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This issue of *Sh'ma* steps outside of convention in celebrating Israel's 60th year. We have asked several well respected and creative thinkers to write as though they held ministerial posts in Israel's cabinet. Each of our renowned "ministers" has been given a "portfolio" and each offers a thoughtful and far-reaching vision for Israel's future from the perch of their ministries. We do not, for sure, include all ministerial positions and we have — just to spice up the cabinet — invited two individuals, Ruth Gavison and Gidi Grinstein, to share their thoughts as the prime minister; they do so in a conversation. This "cabinet" is not made up of political parties, and it has not, of course, been charged with maintaining the real security of the state. The "ministers" do not offer insights into how to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict, how to respond to shelling from Gaza, or how to address the hatefulness spewing from Iran. What these imaginative essays offer, rather, is a rendering of Israel not transfixed by war or a hostile Middle East landscape.

The essays — which include the work of the ministers of defense, justice, education, arts & culture, religious affairs, welfare, the environment, the interior, and foreign affairs — report and

suggest how Israel might tell its story to the Jewish people. The essays respond to the challenges of a globalized economy and mindset — that is, they situate Israel in today's world as a player both internationally among the nations and, locally, as a country confronting the challenges of a modern pluralistic democracy. One "vision" explores how the legal system will reflect Jewish tradition without becoming a victim of religious coercion. Another essay explores how schools could become communities that provide a range of family services and serve a deeper, more expansive national identity. The ministers are all Israeli; some were born in Israel, others have made *aliyah*. Some are seasoned educators and writers, others young entrepreneurial men and women who — here in these pages — raise essential questions that touch the core of Israeli identity and politics.

This month, our Talmud page, *NiSh'ma*, is an artistic center-spread offering an abstract visualization of relationship. The four pieces explore and reflect unconscious yearnings and the relationship between what is and is not visible to the naked eye. I chose these abstract artists because they get below the surface; they connect experience and imagination, boundaries with what's beyond — they portray layers and cracks where light filters through from the unknown. "Uncovering layers — places that are hidden, mysterious... [and] luminous...." might help us shed some of the cynicism that creeps into our thinking about Israel. As the country celebrates its 60th year, much about its future remains unclear and even unknowable. How we remain engaged with Israel, perhaps guardedly optimistic about its future, will depend on not only how we live with the ambiguity of Israel's currency in the world but also how we suspend a need to know the exact outcomes and, instead, live day-to-day marking its miracles and prodding its leadership to make the tough and essential decisions for its future. — SB

The "ministers" all raise essential questions that touch the core of Israeli identity and politics.

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Minister of Justice

Yedidia Z. Stern

The law is a social tool that, through its rulings, should express a society's values, culture, and ethos. The fundamental issue that should therefore concern the Israeli minister of justice is: Is currently accepted Israeli law truly suitable in meeting the needs of Israeli society? In my opinion, the answer is "no."

The State of Israel exists out of cultural duality: On one side is western-liberal culture and on the other is Jewish tradition. Its laws and, perhaps more importantly, its citizens' collective consciousness, define it as a "Jewish and democratic state." In this sense, the State of Israel is an organization of a unique historical nature in the annals of human history: It is the only Jewish country within the family of democratic nations, and the only democratic organization among varying forms of Jewish existence throughout our people's long history.

However, this unique dual sense of belonging is not reflected in Israel's legal system. The democratic character of state law is easily discernible. But what is the uniquely Jewish character of Israeli law? How is the substance of the law — its values, the balances among them, and the concrete allocation of rights and resources — influenced by the Jewishness of the society within which it exists?

Two models of the "Judaization" of Israeli law are visible on the Israeli public agenda: The first, accepted by the religious-Zionist community, seeks to advance religious legislation that will set into law Jewish halakhic practices (for example, a law forbidding the display of *chametz* during Pesach) and to remove from law norms that conflict with halakhah (such as objecting to the legalization of the value of "equality"). The second model, accepted by the Charedi, the ultra-Orthodox community, proffers a coexistence of two alternative legal systems — the halakhah and state law — to be applied side by side, on different sectors of the population, as per their choice.

As minister of justice, I would reject both these models unequivocally. The first attempts to enforce religion on a secular majority, thereby resulting in a continuous struggle between state and religion. After 60 years, it can be clearly determined that religious legislation is a central reason for the failure of the relations between the religious and secular communities in Israel. Coercion distances Israelis

from their Judaism. Similarly, what religious value can be ascribed to a religious practice that is interpreted and implemented by a civil court of law? I find the second model equally invalid: If realized, every minority group in Israel will request independent judicial autonomy: halakhah for Charedim, Islamic law for Moslem Arabs, international law for secular liberals, etc. Israeli society, already divided, would only further split into separate autonomies independent from and hostile to each other.

Nonetheless, I am of the opinion that the primary task of the Israeli minister of justice should be to extend a sense of Jewish uniqueness to Israeli law. We must now examine in what manner this is to be achieved.

Israeli law is, in principle, a reflection and an echo of the British and American legal systems. Israeli professors of law are educated between the Charles and Hudson rivers (and not between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean). The precedents that shape the law and its leading lights are not drawn from the Jewish bookshelf. The Americanization of the law is part of a broad process of domination — western culture (primarily American) eclipsing the unique aspects of small cultures. Thus, the processes overtaking media, art, taste, language, and leisure are also taking place in law. The motto is "I am in the East and my heart (both professional and cultural) lies deep in the West."

American law expresses concrete moral choices, a proportion of which contradict the moral choices generally accepted in Jewish culture. Thus, for example, American culture sanctifies the individual, disregards the community, and in some contexts views the state as dangerous. The American public domain is conceived as a neutral area, lacking any particular identity. An American (generally) has rights, not obligations. Values of efficiency are paramount to (almost) all other values. American capitalism and the American ethos despise imposing the responsibility for private welfare on the state: Therefore there is no place for an American welfare state. Massive import of American law — which embodies these moral and cultural choices — into Israeli law transforms Israeli society into a body that echoes the American lifestyle.

The Israeli minister of justice must expose

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May 2008
Iyar 5768

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the local legal system to the influence of varied cultural voices, a central one of which must be the Jewish voice. The halakhah bears the fundamental genome of Jewish culture, and it prefers alternative solutions to each of the aforementioned American preferences. Even a Jew who is not interested in Judaism as a religion can relate to the halakhic answers regarding the place of the community in Israeli society (extremely important); the obligations of the Israeli citizen (and not merely his or her rights); the value of decency (even at the expense of efficiency); the unique nature of the public domain (which should be particularly Jewish, as befits a nation-state); the deep-rooted value of solidarity and mutual responsibility, and the assignment of communal responsibility for the welfare of the underprivileged (i.e., creating a welfare state) and for the minorities living in our midst ("loving the stranger"). Without all these, there is no spiritual and cultural justification for the existence of a Jewish state.

The "Judaization" of Israeli law is neither a religious mission nor one for the religious. Although true that halakhah is a religious judicial system, beyond its theological significance it also possesses immense cultural importance. It is the pungent spice that has, for generations, contributed to the shaping of the Jewish soul. It is a detailed road map, whose strength and light have guided and managed a Jewish way of life throughout history, everywhere and always. The Jewish identity, memory, and consciousness are woven into it. For these very reasons, the current removal of the halakhah from the daily agenda of the Jewish state renders Israel a country lacking in depth, meager in language, disconnected and isolated from the rich horizons of its past. The Israeli minister of justice — religious or secular — must amend this situation and enable Jewish tradition and halakhah to shape secular Israeli culture without caving in to religious coercion. 🕯

Minister of Education

Ruth Calderon

Israel's chief resource is its human potential. We have no oil, no water, no forests. Cultivating learning and the pursuit of knowledge of Torah, as well as of arts and sciences, have always been central Jewish values. The intellectual achievements of Jews have always stood out. In fact, the establishment of the state fostered the dream that Israel would become an epicenter of Jewish "genius." Sixty years after statehood, we are still learning how to educate youngsters to use their talents, be drawn to innovation and, at the same time, become decent people and good citizens.

If I were Israel's minister of education I would try to achieve this goal by reinventing the public school system that was legislated in 1953. Over the years, the divisions between the two streams of education — one secular and the other religious — have become enormously fragmented. The religious stream has spawned a variety of styles of religious education, including an educational approach that undermines the centrality of the state and its values. Within the secular stream, some of the finest students are migrating toward private schools because they are frustrated with the

poor quality of public education. Insular communities have evolved around private schools and children are becoming more parochial, more familiar with like-mindedness; thus, solidarity with Israel's citizens is being eroded.

The cleavage between secular and religious education should be rectified. These very definitions are wrong and create identity confusion. To revive a system of education that fosters identity, produces broadly educated adults and engaged citizens, and unifies experience, Israel needs a uniform state/public school system. It is better for Israel if this experience is provided by schools in addition to the army. The revitalized system must be based on a core curriculum that is modest and down-to-earth. Ethical education cannot tolerate falseness, kitsch, or excessive pathos. Israeli educators are no longer the authoritative figures they once were, simply because their core values are no longer held in consensus. Communities would not be forced to accept a constructed identity imposed from "above" by the ministry of education.

Schools can only educate toward values that the family holds dear. Cultural identity demands sharing a language. This language is

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May 2008

Iyar 5768

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acquired by a child, first in the home, where he or she listens to conversations, idioms, terms of endearment, anger, or even swear words that together create the “world” of the nuclear family. Later, in school, one’s cultural language expands and incorporates literature, art and music, as well as television, computers, and the digital environment.

The state school creates a common cultural language for all citizens. It is a “boot camp” to train Israel’s future citizens in civic skills such as integrity, manners, consideration for others, standing up for one’s rights, and respect for the law. A democratic learning community, with known boundaries and clear mechanisms of influence, provides students with opportunities to learn and practice diverse forms of action, and to test the breadth and the boundaries of liberties in a democratic community.

The state school would be both uniform (standardized) and modular. The core curriculum would embody unity and a charter of good citizenship and humaneness. Complementing the core values, every community and family would educate toward the particular values that it cherishes. Particular religious orientations of every community would be respected so long as the community’s members participated in the core curriculum and the joint charter. Modular content would be created by and for individual communities so that each community could create distinct identity modules for non-Jewish Israeli communities (Muslim and Christian Arabs, Druze) as well as for diverse Jewish communities with their particular emphases under the aegis of a common state institution. Graduates of the system would intimately understand the principles of democratic life, and each day would begin with a pledge of allegiance to the flag and the state.

Every graduate would acquire competency in the cultural heritage of his or her own community and proficiency in the literature of the “Great Books” of Jewish civilization as well as of the “general” culture. Hebrew language, mathematics, sciences, English, and computer literacy studies would allow every graduate of the system to enroll in institutions of higher education. (Learning Arabic as a second language once the broader population felt peace was at hand would become more popular.)

Parents would choose which public school their children would attend. Ethical and reli-

gious tones would be set by each community, which would also determine which organizations would provide suitable content. To this end, a standard voucher of equal currency would be issued; the community rather than the ministry of education would be authorized to use it. The community’s “consumer” choice would create competition among content providers, resulting in a florescence of educational opportunities.

The school structure and its environment would be sensitive to the needs of both children and communities. Aesthetics, beauty, simplicity, and comfort would be valued; quiet spaces as well as play spaces would be planned. A shared architectural style would turn schools into a cultural symbol, generating a sense of commonality and mutual feeling among all residents of Israel.

The state school would be influenced by the educational institutions that laid the foundations of Hebrew culture: from the *heder* we would take the principle of early literacy, the biblical stories as the child’s narrative substrate, and the small learning group. From the kindergarten we would adopt and create a safe, playful environment that would allow creativity and movement, permitting choice within a structured schedule. From the *bet midrash* we would adopt learning in *hevrutot*, small groups. And though we would adopt the study of primary texts — the Bible, Mishnah, Kabbalah, Hassidism, *siddur*, poetry, Jewish thought, Koran, New Testament — we would avoid a particular religious stance vis-à-vis the material studied; students would study texts as cultural treasures, each according to his or her own belief. From the *gymnasium* we would adopt the view of culture as language, with an emphasis on Hebrew as a language connecting Jews all over the world. Hebrew could also become a language that connects Israeli citizens of all faiths. Schools would take from the *incubator* a direct connection between theory and practice, on-the-job learning, and the value of experimentation. From the art school we would emphasize individual learning and the cultivation of the talents of each student.

I recall a ceremonial moment in my childhood schoolyard. We stood, arranged in the shape of the letter “*chet*,” and the eighth graders presented Natan Alterman’s poem, “The Silver Platter,” which pays tribute to the soldiers who helped create Israel. A ray of

light broke through the clouds and I thought God had joined our ceremony. Even today, since I have learned to regard the memorial service critically, I think back to that moment

and know that it helped create my identity. I would not want children to grow up in Israel, in any community, without such moments of remembrance, and belonging at school. 🕯

Minister of Defense

Mishael Zion

A song written by Israeli troubadour Ehud Banai, “Real or a Dream,” raises questions that many Israelis have wanted to ask their defense ministers. Where are you taking us? Where are we headed? Why have we been dragged out to unrecognized fields, in Lebanon, Sinai, Gaza? Can we hope that the ancient wind that is being renewed in the light-filled fields of *Eretz Yisrael* will become a soft welcoming breeze, or is it doomed to turn into the torrent of violence we’ve seen in our homeland time and again?

As Israel reaches its 60th birthday, I look toward a vision that might pull Israel out of the strange night. I hesitate, not wanting to produce a naïve vision — here, in Israel, where many a vision has crumbled in the face of a harsh, violent reality. Yet between bouts of Israeli cynicism, one such vision might look like this: In Hebrew, my job is called “*Sar HaBitachon*. ” *Bitachon* translates not only into safety and security, but also into confidence and faith. How do we help Israel reach a place of *bitachon*, of confidence and faith?

Paradoxically, *bitachon*, I believe, will best be achieved by reducing the constant discourse about Israel’s security — by shifting the spotlight on Israel from issues of securing life to issues of celebrating life. My goal as defense minister is to get Israel’s defense concerns out of Israelis’ faces so that we can reorient ourselves toward other pressing concerns.

Obviously, the first step is to reach a peaceful status quo and basic agreement with our Arab neighbors and, most importantly, with our “co-dwellers,” the Palestinians. After many decades in which ministers of defense believed that the only way to maintain security was by controlling other people’s lands — in Lebanon, the Golan, Gaza, the West Bank, and the Sinai — we have recently moved to a different and radically simple defense strategy: we will protect our borders from *within*. Though this new strategy has yet to prove itself fully, as the citizens of Kiryat Shmona and Haifa, or those of Sederot and Ashkelon,

can testify, I believe it will eventually become the best option for Israel and our neighbors. It is time to reestablish this country with clear and fixed borders.

Admittedly, it will be hard for Israeli Jews, and for Jews across the world, to readjust to these new borders. We will be forfeiting places in which some of our most profound historical events took place, including — in all probability — the place we consider to be the center of the world. Though relinquishing borders requires relinquishing dreams, memories, and expectations, it will allow us to build a new, fresh relationship with our country, state, and land — free of guilt, injustice, and the *hilul haShem*, desecration of God’s name, that accompanies sacrificing life for “holy” space.

Maintaining safe borders will not be easy. Many experts believe that fences (or concrete walls) lead to good neighbors. This may have been a necessary first step. But if we are to maintain safe borders over the long term, we must build partnerships through joint industrial zones, centers of research and education, and places where we can share our contradictory historical narratives. Eventually, we might take down those fences.

Yet beyond all this lies a greater vision for the ministry. To date, the agenda and focus of Israel’s defense (albeit an understandably dire concern), has prevented the country from creating a vibrant Jewish-Israeli culture — a just, multifaceted society, and a cohesive, minority-embracing, Israeli identity. My vision for the ministry and Israel’s defense forces includes a process of *tzimtzum*, of contraction and constriction, which would allow other discourses — on Israel’s defense and on broader issues such as Israel’s identity, culture, and society — to surface. By removing the constant discussion about the fragility of the present, we allow people to imagine their futures in bold and creative ways.

Yes, the safety of our borders and the eradication of terror are of crucial importance. Yes, we take pride in our army, in its officers and its

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Professor Alon Tal, from the Blaustein Institute of Desert Research at Ben Gurion University, is the past chairman of Life and Environment, an umbrella group for 100 Israeli environmental organizations.

soldiers. Yes, we are proud to serve in the IDF, and believe that it really does strive to act as a moral body within harsh circumstances. But we must stop expecting the IDF to serve as the glue that connects Israelis to each other. The IDF cannot be, and should not be, Israel's "melting pot." We shouldn't expect Israel's memorial day for fallen soldiers to be the catchall day for Israeli solidarity. Rather, let's build, enrich, and recreate Jewish and Israeli ritual and culture that doesn't center on threats but rather on possibilities, that doesn't linger on enmities but rather on covenants.

It is also time that Israel builds its relationship with Diaspora communities on

shared memory, mutual respect, and a combined future, rather than on the basis of fear and insecurity.

Living in Israel, I have often felt that people are afraid to dream bold dreams here, since they are so bogged down in an insecure reality. But if we can re-center the discourse outside the language of threat, we can reinstate confidence and faith and the ability to dream. My vision for Israel is one in which no one remembers who the minister of defense is, because they are so busy dreaming and creating the possibilities inherent in the amazing, challenging, and paradoxical project that is the State of Israel.



Minister of the Environment

Alon Tal

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of Israel's Ministry of the Environment. The fact that it took 40 years for the state to provide "ministerial" protection for its environment says something about national priorities during the country's formative years. And the circumstances surrounding the ministry were not auspicious. Unlike many western countries where grassroots green activism galvanized support for a new government commitment to the environment, Israel's ministry was created as an ad hoc solution to solve a political crisis: a Likud minister had been promised a cabinet portfolio and there was none available. These humble beginnings portended a history of ministerial mediocrity. Israel's modest environmental achievements have often been achieved *in spite* of its minister of the environment rather than because of his or her leadership. Before addressing the specific environmental agenda, there are three underlying structural changes that Israel's minister of the environment must pursue in order to produce substantial progress.

First, an adequate budget will indicate the government's commitment. Thus, the first thing a minister of the environment needs to do is to receive a commitment to increase funding five-fold; that would allocate one percent of the government's budget. Such an increase hardly seems excessive, given the severity of the problems and the enormity of the responsibility associated with protecting the "Holy Land." The results would ensure more and higher quality technical personnel, increased inspection hours

in the field, greater assistance to small industries to purchase pollution control equipment, additional support for environmental education programs, more precise monitoring, and much else.

Second, given the historically sporadic uncommitted tenure of people holding this portfolio, the new minister must make a personal, long-term commitment to the position (given the obvious political constraints). More important, the minister should design programs and policies with clear quantitative objectives for the coming five and ten years.

Finally, the ministry must be given authority in areas where the absence of such authority currently prevents successful operations. Currently, Israel's minister of the environment frequently finds him or herself to be "irrelevant" in a range of critical environmental issues. Consolidating new ministerial authorities is critical for an integrated national environmental policy.

The Agenda

First, conduct a serious comparative risk assessment to help the country set ecological priorities. There seems to be some dissonance between the resources invested in environmental problems and their actual severity. For example, air pollution in Israel is responsible for over 1000 premature mortalities a year. In 2007, although 46 percent of the spot checks at factory chimneys revealed violations of emission standards, the number of enforcement actions was trivial. The result is that there were 45 days of air pollution violations in Israel last

May 2008
Iyar 5768

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year. This means that one out of every eight days it was unhealthy to breathe Israel's air. Surely, this requires serious attention.

Second, create policy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. As a "developing country" under the Kyoto Protocol's division, Israel has been "off the hook" for the past decade. While European countries began the onerous task of cutting back, we have had no international commitment to reduce carbon and methane emissions, even as Israel's per capita emissions are surely comparable to the most industrialized "Annex I" countries. But after the recent Bali summit, it is now clear that this status will change and that by 2012 Israel will be expected to do its part to combat global warming. While greenhouse gas reductions involve transformation in myriad sectors of the economy, Israel's minister of the environment needs to spearhead a proactive policy. For starters, the ministry must create meaningful incentives to use public transportation, reduce energy consumption, develop renewable energy sources, capture methane from garbage dumps and (cows), and expand JNF tree-planting activities.

Undoubtedly, Israel's paramount ecological challenge is preservation of open spaces. Both "declaring" 50 open spaces as nature reserves and upgrading those spaces is critical if the marvelous biodiversity that Israel enjoys is not to be lost. This means creative policies and tough enforcement actions to address the

litany of threats to open space integrity — from the all-terrain vehicles that scar the landscape to the 50,000 illegal structures built by Bedouin squatters sprawled across the Negev, to the increase in illegal hunting by migrant Thai agricultural workers.

What Peace Will Bring

Proactive policies also will require that Israel prepares itself for the new "ecological" reality that peace will bring. While the past geopolitical agreements between Israel and its neighbors all contained environmental provisions, commitments have been relatively amorphous. Israel will never be able to protect its aquifers without Palestinian cooperation. The Gulf of Eilat, whose coral is disappearing at a shocking rate, will not start to heal without a regional strategy that includes Egypt and Jordan. Palestinians justifiably will eventually start to complain about transboundary air pollutants that arrive with the westerly winds from Israel. Ecologically, Israel is no bigger than a postage stamp. Without common efforts and standards in biodiversity protection, pesticide application and residues, fuel quality and sewage treatment, it is unlikely that progress will be meaningful. So a minister of the environment needs to make sure that future harmony in the Middle East is translated into harmony between humans and the magnificent resources of our promised land.

Sh'ma

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Address all editorial correspondence to *Sh'ma*, P. O. Box 9129, Newton, MA 02464. Telephone: 617. 581. 6810. Email: sberrin@JFLmedia.com.

Send all subscription queries and address changes to *Sh'ma*, P. O. Box 439, Congers, NY 10920-0439.

Telephone: 877. 568. SHMA.

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Sh'ma is published by Jewish Family & Life! monthly except July and August. Application to mail at periodical-class postage rates pending at Newton, MA 02464. Subscriptions: \$49/2 years in U. S.; \$29/1 year; \$59/2 years international; \$39/1 year international; \$21. 97 for one year senior/student. Bulk subscriptions are available at reduced prices. Please notify the subscription office in writing if you prefer that your name not be given out on rented lists.

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ISSN: 0049-0385 May 2008.

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May 2008

Iyar 5768

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Minister of Welfare

Jonathan Gillis

Welfare arouses strong passions in Israel, like most areas of government. Few would dispute that Israel's current welfare state is facing many difficult challenges; many argue that it is failing in its mission. However, the real difficulty, and that which forms the great challenge of this portfolio, is that the current system represents an extremely narrow construction of what a welfare state can and should be.

The primary purpose of welfare, beyond caring for needy populations, would be to provide the circumstances and wherewithal by which all members of society are enabled to participate as fully as possible in the life of the community, and enabled also to care for themselves to as great an extent as possible. The current obstacles to that are not, primarily, budgetary, but bureaucratic, physical, and legal — obstacles that result from a failure of imagination above all. Consequently, an improvement in welfare — and in the genuine health of Israeli society generally — is to come not from diverting more money to existing welfare programs (although that is almost certainly needed) but from a general adjustment of vision, a reassessment of current 'norms' and the creation of new ones, a collective willingness to entertain the absolutely obvious.

I will illustrate what I mean with two examples drawn from the field of disabilities, the area I know most concretely.

This year, 2008, marks the 10th anniversary of the passing of Israel's Equal Rights for People with Disabilities Law. By all standards, this was a groundbreaking piece of legislation. Two aspects seem particularly distinctive in retrospect. First, the law didn't begin as a government initiative but rather was written by *Bizchut* (a nonprofit independent nongovernmental organization, NGO, that addresses human rights for people with disabilities) and later adopted by a cross-party group of Knesset members. The government of the day was distinctly ambivalent; the finance minister at the time actually threatened to resign if the bill passed.

The second feature relates to the law's content. For the first time in Israel's history a principle that seemed so obvious — that someone with a disability was entitled to equality and to participate equally in the life of the community — was made into a principle of law. At the time the law was passed, the provision of welfare and

care in Israel to people with disabilities was not notably worse than that provided in many Western countries. And yet people with disabilities were almost entirely excluded from the mainstream of Israeli life. The law inspired the beginnings of a new kind of thinking in Israel that has had a profound effect on the social fabric here — and not just in the field of disabilities — a willingness to begin to entertain the possibility that what we take to be the accepted norms (dictated by prejudice, old habits of thought, and bureaucratic expediency) should not necessarily remain acceptable.

My second example is an action *Bizchut* is presently fighting in the Supreme Court against the Ministry of Welfare on behalf of four young people with severe intellectual and physical disabilities who are fighting for their right to live in the community rather than in institutions. The very fact that the judges are engaging seriously with the issue means the ministry has been forced to reassess its policy. This alone attests to a remarkable spirit of change.

The willingness to reopen what were thought to be uncontested norms brings with it a host of possibilities for progress for all areas of welfare. Though Israel has taken significant steps in the direction of change, this merely feeds the desire and commitment to see more. For example, the remaining physical barriers to employment and the ever-present stereotypes with regard to people with psychosocial disabilities, indicate the significant challenges that still lie ahead.

The ministry's goal, to seek to enable all people to care for themselves and, to as great an extent as possible, have control over their own lives, would also reconfigure rehabilitation programs for the mentally ill, provisions for the homeless, and the care and protection of endangered young persons. The role of the Welfare Ministry would move away from its present one as the distributor of funds to programs that it dictates are the means by which such needs are to be addressed (on the pretext that it knows best and that that is how things are done). In doing so, it would also seek to cooperate with, harness, and exploit the considerable knowledge, goodwill, and expertise that exist in the nongovernmental sector from where much of the force for change comes.

Jonathan Gillis is a writer, lawyer, and teacher who lives in Jerusalem. He is currently chairman of Bizchut.

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Minister of Religious Affairs

Donniel Hartman

Zionism and the rebuilding of the State of Israel entail the decision of the Jewish people to build our collective lives together. By collective lives I do not mean a loose confederation of denominations that join together in a number of common enterprises, in particular at times of crisis. Rather, the Zionist dream is to build a common *public domain* where all join together, a domain that belongs to us all equally and is shared accordingly.

While this ideal lies at the foundation of the Zionist narrative, the reality of modern Israel has failed in its implementation. Instead of a shared public sphere, many, in particular my predecessors in this ministry, have spent too much energy on attempts to control it and to shape it in accordance with their particular ideological affiliation. They have seen success not in fostering tolerance of difference and the ability to share, but in the victory of their particular party and ideology. This must come to an end.

Some argue for a public domain that is religiously neutral, where religion is relegated to the private domain of individual life. While this solution will indeed remove some of the conflict, it is akin to a “successful operation” where the patient dies. If the only way for Jews to live together is to remove our Jewishness from our collective lives, then the Zionist endeavor is bankrupt.

We do not need a state to ensure the physical survival of Jews, and even if we did, Israel alone cannot provide that guarantee. The aim and telos of Zionism is to create a state for the Jewish people, a state where Jewish ideas and values lie at the core of our sensibilities and policies, a state where Jewish ideas and values shape our public, not merely private, lives. It is not the goal of Israel to ensure solidarity either by allowing the dominance of one ideology or by relinquishing our vision of a Jewish state.

Our task is to create a culture of respect for our differences and to educate all to the notion that a Jewish public space is not anyone’s private domain. As that which belongs to us all, we must learn to share it equally. We must learn to allow others, even those with whom we disagree, to function freely within the public domain.

As minister of religious affairs, I am the ad-

vocate of all Jews who participate in the rebuilding of the state. My task is to ensure that all have equal access to public funding and functions. Though this policy already functions with other religions in Israel, it must become the standard within Judaism as well. Just as Israel is the home of all Jews, so too must the ministry be the home for all Judaisms.

Citizenship in the state is not limited to a particular Jewish domination, and consequently, neither are the religious policies of the country, whether we are talking about

Jewish public space is not anyone's private domain, and we must learn to share it equally.

marriage and divorce, conversion, funerals, or funds for the building of religious institutions. Under the auspices of the ministry, we will fund the creation of multiple rabbinate, men and women from all denominations, so each Jew can be guaranteed the right to religious ceremonies and services in accordance with his or her belief system. This will apply not only to the diverse religious denominations, but to secular Jews, as well, whose rights to perform Jewish and civil ceremonies in accordance with their Jewish sensibilities must be protected.

The ultimate aim of my ministry is not only to ensure that the religious life of Israel reflects and represents the diversity of ideologies among the Jewish people, but also to be the chief advocate for maintaining the quality and content of Jewish life in Israel. What we have learned over the centuries is that whenever someone wants to control the access points to Judaism, the result is neither the furthering of Jewish life nor Jewish unity, but rather the creation of a reality in which most Jews stay outside, alienated from their own tradition and identity.

We cannot afford to allow Israel to continue to be the primary catalyst for the alienation of Jews from their heritage. Rather, we need an Israel that serves as the catalyst for a new Jewish renaissance — an Israel that nurtures an array of access points into our tradition. This is the challenge and aspiration of Zionism and the charter of my ministry.

Rabbi Dr. Donniel Hartman is co-director of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem and has founded some of the most extensive education and training programs for educators and rabbis in Israel and North America. He is the author of The Boundaries of Judaism and the editor of the anthology, Judaism and the Challenges of Modernity, both from Continuum Press.

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NiSh'ma
LET US HEAR

Heidi Berrin Shonkoff
Learning by Heart
60" x 48"
acrylic on canvas



All my life I have studied what is underneath. I have focused my 25-year psychotherapy practice and my art on excavating truth — understanding and seeing what is not immediately visible. The process of uncovering layers — places that are vibrant, dark, passionate, mysterious, hidden, and utterly luminous — excites me.

Though as a woman and a psychotherapist I rely on language, I paint from a place without words. Here I speak through my love of color, through the textures of thick, sensuous paint, and with the light that emerges through transparent glazes. Always present for me is a vigorous pursuit of the balance between intensity and stillness.

My paintings bring my impulses, intuition, and deep emotional feelings to a more conscious level. Throughout, there is a constant theme — an attempt to control and balance chaotic forces in our lives. I search for an equilibrium by using a broad spectrum of color and a multiplicity of approaches, controlling and directing the movement of amorphous elements by the stricter structural boundaries imposed by both the canvas and the painted forms themselves. With the rhythm of color and texture and repetition of forms, I seek to turn each piece into a visual symphony.



Sharon Booma

Undisguised Wonder
oil / mixed media on panel
60" x 60" x 3"

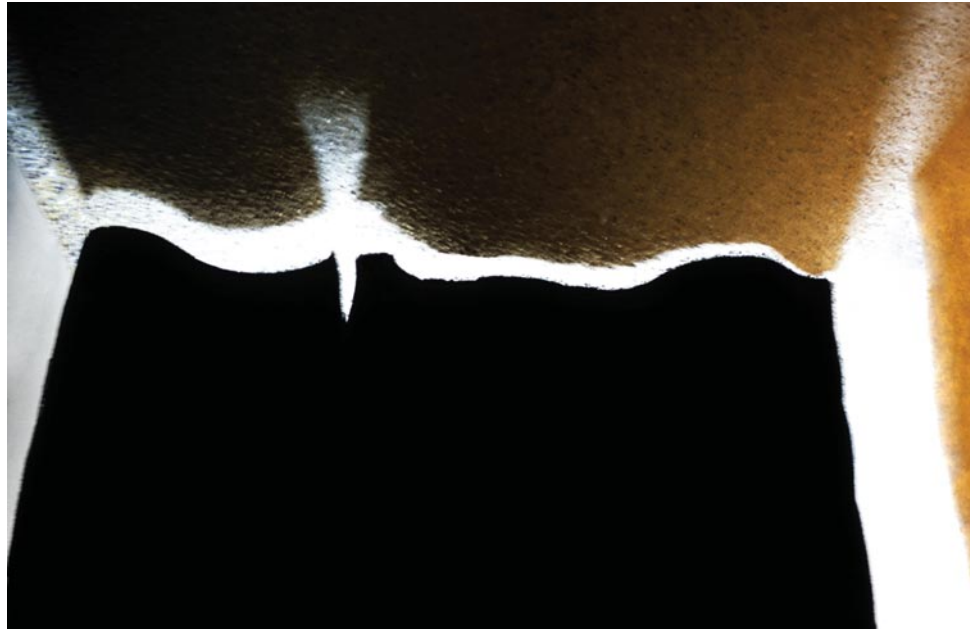
Joshua Abarbanel
String Theory #012
digital work on paper
40" x 60"

I was very moved by Heidi's piece and the notion of uncovering layers as revelation. I use a similar process in my work, which is inspired and informed by the colors, forms, and structures found in biological, botanical, and geological forms. Exploring the relationship between the individual elements

of structures and the larger forms within which they exist, I use line, color, and shape to create abstract, multiple-perspective compositions that allude to a variety of metaphoric and symbolic meanings. Read on their surface level for the sheer visual pleasure of exploration and discovery, the multilayered imagery creates aqueous vistas of new worlds for the eye to inhabit and explore. On a metaphoric level, the concepts of structure, connections, support, separation, expansion, contraction, growth, and decay can be examined in the work, as well. Ultimately the work is about the yearning we feel when touched or inspired by beauty, the longing ache that transcendent experiences always leave us with as they inevitably pass, and the personal and universal rebirth and transformation that occurs each time this is felt.

My work explores notions of what is "real and possible" through the antinomies of "presence and absence," "apparition and disappearance," "through and beyond." *Chance 19* represents a real place of experience and recognition; it creates a connection and is the symbol of a division. It shows a transition between two states, a vibrating boundary that joins and yet separates. The image speaks about the experience of visible existence while alluding to the invisible we belong to.

Silvio Wolf
Chance 19
49.25" x 32.25"
chromogenic dye coupler print
© Silvio Wolf. Courtesy Robert Mann Gallery, New York



Minister of Arts and Cultures

Basmat Hazan Arnoff

When Israel turned 30 years old I was in the third grade. My teacher, a special woman with very original teaching methods, devised a project to celebrate “Independence” in which all the children’s parents were invited to tell the story of their families’ *aliyah* to Israel. The neighborhood school was public and Modern-Orthodox; we were 34 children in that class and while some were immigrants, most were sabras — even if only for a generation or two. Every Friday, parents came and told stories about the Inquisition and the city of Mashhad and the journey of Persian Jews to Israel; of the doors of the Second Temple buried under their synagogue of Djerba; of life in China (I still remember the train tickets...) where one family had been exiled during the Shoah; of Italy and South Africa and Yemen and Eastern Europe and more.

Today when I look at the cultural and artistic “map” of Israel, it becomes clear that although Jews amount to no more than a speck of the world’s population, we have gathered in Israel from every corner of the earth. For several decades, Israel has been fusing generations of immigrants with children and grandchildren coming of age in a totally Israeli milieu. Now, our citizenry is comfortable enough to challenge sacred beliefs about what an Israeli identity is and also strong enough to seek out the landscape of our roots, looking for them and integrating them into cultural work as we craft our own contemporary creative and artistic dreams.

This trend of mixing old and new is emerging within every art form; perhaps most obviously in the world of music where the sounds of the broader contemporary world are being combined with wafts of traditional music from home (sounds that might have embarrassed young Israelis during their childhood and teenage years). What is occurring now is not merely a bridge back to “world” music but an intimate link with the *piyyut* and *niggun*, liturgical music composed before modern Israel existed. Throughout Israel singing communities are inviting men and women of all ages, expressions, and approaches to the Jewish faith, and from every stream in the political spectrum, to sit together and sing *piyyutim*.

In theater, poetry and fiction, film, and even in comics and graphic novels, Israelis are creating a contemporary dialogue as they dig for cultural roots. Artists with all of the necessary tools and techniques and knowledge for launching contemporary successes are exploring their families’ and the broader Israeli cultural wells of the past. This process of merging layers of Hebrew language with diverse layers of Jewish and Hebrew culture is creating a vibrant, deep, and smart artistic language that enriches our Israeli cultural moment.

To nurture this cultural renaissance we must address the following challenges:

First, we must welcome the influences of many Israeli communities, especially those whose voices in the mainstream dialogue are often silent. This includes the most recent waves of new immigrants from the former Soviet Union and from Ethiopia, as well as Bedouins and others on the fringes of Israeli society.

Second, we must provide greater resources to “laboratories” for cultural experimentation. Against the lure of popular culture, so often obsessed with sameness and “ratings,” cultural experimentation offers innovative and particularly *Israeli* forms of expression.

Third, we should inject “new blood” into the cultural institutions of Israel while also opening the hearts and ears of these cultural rainmakers to new trends. Too often, Israeli cultural institutions — from theater and television to newspapers and publishing houses — depend on static criteria of secular or religious, pop or highbrow, Ashkenazi or Mizrahi to define popular trends rather than reflecting the diversity that exists here.

Fourth, documenting and archiving (online) the cultural artifacts of traditional and new fusion groups is essential. Building a multilingual archive will provide valuable educational resources for generations to come, in addition to salvaging and preserving our ancestral treasures.

Finally, we must strengthen the dialogue between Israel and the larger Jewish world by creating shared artistic opportunities as well as venues and programs for mutual critique and growth. A healthy flow of performance, film, literature, and more across the world will not only reinforce the creativity within Israel but will model cooperative ventures among Jews within and outside the state. This ongoing

Basmat Hazan Arnoff is the author of *Mayyim Hafoochim*, a novel, and works as a theater director. Her play, *LeShem Yichud*, won the award for best ensemble at the Akko Theater Festival. She recently adapted David Grossman’s *See: Under Love* for the stage in Tel Aviv and New York. Translated by Stephen Hazan Arnoff.

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ing collaboration, based loosely in text and tradition, is essential to the livelihood of art and culture making. With the tools of modern communication and technology, we can reach new heights and many more hearts.

Thirty years ago, second and third generation Israelis like me were just beginning to be exposed to the incredible diversity of cultures

our parents and grandparents had brought with them to create a new society. Today, as my generation matures, and we become the gatekeepers of Israeli arts and cultures, we are uniquely charged with the responsibility of using the technologies and our tolerance of the future to integrate visions of today's Israel with the deep roots of its past. 

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Daniel Gordis

It's not that Israel hasn't told its side of the story. It's that Israel has failed to explain that it is a story; that its story is *about* something.

The mere notion that a country can be *about* something sounds strange to our contemporary ears, but Montesquieu, among others, said precisely that. Given that Israel will face enemies and be at war for as long as we can currently imagine, and since Israel's enemies are likely to be portrayed as the underdogs by a world that often prefers that Jews play that role, the Foreign Ministry has a mandate to speak clearly — both to the international community and to Jews in Israel — about what Israel is *about*. The challenge is to shift the spotlight, focusing the world's discussion on why the Jews need a state in the first place, what we are busy building.

Israel is, first and foremost, the story of restoring hope to a people who had no reason to hope. Following the Shoah, on what basis dared we imagine a Jewish future? America's Jews were weak. Europe's had been exterminated. The Soviet regime would only grow more oppressive. Palestine's shores were closed to Jewish refugees who had nowhere else to go.

Statehood restored hope. Exiles were ingathered. Hebrew was reborn. Refugees became soldiers. The desert bloomed. Victims began to determine their own destiny. A future, suddenly, was possible. Though the prophet Ezekiel wrote that "our bones are dry, our hope is lost" (37:11), Israel's anthem, "Hatikva," proclaimed *od lo aveda tikvateinu*, "our hope is not yet lost." The world needs to understand that Israel is not about sovereignty, or borders. It's about the very possibility of a Jewish future.

As foreign minister, I'd help design a setting in which Israel becomes the place where Jews imagine what they should become. "Why

did these things happen to us?" does not matter. What matters is, "Given that they did, who and what do we need to be?" In Israel, where Jews are blessed and saddled with sovereignty, they can begin to re-imagine what 21st-century Jewishness might look like.

It is through that lens that the Foreign Ministry must help the world understand the agonizing decisions Israel makes. For example, given that Israel has been forced into war (the disengagement from Gaza could have led to a very different outcome for Gazans had their leadership chosen differently), what rights and responsibilities do a people have when its enemies do not recognize its right to exist? How much should Israel risk the lives of its soldiers in order to protect Palestinian civilians, many of whom offer sanctuary to Israel's armed enemies?

The Israeli story is key to understanding the dilemma we face with Sudanese refugees. Some (though not most) are fleeing genocide. What should Israel — still settling Jewish refugees and worried about the decreasing percentage of Jews that make up its population — do? Part of our story is the Torah's command, "You shall not oppress the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Should Israel just open the border, risking a genuine flood of such refugees? Could Israelis turn them away and still read the Haggadah without shame? Facing that dilemma is what it means to live inside a Jewish story.

Israel's Foreign Ministry must make numerous complex judgments about nurturing relationships with other countries. How will we balance our economic needs and our military prowess with our concern about selling arms to countries whose policies we may abhor, and that our history would suggest we ought not to do business with? When Turkey

Daniel Gordis (www.danielgordis.org) is senior vice president and senior fellow at the Shalem Center in Jerusalem (www.shalem.org.il). His next book, *on re-envisioning Zionism for the 21st century*, will be published by Wiley this year.

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predicates its relationship with us on our being complicit in their denial of the Armenian genocide, how should we respond? Israel needs Turkey as an ally; it borders Syria, it's a democracy, and it's a Moslem country. But at what price? Not only does the Foreign Ministry need to evaluate and build relationships that help Israel become a global player, but also, and no less important,

it needs the world to understand how we assess these critical decisions.

The Foreign Ministry cannot make everything Israel does palatable, or even just. But it can, and must, be at the forefront of reminding the world that Israel is more than just a country; it is a story of rebirth and renewed hope, still awaiting the peace that it once believed would have arrived long ago. 

Minister of the Interior

David Shechter

The minister of the interior of the State of Israel is one of the few people in Israel in whose power it is to take real concrete steps to creating a normal and unified civic society in Israel.

Eligibility for Israeli citizenship must be reconsidered. At present, in accordance with the Law of Return, all new immigrants to Israel, *olim chadashim*, automatically receive citizenship and the full set of rights associated with it — including the right to vote in elections for the Knesset. Thus a strange state of affairs is created whereby a person, barely two months in the country who is unfamiliar not only with the Israeli political system but even with the language in which this system is conducted, is entitled to decide which party should control the reins of government. This situation inherently possesses the potential for manipulation and deception of the new voter, a phenomenon already witnessed on several occasions in the past. I would suggest an interim period, perhaps two-to-three years, after which the citizen would become entitled to vote in Knesset elections.

Another area for reform addresses the situation of non-Jewish relatives of new immigrants. Citizenship for this population would be granted only after three-to-five years, and only after having passed proficiency tests in Hebrew language, the history of Israel and the Jewish people, the fundamentals of the governmental system and basic Israeli laws. During the interim period, these “quasi-citizens” would be obligated to affirm a pledge of allegiance to the state, and if a person from this group engaged in any activities deemed as treacherous or unfaithful to the interests of the country (including forbidden connections with the enemy or espionage), an Israeli court of law would be entitled to revoke potential citizenship and expel him or her from the country.

A small but critical change would be to lib-

eralize passport extensions for Jewish men and women living outside of Israel. The current policies hinder the work of hundreds of Russians holding Israeli passports who do business outside of the country. These people donate millions of dollars to Jewish educational institutions in Russia and Israel, help strengthen the connection between Russian Jews and Israel, and promote Jewish culture and awareness, both in Israel and in the Diaspora. However, instead of bestowing gratitude, Israel inflicts upon them a set of bureaucratic obstacles that must be stopped.

Reforming the conversion process will also be necessary. Three hundred thousand non-Jews, who immigrated together with their Jewish relatives, are living in Israel today. Many of them are not considered Jewish according to halakhah (primarily because their father is Jewish but not their mother). In the Soviet Union, nationality was determined according to the father, and thus, these people considered themselves and felt Jewish their entire lives (and usually their official Soviet documents also classified them as Jews). To their astonishment, upon arriving in Israel, they suddenly became non-Jews. A nationwide network of conversion *ulpanim* (schools) must be established for these and other immigrants who have arrived with Jewish *olim*. And the conversion process must be made easier. Naturally this network must be open and available to all. Although I object to excessive leniencies in the conversion process, I also strongly oppose raising unnecessary difficulties.

It is my intention to adopt a liberal attitude regarding entry visas for foreign workers. Though some opinions suggest that these workers are taking employment opportunities away from Israelis, this is for the most part untrue. Most employment for foreign workers includes jobs that Israelis won't accept, such as

David Shechter, a nationally acclaimed writer and journalist, was senior press advisor to the Minister for Diaspora Affairs, senior advisor to the Minister of Absorption, and spokesperson of the Yisrael B'Aliya Party. Today he is an independent consultant and editor-in-chief of the Menora newspaper. Translated by Jeremy Kuttner.

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agriculture, construction, and harvesting fruits and vegetables. The current state of security doesn't allow Arab workers, who used to take these jobs, to continue.

All the abovementioned actions can effectively accelerate the process of turning Israeli society into a more consolidated and, therefore, a more wholesome, stronger society. 🌱

The Prime Minister

***Ruth Gavison** is the Haim H. Cohn Professor of Human Rights in the Faculty of Law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and founding president of Metzilah, a new center for Zionist, Jewish, Liberal and Humanist Thought. Gavison served as a founding member and president of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) and as a member of the Winograd Committee to investigate the 2nd Lebanon War. **Gidi Grinstein** is founder and president of the Re'ut Institute, an Israeli nonpartisan policy group focusing on strengthening the Zionist vision to meet the Jewish state's evolving challenges. Grinstein has served in the Office of Prime Minister Ehud Barak as the secretary and coordinator of the negotiation team of the government of Israel on the Permanent Status Agreement between Israel and the PLO (1999–2001). Grinstein and Gavison shared a conversation about leading the state as its prime minister.*

Ruth Gavison: Today's prime minister needs to combine clarity of vision with practical goals for the government. Israel's strategic challenges are huge. It is the role of the government to prepare to meet them. This requires the best people as ministers, the best staff people and civil servants to facilitate their work, and an ability to derive policies from long-term goals. Much, of course, depends on the number and the size of the parties participating in the government and their different platforms. And of course, Israel is a very small country. The nature of the geostrategic constraints — military, political, economic — will all impact the outcome.

Gidi Grinstein: I would name the structures of Israel's electoral system and political institutions as having the most powerful effect on the ability to govern the State of Israel. Israel suffers from one of the weakest governments among developed nations. There's a grave mismatch between, on the one hand, the complex challenges we face as a nation and our population's potential in terms of education and technological savvy, and, on the other hand, a highly underperforming government and public sector. Our electoral system generates powerful incentives for short-term, sectarian, and populist conduct, while our reality demands long-term, broad, and substantive conduct. We urgently need a more stable government and a more cohesive Knesset and legislature.

Gavison: I agree with Gidi that we have a serious problem. However, I'm less certain that a change in the electoral system will provide a remedy. For instance, a two-party system, basically the models in England and the

U.S., generates more stability but might not be workable or desirable in Israel.

Grinstein: Democratic societies choose where their diversity will manifest itself: in parties or within the parliament. Britain and the U.S. represent one end of the spectrum, where diversity is almost entirely on the party level, while on the national level there are only two parties. Israel represents the other end of the spectrum: great diversity at the level of the parliament. We need to strike a different balance. Israel would remain a healthy parliamentary democracy even if we had only five or seven parties instead of eleven or thirteen. While a certain level of fragmentation is essential in order to reflect the structure of Israeli society, today we are over fragmented and need to consolidate.

Gavison: While I agree, I'm afraid that the five big existing blocks will continue to create an uneasy move between paralysis and instability — the paralysis of a unity government or the instability of a very small coalition. I would consider ideas such as adding a chamber and creating a two-chamber solution so that one chamber would be more directly representative and the other would be more effective. The interplay between the two chambers would also provide a much-needed check on parliamentary power. At present the court carries the entire burden of policing our legislature, which is bad for politics and bad for the court.

Grinstein: Historically, Israeli politics were most stable whenever we had a critical political mass at the center.

Gavison: True, but that was under the same electoral system we have now! And there's no structural way to recreate a centrist

party. So while the instability of government is a serious issue, it is not clear whether changes in the electoral system could change that.

Susan Berrin: I wonder if you would comment on the tension caused by striving to become a global economic power while remaining mired in a foreign policy defined by years of conflict with Israel's closest neighbors. How do you balance economics and prosperity on one side of the scale with security and foreign policy limitations on the other?

Grinstein: The weakness of our international standing is not inevitable, and we can improve it dramatically. First, we belong to one of the most powerful networks in the world, the Jewish network. We can tap into it and empower our many supporters and friends as effective communicators of Israel's case. Second, our diplomacy and national public relations are simply badly managed and need to be overhauled. Third, we can make a qualitative, distinctly Jewish and Israeli contribution to the world — *tikkun olam* — in areas we have excelled in such as agriculture, public health, and water technology and management. Finally, we can tackle some structures that compromise our standing such as the basic notions of international law as it regards fighting terrorism.

All of this requires a significant reallocation of resources. Israel's biggest threats are not only military but also political and diplomatic; we spend on our foreign service only two percent of what we spend on our military. That's an unacceptable ratio. Chabad has 20 times more emissaries in the world than Israel has professional diplomats.

Gavison: I like the directions drawn by Gidi. My picture is a bit less optimistic, however. For example, I am worried about our internal social and economic structure, the troubling signs of societal deterioration, and the growing gaps between segments of the population. And I am extremely reticent to talk about a "Jewish network" because it touches on pernicious images of Israel and the Jews. Though I agree with Gidi about the ineffectiveness of our public relations, our military threat is very, very serious. And though the economy is flourishing, we can't count on this remaining so. We need to think strategically about the military challenges Israel faces in the region and the implications these challenges have for Israel's economics and diplomacy. More important than improving our public relations and increasing our diplomatic corps, we must have a coherent

statement for these diplomats to express.

The southern part of Israel has been subjected to rocket fire without effective Israeli military or political response. The lives of a large segment of Israelis at the periphery are extremely vulnerable. Moreover, Israel is perceived by some as the villain in a very unstable area of the world — and responsible for one of the greatest dangers to world peace. This perception is wrong, not the reality, and we should not take it lightly. There is also the fact that we have been occupying for more than 40 years territories densely populated by Palestinians, who are not Israeli citizens. These are very serious matters. We need a comprehensive response that acknowledges that this is the way we are seen by populations — not necessarily governments — around the world.

Grinstein: For the foreseeable future, a certain measure of violence around us will be a fact of life. This violence will be funneled to friction points. Today it's Sderot. In the past it was Kiryat Shmona, Tel-Aviv, El-Al airplanes, or Beit Shean. In the 2nd Lebanon War, we saw the collapse of the distinction between homeland and frontline. In fact, the entire State of Israel may be "frontline" in times of conflict. We must therefore build vibrant and resilient communities — a centerpiece of our national agenda — not only at the center of Israel but also at the periphery. This is a challenge that is both a national security as well as a development one.

Gavison: Israel will not survive unless we share a commitment, irrespective of where we live, that this is our home and we're willing to do what it takes, for as long as it takes, to protect it. This requires an ability to sustain periods of hardship. And it's easier to sustain periods of hardship when we feel solidarity; when the north is shelled, we in the south or the center don't just go on with our lives. I would expect an effective and responsible government to communicate credibly not only with words but also with deeds — to invest in vulnerable communities under attack, to offer resources that show solidarity, and to be prepared for contingencies.

At a time of crisis, power needs to be coordinated from the center while effective help must be on the spot. The civil government and military authorities must coordinate effectively. This requires long-term investment and implementation; it's not enough to have the best policies. We need to begin at the grassroots and make things happen in schools

and hospitals and civic centers. And these top-down and bottom-up social processes need not only tending but also to be part of the national ethos in a structured way. This was so at the beginning of the state and was responsible for many of our achievements. That ethos is weakening now; it needs to be revitalized and endorsed by the government from municipalities to units in the field.

Berrin: What has contributed to that erosion of national spirit?

Gavison: Israel has been the victim of its own success. No one can maintain a revolution forever. It's natural that once the basic challenges of existence are met, people want to live; they want to address the next question on the list. Crises extract a very heavy price. But we should not lose our direction; we must maintain the sense that we're here because this is a country with a mission, and that mission is being challenged. It's the responsibility of government to articulate this, that despite a much higher standard of living, we cannot take our lives here for granted.

Grinstein: I would only add that in the 1990s there was a deep-seated hope, perhaps illusion, about the imminent end of conflict with the Palestinians and hence with the Arab world. The Intifada in 2000, however, served as a wake-up call that we'll be in the struggle for a long time. The second thing is the relatively recent growth in economic disparity. In a globalized society like Israel, those who play globally become relatively ultra-rich and super-powerful. It is estimated that there are 7,000 Israeli millionaires, more than one percent of the population. At the same time, more than 20 percent of the population is poor. These disparities are expected to grow. This is why it is critical to have a society of meritocracy where anyone has a sense that they can make it on a leveled playing field, where people have solid foundations of education, opportunity for life-long learning, and flexible job markets. These issues have been neglected and should be at the top of the agenda.

Gavison: And seeking peace. We should accept responsibility for what we are doing to hinder or delay reconciliation. But we should also be very aware that some of our partners are not indicating interest in making peace with us. It's critical for Israelis to live with this paradox, the contradiction of actively wanting peace yet also understanding that we may never have peace. Moreover, at times it may not be possible to reach peace — and we must then learn to man-

age the conflict in a way that serves our long-term goals, including the necessity of not perpetuating our rule over people who want their own self-determination just as we want ours.

Grinstein: I agree that unrealistic expectations are dangerous. Most Israeli governments that have set unattainable objectives have led to massive disappointment. Calibrating expectations is a critical task of the political leadership.

Berrin: What impact has that disappointment, over and over again, had on the makeup of Israeli society?

Gavison: Today, people are very sober — wanting to promote chances for peace but not wanting to base policies on wishful thinking. The gamble should be very measured and very minimal so that if what we hope for does not materialize, the situation won't be catastrophic. Political leaders must seek peace not only to achieve stability but also to have justice. Our ultimate concern is the wellbeing, the survival, and the flourishing of Israel and the Jewish collective in it. We should pursue these goals within the constraints of human rights. We must do this responsibly, without letting wishful thinking mislead us.

Grinstein: Another aspect of continued conflict, adversity, and challenge is that it is has pushed us to be creative, resourceful, and innovative. We have turned our major challenges into significant assets. The Arab boycott pushed us to embrace trade as few other countries did; similarly water scarcity encouraged us to become a world leader in desalination and irrigation; our defense challenges turned us into leaders in electro-optics and communications. We have a mentality of assertive experimentation that is a very attractive aspect of Israeli society.

Gavison: I agree that necessity breeds creativity, innovation, and initiative. But the necessity of fighting cancer and global warming and issues not directly connected with continued threats to our existence would provide enough incentive for us to excel. Striking a good agreement with our neighbors should not condemn us to apathy and failure. Moreover, since the security threat is a permanent feature of our existence, it has, in fact, made us less innovative, energetic, and creative than we used to be. Some of our systems have become too bureaucratic, too routine. We should create incentives to keep the spirit of creativity and originality more alive. This is not simply a luxury but a critical aspect of our continued success.

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FROM YIDDISHKEIT TO COOLKEIT

Yitzchok Mouly

Generally, I am easy to pick out in a crowd. Dark suit, white shirt, beard, and bright pink yarmulke. It is something I picked up at the bat mitzvah of one of my Hebrew school students about a year ago. I thought it was cool. The Hebrew school parents love it, the students see me as fun and somewhat more relevant, and it brings smiles to many in a variety of situations. So as I began thinking about this column I pondered the relationship I have with my pink yarmulke — what makes me relate to this pink yarmulke. It is cool, no doubt about it.

The question I ask myself, though, is this: Is cool what I'm striving for, the end result, or is it a potential vehicle to attain a greater goal? And then I began thinking about the Jewish condition and its relationship with doses of cool. From Heeb to Jewlicious, cool is definitely the status symbol of the times, and for Jews no less so.

But what does the source of the Jewish condition have to say about it? What does Torah, our guidebook for life, given to us by God, say about cool? Does this Torah embrace cool? Does it have to embrace cool to be more cool?

Rarely is any one idea cool for any meaningful period of time. And some things don't evolve with the passing waves of cool. Torah remains constant in a storm of social evolution. So maybe it's not Torah that is or is not, was or will be, cool. Rather, it's humanity, Jews, who need to find cool within Torah in order to have it resonate with our lives. For Torah is the constant in the perpetual flow of our existence.

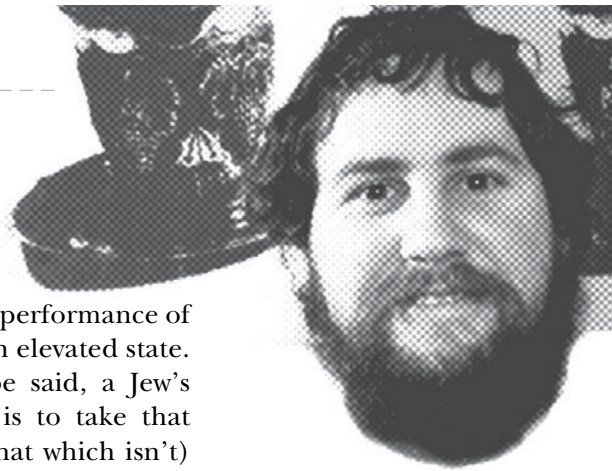
Chassidic thought reveals insight into the grand plan of our purpose here on the earth and thus shines some light on the subject of our coolness. God created the vast world in six days and then lastly placed man in the world for him to "toil the land." To toil and use the world as a vehicle to attain a higher level of consciousness. When one takes flour and water and kneads together matzah, the mixture is not just food; it is much more than that.

This matzah is used in the performance of a mitzvah, bringing it to an elevated state. As the Lubavitcher Rebbe said, a Jew's function in serving God is to take that which is cool (and even that which isn't) and elevate it to a higher level of reality. Everything, and all our actions, can be used as vehicles in the service of God. How much more so something that operates in the coveted arena of cool! When one takes pink fabric and fashions it into a yarmulke, it transcends the mundane into something both cool and authentically Jewish. This — coupling rituals and practices with one's expression of the Torah — makes Torah forever relevant and cool.

Art, especially contemporary art, has reached the apex of cool (one need only look at the long lines at the recent New York Armory Show to be persuaded). Art, as a discovery of the inner self, delves beyond the surface of a subject and engages the viewer at a deeper level; it challenges the viewer to wonder, to be awestruck, to imagine on a higher plane, on a deeper level of consciousness.

Contemporary Jewish art continues to chug down that road. It speaks to Jews who appreciate cool and its relevance to the world. As a rabbi and artist, I attempt to bring together these two worlds. Through my work I attempt to engage and create a dialogue — to blend the energy and vitality of our heritage with personal expression, to forge an alliance and make relevant the timeless Torah messages by creating deeper connections to God.

"Cool" enables people to take a fresh look at age-old ideas that may be adrift in our culture. It is not only a status symbol that we strive for but also a powerful means to convey our message, no matter what the message may be. And so whether it's a pink yarmulke on our heads or Shabbat candles on Friday at sundown, it is our commitment to these timeless customs that makes us Jews more relevant to ourselves, to humanity, and to our divine purpose in life. Now ain't that cool? 



YITZCHOK MOULLY is the Youth Rabbi at the Chabad Jewish Center in Basking Ridge NJ. By day, he is a rabbi and by night an artist — when he gets the chance.

May 2008
Iyar 5768
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Sigi Ziering Ethics

This year our Sigi Ziering column will focus on the ethics of silence. Each month an esteemed guest columnist will wrestle with questions concerning silence and its impact on Jewish life and the world around us. The column is sponsored by Bruce Whizin and Marilyn Ziering in honor of Marilyn's husband, Sigi Ziering, of blessed memory. Visit shma.com to view the series of columns with responses.

Sheila Peltz Weinberg, a Reconstructionist rabbi, is director of outreach for the Institute for Jewish Spirituality (ijs-online.org).

Silence is Not the Opposite of Speech

Sheila Peltz Weinberg

When Sylvia Boorstein and I cooked up the idea to bring rabbis on retreat to learn meditation and have them be in silence for four days, people thought we were crazy. "Are you kidding?" they exclaimed, "You think you are going to get rabbis or any Jews for that matter to be quiet for that long? It's not possible and anyway, it's not Jewish!"

That was about thirteen years ago. I have since had the pleasure of sitting in silence with many Jews — rabbis, cantors, educators, lay leaders — who have expressed gratitude for the opportunity. What is this all about?

Most important, it is about choosing to be silent. This is completely different from using silence as an instrument of power or punishment, whether in a family or in society. It is not "being silenced" or retreating into silence out of fear, confusion, or weakness. When we choose silence we set an intention to limit distraction and stimulation for a period of time. We create an oasis in the midst of the constant barrage of input in our lives. We establish conditions that help us see more clearly the way our minds work, the truth of this moment of experience. Silence is a structure that helps us cultivate awareness of what is happening in the moment. Silence helps us slow down and simplify in order to observe what is often obscured from view.

When we turn our awareness toward our own experience, we have a front-row view of how we suffer and struggle, what causes pain and what leads to freedom. We are our own laboratory, our own wisdom teacher. We see our habitual reactions. We hear the stories we have been telling ourselves forever. We be-

come intimate with the rising and passing of all phenomena, with what is within our control and what is not. We learn in this very body what anger and fear feel like. We sense the inner landscape of generosity and peace. This learning stays with us when we return to conversation, sound, and speed. Silence is not the opposite of speech. It is a way to find the truths that need to be spoken and a way of speaking them so that they can be heard. When we resume our lives, we have more tools to practice wise, true, and caring speech. As we learn to appreciate the gift of silence in our lives, however, we still violate an ethical boundary when we impose silence upon another without their consent.

There are multiplicities of techniques that help cultivate awareness, just like there are many machines in the gym to build up our muscles. All of these practices are supported by a reduction of external stimuli. Their intention is to help us grow in freedom, wisdom, and love.

There are times when we enter the silence within the silence. We may be sitting and paying attention to what is arising and passing moment to moment. Suddenly boundaries fall away and divisions disappear. This is what we listen for when we say *Sh'ma Yisrael*. We enter the presence of the infinite, the eternal, and the mysterious, the presence of the One.

When we call upon *Yisrael* to listen, we are calling ourselves to wake up and show up. We are calling ourselves to know how deeply we are connected to each other. We are calling ourselves to more wisdom, more love, and more peace. What could be a more Jewish practice?



May 2008/Iyar 5768