Success Technologies (<http://www.researchsuccess.com>), a Jerusalem-based company specializing in Internet systems for data management, communication, and evaluation.

Footnotes for this essay appear on www.shma.com.

May 2006
Sivan 5766
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DURING THE SUKKOT FESTIVAL last year, 5,000 mostly young and secular people gathered in Ramat Eyal for the ninth consecutive year to participate in approximately 100 workshops, lectures, and events about Judaism in contemporary Israeli society.

On Shabbat evenings, in downtown Tel Aviv (Israel's secular and hedonistic city), in Nahalal (the mythological community that symbolizes the country's pioneering secular settlement), and at many similar events across the country, scores of mainly secular men, women, and whole families congregate for prayers to welcome the Shabbat together.

Hundreds of activities are planned each month by dozens of organizations and groups involving thousands of Israeli citizens. The common denominator is an expression of a great powerful voice rising from many non-religious Israelis: our Judaism is important to us. It is a central part of our lives, and we actively engage in its interpretation and design for our personal, communal, and national experiences.

This phenomenon is part of a slow but steady and profound process, and while it has simmered in Israel's secular community over the past 40 years, it is now gathering strength.

The Israeli media is increasingly acknowledging this trend, as is the state school system that serves the secular community. Leading Israeli singers and musicians are drawing inspiration from traditional Judaism, creating hit songs, and book publishers are responding as well.

Secular *batei midrash*, study groups, classes on the week's Torah portion, the scrupulous marking of religious holidays, and social justice as a Jewish imperative are an inseparable part of the normative secular Israeli agenda.

Even in the recent past, in Israel, Judaism was identified solely with Orthodoxy. A secular person wanting to connect with Judaism generally had to cross the line and become *chozer b'tshuva*, newly religious. Today, it is much more common to find Israeli Jews who are not God-fearing or observant of religious commandments (*mitzvot*), whose secularism is undoubted, but who nonetheless study Torah as a way of life, keep traditions, sometimes involve themselves in religiosity and spiritual-

ity, and who perceive their Judaism as a central and binding component of their lives.

Many of these secular Israelis have been influenced by the various streams of American liberal religious Judaism, which offers an alternative model of religious Judaism.

This wave of secular Judaism is influencing broad circles of the secular public and creating a new type of conflict and dialogue between Israel's secular and Orthodox communities. It undermines the very problematic "status quo" that has characterized the central Israeli agenda since independence in 1948, in which the 20 percent of the Israeli population that is Orthodox held responsibility to preserve, interpret, and control Judaism in the Israeli public sphere. Some observers muse that this perspective — where religious matters would not be in the hands of the Orthodox alone — would be opportune for a majority of Jews who live here and would offer a means to recreate the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic country, a condition that is essential and existential for the state's future.

The appearance of the "new secular Jew" not only affects the secular community, but also the varied Orthodox communities; it challenges Orthodoxy and offers an opportunity to reformulate the historic Jewish-Zionist narrative in Israel.

While the phenomenon is still fairly small-scale, it just might influence deep processes within Israeli society.

Discussion Guide

To facilitate a fuller discussion of the ideas in this issue, we offer the following questions:

1. What motivates the recent thirst for exploring identity questions among Israel's secular population?
2. What are the avenues for exchange between Israeli and Diaspora Jews, and how can we best facilitate them?
3. To what degree, and how, does the question of Jewish identity among Israelis shape the nature of Jewish education in Israel?

Meir Yoffe is Executive Director of Panim for Jewish Renaissance in Israel, a nonprofit organization that advocates changing Israeli national policy and government funding of Jewish pluralism. Yoffe can be reached at meiyof@panim.org.il.

A RUSSIAN SAYING: “Tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are.” In today’s postmodern society, this proverb seems odd and misplaced. Today, an understanding of “self” is so often bereft of its homogeneous connotations, it feels so often multi-informed, even contradictory. In an era of migration and globalization, it is by no means easy to get to know yourself through engaging others, and it is not so easy for others to know you either.

The situation is still more complicated for newcomers entering foreign turf and culture. For an immigrant, this search for identity means simultaneously undergoing a metamorphosis as life is carved out in a new cultural milieu. I’ll try here to identify a few possible scenarios of identity metamorphosis on immigration/repatriation to Israel.

In the beginning of the 20th century, Zionists constructed an image of the new Jewish immigrant coming to Palestine, the *Ivri*, or Hebrew. This image acquired consensus as an antithesis to their collective perceptions of the “old” Jew. Among the factors in creating the identity of the pioneer were many “anti” clauses: anti-*yiddishkeit* (Judaism of a distinctly East European cast), anti-old-religious-*Yishuv* (pre-Zionist settlement in Israel), anti-traditional, anti-*Moshavot HaBaron* (those living from Rothschild’s philanthropy), anti-urban, anti-*Levantine*, etc.

Over time, the part that “anti-” played in establishing this new identity became a large proportion of the whole image; eventually it morphed into the name, *sabra*, which is a fruit — called prickly pear — found on a cactus. The *sabra* fruit has a thorny, rough, and crude surface, but within is ripe, sweet, and juicy. A new generation of *sabras* became the antithesis of the Jewish multicultural and multilingual *luftmensch* of the Diaspora.

Speaking a newly revived Hebrew, the new immigrants promoted a monolingual, monocultural, provincial identity that declared on ideological grounds a desire to ignore traditional Jewish learning and mores that had informed its diasporian “other.” Between two basic Zionist concepts — *kibbutz galuyot*, the ingathering of Diaspora Jews in Israel, and *sabra* — is buried a fundamental contradiction. And as sometimes happens, ideology suppresses

physiology; perceived similarities between Jews in Israel and Jews in Diaspora began to diminish and connections vanished. That anti-Diasporian sensibility in Israel created a barrier and, paradoxically, the State of Israel that aimed to ingather and unify the Jewish people, promoted a message of “split” peoplehood — Jews in Israel and Jews remaining in the Diaspora.

Officially at the moment of arrival in the state of Israel, at the border crossing, a Jew — according to the Law of Return — automatically receives Israeli citizenship and becomes an Israeli with equal rights. But become immersed in Israeli society (to become an equal citizen and part of the hegemonic society), one must work hard and pass through a long thorny and turbulent route.

In the last decades of *aliyah* from the former Soviet Union, immigrants were expected to embrace, patriotically, the conditions of the State, the people, and the current political situation. A Russian surgeon, for example, might be expected to be “grateful” for the opportunity to work in Israel as, say, a street sweeper.

Choosing to preserve aspects of one’s cultural past — maintaining one’s mother language or cultivating a foreign accent — is considered improper. Some of the issues around acculturation and assimilation into the host country are similar to immigrant issues in other countries — for example, the questions rising from Hispanics being educated in Spanish rather than English in the U. S.

The motivation for *aliyah*, or repatriation to Israel, impact how the immigrant is accepted and absorbed. Is the immigrant coming to Israel from the free world of America or Britain with a passion to live in Israel? Or is the immigrant escaping an antisemitic Europe or economically third-world Russia? Questions are, ultimately, condensed to: “Who are you?” and “Why are you here?”

Today, Russian immigrants (who comprise more than 20 percent of the Israeli population) are trying to preserve aspects of their Russian identity. Given the negative construction of Israeli identity (based on images that are “anti”), this strategy would seem to be discernibly richer. But finding legitimization for an identity that is designed and chosen and outside the “anti” model, does not fit with the classical

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May 2006

Sivan 5766

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model of Israeli identity construction.

One additional complicating factor is the growing place within Israel of post-Zionism — a deconstruction of the ideological frameworks of 19th-century Zionism, including rethinking and redefining traditional commitments. While this post-Zionist mood is viewed as legitimate, in at least certain quarters, for *sabras*, new immigrants are expected to travel the whole road — from rejecting the Diaspora to building up the Zionist dream — before entering a post-Zionist phase.

New Israeli Russians are finding themselves, at times, treated with ambivalence. Because they occupy an insider-outsider position, they do not hurry to emerge from their immediate Russian milieu and take a stand in the public sphere. They are occupied with constructing identity — trying to both penetrate the actual flavor of the *sabra* fruit and looking for a place where they remain feeling authentically Russian. Russian-speaking immigrants do not represent one homogeneous whole or some kind of community (*community*

as a concept lost its social-cultural meaning under the Soviet regime). The common fate of repatriation to Israel, speaking the same language (Russian), is not enough to become one community in a strange land. Personal interests of such a divergent group (arrived from fifteen ex-Soviet ethnically different republics that cross an enormous geographical space) don't lead to common collective motives that are strong enough to be organized into one community (in terms of religion or politics in a democratic capitalist society). In other words, Russian immigrants in Israel must construct parallel identities. They can't and don't want to become "or ... or," preferring to live in the complexity of "and ... and," choosing according to the circumstances who would be the "self" and who would be the significant "other." They are calling for legitimacy to live in "between," and their muted voices call for attention, clarification, and dialogue within a society that would be ready to treat them not as Russian ex-patriots, but as equal co-speakers in Israeli society. 

Culture as Compass: Reconnecting Secular Israelis

Martin Ben Moreh

FOR MANY SECULAR Israeli Jews born and raised in Israel, there is little understanding of what it means to be a Jew, and the bonds that tie them to their Jewish heritage are weak. Moreover, the basic level of Jewish knowledge has plummeted to the point that many have become like the son who doesn't even know how to ask.

While the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox have separate educational streams that focus on Jewish content, the vast majority, or 67 percent, of Israeli Jewish school children attend non-religious public schools. These academically-oriented public schools concentrate primarily on the study of English, mathematics, computers, and Hebrew. The traditional Jewish subjects — Bible, Talmud, and Jewish Thought — are not required subjects for the matriculation exams and, therefore, receive much less emphasis.

In 1994, the Israeli government's "Shenhar Report," which assessed the need to teach Judaism in the Israel public schools, found that "non-Orthodox students are increasingly alienated from Judaism and that the existing curriculum does not appeal to them." The

Shenhar Commission called upon the Education Ministry to teach Judaism in an open and pluralistic way and to ensure that educators who teach Judaism are equipped "with a worldview and lifestyle acceptable to the secular public in all its diversity, and appropriate to the distinctive character of the communities served by state schools." A decade later, Prof. Shenhar wrote: "During the last few years there was a shift in educational goals and as a result, secular children are left to continue believing that the Jewish heritage does not concern them and is the sole property of the ultra-Orthodox..."

Young Israelis often feel that their Judaism is obvious and integral in their lives. But after scraping under the surface, large gaps of Jewish illiteracy become blaringly apparent. Born into non-religious/secular families, where Jewish religious traditions and heritage were often not discussed or practiced, secular educators today must not only ensure that their students achieve Jewish literacy, but reclaim *ownership* of their Jewish identity.

Educators today are rethinking how to teach Judaism to secular pupils. Current

teaching methods that present information about Jewish heritage do not seem sufficient. The challenge, then, will be to create reflective environments where young students can explore their minds and souls to gain greater insight into their Jewish heritage. But transforming teachers into educators who can teach Jewish knowledge in a way that challenges students to look within and reclaim Jewish identity is enormously challenging.

Judaism as culture is much more than an academic discipline; it is a mindset that perceives Jewish culture and values as a compass to life. Judaism is bigger than studying Bible or Talmud, Jewish Thought or Kabbalah. It exposes students to core Jewish values of our tradition — the ideals of continuous learning, social justice, and *tikkun olam*. Judaism is a dynamic culture in constant evolution and demands that each generation — secular and religious — redefines that culture for itself.

Meitar — the College of Judaism as Culture — has developed a five-pronged approach de-

signed to engage various populations in Israel in reconnecting to their Jewish roots.

- **Educational.** Humanities, Social Sciences, Arts, and Civics curricula fall under the rubric of culture. What we do, experience, and learn at school is in essence an expression of our Judaism. Moreover, school is the ultimate workshop for creative Judaism.
- **Problem-oriented.** Content is presented through dilemmas and choices relevant to the challenges and needs of students exploring their Jewish identities.
- **Empowering participants.** Critical and creative dialogues with *parashat hashavua*, bar/bat mitzvah projects, reinterpreting Jewish holidays, Jewish identity programs, and dilemmas in Jewish history provide students with personal avenues to explore Jewish identity.
- **Interdisciplinary materials.** Blending intellectual stimuli with emotional experiences and integrating various media with the creative arts enriches the curriculum.
- **Forging cultural communities.** A community model fosters a pluralistic environment in which Jewish identity is the common denominator, bringing people together and creating Jewish solidarity for secular Israelis.

As citizens of the "Global Village," every Jew, whether in Israel or the Diaspora, must make a conscious effort to explore his or her individual identity and choose to be Jewish. Learning about our culture and traditions and gaining an understanding of core Jewish values will provide a Jewish compass to the complex world we live in. The concept of "Judaism as Culture" allows the majority of Jews, non-Orthodox and secular, to identify with their Jewishness in a way compatible to the mindset and lifestyle they live. Jewish culture is the common denominator of the evolving Israeli society and Jewish world, where each of us has the right to a place at the Jewish table.

Martin Ben Moreh, a Scottish Israeli, is the Director General of Meitar, the College for Judaism as Culture in Jerusalem and a member of Kibbutz Nirim. Meitar is an educational center based in Jerusalem working with non-Orthodox and secular Israelis to raise their awareness of Jewish tradition, cultivate their Jewish identity, and experience Judaism as a dynamic pluralistic culture. A fellow in the Mandel School for Educational Leadership in Jerusalem, Martin sees the challenge of strengthening Jewish identity as a vital component to Israel's national security. He can be reached at martin4@netvision.net.il.

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Additional Essays

Benji Maor: "Study, Social Justice and Community," and Naamah Kelman-Ezrachi: "Looking for the Old/New Stakeholders: Remaining Jewish, Connected and Secular in Israel" on www.shma.com.

Honoring the Influential

Aliza Kline

Sigi Ziering Ethics

This year, the practical ethics column will focus on personal and social ethics. Each month a guest columnist wrestles on paper with situations where ethical considerations tug on the heart and demand deeply thoughtful consideration. The column is co-sponsored by Shelley and Bruce Whizin and Marilyn Ziering in honor of Marilyn's husband Sigi Ziering, of blessed memory. The series of columns, with responses, is available on www.shma.com.

HOW DOES a Jewish community organization meet its fund raising goals while maintaining its integrity and honoring its mission? Most Jewish organizations incorporate honorees into their fundraising events because by honoring influential people, we expand our prospect lists, raise money from new sources, and build a sense of community ownership by celebrating people who contribute valuable resources. Development committees struggle to create a list of potential honorees that will ultimately help reach the campaign goals. Honorees should be philanthropic in their own right, involved in the community, and, most significantly, *personally connected* with the organization.

Acknowledging a community member demands sensitivity and integrity. Sharing their personal and professional address books demands enormous trust between the honoree and the development professionals or event chairs. The honoree is likely to feel vulnerable and exposed; with his or her list entrusted to the organization, the honoree may be concerned that friends, family, and colleagues will feel compelled to offer support. We can resolve this tension by drawing a vivid picture of the honoree's genuine connection to the organization's mission.

That connection should respect the honoree's personal style and maintain the Jewish ethic of humility. While we are instructed to "walk modestly with your God" (Micah 6:8) (and avoid boasting about charitable contributions), our sources also teach that there are times when it is advisable to publicize a donor's good deeds. In *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* 34:13, we are taught, "But if one consecrates a certain article for charitable purposes, it is permissible to have his name engraved thereon

so that it serves as a memorial; this is a proper thing to do." That is, the motivation for giving should not be for the sake of recognition, but if the recognition will memorialize and inspire others, then it is permissible.

Protecting an honoree's humility while also teaching about tzedakah can be challenging. At Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikveh and Education Center, we are guided by a list of Jewish values including *hiddur mitzvah*, beautifying the mitzvah, and *chinuch*, education. We consider our fundraising events successful only if they meet our financial and educational goals.

For example, we have created a "Nachshon Award" based on the midrashic character in the Exodus narrative who took the first "leap of faith" into the Sea of Reeds before the waters parted. The award fits our organization, a community mikveh (ritual bath), and allows us to acknowledge community leaders and visionaries. This past year the award went to one of our organization's founders, a senior rabbi known for his ability to challenge — with humility — the status quo. A colleague of his, who is a cantor, wrote an original song that linked the honoree's leadership to Nachshon.

Mayyim Hayyim's annual major fundraiser is *The Mikveh Monologues*, a theatrical and musical performance based on personal immersion stories. The performance, which illustrates our work, honors a major donor, teaches Jewish values, and inspires involvement. The challenge of our sacred work is capturing the excitement and building on the connection with the honoree. When we give the audience something to "take home," they feel like they are getting more than they gave — and that is a great place to be when cultivating a deeper relationship. 

Aliza Kline is Executive Director of Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikveh and Education Center in Newton, Mass. (www.mayyimhayyim.org).

May 2006 / Sivan 5766